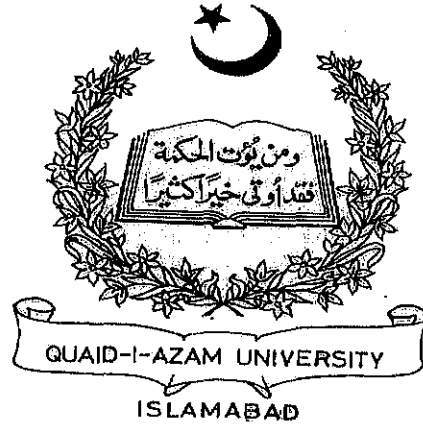


**Identity Politics in Pakistan:
An Ethnographic Study of Dalit Activism in Sindh**



Ghulam Hussain

**Thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, in partial
fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology**

**Quaid-i-Azam University
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Year 2022**

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No part of this thesis has been submitted anywhere else for any other degree. This thesis is submitted to the Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, in the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Field of Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

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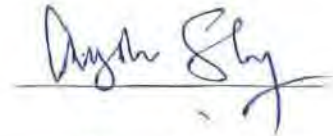
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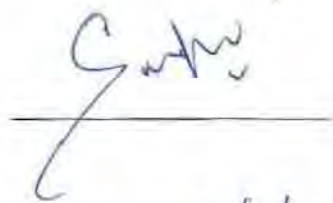
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Abbreviations

ADRF	Asia Dalit Rights Forum
AJP	Awāmi Jamhoori Party
ASKA	All Sindh Kolhi Associations
AT	Awāmi Tehreek
AT	Awāmi Tehreek
BAMCEF	All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation
BIF	Bheel Intellectual Forum
BISP	Benazir Income Support Program
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BSP	<i>Bahujan</i> Samaj Party
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CM	Chief Minister
CNIC	Computerized National Identity Card
CNIC	Computerized National Identity Card
CPEC	China-Pak Economic Corridor
CPP	Communist Party of Pakistan
CPP	Communist Party of Pakistan
CSS	Central Superior Services
DST	Dalit Sujaag Tehreek
EAO	Educate Agitate Organise
FANA	Federally Administered Northern Areas
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FPP	First Past the Post
GDA	Grand Democratic Alliance
GHQ	General Head Quarters
HRCPP	Human Rights Commission Pakistan
HRCPP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
IDSN	International Dalit Solidarity Network
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Governmental Organizations
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
JSM	Jeay Sindh Mutahidda Mahaz
KTN	Kawhish Television Network
MKI	Mazdoor Kisan Itihad
MNA	Member of National Assembly
MPA	Member of Provincial Assembly
MQM	Muttahida Qaumi Movement
NADRA	National Database Registration Authority
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
NWFP	North West Frontier Pakistan
OBC	Other Backward Castes
PATA	Provincially Administered Tribal Areas
PCDP	Parkari Community Development Program
PDF	Pakistan Dalit Forum
PDSN	Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network
PHC	Pakistan Hindu Council
PILER	Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research
PMC	Pakistan Meghwar Council
PML-F	Pakistan Muslim League Functional

PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek Insaf
QAT	Qaumi Awāmi Tehreek
QAT	<i>Qaumi</i> Awāmi Tehreek
RSS	Rasthriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SANA	Sindhi Association of North America
SC	Scheduled Castes
SCA	Scheduled Caste Association
SCFP	Scheduled Caste Federation of Pakistan
SCRM	Scheduled Castes Rights Movement
SGRHF	Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation
SHPC	Sindh Hari Porihiat Council
SRSO	Sindh Rural Support Organisation
ST	Scheduled Tribes
STP	SindhTaraki Pasand Party
TRDP	Thardeep Rural Development Program
UC	Union Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UPR	Universal Periodical Review
WSC	World Sindhi Congress

Transliterations

While translating the passages from Sindhi or using local terms, the English spellings of the terms commonly used in Sindhi by English educated writers have been followed. However, where necessary, some of the important terms and words have also been Romanized only on their first mention. For instance, the term ‘دراوڑ’; its Romanized form will be ‘Darāwaṛ’. Similarly, Kolhi’(Kūlhi) and ‘Bheel’ (Bhil) are Romanized on their first mention only. The spellings of some key local Sindhi terms in terms of use of diphthongs has been explained below.

Romanized pronunciation and spelling of Sindhi Terms*					
Sindhi (Arabic Script)	Romanized Sindhi	Romanized Sindhi/Common Spelling	Sindhi (Arabic Script)	Romanized Sindhi	Romanized Sindhi/Common Spellings
ب	B	Bait (Bait)	ز	z	Mirzā (Mirza)
بھ	bh		س	S	Sammāt (Sammāt)
بھیل	Bh	Bhil (Bheel)	ش	sh	Ashrāfiyā (Ashrafīa)
ت	T	Zāt, zāt-parast	ص	ṣ	ṣūfi (sufi)
تھ	Th	Thar	ض	z	
تھ	t	Sammāt	ع	ayn	Āmil
تھ	th	Saithiyā	غ	gh	Arghūn (Arghun)
س	S		ف	F	Ashrāfiyā
پ	P	Pīr (Pir)	ف	ph	
ج	J	Janḍāwṛā, Jāti (Jati)	ظ	z	Nizāmāni (Nizamani)
ج	J	Jām (Jam), Rāj (Raj)	ق	Q	Qaum
جھ	Jh		ک	K	Kūlhi
جھ	Ñ	Paiñārā (Penjara)	ک	kh	
چ	c, ch	Balauch (Baloch)	گ	G	Dargāh (Dargah)
چ	Ch	Katch (Kutch)	گ	Ñ	
ح	h	Kūlhi (Kolhi)	گ	ñ	Manñrio (Mangrio)
خ	Kh	Khānqāh (Khanqah)	ل	L	Kūlhi
د	D	Darāwaṛ (دراوڑ)	م	m	Sammāt
ذ	Dh	Dharam	ن	N	Vāñiyō (Vaniyo)
ڈ	ḍ	Waḍairo (Wadero)	ڻ	ṇ	Vāñiyō
ڍ	ḍh	Janḍāwṛā (Jandawra)	و	v, w	Darāwaṛ, Vāñiyō, (Vaniyo)
ڍھ	ḍh	Sodhā (Sodha)	ھ	H	Dargāh
ز	Z	Zāt (Zat, Zaat)	ي ي ي	Y	Sayed
ر	R	Ashrāfiyā (Ashrafīa)	ڑ	ṛ	Darāwaṛ

Vowels and Diphthongs					
ا	A	Darāwaṛ	اِي	Ī	Pīr (Pir)
آ	Ā	Darāwaṛ (دراوڑ)	و	O	Sodho, Vāñiyō
اُو	Ū	Kūlhi (Kolhi)	ي	E	
اِي	Ai	Bait, Saithiyā (Sethiya)	اُو	Au	Qaum
اِي	I	Shiā (Shia)			

*Note: The rules of application for Urdu are to be used for Sindhi. Vocalization is that used for entries in Mewaram’s ‘A Sindhi English Dictionary’ (1st ed., Hyderabad, 1910), Sindhī Ūrdū Lughāt (Haidarābād, 1959), and Jāmi‘-ī Sindhī Lughāt (Karācī, 1931). The Romanization table has been adapted from the ALA-LC Romanization developed jointly by the Library of Congress (LC) and the American Library Association (ALA). The revised Urdu (in Arabic Script), Pushto, and Sindhi (in Arabic script) Romanization tables are now available for downloading from the ALA-LC Romanization Tables webpage. URL: <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsp/romanization/sindhi.pdf>.

Note on Key Terms and Concepts

The term ‘minority’ in Pakistan is usually understood not in only terms of numbers but also in terms of religious identity markers. All non-Muslims are considered as a minority because of their population which is far less (1.86% Hindus, 1.6% Christians, Others 0.6%) than the Muslims (96%). In Pakistan both the Savarnas and the Dalit Hindus were imagined and classified as a ‘Hindu minority’, the identity marker that is contested by the Scheduled Castes who assert for their recognition as the ‘majority-in-minority’ (i.e. about 85% of the Hindu and Christian population and about 50 percent of the Muslim population). This trans-religious claim is made by juxtaposing a different set of identity markers such as ‘Dalit’, ‘Bahujan’, ‘Darāwar’ (دراوڑ), ‘Adivasi’ that are either indigenous to Sindh and Pakistan or have been borrowed from Indian Dalit activists. Hence, I use the social identity markers, such as ‘Caste’, ‘Dalit’, ‘Scheduled Castes’, Bahujan, Darāwar, Adivasi, Hindu, etc., both as emic categories when the Dalit activists contest and negotiate their subalternity through these identity markers, and as etic categories when I use them in a generic academic sense. The use of these terms and identities as anthropological categories is largely inspired by the Ambedkarites or the Dalitbahujan intellectuals and scholars such as Gopal Guru (1998) and Kancha Ilaiah (2002), who suggest using these terms or identities to refer to the historically oppressed castes. The term Dalit is often used to refer to ex-untouchable castes or Ati-Shudras, classified in governmental documents in Pakistan as Scheduled Castes. The identity ‘Dalit’ as a political category in literature and journalism in Sindh was popularized by Dolat Thari (Meghwar) and Ganpat Rai Bheel. Dolat Thari popularized it through the monthly newsletter ‘Dalit Awaz’ in the early 2000s. Ganpat Rai Bheel, affiliated with Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum and SCFP, popularized it in literature circles by persistently writing and publishing in newspapers and a monthly digest ‘Dalit Adab’¹ with its first edition in 2007.

Kancha Ilaiah (2002) suggests using the term Bahujan (majority) or Dalitbahujan to refer collectively to both the Dalits (Ati-Shudras,) and Shudras (neo-Kshatriyas) that are classified by the Indian state(s) as Other Backward Castes (OBC), to mark the socioeconomic difference from the dominant forward castes such as Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya caste groups. These forward castes are politically referred by

¹ For the pre-print copies and editorial processing of the digest see dataset: Hussain (2019zv), ‘Dalit Adab (Pre-prints by Ganpat Rai Bheel)’, Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/fmg2ghd4ht.1

Dalitbahujan activists in India as so-called Savarnas (that as per Brahminic ideology are believed to be twice-born, hence superior). In Pakistan, no differentiation is made between the forward and the backward castes, and instead, the categories of Jati Hindus and Scheduled Castes are used. Hence, while Scheduled Castes in Pakistan also contain those castes and tribes that in India are categorized as Scheduled Tribes and as undefined tribes, the Jati Hindu category includes both the historically privileged castes and the occupational castes (i.e. ex-Shudras). The locals made the differentiation between the dominant castes within Jati Hindus and labeled them as Sethia (Saithiyā)/Vaniya (Vāṇiyā), Thakurs and Brahmins as the oppressor caste groups. Hence, for them not all Jati Hindus were oppressors. To render that difference theoretically and ideologically meaningful, I borrow the term Savarna from the Ambedkarites in India, and use it where necessary, to identify the dominant Brahmin, Thakurs (Kshatriya) and Vāṇiyo/Saithiyā (Vaishya) caste groups. Further, I use the term ‘neo-Kshatriya’ and ex-Shudras, the classification suggested by Kancha Ilaiah, where required to mark the empirically existing class differences within the marginalized Jati Hindu castes. I define Savarnization in a little bit different sense of the meaning than implied by Sharmila Rege (1998 & 2006), or from the Sanskritization, the term coined by M.N. Srinivas (1952). Rege (1998) used it to explain the “Savarnization of womanhood,” whereby she argued that it was a “classical exclusion” where all the women came to be looked at as “Savarna” (p.42). Similarly, M.N. Srinivas coined the term ‘Sanskritization’ to explain the caste mobility whereby, ‘a caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, [...] and it's ritual and pantheon, [...] the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and adoption of the Brahminic way of life’ or that of the twice-born (Srinivas, 1952, p.32).

Dalitbahujan scholars and the activists, however, do not wholeheartedly buy Rege’s and Srinivas’ notions of Savarnization and Sanskritization (see Guru, 1993; Guru, 1995; Kumar, 2016). The explanation of M.N. Srinivas gives the impression that the caste identities change, and the Dalits become the ‘upper castes’. In this thesis, I contend that despite the inherent flexibility of the ‘caste’ whereby Dalits tend to climb the caste ladder by adopting ‘upper caste’ names, by hiding their stigmatized caste names and the ‘untouchable’ past, or by associating with the Hindu Savarnas, they fail to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy and continue to be discriminated and excluded. Hence, instead of ‘Sanskritization’, I call it Savarnization, i.e. the (unsuccessful) tendency of the Dalits and the neo-Kshatriyas or the ex-Shudras to adopt Savarna caste names, and to identify

with the Hindu (post) Vedic religion and the Savarna customs. I call these attempts either as unsuccessful, or partially successful, as the Savarnas tend to differentiate between original and fake Savarnas and reposition themselves as the superiors. The same is true in the case of Dalits emulating the Ashrafia (Ashrāfiyā) classes. Hence, I make use of the Savarnization and the Ashrafization (the tendency to associate with the Sayeds, or with any other Ashrafia caste) (see Vreede-de Stuers, 1968; Morimoto, 2004; Buehler, 2012) in the similar sense of the meaning as parallel processes and tendencies among Dalits to emulate the Savarna and Ashrafia classes, that I argue, did not seem to get the desired results for the Dalits.

Similarly, since the terms ‘Bahujan’ and ‘Dalitbahujan’ have not entered into the social imaginary of Sindhi civil society in Pakistan, I prefer to use the term ‘Dalit’ which has acquired currency among Dalit activists and in media in Sindh and Pakistan. I, however, where necessary, use the term ‘Dalitbahujan’ in a broader etic sense of the meaning to refer to all oppressed castes that may include Scheduled Castes, Pasmandas (‘lower caste’ converts to Ahmedi² sect/religion and Islam), Dalit Christians and also many other oppressed castes whose religion cannot be defined or identified in any of the well-known categories. Since many from among Jati Hindus and also from Dalits claim to be Kshatriyas, I mention them, where necessary as ‘ex-Shudras’ or the ‘neo-Kshatriyas’ as defined by the Kancha Ilaiah. The use of the term ‘Ashrafia’, ‘Ashrafia class’ or ‘Ashrafia castes’ to refer to the historically privileged castes among Muslims is inspired by the Pasmanda Muslim intellectuals such as Khalid Anis Ansari and Masood Alam Falahi, and the academicians such as A.F. Buehler and Morimoto Kazuo. This etic-emic use of the broader inclusive categories of Dalitbahujan, Savarna, and Ashraf has been made to understand the identitarian contention between Scheduled Castes and the Vaniya, Thakur, Brahmin and Sayed castes.

² On Dalits belonging to different religions and belief systems also see sections 2.9.3.1, 7.5, 8.7 and 9.3.

Abstract

This study analyses the ways Dalit activists contest and (re)construct social identities to gain self-respect and political representation in Sindh, Pakistan. The study spans over four years of episodic field work consisting of 16 months from September 2015 to August 2017, and from October 2018 to January 2019, in villages and towns in Sindh province of Pakistan, particularly Mirpurkhas and Hyderabad divisions, where Dalit activists had some public visibility. To explore contestation between the opponents and the supporters of the ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity markers, the researcher became one of the core members of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (DST), a group of anti-caste activists. DST opened up outlets to interact with several Dalit and anti-caste activists that were members of different social and political groups. Most of the Dalit activists belonged to Kolhi, Bheel and Meghwar castes, which are the demographic majority in lower Sindh. The ethnographic insights are supplemented with an analysis of vernacular literature and official documents.

Looking from the Ambedkarian perspective, the study revealed the arbitrariness of identity markers. The arbitrary identities were adopted by Dalit activists in the discursive spaces where Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony persists in its various forms. Instead of diluting casteism, Political Sufism glossed over caste-frictions under the performative and the rhetorical Sufi-Muslim binaries whereby Sufi was accommodative of Hindus, but a Muslim was not. Similarly, the Ashrafia denial of casteism set the epistemic barrier not to problematize caste thereby discouraging to entertain Dalit issue. The denial thrived on performative assumption that there is no concept of caste discrimination among Muslims. These normatively hegemonic assumptions choked Dalit agency to problematize caste-based discrimination and to formulate their political demands.

Though Dalit activists assert to (re)construct their identities and history to achieve caste-parity and gain self-respect, it does not wholly work as desired and often prove rather counterproductive turning Dalits into loyal subordinates of Savarna-Ashrafia political elite. Their reluctance to confront the Ashrafia elite as compared to Savarna (Hindu) elite (of the Vaniya/Lohana, Thakur and Brahmin castes) reflected the limits of their assertion in the Muslim dominated polity and the hegemonic influence of Ashrafia narrative that was constraining them to Ashrafize.

Despite the appropriability of Dalit spaces, identities and issues, the possibility of counterhegemonic Dalit assertions was not completely foreclosed. There did exist a minimal epistemic and discursive space for Dalit assertions at the margins of civil society though. The impact of that discursive space became evident during the 6th population census held in 2017. The campaign launched by Dalit activists to mark the Scheduled Caste category instead of ‘Hindu’ paid dividends. The census results reflected an unprecedented demographic shift, and affirmed the viability of doing Dalit politics in Pakistan. Dalit activists could experiment with identity (re)construction in ways that could enable them to gain the desired self-respect. They could add to their subaltern consciousness of being oppressed majority (as against the Hindu minority). This assertion as the oppressed class was immanent from their attempts to invert religious binaries by asserting Scheduled Castes, Dalit and Darāwar identity markers. It was also evident from their attempts to reframe their caste-based, ethnic, regional and national identity markers. The study, thus, concludes that identity assertions were infusing in Dalits a much-needed optimism and giving them the sense of direction to make social forums inclusive of all Dalit castes so that they could legitimize claims of representation in proportion to their demographic strength and subalternity.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Conception of the Research Problem

I had previously researched the nature of sharecropping, reciprocity and the conflict in the peasant communities of Sindh³ (see Hussain, Mohyuddin, & Mahesar, 2013; Hussain, Mohiyuddin, Ahmed, 2013; Hussain & Mohiyuddin, 2014; Hussain, Mohyuddin, & Ahmed, 2014). This was followed by the ethnographic research on the activism of Parkari Kolhi (Kūlhi) community in Badin, Sindh, in 2013-14 (see Hussain, 2014)⁴. From this background research on the peasants and the Kolhi community, I came to infer that there are social hierarchies within peasants and that they were organized based on their caste identities⁵. I also inferred that as compared to ‘lower caste’ Muslim peasants, the Hindu Dalits were more marginalized, and were being actively discriminated against because of their caste. Some of the Dalits that I interacted with also practiced Christianity, Islam and other religions, but the religion did not seem to have brought about an improvement in their living conditions or their social status. I noticed that along with Kolhis, the large number of Bheels (Bhilz) and Meghwars (Mainghwārz) had decisive electoral strength in lower Sindh, particularly in Mirpurkhas division, the locale of my study.

Socioeconomic marginality set the Dalits apart from the Vaniya, Sodha (Sodhā) Thakur (Savarnas) and the ex-Shudra (Bahujan) castes of the Hindus. To reframe that socioeconomic disparity and difference from the Vaniya, Thakur, and Brahmin castes, Parkari Kolhis were asserting Darāwaṛ identity markers and were reframing themselves as the indigenous warrior tribe having a 5000-year-old historical and civilizational legacy. I found that while their ‘hidden script’ (Scott, 1990) was to organize around their Parkari Kolhi caste as against the Ashrafia landlords, and for that they were utilizing every possible social and political forum, their ‘public script’ (Scott, 1990) informed that they were striving for the rights of all the peasants (Hussain, 2014; Hussain 2019a).

³ Sindh province has the population of 47.89 million (Source: Bureau of Census Pakistan), and is located at 25.8943° N, 68.5247° E coordinates on the world map.

⁴ For the online citable link to my research during M.Phil, see: Hussain (2019zb), “The Rise of Dalit Peasants: Kolhi Activism in Lower Sindh”, Mendeley Data, V3, doi: 10.17632/5sfhcztmx6.3.

⁵ On social hierarchies in Sindh see also the datasets:

Hussain (2019z), “Types and Nature of Dalit Exclusion in Sindh”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/589kvr8hzn.2.

Hussain (2019za), “Typological presentation of hierarchies of oppression and intersectionality in Pakistan”, Mendeley Data, V3, doi: 10.17632/kvhx52mdw5.3.

During that early engagement with the Parkari Kolhi community, I came to know that a few of the Kolhi activists were referring to themselves as Scheduled Castes⁶ as well; quite a few were using the term ‘Dalits’ too. However, most of the time they referred to themselves as Kolhis and Hindus by occasionally suffixing with it ‘Darāwar’ identity marker. This made me curious to explore further how similarly situated communities, particularly Meghwar and Bheel define and contest their identities. I began asking myself who defined them in the first place and how salient were these identity markers in the political sphere of Sindh. This query shaped the research question in the early stages of ethnographic exploration, and consequently, I embarked upon knowing the nature of the politics of these communities organized around their identitarian assertions.



Figure 1: Versi Kolhi (left) and me (right) with the local small landlord Khameeso Khan Korai Baloch (center) at his Otaq (guest house) near Versi Kolhi Colony, Naon Dumbaalo, Badin, Sindh,

Source: Author (2013)

I remained in touch with the Parkari Kolhi activists for the next two years and kept myself abreast of the issues that they confronted. Meanwhile, I was trying to find a way to engage with some leading Dalit activists of Meghwar, Bheel, Baghri (Bāghri) and other Dalit communities. It did not seem too difficult to locate them as they could often be found at protests, rallies and civil society programs. Moreover, the nature of the research, being on activists who remained on the move from one village to another and from one town to the other, afforded me to expand my research locale to several towns. Social media, cell

⁶ See Table VIII and IX in Appendix for the list of Scheduled castes in Pakistan.

phones, and the internet also provided the additional space to engage with the activists before and after my meetings with them at various places. What proved to be more challenging was to situate me as an ethnographer within their contesting political narratives and personal viewpoints. After several abortive attempts to (re)establish rapport, I finally found out a way to establish long-lasting interaction when I met with Radha Bheel, an ambitious lady of my age (37) who was willing to seek and experiment alternative ways of social and political activism. My first meeting with her did not begin on a good note though, as she seemed quite suspicious of my motives. I was like a selfish researcher, who would collect data and disappear without benefiting them in any way. I had to explain to her that I was there to stay as the nature of my research demanded of me to stay with the anti-caste activists for a long time. But this did not pacify her concerns. She said, ‘If you care, then *ada* [brother] stand with us’⁷. I also assured her that I will engage with her as an activist and stand by their cause. Since I was interested more in the political aspect of anti-caste activism, I asked her if she ever thought of joining any party. She replied, ‘I was once in Awāmī Tehreek⁸, they have the program for the oppressed. My brother is with them, but I think we need to have our platform’.

During this 32-minute heated conversation that I had with Radha Bheel on January 16, 2016, at Press Club Hyderabad, her tone was very assertive and expressive of pent-up emotions. She wanted to represent Bheels, her caste fellows, and other Dalit communities without relinquishing her fidelity for Sindh and Pakistan. She had come from Mirpurkhas city to participate in a program of Rawadari Tehreek, a civil society group active for the restoration of interfaith harmony that they believed was undermined by Islamic extremism. The participants reiterated that ‘Sindh is the land of Sufis’, and that Hindus, Muslims and the Christians have lived there with exemplary peace and religious harmony. The program was organized in coordination with Veerji Kolhi (although he was not there by the time I arrived) and was attended by her sister Krishna Kolhi⁹. I had specially come to see if the Rawadari Tehreek had on its agenda the issues of caste-based discrimination. I had come to interview some notable peasant rights activists including Veerji Kolhi. Veerji Kolhi had

⁷ Most of the conversations quoted in this study were made in Sindhi language, the lingua franca of Sindh, the province of Pakistan

⁸ Awāmī Tehreek is the Marxist-Maoist-Leninist party with the Sindhi nationalist inclinations.

⁹ Krishna Kolhi was later elected senator in the parliament on the reserved seat of women given by PPP on March 12, 2018. Veerji too made Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Sindh on April 1, 2019.

become an activist after the story of his family's release from bonded labor had become symbolic of the oppressiveness of 'upper caste' landlords¹⁰.

After having delved in anti-feudal politics Veerji Kolhi and most of the other 'non-Muslim' human rights activists had significantly shifted their activism in the direction of minority rights. 'Minority' is the term largely conceived in Pakistan in terms of religion, instead of class or ethnic group. This gradually became evident to me during my interaction with these minority rights activists who did not seem to take interest in me when I told them that I was investigating the status of Scheduled Castes in Pakistan. They were looking at me with suspicion as if I were an outsider, not a 'minority', not a 'Hindu'. I noticed the unwelcoming expressions of Veerji Kolhi and Krishna Kolhi who did not seem to like being called Scheduled Castes. The same was the case with a few Christian and Sindhi Sufi activists who had gathered there. But Radha Bheel was an exception. Her face brightened when I told her the same. The conversation with her was enlightening as it unraveled the identitarian friction existing within the 'minority' rights activists on the issue of politicization of caste. She seemed eager to establish her forum, and it felt she was already working and was lobbying for it. She invited me to meet her again at her house in Mirpurkhas, a city at a distance of 74 km to the east of Hyderabad in Sindh province. As planned, I met her again after two days at her house in Mirpurkhas where Mahesh Bheel, president of Bheel Intellectual Forum (BIF), and Satram Das, Radha's husband, also joined us. BIF was already uplifting the Bheel community. They also had on their agenda the issues of all Scheduled Castes, particularly the issue of political representation. During the conversation, it became evident to me that since the BIF was primarily catering to a single caste, it could not efficiently represent Dalits belonging to other castes. Mahesh had realized that and wanted to broaden the scope of their struggle that could eventually lead them into mainstream politics.

Before meeting with Radha, I had interviewed 22 other Dalit activists, mostly Ambedkarites (anti-caste activists). I also had several lengthy conversations with the Dalit activists who were scattered across lower Sindh in different towns. I found many of them looking for a political alternative. They wanted either to reinvigorate already established anti-caste and caste-based forums or to form newer ones. After having discussed casteism

¹⁰ The family of Veerji Kolhi had been allegedly in bondage of a local landlord who demanded a sum of Rs65, 000 for their release. His family was eventually released and Veerji after few years in 2012 emerged as the Hindu minority rights activist after having training from Mehrgarh, an Islamabad-based NGO. Listen him online explaining bonded laborer. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGM97Ni1wiE>.(Retrieved on July 22, 2019)

at length with key anti-caste activists, it became evident to me that my engagement with them as a researcher could not help much to gather further in-depth data without my active participation in their struggle.



Figure 2: Dalit activists discussing the possible name of the forum on April 16, 2016, at Mirpurkhas
Source: Author (2016)



Figure 3: Sharing my views in an inaugural program of DST on May 7, 2016.

Source: Author (2016)

Also, I gradually came to realize that I should become part of the initiative forethought by Radha, Mahesh and like-minded activists since many of them seemed reluctant to include me in their domain of ‘minority’ politics. This realization happened at a time when some Dalit activists were already planning to form a vibrant civil society forum or even a political organization for oppressed castes and classes. Hence, my gradual acceptance as a researcher-cum-activist coincided with the formation of Dalit Sujaag

Tehreek ¹¹(DST), a formal association of Dalit activists initiated by Radha Bheel, Mahesh Bheel, Sher Muhammad Solangi, Ahmed Soomro, Sono Khangharani, Malji Meghwar, and several other Dalit activists. I had become closely associated with these activists by the time they formed Dalit Sujaag Tehreek on May 7, 2016¹². Hence, while I was contemplating to involve myself with the Dalit activists more meaningfully, most of these activists already had matured the idea to form a vibrant anti-caste forum.

The formation of DST further unfolded the preexisting identitarian rupture between the ‘minority’ rights activists and the Scheduled Castes activists or the Dalit rights activists. It initiated the debate on caste discrimination, untouchability, Scheduled Castes’ rights, and Dalit politics. This study analyses that contestation over the choice of multiple identities, and the (dis)use of social, ethnic and political labels or categories that I observed as the researcher-cum-activist of DST. Hence, DST served for me both as the social and epistemological loci from where I observed and let others observe me.

Being considered literate and well-versed, I was given by DST members the task of writing literature for the forum, particularly in English. To that end, along with face-to-face interactions, I also made intensive use of cell phones and social media, particularly Facebook, as the major vehicle to highlight the issues of Dalit communities. Social media and cell phone networking played an instrumental role in organizing activists, inviting newcomers, and in publicizing literature. I was also assigned the task of managing chat boxes and social media pages of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek¹³. Similarly, Ranshal Kolhi, Ganpat Rai Bheel, and others were to write the literature in Sindhi language and share on social media pages or get it published and disseminated through friendship circles. Sher Muhammad was managing a WhatsApp group. The historical analysis of demographic shifts, the discursive analysis of Dalit identity contestation, and the critique of Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony given in this dissertation is based on the representation of the narrative that emerged out of that engagement with the activists of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek, Scheduled

¹¹ Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (DST) literally means, the ‘Movement for the Awakening of Dalits’.

¹² Dr Saeed Ahmed Rid and Dr Qasim Sodhar have written research article on emerging Dalit discourse in Sindh by quoting me as ‘the founding member and guiding spirit behind DST’. Rid & Sodhar, 2019, p. 175).

¹³ See the Facebook group page of DST, URL: <https://web.facebook.com/groups/Dalit.Sujaag/> (accessed July 8, 2019).

See also DST page : <https://web.facebook.com/DalitSujaagTehreek/>. (accessed July8, 2019)

Castes Federation of Pakistan, Bheel Intellectual Forum and several other small as well as large pro-Dalit and anti-Dalit civil society activists.



Figure 4: Glimpses of the campaign for DST contestants in general elections held in Pakistan in July 2018.

Source: DST (2018)

I interacted with these forums or groups and actively engaged episodically for a period of 16 months from September 2015 to August 2016 and from October 2018 to January 2019. Most of the issues of Dalits that we highlighted were related to three demographically prominent Dalit communities, namely Kolhi, Bheel and Meghwar castes as most of the

Dalit activists belonged to these communities. The issues revolved around some of the following major activities, protests, demands, and political statements:

1. Caste-based assertions by Kolhis, Bheels and Meghwars demanding inclusion and representation.
2. The simultaneous assertion of the indigenous Sindhi Dravidian, Thari, Pakistani and Hindu identities.
3. Debates on the suitability of 'Dalit', Scheduled Castes identity markers.
4. Debates on the originality, validity, relevance and the impact of Manusmriti and the Vedic scriptures.
5. Debates on the historical causes of untouchability and Dalitness.
6. Adivasi land rights, protests and the long march of Sindh Kolhi Itihad
7. Dalit forums protesting abduction, rape, and murder and alleged forced religious conversions of minor Dalit and Hindu girls.
8. Expressions of regret over the tendency to commit suicide among Kolhi community.
9. Land-grabbing, encroachment of graveyards.
10. Lack of education and school facilities in Dalit villages and neighborhoods.
11. Various atrocities such as physical violence against Dalit men or women.
12. Maltreatment of Dalit children at schools.
13. Untouchability at schools and hotels.
14. Protest for and/or against Hindu Marriage Bill.
15. Political representation at local, provincial and regional level.
16. Protests for the release of Dalit activists such as Versi Kolhi, Veerji Kolhi and Veeru Kohli (indigenous rights activists).
17. Kolhi and Bheel complaining against Meghwar dominance.
18. BIF (Bheel Intellectual Forum) demanding inclusion in Pakistan Hindu Council.
19. 1,288 days long symbolic hunger strike by Manu Bheel to get released his family from the alleged bondage of Marri landlord.
20. Protests by Pakistan Darāwar Itihad and Megh Samaj Sath against the murders of Dalit boys by the Saithiyā (savarna) employers.
21. Rallies for marking scheduled castes in the 6th population census.
22. Campaign for contesting in general elections in 2018.

During my fieldwork, in some of the protests and rallies, one forum agitated against another, such as BIF Pakistan (Bhagchand group¹⁴) protesting against Dalit Sujaag Tehreek, or a protest of Kolhi community of Mirpurkhas against Krishna Kolhi's selection as senator by PPP, and, alternatively, to support Advocate Bheemchand Kolhi. Apart from that, Dalit activists generated debate on pertinent issues in the print media, radio and social media. This multicoated and multifaceted activism for a while created an aura of movement for the rights of Dalits.

I remained in touch with the Dalit activists through social media and intermittent field visits from 2016 till 2019. This rendered my study into the kind of focused ethnography analytically weaved with the insights taken from the conversations, in-depth interviews, field notes of the observations, ethnographic survey, social media content and the vernacular literature shared by the Dalit activists. Dalit activism can be termed as both (or either) the reformist and the revolutionary, and varies greatly in modus operandi, in strength, approach and organization. Dalit intellectuals explain Dalit activism as a form of assertion (Kumar, 2006; Rawat, 2017), which is believed to be democratically unifying instead of divisive and the casteist (Round Table India, 2017). Analyzing from this theoretical context, I trace the gradual shift in Dalit activism from harijanization to contemporary Dalit assertions. With the purpose to bring forth Dalit agency, I analyze attempts by Dalit activists to redefine their past to express the political difference from the Savarnas.

I investigate the problem preexisting casteism and caste discrimination against the Dalits that, as I increasingly came to realize, was not considered as the major issue by Sindhi civil society, local political activists and the state of Pakistan. The vantage point of Dalit activists enabled me to look critically at this denial and indifference of Ashrafia-dominated Sindhi civil society and to unravel historical, discursive and ideological reasons that were behind the undermining of the issues affecting Dalits. I seek to understand the dissonance between the empirical reality of caste-based exclusion and functionality of caste in Sindh; the society that was (is) under the hegemonic influence of Ashrafia and Savarna

¹⁴ When I entered the field, Bheel Intellectual Forum had already dissented into two groups namely BIF-Sindh and BIF-Pakistan. The latter group was headed by young advocate Bhagchand Bheel.

classes. Ashrafia class mainly consists of *Sammāt*¹⁵, *Baroch* (Baloch¹⁶), *Pathan* (early Pashtoon migrants from Afghanistan), and the castes claimants of Arab and Sayed descent. These caste groups are predominantly Muslim by religion. Another class I call Savarna, the term commonly used by the Dalit intellectuals for castes that historically have dominated over them. The Savarna class mainly consists of Vaniya/Saithiyā/Lohano/Deewan, Thakur, and Brahmin caste groups. In this study, I investigate the worldview of Dalits as they imagine themselves as the caste group(s) existing in the spaces/places dominated by Ashrafia-Savarna classes.

Given the above ethnographic background, I will further extrapolate Dalit predicament in the coming chapters to see the possibilities of the moral-ethical and their political agency that require of them to assert for their representation and inclusion in the mainstream. The ways they (re)define, (re)construct and (re)classify their identity markers to achieve political inclusion will be explored in detail. It will be followed by the analysis of their counterhegemonic maneuvers, the ways they assert their agency and redefine, contest and construct their identities. This question led to further explore and analyze the structural givens, caste-class structure of Sindh, the causes of Dalit exclusion and ‘upper caste’ (both Ashrafia and Savarna) hegemony and domination concerning Dalit activism.

The critical Ambedkarian (anti-caste) perspective will guide my analysis throughout the thesis. While other critical discourse analytic approaches (on CDA see Fairclough, 1995; Lazar, 2005; Van Dijk, 1996; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) when combined with Marxist approaches in general may also be effective in deconstructing the hegemonic social relations of caste as it intersects with race and gender, the critical anti-caste approach further deepens the inquiry by sharpening focus on caste as the structural site of oppression, exploitation, exclusion, and humiliation. As this thesis will demonstrate, it critiques the relations between discourse and power in society, particularly in the South Asian context, and specifically when caste question is invoked to critique hegemonic Ashrafia and Savarna discourses that perpetuate Dalit exclusion. It reflects upon the ways meaning may be articulated simultaneously through multiple modes such as literary texts and everyday conversations on the local politics. Therefore, the critical intervention of an

¹⁵ *Sammāt* is the major Sindhi indigenous ‘upper caste’ group that is believed to have converted to Islam from ‘upper caste’ Rajput castes. The consciousness of a common genealogy exists between Hindu Rajputs, Muslim Rajput migrants from Rajasthan (Dhat area) and that of Sindhi Sammat castes of Indus basin. Rajput Association was formed in 1960s by Qaimkhani Muslim Rajputs that recognized Rana Chander Singh (Hindu) as their local Rajput Chief.

¹⁶ *Baloch* is another dominant ethnic group in Sindh whose dominance in politics was well-established in Sindh before the British overwhelmed Talpur (Baloch) rulers in Sindh in 1857.

anti-caste perspective in the South Asian context should be understood as a form of analytical activism aimed at achieving radical social change by problematizing casteism and related social anomalies such as untouchability and Dalit exclusion from epistemic and discursive spaces of knowledge production and opinion-making.

My primary purpose was as such not to explore the nature or level of oppression, the culture of Dalits, or the tribal-caste hierarchies, but the assertions and activism of Dalits against caste-based discrimination and political exclusion. Nonetheless, insofar as the empirical evidence permitted, I have also made some relevant and necessary generalizations about the overall caste structure of Sindh, the existence of casteism in public places, in mosques, at schools and towns or village hotels, and as it manifests from the membership in local government offices, and in legislative assemblies. I discuss the contemporary nature of casteism, specifically showing how certain historically privileged castes have been working under the implicit social contract to continue dominating Dalit castes. This approach ultimately unfolded into the critique of Ashrafia and Savarna domination and hegemony as it reflected in the specific interpretation of political Sufism (Sindhi nationalism, Hindutvadi ideology) and Islam (Pakistani nationalism).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

‘Caste’ is the social structure and an institution typical to South Asian countries. It regulates inherited and ascribed relations of domination and subordination whereby certain caste groups thrive on their privileged status while others remain subdued and excluded from the mainstream (see Ahmed, 1978 (1973); A.R.Desai, 1979; Guha, 1982; Guha, 1997; Ilaiah, 2002; Jodhka et al, 2010; Falahi, 2009). While casteism and the identity politics that undergirds it, has been sufficiently studied in India, it remains at the periphery of academic and political discourses in Pakistan (see section 1.4 and 3.3.4 on why caste as a category lies at the periphery of academia and politics in Pakistan; see also Singha, 2015; Lee, 2018; Hussain 2019a; Hussain 2019b; Hussain 2020). The researchers in Pakistan have, however, dealt with it as a social phenomenon peripheral to class or religion and nation (see, for instance, Ahmed, 1970; Alavi, 1973; Jaffrelot, 2015).

One may also find some studies on political Islam, Sufism and the criticism of the state’s religious narrative based on the two-nation theory. A few studies done in Pakistan analyze political Sufism at a state level (see, for instance, Ewing, 1983; Suleman, 2018). Similarly, a few studies on Sindh help understand the nexus of feudalism and *pirs*

(spiritual heads, saints and or Sufis) in politics of patronage (See Ansari 1992; Cheesman, 1997) and on the intersection of Sindhi nationalism and Sufism (see Verkaaik, 2004; Levesque, 2016). Sarah Ansari (1992), however, in her remarkable historical documentation of the political influence of Pirs in Sindh, thoroughly examines the rise of Pirs to power. It furnishes the insights into the concomitant rise of Sayeds to power beginning with the early 18th century. These studies, however, do not specifically deal with the Sayed-Ashrafia hegemony, much less the comparative status of the underprivileged caste groups. All such studies that are considered as the major scholarly work on the relevant themes in Sindh have not dealt with the casteist dimension of society.

Similarly, studies on castes done in Punjab or northern areas of Pakistan are of descriptive nature and mainly focus on the functional aspects of kinship patronage (see Barth, 1960; Marriott, 1960; Ahmed, 1978; Wasim, 1994; Chaudhary, 1999; Lyon, 2002; Lefebvre, 2014 (1999); Martin, 2016). Hence, while one may find a few academic references to the existence of casteism in Pakistan, the hegemonic aspect of political Sufism and Islam as it perpetuates Ashrafia hegemony and Dalit exclusion has so far evaded the identitarian politics embedded in academia. Though different scholars sufficiently enlighten us about the historical-political and economic role of Ashrafia class, particularly Pirs and Sayeds in Sindh, they, however, seem to evade the caste question, i.e. the significance of casteism as it leads to caste-based discrimination and Dalit exclusion.

This study attempts to fill in that research gap by extrapolating the politics of caste as it is negotiated and contested by the underprivileged anti-caste and Dalit activists in Sindh, Pakistan. It deals with the identity construction, the issues of representation and the denial of 'caste' as they are negotiated and contested by the Dalit activists in Sindh. It explains the researchers' engagement with the Dalit activists as they struggle to assert their identities, problematize caste-based discrimination and strive for self-respect and demand political representation. It is premised on the assumption that historically Scheduled Castes make one of the most oppressed and politically excluded communities. Their socio-economic marginality has a history that can be traced to the colonial and pre-colonial times (see Desai, 1979; Guha, 1982; Guha, 1997; Ilaiah, 2002; Thapar, 2003; 2014; see also section 3.2). This study traces Scheduled Castes' marginality as it was deepened in the post-Partition neo-communal setting in Pakistan. In lower Sindh, particularly in Mirpurkhas division Scheduled Castes assume the greater political significance based on their population strength (see Shah, 2007; Hussain 2019a; Hussain 2019b). This demographic concentration of Dalits in some 11 districts of lower Sindh plays a decisive

role in the victory or defeat of any political candidate or party (see Population Census Organisation, 2014; Election Commission of Pakistan, 2018; Census Organization Pakistan, 1961). Despite having significant demographic strength in certain districts of lower Sindh and Southern Punjab, they remain considerably underrepresented in all sectors of society and politics. This study aims at explaining the social, cultural and political reasons behind such disparities.

Speaking in the language of Dalit activists of Sindh, this study specifically contends the religious category of ‘Hindu’ as it glosses over the constitutionally approved socio-economic category of ‘Scheduled castes’ along with other categories such as ‘Dalit’, ‘Darawar’ etc. It takes issues with the Dalit identification with a religious minority group as it invisibilises their special status as the underclass, and argues for their recognition as a socioeconomically marginalized section of society in need of reservation, quota or affirmative action. It problematizes the discursive landscape of Sindh, and interrogates the dominant narratives that obstruct and hegemonize the Dalit agency and shape the identitarian politics¹⁷. Tracing the discursive trajectory of the neo-communal Hindu-Muslim politics, the demographic counts and the legislative counter-measures, it explains the erasure of Scheduled Caste identity, its replacement with the religious identity, and the subsequent diminishing of the possibility for Dalits to demand separate electorate, reservations in jobs and the representation in local government.

The study is supposed to inform the academics and policymakers regarding the reasons behind Dalit underrepresentation in social and political spheres, the erasure of caste, the silence over the plight of Dalits, and the nature of hegemonic relations that regulate Dalit marginality and impede Dalit agency. It shows how the minoritisation of Dalits has created categorical confusion and limited their epistemic choice to conceive the counterhegemonic identity markers to nullify the denial-based Savarna-Ashrafia domination. In doing so, it liberates Dalit agency as it reflects in their everyday assertions to redefine their ethnic and caste identities that were either self-chosen (Kolhi, Bheel, Baghri, Muslim Shaikhs, etc.) or imposed (*Achoot, Harijan, Mussali*, etc.). It shows how they contest the construction of the meaning and the use of both the imposed and self-chosen identities, particularly their contestation over ‘Dalit’, ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘Sindhi’, ‘Darāwar’ and ‘Hindu’ identities, to gain self-respect and caste-parity.

¹⁷ On how I analyzed literature and which sources explored, see the dataset: Hussain (2019d), “*Literature on Dalit Activism: Excerpts, Review and Notes: 2014-2018*”, Mendeley Data, v1 <http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/jgfkxkrw54b.1>.

1.3 Research Question

1. How different identities interplay to shape the inter-caste politics, inform about the issues of Dalits and shape anti-caste activism?
2. How social and political issues are framed and projected by Dalit activists in Sindh, Pakistan?
3. How the issues of Dalit identity, inclusion, representation and self-respect are negotiated by Dalit activists and can be further resolved?

1.4 Lack of Academic Evidence

The research problem can further be explained in terms of empirically existing denial of casteism and the erasure of caste academia as the empirically relevant category central to Dalit oppression. ‘Caste’ is not merely a basic social category, a social status symbol, but a symbolic capital transformable into political capital. That caste capital reflects in local politics as well. The claims at the local level to own the electoral constituency and seats in local union council, taluka, district, provincial and national assemblies are made based on the support from one’s caste or the aligned groups of caste *bradaris* (communities) supporting any particular candidate. The tribal-caste lords also make claims to own any political constituency based on their inherited right to rule. Therefore, the number of people any particular caste or the group of castes, or the influence any tribal-caste landlord holds over the people of any particular constituency it is of great political and economic importance at local, provincial and state level.

Since Dalits were in large numbers in certain electoral constituencies in lower Sindh, they did not have equal political representation at the local, provincial and national level. Instead, they were humiliated and discriminated by the Ashrafia and Savarna castes. This reflected Ashrafia and Savarna hegemony over Dalits, the rigorous and authoritative academic evidence for which did not exist before. The studies done on Dalit Christians in urban Sindh by Pieter Streefland (1979) and Sarah Singha (2015) are the only notable academic works done in urban Sindh that, to some extent, investigate the hegemonic aspect of religion vis-à-vis caste location. Based on the content analysis of data extracted from audio-visual records of church activities, Sarah Singha illustrated “the issues of persecution and caste discrimination” (Singha 2015, pp. 5). The source that has been most often cited by Sarah Singha (2015) and other scholars on the Scheduled Castes of Pakistan is the report written by Zulfiqar Shah (2007). It is the report that is paradoxically written by a Sayed affiliated with the advocacy-based NGO that is targeted by the civil society to deny

casteism, presenting it as the proof that the reframing of issues related to caste discrimination, such as Dalit exclusion, are grafted into Pakistan by donor-driven NGOs. In his report on Scheduled Castes of Pakistan, Zulfiqar Shah viewed the issue of Dalit representation from a religious-minority perspective, arguing that Scheduled Castes were politically alienated after the introduction of the separate electorate, which was based on religious categorisation (Shah, 2007 p. 24). Shah does not explain or suggest a separate electorate for Scheduled Castes based on their distinctive socioeconomic status and instead assumes that Scheduled Castes make a religious group. This portrayal of Scheduled Castes as part of the religious minority contradicts the historical and ideological stance of Ambedkarites that see Scheduled Castes as the class of the oppressed that should be aligned with the ex-Shudras and other Bahujan (Pasmanda Muslims and Dalit Christians etc.) across religions.¹⁸

This shows not only the lack of research on casteism, and its peripheral position in academia and civil society, and the denial of the problem by the state, but also the level to which casteism and its different existential forms are denied. This denial seems more problematic in the case of Sindh, the province of Pakistan where a tiny minority of Sayed castes forms the core of the dominant Ashrafia class and an estimated 2-6 million of Scheduled Castes that live at the margins of society (Shah, 2007). To fill in that research gap on casteism left by studies on Dalit Christians in urban Sindh by Pieter Streefland (1979) and, Sarah Singha (2015), this study, therefore, explores the existence of Dalit agency and argues for its relevance in contemporary Sindhi and Pakistani society.

Although the evidence on caste-based discrimination and Brahminic hegemony in India is enormous (see Tambs-Lyche, 2016), the similar or parallel academic evidence about the Ashrafia hegemony in Pakistan, however, is lacking (see section 3.2 and 3.3). Based on the analysis of the available literature¹⁹, it can, however, be inferred that Islamization and the Ashrafization (i.e., the tendency to associate privileged Muslims castes (Buehler, 2012) in the postcolonial Sindh, in Pakistan was the result of increased

¹⁸ On the Ambedkarian stance about separate electorates, see B.R. Ambedkar in 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables, published in 1945 and also in 'States and Minorities', published in 1947).

See also. Denunciation of Poona Pact by Dr. Ambedkar that you haven't read: Retrieved from: <http://velivada.com/2017/05/26/denunciation-poona-pact-dr-ambedkar-havent-read/> .

¹⁹ See also sections 6.2 and 8.3 in this thesis and section 9.13 on 'Jogendar Nath Mandal on West Pakistan and SCs' in Hussain (2019d), "*Literature on Dalit Activism: Excerpts, Review and Notes: 2014-2018*", Mendeley Data, v1 <http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/jgfkxrw54b.1>

insecurity experienced by the non-Muslim communities declared as ‘minorities. The debate in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, during the early years of state formation, shows that the Muslim-dominated political culture was understood by ‘minorities’ as adding to their “ghettoization”.²⁰

Apprehensive of the hegemony of Ashrafia class over non-Muslims, the privileged caste Hindu legislators rejected the division of Hindus into “Caste Hindus” (hereby referred as Savarnas and Jati Hindus) and “untouchables” (Scheduled Castes) and considered any move to divide them as a conspiracy or ill-will of the Muslim majority²¹. Savarnas, in particular, continued to oppose it in East Pakistan until the separate electorates between Caste Hindus and Scheduled Castes were annulled in 1954 (Callard, 1957; Jaffrelot, 2015). Ultimately, the dominant caste groups within minorities, subsisted on minority (non-Muslim) narrative, their status of ‘second-rate’ citizenship and projected all minorities as monolithic and homogenous group of the oppressed, ignoring the fact that ‘non-Muslims’ or ‘minorities’ themselves were/are deeply divided into religious, sectarian and casteist lines. Internal ‘graded inequalities’ within minorities and Muslims and the subterranean caste-class frictions were shrouded under the cover of ‘minority’, ‘Hindu-Muslim’, and ‘Muslim-non-Muslim’ narratives. This reconstruction of ethnic identities into Muslims and non-Muslims or ‘minority’ affected the least Savarnized and the least Christianized ‘non-Muslim’ communities, such as Bheel, Meghwar, Kolhi, Jandawara, Kabootra, Sami, Sensi, Baghri, Oad etc.

I define Savarnization in a little bit different sense of the meaning than implied by Sharmila Rege (1998), or from ‘Sanskritization’, the term coined by MN Srinivas (1952). Rege used it to explain the “Savarnization of womanhood,” whereby she argued that it was a “classical exclusion” where all the women came to be looked at as “Savarna.” (p.42). Dalitbahujan scholars and the activists, however, do not wholeheartedly buy Rege’s argument. Similarly, MN Srinivas coined the term ‘Sanskritization’ to explain the caste mobility whereby, ‘a caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, [...] and it's ritual and pantheon, [...] the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and adoption of the Brahminic way of life” or that of the twice-born (Srinivas, 1952, p.32). According to Christophe Jaffrelot (2005), B.R. Ambedkar, probably after having influenced by E.T. Atkinson and Alfred Lyall (British Administrators), had suggested in his paper ‘Castes in India: Their

²⁰ Source: National Assembly Debates, Government of Pakistan., URL: <http://www.na.gov.pk/en/debates.php>.

²¹Ibid

Mechanism, Genesis and Development' (1917) such a gradual change in caste identities (p. 33).

Dalitbahun scholars and the activists, however, do not wholeheartedly buy Rege's (see Guru, 1995), Srinivas' (both scholars Brahmin by caste), or for that matter, Jaffrelot's explanations related to caste mobility and fluidity. Several early sociologists and anthropologists, including Srinivas, are often criticized by Dalit activists for suggesting that there are considerable flexibility and mobility in the caste hierarchies (see Guru, 1993; Kumar, 2016). The definition proffered by MN Srinivas gives the impression that caste identities change in a manner to dilute their past stigma, and that Dalits become the 'upper castes' in process. In this thesis, I contend that despite the inherent flexibility of 'caste' whereby Dalits tend to rise the caste ladder, such as, by adopting 'upper caste' names, by hiding their stigmatized caste and the 'untouchable' past, they fail to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy and continue to be discriminated and excluded. Hence, instead of 'Sanskritization', I call it Savarnization, that is, the process and the tendency of Dalits and neo-Kshatriyas or ex-Shudras to adopt Savarna caste names and to identify with the Hindu (post) Vedic religion and Savarna customs. I call these attempts unsuccessful, or partially successful, as the Savarnas tend to differentiate between original and fake Savarnas and reposition themselves as the superiors. The same is true in the case of Dalits emulating the Ashrafia classes. Hence, I make use of the Savarnization and the Ashrafization in the similar sense of the meaning as the parallel tendencies of Dalits to emulate Savarna and Ashrafia classes, that I argue, did not seem to get the desired results for Dalits.

1.5 Global Context and the Denial of Caste

Pakistan ranked fifth on the Christian support organization's Open Doors 2020 World Watch list of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian²². On November 28, 2018, the United States also added Pakistan to its blacklist of countries that violate religious freedom. In 2019, USCIRF again designated Pakistan as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), as it has found since 2002²³. USCIRF considers Pakistan a Tier 1 Country of Particular Concern due to its blasphemy law, official policies of religious discrimination, and failure to protect

²² Compared to Pakistan, India is number eleven on the 2018 World Watch List, 35 up from number thirty-one on the 2013 World Watch List, a list of the fifty countries where Christians are most severely persecuted. See: The 2013 World Watch List is here, OPEN DOORS (June 5, 2013), <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/the-2013-world-watch-list-is-here/>.

²³ See USCIRF, Annual Report 2019

religious minorities from terrorist organizations and individuals²⁴. It maintains that Sections 295 and 298 of Pakistan's Penal Code that criminalize acts and speech that insult a religion or religious beliefs or defile the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad, a place of worship, or religious symbols, are "inherently violate international standards of freedom of religion or belief, protecting beliefs over individuals"²⁵ (Hussain, 2020, p.9).

The recurring narrative in Pakistan often argues that the country was conceived by its founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah as a secular state but was turned into an Islamic Republic in 1956 when the first Constitution was introduced. Despite abundant material to the contrary, the proponents of this narrative allege that it was this watershed turn of events that had later led to the passage of laws and formation of statutory regulations²⁶ that are discriminatory to the religious minorities and that in a way sanctioned persecution of religious minorities.²⁷ Rights activists suggest that it was this radicalization of the State and society that has led to a systematic and organized persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan (see Hussain, 2020, p.9). All major international and global forums, including UN, EU, US Congress, and UK Parliament have taken notice of the persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan and enforced upon the government of Pakistan to take necessary measures. (see Hussain, 2020, p.9)

As is evident from the above passages, both locally and globally Pakistan is seen as religious state, and the different ethnic groups are also often seen in terms of religious binaries. Hence, Dalits are also not seen as Dalit or the oppressed class, but as Hindus, a religious group. This study sees this religious configuration as highly problematic as far the anti-caste stance of the Dalit activists matters. This minoritisation of 'Scheduled Castes' identity marker shrouded over Dalit majority in Pakistan. The shroud was sustained by the protagonists of state and local Ashrafia elite as reflected in their political statements. For instance, official statement was given by Barrister Zafarullah Khan, Minister of State for Law and Justice, in a 30th Meeting of the 61st Session of Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations²⁸, in which the Pakistani state was

²⁴ USCIRF, 2017 Annual Report, supra note 37, at 60.

²⁵ See USCIRF, Annual Report 2019.

²⁶ For instance, Pirbhu Satyani, a rights activist, noted that Article 2 (Islam shall be the State religion), Article 41 (president of the State will be a Muslim, and that prime minister will also be a Muslim) as given in the Constitution of Pakistan are discriminatory against non-Muslims (Satyani, 2014, p.14).

²⁷ Pirbhu Satyani notified that Anti-Blasphemy Laws, Hudood Ordinance and Law of Evidence (Qanoon-e-Shahadat), and establishment of Shariat Court and Council of Islamic Ideology as discriminatory against non-Muslims.

²⁸ United Nations has declared 'casteism' as the human rights abuse, a global phenomenon. See UN's Human Rights Council. Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues (A/HRC/31/56). United Nations, 2016.

represented by the delegation led by Dalit Christian Senator Kamran Michael, Minister for Human Rights, Head of the Delegation and eight others; all belonged to Ashrafia castes except Kamran Michael. Barrister Zafarullah Khan, in response to the queries regarding the status of Dalits in Pakistan even denied that there is anything about the Scheduled Castes in the constitution of Pakistan. He denied that there are Dalits in Pakistan. He denied that any Scheduled Castes are living in Pakistan (UN Web TV, 2017). He argued:

Can anybody prove where Dalits in Pakistan are! Any authentic book, any authentic survey, UN sponsored! [...] On the issue of Scheduled Castes, I think there is confusion. In our constitution, we do not have this scheme. Yes, we have that issue of majority and minority, but we don't have Scheduled Castes, we don't have Dalits. May be in India—but in Pakistan, we have a sizable Hindu community living in the province of Sindh bordering India, in the desert Thar. [...].

(Zafarullah in a 30th Meeting of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Source: UN Web TV, 2017)

Barrister Zafarullah's words epitomized the common perception of the public created by the state and the laws of Pakistan. They make pointed remarks to deny casteism without knowing the legal and constitutional status of Dalits in Pakistan and tend to view through binaries of minority-majority or Hindu-Muslim. Contrary to the state narrative, Dalit leaders in Pakistan advocate for Scheduled Castes and the Dalit rights. Dalit leaders belonging to the mainstream political parties maintain their political position that differs from Savarnas on the point of caste-discrimination. To illustrate an example, in a community gathering for a wedding ceremony in village Jhapyo, Mithi, Tharparkar, Engineer Giyanchand was there when Dr. Khatumal Jeewan delivered a historic speech on the status of Scheduled Castes in Pakistan and their social and political exclusion. At that time in 1995, Dr. Khatumal Jeewan was then a Member of the National Assembly (MNA) (1993-96), and Eng. Giyanchand Meghwar was MPA (1993-96). Dr. Khatumal said:

We spoke about Scheduled Caste communities. We spoke about them because we believe it is their right if Bheel is elected to assembly; it is the right of Kolhi to get elected. They have got their votes. When six to eight of our people would come into assemblies, by God, we shall change the whole map of this region.²⁹

²⁹ To read the full text of speech see dataset: Hussain (2019zc), "*Speech of Dr. Khatumal Meghwar (Transcribed in English)*", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/yrb4yc3sxs.2.

It can be accessed online at: <http://roundtableindia.co>. The speech was delivered in 1995-96 (the exact date is unconfirmed). Dr. Khatu Mal Jeewan delivered that speech to Meghwar community in a private wedding of the son of Arjan Das Meghwar at village Jhapyo, Mithi, Tharparkar Sindh. Dr. Khatu Mal Jeevan was then MNA (1993-96), and Eng. Giyanchand MPA (1993-96). In this short speech, he speaks reflects on the oppressed past, existing challenges to Dalit communities, about his own trust in Eng. Giyanchand, both Meghwar, about his commitment to community and the need for trans-local Scheduled castes or Dalit alliance. I have translated it and got it published in Roundtable India, the online Dalit Think-tank based in India.

Excerpts from Speech of Dr. Khatumal Jeevan (MNA) delivered in 1996. During my fieldwork, common Dalits also reported the same, except that some of them had an issue with the use of 'Dalit' identity marker to refer to them. This shows that while the locals had the realization of being oppressed and many of them were conscious of their Dalitness, the state of Pakistan neither recognizes castes as the social problem nor accepts the factual reality of Dalit oppression or the use of Scheduled castes\ Dalit as the social, political, legal and constitutional category. Pakistan explicitly stipulated in a report submitted to UN's CERD on November 2015, that "there is no apartheid and racial segregation/ discrimination in Pakistan." It "does not recognize any discrimination among individuals based on their belonging to a specific caste" and discourages "the recognition of the individuals based on caste for it may be discriminatory to divide a culturally diverse society on the basis of caste". It maintains that the "Government has abandoned all earlier references to the term "Scheduled Castes" from the pre-Partition inherited documentation.". According to Malji Meghwar, a Dalit rights activist and member of DST, "this is the unconstitutional and undemocratic rather criminal act on the part of the state as by decimating our official recognition they have further thrown us under the feet of Vaniya".

The report, however, mentions that "the Government has made policies after independence for the advancement of socially backward classes of citizens by prescribing quota for the underdeveloped castes and regions". The state's position, however, does not corroborate with the facts on the ground. 'Scheduled castes' as a socio-religious category continues to be part of the Constitution of Pakistan. Census forms and legal certificates of Scheduled Castes are also issued on demand by the local government. Moreover, there is no such quota for the "underdeveloped castes". This shows that the issues faced by Dalits in Pakistan are not the priority for the Government.

This lack of commitment by the state has also been noticed by the United Nations. UN's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, on October 3, 2016, expressed concern that the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1992 has not been implemented with the result that Dalits continue to be victims of debt-bondage. It also expressed concern over the "persistently narrow interpretation of the concept of minorities, exclusively consisting of religious minorities." It raised concern over the absence of disaggregated data on the situation of different minority groups that results in the internal discrimination within minorities while distribution resources through minority quota."

Another UN report on Pakistan by Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights³⁰, issued on July 20, 2017, reported concern at the “discrimination and segregation” meted out to “scheduled castes” or “Dalits and the entrenched stigma and prejudice against them (arts. 2, 6 and 13-14)”. The Committee recommended that:

[T]he State party carry out a study on the situation of the “scheduled castes” or Dalits, with the participation of the members of that “community and of relevant experts, and that it includes information on the situation of Dalits in the country, including relevant statistical data, in its next periodic report. It also recommends that the State party take effective measures to eradicate stigma and prejudice against members of the “scheduled castes” or Dalits, including awareness-raising campaigns, and to combat discrimination against them, particularly in the employment and education sectors³¹.

In this study, I interrogate the ideological and discursive bases of this denial of Dalitness and indifference of the state and the governments in Pakistan towards the representation of Dalits, and render legible the identitarian crises among Dalits created by such denial and indifference.

1.5 Significance and the Scope of Study

The research is of both applied and theoretical importance and will fill in the gap that exists due to the lack of critical literature on caste-based discrimination and Dalit assertions and activism in Pakistan. The study, however, has certain thematic and theoretical limitations as it is focused on the oppressed castes, and views mainly from Dalitbahujan³² lens. The study can help draw some cross-regional comparisons across South Asia, the task which I believe can easily be undertaken in the future to supplement this study, and can add to a body of scholarship, for instance, on ‘casteism among Muslims or Islam’ in South Asia. It can also help to formulate sound propositions to study the intersectionality of caste, class, gender, and nationality in other regions of Pakistan. This study, however, will certainly contribute to the theoretical literature on identity politics, ethnic identity construction, subaltern studies, caste-class-race studies, critical theory approaches, postcolonial studies, South Asian Studies, social movements, behavioral studies, Marxist and conflict theories, and reflexive anthropology, political anthropology or political sociology.

Since the study ontologically followed the logic of activism, the study furnishes some insights and the recommendations for the policymakers the legislators, political

³⁰ See online: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [Concluding observations \(2017\) E/C.12/PAK/CO/1](#). URL:

³¹ See online: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [Concluding observations \(2017\) E/C.12/PAK/CO/1](#). URL:

³² ‘Dalitbahujan’ literally meaning ‘majority people’ is used by Abmedkarties to refer to Dalits across religions and ethnic groups. It includes not only Scheduled Castes but also Dalit Buddhists, Dalit Sikhs, Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims as well denotified tribes and communities.

parties and also to the Dalit activists and civil society in Pakistan to recognize casteism as the socioeconomic problem and ‘Dalits’ as the class of oppressed and under-represented communities. It is also suggestive in terms of academicians and the scholars and the think tanks in Pakistan to diversify and broaden their analytic frameworks to bring Dalit studies into the national and local scope.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 2, explains why the Ambedkarian or Dalitbahujan anti-caste lens was preferred as an analytical perspective to explain the use of ‘Dalit’ and Scheduled Castes’ identity markers. It also discusses the intersubjective limits of doing ethnographic research with the Dalit activists thereby delimiting my overall analysis and my interpretation(s) of Dalit activism and identity assertions framed in local narratives and discourses. It further explains how the research was shaped as a multi-sited ethnography focused on a particular aspect of Dalit lifeworld.

Chapter 3 presents a brief historical sketch of different caste groups, particularly Dalits in Sindh, and discusses the reasons why the academic literature on caste politics, particularly on Dalit activism, lacks in Sindh even though caste has played a vital role both at the macropolitical and the micropolitical levels. In the end, I give forth a brief overview of how Ashrafia-Savarna classes have historically evolved to dominate the culture and politics in Sindh rendering the question of caste-discrimination normatively irrelevant.

Chapter 4 explains the Sayed-dominated Ashrafia cultural constraints to Dalit activism in hegemonic space for the contestation of Dalit identities.

Chapter 5 elaborates upon different organizational strategies adopted by Ambedkarites and Dalits activists to organize their contestation around Pakistani, Sindhi, Hindu, Sufi Darāwar, Dalit and Scheduled Castes identities. It analyses the reasons why the Dalit activists opted for or rejected certain identity markers.

Chapter 6 analyses the Dalit claims of numbers and the contention to argue that they have been systematically excluded from mainstream politics. It explains the arbitrariness of social and political categories, and the relevance of ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity marker is more relevant for the Dalit activists to (de)minoritize.

Chapter 7, elaborates as to how under different electoral systems Scheduled Castes (Dalits) were allowed to contest and failed to be represented (or included in the mainstream). It presents a Dalit view of electoral representation and the type of proportionate electorate system they want to introduce in Pakistan.

Chapter 8, discusses the formation, working and the ideological stance of some of the leading Dalit forums. It specifically discusses the organizing strategies of Ambedkarites framed in the message of B.R. Ambedkar to ‘Educate! Agitate! Organize!’ concerning acceptance and the rejection of the terms ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘Dalit’, ‘Darāwar’, and ‘Sindhi’.

Chapter 9 concludes the whole discussion and analysis. It attempts to weave the analysis done in different chapters by recasting it under the sub-headings reflective of concluding premises of the thesis, to argue for and or against the possibilities of Dalitbahujan emancipation and the societal reformation. It sums up the causative, relational and correlating knots of the different aspects of the processes and the practices related to Dalit identity assertions.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the reasons to adopt the Dalitbahujan³³ or Ambedkarian perspective as an analytical tool are explained in detail along with the rationale behind a multi-sited ethnographic research design. The Ambedkarian perspective is discussed by expanding the analysis of the use of ‘Dalit’ and Scheduled Castes’ identity markers by Dalit activists to refer to individuals and groups invariably categorized as ‘Hindu’ and ‘minority’. This will enable to understand both the emic and etic systems of meanings. It will also enable us to understand the intersubjective limits of doing ethnographic research with the Dalit activists and the delimitation of overall analysis and interpretation(s) of Dalit activism and identity assertions as framed in local narratives and discourses. The theoretical concepts evolved by the Ambedkarian scholars serve empirically relevant toolkit to study caste-class structure, Dalit exclusion, and the debates over ‘identity’ and ‘difference’, ‘oppression’ and ‘intersectionality’, ‘subalternity’ and ‘hegemony’, and help mount the vigorous criticism of the prevalent political narratives and academic approaches in vogue in Pakistan. I explain how these rearticulated notions can be further contextualized to analyze:

- a) The denial of caste discrimination, Dalitness and the tendency to Ashrafize and Savarnize (i.e. to emulate the Savarnas).
- b) The hegemony of Savarna-Ashrafia classes.
- c) The minoritisation of the Dalits and the resultant debate over the choice of identity marker(s)

2.2 Multi-sited Ethnography of Activism

The connection between anthropology, social change and activism is inherent in the anthropological engagements and the concepts such as ‘cultural relativism’ that suggests engaging with the communities or groups on their terms and evaluating them based on local relations (of domination and subordination). My engagement with the Dalit activists was not wholly exotic as I was a native Sindhi myself. Sindhi language, being culturally universal, I could communicate with them without learning their mother tongue. Moreover, as I had already researched Dalits and peasants in the same area, therefore, it cannot be

33 To have a comprehensive understanding of what I mean by Dalitbahujan perspective, read my paper draft, ‘Mainstreaming Dalitbahujan perspective in Pakistan’

Doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.23455.87200, URL: <https://www.researchgate.net>.

assumed that I entered in the field with the blank mind having no idea of what was going on, or that I was not predisposed to some of the ideas of the local activists and Sindhi civil society.

It is often assumed by progressives and conservatives in Sindh that caste is a social anomaly not inherent to Sindh's Sufi identity. It is divisive evil that does not exist as much in Pakistan as in India. The conversations held with Sindhi civil society activists in Sindh during my fieldwork in 2016 made it amply clear that denial of caste prevailed even though, at many places, social and commensal segregation and division of labor between caste groups could be seen. Hence, although casteism was something undesirable, they just simply disowned it by referring to the egalitarian Sufi values inherent to Sindh. They justified their point of view by quoting verses of Shah Latif, a Sufi poet, by alluding to the socialist struggle of Sufi hah Inayat or by arguing that modernization is imperceptibly eliminating the leftover casteism, and, therefore, it did not require invoking any social or political urgency to eradicate it. It did not take me long to infer that, more than conservative ideas, this denial was influenced by progressive literary activism. It was evident that progressive nationalist ideology has developed the social imaginary of the locals through print media, literary circles, and lately through social media that desires to see Sindhi people united against the external and internal forces. It was also obvious that it did not identify Ashrafia³⁴ –Savarna (upper caste Muslim-Hindu) elite as the internal oppressors as did the Dalit activists on whom I was doing ethnographic research. The ideological debates between anti-caste Dalit activists and the pro-Marxist nationalists brought to fore the political rupture. While the anti-caste Dalit activists wanted to bring caste into the political framework of local parties, the nationalists and Marxists tried to prove the irrelevance of invoking caste which, they believed, was dying out on its own. No all Marxists were denying casteism and Dalit exclusion. Some of them were keen to engage with Dalit activists on their terms and condition, but they did not make casteism their central political concern. For instance, the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) organized Ambedkar's anniversary twice during the last two years. Imdadullah Qazi, president of CPP was observed making attempts to attend programs organized by Dalits to stand with

³⁴ Ashrafia class (i.e. Sayeds or the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, and the castes claiming to be of Arab and Central Asian descent. (Morimoto, 2004). Since Sammat and Baloch castes also usually trace their origins to Arab and central Asian descent, I also refer them as Ashrafia.

them in solidarity. But, he did not flinch more than that and, in his speeches, used classical Marxist jargon that was alien to Dalits.

The progressives most of the time outnumbered Dalit activists and cowed them down by using progressive's anecdotes made easily available through vernacular literature. While it reflected the wider currency of progressive ideas in Sindh, it also reflected the hegemony of Ashrafia-Savarna intellectual elite that depoliticized casteism and Dalit exclusion. The local Dalit activists, which included some Ambedkarites as well, often combined the ideas of both B.R. Ambedkar and Karl Marx to articulate their viewpoint. Since Ambedkarites defined class in terms of groups of castes, terming Dalits as the marginalized and excluded class of the proletariat, Marxism made sense to them. They combined them both also to win the favor of the local Marxists as much as they did own the social and political issues raised by Sindhi nationalists. Hence, while Dalit activists were willing to compromise their ideological stance, it was not being sufficiently reciprocated by the Marxists and the nationalists within the progressives. As compared to the mainstream progressive, the literary content of Dalit activists was negligible and even many of the Dalit activists themselves were unfamiliar with it³⁵. Notwithstanding that, Dalit activists idealize B.R. Ambedkar, a Dalit icon, Waman Meshram (BAMSEF leader) and Mayawati (of BSP), the leaders that are often undermined by the progressives by terming them as Indian.

This existence of newly emerging Dalit agency as it was being downplayed by the progressives, who are otherwise supposed to side with the oppressed, behooves one to re-examine the Sindhi progressive legacy from the Dalit or rather Ambedkarian perspective (for the typical writings that inspired Ambedkarites see Ambedkar 1991; Prasad & Gajjan 2007; Guru & Sarukkai 2012; Kumar 2018). Hence, in this paper, I evaluate progressive literature in terms of their sensitivity to employ 'upper caste' or 'lower caste metaphors. It will enable us to problematize caste from the Dalit activist's viewpoint, and the progressive literary landscape to mount the criticism of literary pieces

³⁵ To have an idea of how local Dalit activists in Sindh connect themselves with the Dalits in India or elsewhere and problematize politics, culture, society and the literature, see Cheel , 2017; Bheel, 2014).

that may seem to be normalizing or advancing casteism in Sindh. Therefore, instead of hiding or negating my former engagement with the Dalit activists, I build my theoretical framework on it by further supplementing it with the theoretical lens of the local Ambedkarites. Hence, instead of merely grasping ‘the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world” (Malinowski 1961 [1922]: 25 (italics in original)), I have primarily attempted to understand Dalit identity assertions at the inter-subjective level.



Figure 5: Stay in a make-shift tent near Naon Kot town, Sindh

Source: Author (2016)

2.3 Locale of Study

The ethnographic approach that eventually was shaped in the process can be defined as a multi-sited ethnography of Dalit activism, Dalit networks, and Dalit identity assertions. Dalit activists were scattered across lower Sindh in different towns and villages, and I had to travel from one town and village to the other to attend their programs and conduct conversational interviews. Although I held very open-ended conversations, yet I did also prepare an interview-guide as well during the middle of the research to assign a (qualitative) score of ‘casteism’ to the activists and civil society activists (see Annexure V). Hence, in that sense, the research becomes a kind of ‘focused ethnography’ (see

Hammersley, 2005 p. 15) revolving around the issues of the Dalits. In the field I interacted with some Ambedkarites, having the intellectual bent of mind that mainly served as gatekeepers. It became evident to me that they had some knowledge of Dalit movements of the past and the present. They were also well aware of the current intellectual and ideological debates on caste and Dalit oppression going on in India. These Ambedkarites were mainly of two types (a) those who delved in the Dalit Human Rights paradigm and wanted to work both with the NGOs and neoliberal political parties, (b) and those with the leftist bent of mind who wanted to organize Dalits by forming a full-fledged political platform. I interacted with both the types of activists primarily as an activist of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (DST), the social and political platform that we evolved to network all those Dalits willing to bring about caste-parity or out-rightly annihilate casteism. Since I was one of the active members of DST and had access to social media most of the time; DST chairman would ask me to clarify the misunderstanding of people commenting against DST on social media. She would also ask me to update the status as per her desire on behalf of DST. Social media greatly facilitated me in various ways. For instance, during my fieldwork and while traveling, I stayed at Hyderabad with friends, at the guest house of relatives, at a hostel and sometimes even at hotels. I would travel throughout lower Sindh whenever I would receive any call to participate and attend the seminars, meetings or protests held by the Dalit activists. Hence, from there, I moved and traveled in all directions into rural areas of Hyderabad district and Mirpurkhas division. When I could not reach the site, I would support them through my social media activism by posting on the DST's group page on Facebook. This critical engagement through a newly developed organizational body set up the empirical field of observation for me for a period of 16 months from September 2015 to August 2017 and from October 2018 to January 2019. In between the intervals, I reviewed literature and analyzed the data collected, while remaining in touch with the Dalit activists through social media, cell phone calls, messaging, WhatsApp and the emails to collect further data and prove my constant interest in their struggle.

2.4 Theoretical Sampling

I met six major Dalit communities namely Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, Oad, Baghri, and Muslim Dalits (Shaikh), and with their representative groups or forums, yet out of these Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, the three largest communities remain the focus of my study. The sample of the study, however, was not limited to the study of only these communities or the forums representing these communities.

Table 1: Orientation of the Social and Political organizations on Dalit Issue

Dalit associations and caste-based forums that support 'Dalit' activism	Neutral Dalit forums and caste-based associations	Pro-Dalit Political Parties and civil society forums and NGOs	'Anti-Dalit' political parties and civil society forums and Dalit associations	Neutral Political parties and Civil society forums
Jogi Itihad (Khairpur)	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)	Communist Party Pakistan (CPP)	JSMM	Haari Porihiat Committee
BIF-Mahesh Group	PCDP (NGO)	Sindh Hari Committee	STP	Awāmī Workers Party
Pakistan Meghwar Council	Pakistan Fisher Folk Forum (NGO)	<i>Qaumi</i> Awāmī Tehreek	JSQM	Awāmī Tehreek
<i>Darāwar</i> Welfare Organization (Punjab)	Bhandar Sangat	Pakistan People's Party	Baghri Itihad (Vesakhi Mal Group)	AJP
SCFP	All Sindh Hindu Waagar MegWar Panchaayat Sindh	Jeazy Sindh Mahaz	Pakistan Hindu Council	MQM
Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum	Gadoliya Lohar Itihad (Manji Lohar)	Sindh Sagar Party	Pakistan Hindu Seva	Pak Sarzameen Party
SKI (Ranshal Das)	SKI (Nemdas)	PML-F	Progressive Youth Forum	PML-N
Maheshwari Jamat (Badin)	<i>Baghri</i> , Oad, Sikdh Itedhad (Larkana)	Awāmī Raaj Tehrek	Sunder Sheva Mandli	
Gujarati Community (Mirpurkhas)	Baghri Itihad (Matiari)	Mazdoor Kisan Itihad	ASKA	
SCRM (Punjab)	Hindu Panchayat (Hyderabad)	PDSN (NGO)	Sandesh Group	
Bheel Lawyers' Forum	Jandawra community	PILER	Oad Community (Matiari)	
Dalit Sujaag Tehreek	Kacthi Kolhi Association	GRDO (NGO)	BIF (Bhagchand Group)	
SCFP	<i>Bheel</i> Sujaag Tehreek	SHPC	Several Hindu Panchayats spread across the province	
Pakistan Darāwar Itihad	<i>Mutahida Meghwar Forum</i> Muslim Shaikh Council	Pakistan Mazdoor Itehaad		
		Women Action Forum		
		Lok Sujag (NGO)		
		Hare Rama Foundation		
		GRHF		

My research coincided with the period during which Dalit activists generated debate on the suitability of different identity markers and the created a space to contemplate the possibility of Dalit emancipation DST activists evolved their own social and political agenda building it upon the previous work of SCFP, Pakistan Dalit Adab and PDSN, the splinter Dalit Forums that had previously failed to achieve desired results.

The above table categorizes some of the leading social and political organizations, Dalit forums, caste-based associations and NGOs that I interacted with concerning their support to Dalit activism, neutrality or the opposition to it.

My communication with them was mostly in the capacity of a member of DST. To establish trans-local and transnational connections, DST, as a team, came into contact with several Dalit activists or Ambedkarites through social media, internet, and other channels. To make its agenda relevant to Dalit's emancipation, DST's manifesto borrowed the ideas of B.R. Ambedkar and Dalit Panthers (now largely defunct), an Indian-based Dalit organization.



Figure 6: Map of Sindh: Source: Adapted from Google Maps.com.

Texts, documents and social media blogs quoted in this research are mostly of those activists and writers whom I met, interviewed, interacted and have remained in touch for months. I have preferred to quote some of the leading Dalit activist's public statements instead of their opinions shared by them during personal interviews. Verbal statements collected during fieldwork, conversation and interviewing, and the observations made have been related to the contextual details. This has been done with the view to avoid the anonymization of statements where possible and avoid intra-Dalit confrontation after this study reaches readers. Following the principles of research ethics, I have avoided to make any sensitive data part of my analysis and have tried my best to keep anonymous as much as possible without sacrificing the historical and ethnographic substance of this study.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were following the ethical guidelines recommended by the Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

The permission was sought, where required, from the concerned persons to reproduce any picture, graph, table or piece of information.

The sources of data and the analytic approach were dependent upon the access to data, the tools at hand, and the personal expertise. When for instance, any Dalit girl was allegedly abducted, or a Dalit individual was humiliated or any Dalit forum was targeted on social media or in newspapers, it then for me became the subject to debate among Dalit activists. As I gradually became a part of those debates, both face to face, as well as through online correspondence. It became increasingly possible to interpret both the public and hidden script of the Dalit activists as well as the level of hegemonic relations that existed between Dalit(Bahujan) and Ashrafia-Savarna classes.

Printed local literature of Dalits by Dalits on Dalits, books, magazines, newsletters³⁶, articles, important governmental and organizational documents, internet archives, Dalit websites and the personal documents shared by Dalit activists also form the data for this study. Social media pages of Dalit forums and organizations, Facebook Chatbox³⁷ discussions, Skype sessions, WhatsApp group conversations, and email exchanges also formed the major source of Data itself and Data collection. Forty-five newspaper articles were written in favor of or against Dalit movement (DST) in local Sindhi and Urdu newspapers during research period generated debate and substance for discursive analysis and furnished a bulk of data for content analysis look into different narratives on Dalits and caste.

2.5 Methods of Data Collection

Ethnographic data was based on conversations, in-depth interviews, notes of participant observation, ethnographic survey, and the secondary sources, particularly vernacular literature shared by Dalit activists and the historical archival data. Ethnographic inquiry was supplemented with the analysis of vernacular literature (mostly in the Sindhi

³⁶ For a sample of newsletter editing in process by Dalit activists, see, Hussain, (2019zcc), "Kolvanish Newsletter (editing in process) by Ganpat Rai Bheel", Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/j54r86djbb.1

³⁷ For a sample of social media chatbox, see dataset, Hussain (2019zzu), "Social Media Chat with an Ambedkarite from Sindh, January, 2016", Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/pkzwcg86jc.1

language)³⁸, the governmental archives (mostly in English), population census reports, online media content (both in Sindhi and English)³⁹ and the ethnographic insights.

Hence, to collect data, I have relied on multiple sources such as books, articles, social media contents or blogs, and internet sources, governmental archives such as census and survey reports along with participant observation, conversational interviews, and vernacular literature produced and shared by Dalit activists, such as pamphlets written and shared by Dalit activists. Field notes make up a significant part of the data collected or gathered through intimate face to face engagement with Dalit activists. I recorded 153 audio tracks, to capture any public voice or a speech as short as a minute and as long an hour⁴⁰. Audiovisuals⁴¹ were recorded very opportunistically, depending on the situation and mode of the Dalit activists. These also constitute some unstructured conversational interviews, insights from group meetings, everyday life free flow conversations, speech acts, public speeches, individual interviews, and based on some hostile interviews (see pages 357-358 that enlist citable online datasets based on a few selected samples of short conversations, field pictures⁴², literature review notes, social media blogs, and a few newspapers articles).

³⁸ On vernacular literature see some citable datasets as given below:

Hussain (2019k), "*Dalit Adab (April-May and June-July Editions)*", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/fxfchc32ct.2

Hussain (2019p), "Letter to Parliamentarians: Lalchand Malhi", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/2855352z4s.2

Hussain (2019t), "*Manifesto of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (in Sindhi)*", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/xjgkbbd5kg.2

Hussain (2019u), "*Newspaper cuttings shared by Dalit Activists in Sindh, Pakistan*", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/krpjhvcbs.2

Hussain (2019w), "*Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan: Basic Manifesto, Constitution and Program*", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/xfjhkppykr.2

Hussain, Ghulam (2019zc), "*Speech of Dr. Khatumal Meghwar (Transcribed in English)*", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/yrb4yc3sxs.2

³⁹ For a few samples of online social media content see the datasets:

Hussain, (2019v), "*Online English and Urdu newspapers, Blog posts and social media posters*", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/ys9kdky9sm.2

⁴⁰ For listening some of the audio clips see datasets:

Hussain, Ghulam (2019), "Audio Recordings of Conversations, Volume I: Identity Politics and Dalit Activism in Sindh", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/zftw7ggvj.2

Hussain, Ghulam (2019), "Audio Recordings of Conversations Vol-II: Identity Politics and Dalit Activism in Sindh Pakistan", Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/b6dkbwb4fs.1

⁴¹ For listening watching some of video clips see: Hussain, Ghulam (2019), "Short video clips recorded by the researcher or shared by Dalit activists", Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/dhpxsnnbw.1

⁴² To have a graphic insight into the locale/field see:

1. Hussain (2019l), "*Field Pictures shared by Dalit Activists, Volume II*", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/ymk94gnpbw.2
2. Hussain (2019m), "*Field Pictures: Ethnographic Study of Dalit Activism in Sindh, Pakistan*", Mendeley Data, V3, doi: 10.17632/kw5cmdtjrj.3

Table 2: Methods and Data-sets

No.	Method	Data-set
1	Participatn Obersation	Field Notes, pictures, videos
2	Conversational Interviews	Verbatims, Frequency tables
3	Qualitative social survey/Interviewing	Analytic tables, Frequency Tables
4	Social media ethnography	Online commentaries, photos, videos, blogs, chat-box debates
5	Secondary data analysis	Quantitative tables, Census and survey-based tables, archival documentary analysis, vernacular literature
6	Archival documents	Archival documents

In addition to that, I also made 25 video records of different lengths based on interviews and opinions of common Dalits and Dalits activists. Some 30 other audios and videos were shared by Dalit activists about their activities, and that contained their speeches, etc. Videos and audios on Dalits of Pakistan available on YouTube and certain other websites were also found very useful (For the details see also page 378 for the list of Audio-visual datasets and YouTube videos recorded and uploaded by me or by Dalit activists).

2.5.1 Conversational Interviews

I explored the political as well as “public sphere” (Habermas, 1962 (1989); Dahlberg, 2005) that is the places and spaces where Dalit activists would gather to debate political issues, contest and construct Dalit identities. Following the theoretical sampling (Fugard & Potts, 2015; Davoudi et al., 2016), I approached about 59 civil society activists and political workers and engaged them in conversational interviewing to seek their opinion on casteism, and to assess the prevalence, normativity, and rationalization of it⁴³. In all remained in touch with about 276 activists of 36 different associations, organizations or forums who either supported Dalit activism or stood against it. As a case study, I have, however, focused on certain selective Dalit forums, particularly DST, BIF and SCFP with

⁴³ For a few samples of conversational interviews see the datasets:

Hussain (2019f), “*Conversation about the local reaction against early Pre-DST Dalit activism*”, Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/gf2mchs854.1

Ghulam (2019g), “*Conversation with a Buddhist Meghwar activist at Umerkot 2--02-2016*”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/sc379jwxyz.2

Ghulam (2019h), “*Conversation on Rooplo Kolhi, Sayedism and Ambedkarism at Mithi*”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/5fmfzbxycy.2

Ghulam (2019i), “*Conversations with anti-caste activist: Umerkot, and with Veerji*”

whom I worked to make sense of Dalit activism. I also attended 10 group meetings and programs (organizational and associational) of the Dalit and Civil society activists.

2.5.2 Analysis of Contested Identity Markers

The conversational interviews helped me to make sense of multiple identity-based claims concerning the political affiliations of activists, and their worldview on casteism. The four major queries around which conversations and interviews revolved pertained to a local opinion about the caste-based bradaris (association of castes, and or subcaste kinship groups) in Sindh, the tendency to associate oneself with caste-based unions, and the existence or non-existence of casteism and caste discrimination in Sindh. The data was analyzed to extract the themes that became evident in the form of different identity assertions, contestations, and in the form of expressions of casteism, particularly, Sayedism and Dalit exclusion.

Identity Markers	Issues	Ideal Score/ Rank
شہیدبول کاسٹ (Scheduled Castes)	Discrimination against Scheduled Castes	1
دلت (Dalit)	Annihilation of Caste /caste-based discrimination	2
اصل ذرتي ۽ ڌڻي، آديواسي soil/Adivasi/Mulnivasi, etc), دراوڙ (Darāwar)	History of the oppressed/ Rights of indigenous (Darāwar) Communities	3
Pasmanda Muslims	Caste-based discrimination in Muslim communities	4
پڙهيل طبقا مظلوم ۽ ڌڪاري (Oppressed classes/ Poor class, peasant, laborer, women/Human rights)	Rights of all the oppressed classes, ethnic groups, women or nationalities, and communities	5
بھيل، ڪولھي، ميگھواڙ، ٻيل (Bhil, Kolhi, Meghwar, Bhagri, etc.)	Focus on the issues of one's caste only	6
اقليت (Minority)	Issues of the religious minorities in general	7
ھندو (Hindu, Sanatan Dharam)	Issues of Hindu minority	7
Thari, Laari, Sindhi, Pakistani	Regional issues of Thar, Laar, Sindh and Pakistan	8
-----	Drought/famine, pollutions, health-related issues.	9

The focus was on knowing the opinion of Dalit and Ashrafia-Savarna political workers affiliated with major Dalit and Ashrafia-Savarna social and political groups and political parties of rural Sindh. The questions that were repeatedly asked or answered were aimed at the understanding political activists' opinion about the personalities, heroes and political ideologies that they support or oppose, their (dis) satisfaction with casteism, the reverence shown to Sayeds, value of shrine worship, and the recognition of the existence of Dalits and untouchability. The themes of personality cultism, the functional outlook on

caste, Sayedism, belief in the shrine worship and the denial or affirmation of Dalit existence were quantified on the score scale of 1 to 5 with 1 representing the lowest, that is, 20% prevalence, and 5 representing the highest, that is, 100% affirmation of casteism (see Annexure V for Interview Guide)⁴⁴. Scores were later converted into frequencies/percentages. Since the calculation of scores of casteism was an intersubjective matter of interpretation, my subjectivity must have had influenced it. I have, however, tried my best to be as objective as possible. I must also make it clear that my method of assigning scores was not based on rigorous quantitative methods, and was the interview guide transformed into a scorecard. It should, therefore, be evaluated as the supplementary qualitative instrument to help better interpret and assess the level of casteism and Dalit exclusion.

Further, to assess the level of casteism, I have applied the Ambedkarian perspective (see section 2.7), which demands the explicit anti-caste stance from the political workers, therefore, any political worker or party that may claim to be anti-caste should not only explicitly recognize Dalit exclusion as the political issue but also avoid the casteist tendencies that may emanate from their belief in the functionality of caste, Sayedism, personality cultism, and shrine worship. Hence, to be anti-caste, the score or percentage of the normativity and affirmation of caste of any political activist or the party should not exceed 1 (20%). I did also analyze the 22 pieces of conversations that I had with the pro-Dalit and anti-Dalit activists to calculate the frequencies of the use of different identity markers and the issues that they tended raise (see section 5.2 and 5.3). To assign the value to each term, I prepared the ideal-typical scale (see Table 3) based on the Ambedkarian or the Dalitbahujan perspective to assign the value to 8 core identity markers and the related issues.

The communication with most of the participants, including Dalits, was made with the Sindhi language, the lingua franca of the province. It was not easy for me to meaningfully engage with Dalits speaking in their dialect that varied from community to community and region to region.

⁴⁴ For the interview guide and score cards see Hussain (2019x), “*Scoring Casteism: Interview Guide and Score Card (Filled Forms)*”, Mendeley Data, V3, doi: 10.17632/dsyfwfv8nd.3

2.5.3 Quantifying and Qualifying Castes

Throughout this writing, I attempt to make sense of the interplay of multiple identities and the multiple meanings of them under contestation. This makes it necessary to explain, classify and quantify different social groups involved in contestation. Since the exposition of the caste location of any individual, group or party is of central importance for Ambedkarites so that the level of caste disparity and hegemony could be assessed, I actively traced the caste location of concerned social activists and politicians and analyzed accordingly. Hence, the inferences and the percentage of castes tabulated were validated by cross-checking caste locations, by tracing out their biographies and by looking into the written records or by asking from the concerned locals.

2.6 (Dis)locating Researcher's Caste: Reflexive Note

I have felt this discrimination myself. But you just talk of it in our favor.
Both are not the same. You just work on the assignment, but I am the
subject of it.

Kelash Baghri (a Dalit activist from Matiari, Sindh)

Several times during my fieldwork, I was reminded by the Dalits activists of the empirical limits of my caste location to give a verdict upon their status. They were true to their words, and I had to reposition myself by staying within my limits. This also proved to me that scientific research is not wholly neutral, and research objectives are partly delimited by the researcher's values (see Zavisca, 2013). Caste-positionality emerged as one of the major limiting factors, not only during data collection, but also during rapport establishment, and in writing ethnographic descriptions.

Looking from the Ambedkarian perspective whereby epistemic primacy is assigned to a Dalit intellectual or the Dalit herself, Ashrafised caste male researching Dalitbahujans can be taken as the contradiction in terms.



Figure 7: Bhagwanti, wife of Versi Kolhi knitting Raksha Bandhan, the ritual thread that symbolizes brother's commitment to a Sister, at a Kolhi settlement near Naon Dumbaalo, Sindh.

Source: Author (Sept 5, 2015)

I term it ashrafised because my caste Mahesar has over time in terms of its origin myth shifted its caste narrative from 'lower caste' fishermen origins to claim the Ashrafia status by associating themselves with Maesro, the servant of Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁵ At the social level in Sindh mahesars have acquired the political and economic capital such that it is clearly understood as the 'upper caste'. Given this background, any intervention as the researcher in Dalit spaces can be feared as an attempt to assert Ashrafia hegemony over Dalits and as the colonization of Dalitbahujan epistemic space.

The problem of the Ashrafia class researcher begins with the appreciation of that paradoxical situation in which he can be declared a suspect in a space in which Dalit lacks equal agency and freedom to create acceptable knowledge. This dilemma consequently demanded of me to give a thorough inter-subjective and reflexive treatment to this issue. As a way out, a somewhat agreeable settlement is offered by both Dalit theory and practice (activism) to maneuver in the shard space where the Dalitbahujan or the subaltern or Dalit could usefully engage with privileged caste activist to eradicate casteism (see Hussain,

⁴⁵ To have an idea of how my own caste was located in Sindhi society, see my note on my own caste, titled, 'Are you a Human or a Mahesar! Origin of Mahesar' (July 2015), URL: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280011497>.

2018). It is premised on the fact that since trans-Dalit issue affecting the whole society, it is necessary to allow and engage the privileged caste researcher to produce coordinated and cooperative knowledge in a given shared space that can ensure not only inclusiveness of all the oppressed but can also problematize caste in its entirety. (Hussain, 2018, p. 43) Hence, I was as much the subject of study as were the Dalits and the Ashrafia-Savarna elite.

To render legitimate my caste positionality vis-à-vis Dalit activists, and to check my casteist and patriarchal tendencies, I (re) articulated my views and opinions into Dalitbahujan narrative (see also Hussain, 2018). It was also necessary to meet the requirement of ethnographic inquiry to get immersed in local perspectives. It demanded to engage with the Dalit activists by assuming the role of being one of the Dalit activists. This engagement was premised on the argument that the critical inquiry of 'caste' cannot be comprehensively (justly) done by the privileged caste researcher if he or she does not engage with anti-caste Dalit activists. Hence, it required of me to have a critical introspection into my caste position, and the overall caste culture in which Dalit life-world was embedded. The precautions set up by Dalitbahujans also demanded of me, to a certain extent, to decastify myself and critically appraise caste from my caste location, family, village and the region. Decastification can be explained as the distribution of social, symbolic, political, economic capital emanating from one's Ashrafia-Savarna caste among the groups and individuals of caste socially considered as 'lower', 'inferior', or 'untouchable', to the point that the 'untouchable' may feel being duly reciprocated. Some of the important indicators or the acts of decastification can be; Ashrafia-Savarna person marrying with the Dalit; standing by the Dalit cause, and by living (along) with the Dalits as social equals; or by adopting the personal epithets, caste names that may resemble with that of the Dalits to symbolize social or political solidarity with the oppressed.

In this manner I become part of their 'shared experiences' (Guru and Sarukkai 2012), thereby claiming to interpret casteism to the extent both the Dalit(Bahujan) and the Ashrafia-Savarna classes share the common space and common experiences. This intersubjective negotiation of epistemic positions makes 'upper caste-lower caste', or the Ashrafised researchers' engagement mutually productive and meaningful as well as ethically justifiable as it is grounded in the shared understanding of the necessity to allow the decastified Ashrafia and Savarna or Jati Hindu to examine the identity barriers to the Dalit mobility across spaces (Hussain, 2018, p. 44). This, at the same time, bounds the decastified researcher to appreciate the knowledge produced by the Dalit agent in a shared

space where Dalits live with the lack of choices and the lack of intersubjective freedom to avoid interaction with the privileged castes. Such a constrained shared space inflicts the epistemic violence upon the Dalit(s) (Guru et al, 2012) that have to take into consideration by the decastified Ashrafia or Savarna researcher and activist.

Hence, given the situational imperatives that create the space for the anti-caste' activist of Ashrafia class researcher, I could not engage with the Dalits without decastifying my Ashrafised self. I could not have developed a thorough understanding of the caste culture of Sindh and the Dalit question. Decastification (by adopting Dalit caste label of Baghri) enabled me to know the limits of the critical engagement with the Dalit activists and to make legitimate supportive knowledge claims without hegemonizing their activism (Hussain, 2018, pp. 43-56). Decastification was necessary also to meet the ethical requirement of the research to make it justifiable in the eyes of the larger intellectual Dalit community, and to make my criticism of casteism and Ashrafia-Savarna classes acceptable to them. The decastification was not simply meant to sympathize with the activists, or necessarily to produce research so that that the group of activists or their avowed cause may succeed or fail, but to understand those very causes of Dalitness that fail or sublimate it.

Since the decastification exercise was meant to meet the criterion of mutual sharing in a given space, throughout the research process, I deliberately attempted to share my research findings and the analysis or the views with the Dalit activists. Not only that, to ensure ethical norms, I have also sought the feedback of many Dalit activists on it and reworked my propositions accordingly. This approach is closer to action research, but it differs in that the Dalit activists were not bound to follow what my research purported to suggest. Sharing was done primarily with the purpose to make sure if I have worded their opinions in a manner, they meant it, or if the given field data and the information has been accurately tabulated or presented as per the information provided or gathered. I also shared my findings with the Dalit academicians internationally that I had the access to and with whom I interacted. These inter-subjective engagements were done to sustain the rapport establishment to keep Dalit activists and intellectuals into confidence so that they do not disconnect abruptly.

As it is obvious, this research, therefore, has its epistemological limitations. I cannot, and do not claim to have the deeper understanding of what the Ambedkarites may call 'authentic' Dalit experience to speak for Dalits as Dalit (Guru et al, 2012), I did certainly share the space that lies within the authentic Dalit(Bahujan) and the authentic

Ashrafia-Savarna continuum or intersects both the Dalit and Ashrafia-Savarna spheres. Since I was not a Dalit (oppressed because of caste), and contrary to that was taken as the Ashrafia against whom the whole Dalit critique is primarily framed, I do not pretend here to have the lived experience of Dalit oppression, their experiences of humiliation or even their subjective understanding of their assertions. My claims are, therefore, largely delimited by (a) my observations, the purposeful inter-subjective interactions with Dalit activists understood in the light of critical study of the history and the historiography of Sindh, and by the limits set by Dalit's externalization of their experiences through their assertions, identity claims, and political demands or concerns. (see also Hussain, 2018, p. 54) I can, however, claim to have (a) lived experience of belonging to 'Ashrafia' class, (b) culture in which I have spent most of my life and the way it may affect my approach towards Dalits, and (c) the social space that I share with the Dalits on the ground. Hence, it should be clear that my position is not that of a foreigner or the Westerner engaged in an exotic exploration, but of a researcher who is exploring the pretty familiar normative phenomenon in which the researcher himself was historically embedded. This self-reflective criticism, thus, delimits my overall analysis and interpretation(s) of Dalit assertions, Dalit identities, different narratives, and the discourses.

2.7 Ambedkarian/ Dalitbahujan Perspective

Ambedkarian claims are invoked based on the critique of both negative and positive universal values such as 'humiliation' and 'self-respect' or 'human dignity'. These selective theoretical notions that have been (re) articulated by the Dalitbahujan scholars, I call Ambedkarian or 'Dalitbahujan perspective', the term coined by Kancha Ilaiah (2010) to propose a kind of theoretical approach to study South Asian society with the critical gaze on caste. Dalitbahujan, literally meaning 'majority oppressed', is used by me as the referential term, to analyze empirical data and come up with counterclaims of universality from a, particularly South Asian location. I employ the Dalitbahujan perspective as the moral-ethical requirement to keep my privileged caste subjectivity in check while making theoretical inferences out of empirical data on Ashrafia and Savarna dominance. I bring to relief the hegemonic oligarchic caste culture in which Dalits are found at the bottom.

Looking from a broader perspective, Dalitbahujan critique of the South Asian political economy lies at the intersection of identity politics of caste and class struggle. It

suggests constructing the alternative ‘assertive’⁴⁶ political paradigm that may facilitate the understanding of identity politics, help evolve counter-hegemonic narratives and spur class struggle. Caste hegemony rests on the manufacture of ‘consent’ (Gramsci, 1971) sought through popular ideologies and narratives (It demands of Ambedkarites to) to do the explicit criticism of casteism, graded inequalities embedded in local practices and discourses and religious or neoliberal Brahminic narratives (see Ambedkar, 1944; Ambedkar, 2014 (1991); Ilaiah, 2010; see Guru, 2011a;2011b; Guru et al, 2012). With this understanding in the foreground, I attempt to explore and analyze the discursive means through which consent of the Dalits is sought, normalized and rationalized. I investigate the historical trajectory of Ashrafia hegemony beginning with the analysis of the biopolitics of caste, class, and religion organized around Hindu-Muslim binaries and unity as it unfolded during and after the partition of the Indian subcontinent.

Ambedkarism demands people take a counterhegemonic stance against the Brahminic and Ashrafia domination (see Ambedkar, 1944; 2014 (1991); Ilaiah, 2010; Guru et al, 2012). Any narrative, discourse or social and political practice that fails to confront casteism or is found supportive of casteism or reproducing and rationalizing it to the exclusion of Dalit class, should be deemed as hegemonic and must be criticized accordingly. Ambedkarian approach focuses on the problem of caste, Dalit oppression, social exclusion, claims of majority (Bahujan) and internal colonization, the themes that Dalitbahujan scholars have theorized upon (Kumar V., 2014; Kumar V., 2006; Kumar V., 2016; Guru et al, 2012; Guru, 1993). Anchoring their analysis in the politics and ideology of B.R. Ambedkar and Jotiba Rao Phule (Ambedkar B., 1944; Ambedkar B. R., 2014 (1989); Ambedkar B. R., 2014 (1991); Ambedkar B. R., 1947; Ambedkar B. R., 2014), the Ambedkarites have rearticulated the theoretical concepts, such as ‘self-respect’ or ‘human dignity’, ‘caste capital’, and ‘graded inequality’, internal colonialism, ‘Bahujan’ (majority), and ‘Pasmanda’. (Guru, 1993; Kumar V., 2006; Guru et al, 2012; Falahi, 2009; Falahi M. A., 2012; Kumar V., 2014; George, 2015; Kumar V., 2016; Ansari K. A., 2017;).

In this study, instead of necessarily validating Ambedkarism, I resort to Ambedkarian approach as the heuristic tool to investigate the hegemonic influences that shape the caste-class structure of Sindh and distribute ‘caste capital’ (see Bourdieu, 1986; Kumar, 2016,pp.82), across different groups of castes. For instance, I attempt to see how

⁴⁶ Literally, ‘assertiveness’ should be meant as the quality of being self-assured and confident without being aggressive and unnecessarily domineering.

political Sufism and Islam facilitates the Ashrafia and Savarna classes to minimize the importance of ‘dissonant’ (Festinger, 1962) thought, outweigh it with plausible counter-arguments or remain in a state of denial when coping with the problem of Sayedism and Dalit exclusion (see section 4.2).

Built upon the critique of functionalist approach of earliest anthropologists and sociologists, Louis Dumont (1980 (1970), G.S Ghurye (1969)⁴⁷, MN Sirinivas (1952) and Andre´ Beteille (1990 &1996), Ambedkarian perspective bounds the ethnographer or the researcher to have inter-subjective approach while engaging with the oppressed so that one could have lived experience of Dalit lifeworld and do the reflexive self-criticism of the Ashrafia and Savarna classes (see Hussain 2018, Kumar 2016a, Kumar 2005, Kumar 2016b, Kumar 2014)). Therefore, to fulfill the epistemological demand of Dalit intellectuals from privileged caste anti-caste scholars to critically appraise the ‘upper caste’ locations and the narratives (Hussain, 2014), I have attempted to maintain equal focus on the criticism of the privileged caste ideologies and oppressive structures. Taking the lead from the critique of internal colonialism and Brahmanism in India by Dalitbahujan scholars (Guru 1993; 2011a; 2011b; 2012; 2013; Vivek Kumar’s 2016a; 2016b), I conduct the critical inquiry into the historically constituted truth claims related to caste-class relations that are performativity reframed in and through political Islam and Sufism. This analytical trajectory also leads to generate the critique of ‘desi’ and ‘derivative’ nationalist discourses (Guru 2011) as they regulate, normalize or legitimize the ‘differential caste capital’ (Kumar V. , 2014; Kumar V. , 2016b). Desi and Derivative terms are commonly used by subaltern theorists, including Dalitbahujan scholars, to differentiate between the folk or oriental and the modern or Western ideologies and their impact or receptivity in South Asia (Guru et al, 2012, Guru, 2011). Dalitbahujan's perspective recasts out of the given Western theoretical body, some important concepts to make sense of casteism. For instance, Vivek Kumar (2016b) borrows the term ' cultural capital' from Pierre Bourdieu, which means a form of institutionalized, embodied and objectified capital (Bourdieu 1986 (2011), p.82). Kumar (2016b) suggests understanding the caste system as, ‘the one in which a minority social group enjoys cumulative ‘cultural capital’ while the majority group is cumulatively excluded’ (p.82). Taking lead from Vivek Kumar (2016b), I investigate that differential

⁴⁷ Ghurye and Sirinivas are often criticized for their Brahminic bias (Kumar, 2016, and Ghurye for relying on the British India census reports, and the racist theories of H.H Risley, and for fitting his definition to then prevalent colonial orientalist perspectives (see Midgley, 2011; Kumar, 2016).

caste capital as it normalizes casteism, (i.e., Sayedism and Dalit exclusion), puts ontological constraints upon the Dalit agency to assert, and shapes the highly constrained discursive field for Dalit identity construction and contestation. Since, in this study, I specifically deal with Dalit's identity contestation and construction as a form of assertion, it is necessary, before I begin empirical description, to understand the theoretical underpinnings of these very concepts of 'Dalit identity' and 'Dalit Assertions'.

2.7.1 Theorizing Identity Assertions

According to the Oxford Learners Dictionary, assertion means "a statement saying that you strongly believe something to be true."⁴⁸ The act of 'assertion' means something asserted as an "insistent and positive affirming, maintaining, or defending (as of a right or attribute)"⁴⁹. While Dalit assertions are labeled by their critics as apolitical, as un-Islamic, anachronistic, anti-Hindu, anti-minority⁵⁰ and divisive of nationalist politics (thus anti-national), the anti-caste scholars see in them the silent revolution leading to Dalit emancipation (see, for instance, Jaffrelot, 2003; Bheel, 2014). For instance, Ganpat Rai Bheel, inspired by Ambedkar and Marx, suggests the socialist route. He writes:

We, the Dalit labor class believe in the materialization of the socialist revolution. Rejecting narrow-minded ethnocentrism, we dream of the society free from casteism, racism, parochialism, religions, and nationalism. Dalit movement is the part of the larger human struggle for the greater union and brotherhood of humans.

(Bheel G. R., Adivasin Jee Roedaad, 2014, p. 28)

The local Ambedkarites, however, do not wholeheartedly accept the progressive's narrative and complain of its casteist bias. While holding the progressives and the society and state at large responsible for casteism, racism, and extremist tendencies, local Ambedkarites criticize their Dalit community for not 'reacting against oppression'⁵¹. They urge Dalits to unite by forewarning them that they can succeed in their goal only through their own

⁴⁸ See Oxford Learner's Dictionary.

⁴⁹ See Merriam Webster Dictionary. URL: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assertion>, Retrieved on January, 8, 2018.

⁵⁰ In Pakistan, all non-Muslims are considered as a minority that collectively makes up around 3-5 percent of the population of Pakistan. Being such a tiny part of Pakistan, minority rights defenders blame Dalit rights defenders of dividing the minority and thus weakening its position in the predominantly Muslim majority country.

⁵¹ To have an idea of how local Dalit activists in Sindh connect themselves with the Dalits and Amedkarites in India or elsewhere and problematize politics, culture, society and the literature, read the literature on Dalits in Sindhi written by local Ambedkarites made available by me on Mendely, and listed at end of concluding chapter.

politically conscious efforts, and that, ‘no other Mahatma, or emancipator, will descend to change their lot, neither did it come in the past, nor it will ever come in the future’ (Bheel, G.R., 2017b).

This approach is line with the subaltern, critical and the Marxist theories of literary criticism (see Ahmed, 2000; Eagleton, 2002; Damrosch, 2009; Behdad, 2011) as it evaluates the Sindhi literature in terms of its utility and the efficacy for the oppressed, the subaltern and the marginalized. It demands the explicit anti-caste stance from the political workers and mounts the critique of hegemonic conditions that (re)produce casteism and graded inequalities embedded in local discourses and religious or neoliberal narratives (see Guru, 2011a;2011b). Therefore, any narrative, discourse or the social and political, literary or the cultural practice that fails to confront casteism, found supportive of casteism or reproducing and rationalizing it to the exclusion of Dalitbahujan class, should be deemed as hegemonic and must be criticized accordingly (see also Hussain, 2019a; Hussain, 2019b). Since casteism is considered by Dalit activists as a form of racism⁵², and gender bias intersects with the casteism through the caste endogamy (Guru, 1995), the patriarchal institution, any individual or the groups, the writer or the political worker or political party that may claim to be anti-caste should not only explicitly recognize Dalitbahujan exclusion as the political issue but also avoid the casteist, racist and gender-biased tendencies that may emanate from their writings, biographies, the beliefs in the functionality of caste, Sayedism or personality cultism, etc.

Dalit assertions vary greatly in their modus operandi in strength, approach, and organization. The acts of assertion by Dalits can be ideologically defined as instances of Dalit activism that can be termed as both (or either) reformist and revolutionary. The phrase ‘Dalit assertion’ is preferred by Dalit scholars to differentiate ‘Dalit activism’ from neoliberal identity politics, claiming that Dalit assertions are of a universal dimension that transcends caste-based identity politics and aims at the systemic and structural changes that could ensure the eradication of casteism, racism and gender discrimination. (Kumar V., 2006; Guru, 2016, p. 241; Faqir, 2016).

Dalit intellectuals explain Dalit activism as the form of an assertion that can even be replicated all over South Asia to bring about political inclusion of Dalits and the oppressed to afford them dignified life equal not only in the political sphere but also in social and moral spheres. (Kumar, 2006; Rawat, 2017) Departing from the functionalist

⁵² See IDSN countries. URL: <http://idsn.org/countries/> , Retrieved on 6th June 2017.

approach of Runciman and Metron applied by some Indian scholars such as MSA Rao, Gopal Guru suggests a subaltern approach to understand Dalits' assertions from below (Guru, 1993, p. 570-573). 'Assertion' as a theoretical concept is given the central epistemic position by Dalit scholars. According to Gopal Guru, Dalit assertions are the result of the reconfiguration of power struggle around nationalist assertions that excluded Dalit issues from its agenda (Guru, 2004) Similarly, Vivek Kumar argues that Dalit assertion "is not divisive. It's democratic. It's not casteist. It's assertive" (Round Table India, 2017).

The empirical identifiers of Dalit assertion can be observed within the social and political claims, contentions and contestations of Dalits and by Dalits. The claims and contestations, as articulated by Dalit scholars, are premised on universal demands for equality and dignity and aim at bringing about structural changes in society. Dalits assert spontaneously for instance, in the form of a complaint against 'untouchable' treatment by Ashrafia and Savarna individuals and groups; or when they tend to realize the 'ancient' past in the present by making counter claims of being the earliest people, the indigenous Dravidians to prove that once they were great and thus equally superiors (Guru, 2011; Guru, 2016, p. 241). 'Assertive politics' as the term is also being increasingly invoked to mark Dalitbahujan difference from the overtly universalistic Marxist, postcolonial, neoliberal or the communal interpretations of the South Asian society and politics (Kumar V. , 2006; Rawat, 2017). Dalitbahujan scholars claim that historicity and universal appeal is inherently there in 'Dalit assertions' (Kumar V., 2006, p. 35).

Christophe Jaffrelot (2003) in his book 'India's Silent Revolution' argues that since the 1960s a new assertiveness has characterized this formerly silenced majority (lower castes) that touched to new heights when in 1972 Dalit panthers further sharpened the political consciousness (Guru, 2004; Rawat, 2017). Dalit scholars argue that both radical and reformist assertions are possible only through the medium of those who have been oppressed the most. The critical engagement initiated by the oppressed themselves holds the potential to unite all the intersected and intermeshed oppressed sections of society may that be, women, blacks, the poor and the peasants or laborers. Dalit emancipation thus would mean the human emancipation from oppression (see Guru, 2004).

While 'Dalit movements' are also, in a way, a kind of Dalit assertions, yet the difference can be made on the basis that movements are more organized, and last for some time and leave clear historical imprints before fading away, as was the Dravidian self-respect movement of EV Periyar (Manoharan, 2017), or the Dalit Panther's movement (Rawat, 2017), while assertions occur even on everyday basis in the form of strikes,

protests, sit-ins, long marches, or in the form emancipatory write-up, through a viral social media blog when any Dalit is raped, abducted, humiliated, ridiculed or discriminated (Kumar V. , 2006). When, for instance, Raya Sarkar, a 24-year-old Dalit- Feminist (*Savatri*⁵³) and victim comes forward to bring out a list of assaulters-that also includes renowned subaltern theorist Partha Chatterjee, and the list included mostly Savarnas-it is but an act of anti-caste feminist assertion⁵⁴ (Lata, 2015; Kundu, 2017; Sripathi, 2017). When, Bheel Intellectual Forum (BFI), a Dalit activist group in Sindh takes to streets to demand equal recognition of their status within the Hindu fold, it is an act of moral-ethical assertion for justice on religious, caste and class basis. Or when controversy erupted in California over the portrayal of the South Asian subcontinent in history textbooks, the erasure of Dalit history and the history of the caste system is mooted by Dalits; it is a form of transnational Dalit assertion having wider implications as regards how the history, in general, should be interpreted and taught (American Historical Association, 2016). Hence, Dalit assertion can be of moral-ethical, social-psychological, religious, caste-based, gender-caste based and political dimensions.

Assertion can be made at an individual level in the form of intellectual activity or literary criticism, or as an artistic performance and even at group level in the form of expression of solidarity, whereas a social or political movement requires the persistent collective assertion with a perspective. In that sense, each Dalit political party, BSP, Janata Dalit (United), and Rashtriya Janata Dal, Republican Party India (RPI), BAMCEF, and Bharat Mukti Morcha can be called as political movements. For instance, it is argued that Mayawati (Dalit), Nitish Kumar, Lalu Prasad and Mulayam Singh Yadav (all OBCs) have emerged as political icons due to assertive Dalitbahujan politics, based on 'backward' identity. Their respective political parties have an organic base in caste politics that sets the tone of doing politics in India at the national level. Since it impacts the overall macro-political structure in India, aims at structural changes in society, it cannot be called as identity politics.

This identitarian real-politic dilemma, in which the oppressed (Dalit) is entangled, is explained out by Bahujan scholars in contextual-temporal (historical) terms (Ansari K. A., 2009; Kumar V., 2014; Ansari K. A., 2016). They, for instance, argue that since the given context, the social milieu within which Dalit politics is identitarian (i.e. divided into

⁵³ Those inspired by Savatri Bai Phule, social reformer and wife of Jotirao Phule, call themselves *Savatri*.

⁵⁴ Also see List Continues to Haunt Savarna Feminists and More Revelation of Hypocrisy of Savarna Feminists, URL: <http://velivada.com/2017/10/29/list-continues-haunt-savarna-feminists-revelation-hypocrisy-savarna-feminists/>. Retrieved on: October, 28, 2017.

different caste groups), therefore, empirically there is no way except to engage with it on the terms and conditions dictated by empirical exigencies of the given political milieu., Dalits have to persistently assert their caste or class identities, and eventually at certain point, there is likelihood that they could transform caste-based 'identity politics'(Heyes, 2016) into class struggle (see Guru, 2011; Guru, 2011; Guru, 2016).

Dalitbahujans assert identities that are either symbolic of oppression such as 'Dalit' or 'Pasmānda', or those that fill them with the historical pride that has been lost, such as through the identity of 'Moolnivasi', Darāwar. These identity assertions otherise the oppressor allegedly camouflaged in the Brahmin, Sayed, Bania (Business castes) identities, and Hindutvadi and Ashrafia ideologies. Hence, Dalitbahujan scholars identify the 'other' in the Ashrafia and Savarna oppressor, and the capitalist. In this way, it is contended that Dalitbahujan identity politics is comparable to class politics that aims at the polarization of society into two antagonistic blocs, the Brahmin-Savarna and the Dalitbahujan, the oppressor and the oppressed, the Ashrafia rulers, Savarna capitalists, imperialists, and the peasants, laborers and ex-untouchables or Dalits. It evaluates caste culture and Dalit politics in the historical context as the process, as the continual struggle of the oppressed from the margins to differ from the oppressor, to name themselves through identity assertions. Dalitbahujan perspective, in its ideal form, does not subscribe to the identity politics of any single caste, but the collective, the majority of South Asian society. Hence, because of its fundamentally emancipatory and universal view, Dalit politics is called by its protagonists' 'assertive' politics. It is contended that "asserting identity is to lay claim on the universal" (Margaret, 2012). This affords agency to the oppressed to actively participate "in eradicating all forms of violence, intolerance, hierarchy, and discrimination in the society" (Margaret, 2012). This Dalit agency that tends to redefine its identities confirm the anthropological understanding that culture is not a reified entity, but a "political process of contestation" among groups to redefine their social contexts (Wright, 1998). It is always "constantly "in the making" (Sökefeld, 1999), and is the dynamic field of contestation, in which differently positioned individuals and groups (tribes, ethnicities, castes) try to dominate each other or tend to marginalize the opponent (; Leach, 1971 [1960]; Leach, 1976; Meijl, 2008; Jenkins, 2004; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; Jenkins, 2010) and reimagine their cultural history (Fox, 2011).

With this ontological understanding, I explore and analyze Dalit activism as it manifests in the form of their identity contestations in Sindh. Since the denial of casteism prevailed, I criticize the ideological bases of the erasure of casteism as it manifests from

the political narratives, and the ‘biopolitics’ (Foucault, 1978 [2001]; Legg, 2005) of casteism (discussed in Chapter 4). I analyze the nationalist appropriation of Sufism and Islam, and the resultant manufacture of consent over the Ashrafia hegemony and Savarna domination, aimed at justifying the ways of casteism.

2.8 How the Actions of Activists can be interpreted from the Dalitbahujan Perspective

The lack of proper literature on casteism and Dalit exclusion or caste-based identity politics in Sindh should not mean that one cannot infer some relevant evidence from the existing literature. Analysis from the Dalitbahujan or the Ambedkarian perspective (see Ambedkar, 1944; 2014 (1991); Ilaiah, 2010; Guru et al, 2012) will certainly unfold the casteist aspect of Pakistani and Sindhi society and that of the writers of the local histories.

Given this theoretical understanding, the basic literary-analytic method should be to see the acts and texts as the reflection of the (in)egalitarian, inclusionary or the exclusionary social practices and the social structures. The literary piece or political act, therefore, should be analyzed concerning caste-based and gender-based inequalities and the hegemonic relations existing between the Ashrafia-Savarnas and the non-Ashrafia-Savarna classes. The analyst must see if the actor is sensitive to the graded inequalities within the oppressor and the oppressed castes, and should help infer the emergent counterhegemonic ideas, issues, and the social groups asserting them. The literary piece, thus, should help reveal the historical patterns of the hegemonic relations, the issues of the oppressed, and underlying friction between the Ashrafia/Savarna and the non-Ashrafia/Savarna classes. Given this Ambedkarian or the Dalitbahujan ontological principle, the epistemology to critically enquire the local polity and the involved actors can be devised that must investigate:

1. The evidence that the actor has an explicit understanding of the caste-based, race-based, and gender-based discrimination.
2. The Historical relevance to caste-class struggle.
3. The communities and or the castes may constitute the oppressors and the oppressed.
4. The writer’s positionality in a given social milieu when he or she wrote poetry or the short story.
5. The representation of castes and classes as socially hierarchized.
6. The evidence of the explicit challenge to the Ashrafia and the Savarna classes.
7. Any alternative the actor proffers to the Savarna-Ashrafia hegemony?

Given these epistemological guidelines, I analyze Dalit activism to see if the civil society actors do the explicit criticism of casteism, racism and gender disparities.

I attempt to see if the activists are sensitive to the historically existing cast-based and gender-based graded inequalities existing within the oppressor and the oppressed castes and if they help infer the emergent counterhegemonic alternatives.

2.9 Categorical Legitimacy of ‘Caste’

The identity markers, such as ‘caste’, ‘Scheduled Castes’ ‘Dalit’, ‘Darāwar’, ‘Brahman’ and ‘Ashrafia’ etc., that are employed to classify similar or different endogamous groups, are being increasingly vernacularized by the Dalit activists in Sindh, the province of Pakistan which was the locale of my study. Therefore, I use these terms and identity markers as emic categories when the Dalit activists contest and negotiate their subalternity through these terms and as etic categories when I attempt to analyze the data by using my anthropological imagination. This etic demand requires me to explain briefly the terms ‘caste’, ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’, and explain in what sense I contextualize these terms.

2.9.1 Caste

‘Caste’ is the English term derived from the Portuguese ‘*casta*’ (lineage, race, and breed)⁵⁵. It is the basic social category that may slightly vary in meaning and use across places and spaces, and is used in academic literature to refer to *qaum*, *qabeelo* or *zaat* (zāt), the identitarian labels used interchangeably in Sindh (as well as in Punjab, Pakistan) to refer to the hierarchical endogamous extended kinship groups that usually trace their origins to particular genealogy or ancestral descent (see Barth, 1960; Streefland, 1979; Chaudhary, 1999; Lyon, 2002; Jaffrelot, 2015; Singha, 2015; Martin, 2016). The slight difference in the usage of these terms in Sindh, however, correlates with the distance from the river Indus basin, such that the castes living nearer to the river Indus prefer to use *zaat* followed by *qabeelo*, whereas the castes living at the farther from the river basin prefer to use *qaum* followed by *qabeelo* and *zaat*.

Caste groups are often found living in proximity with each other in a single village, neighborhood or adjacent villages, and share common cultural values, customs and traditions (see Barth, 1960; Streefland, 1979; Chaudhary, 1999; Lyon, 2002; Jaffrelot, 2015; Singha, 2015; Martin, 2016). Villages are primarily caste-based social organizations

⁵⁵ Source: online English Oxford Living Dictionaries.

URL: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/caste>. Retrieved on 28 September 2018.

dominated by one or the other caste group. Different social groups are either directly organized on the basis of their respective castes in form of caste-based associations or informally aligned to the Sardar (caste chief) or Wadero (village heard) of their caste. The exact number of caste-based forums and associations, either registered or not, have not been documented so far. The analysis of the list of some of the social welfare organizations of Sindh furnished by Gul Hayat Institute, Larkana, out of 412 organizations, 89 especially caste associations, 23 others are controlled by Sayed castes, and about 190 are village-based welfare associations dominated by a single caste⁵⁶. The rest are either religious associations or citizen-based urban unions. Hence, the total number of caste-based and caste dominated social welfare associations, if the numbers of Scheduled Castes and Jati Hindu welfare associations were also added, could be more than 60 percent of the total in Sindh.

Although this study primarily deals with the identity contestation(s) by Dalit activists, in process, it also reveals that caste identity serves as the basic social identity marker. The interaction of different castes develops the self-image of the individual or the caste group based on the social perception of the worth of the social capital each caste inherits, that develops the feelings of superiority and or inferiority among the individual or caste, thereby developing *zaat-parasti* (hereby referred as casteism). Casteism is the tendency, to mark the individual or caste group as different, equal, inferior or superior. Casteism further gives birth to caste-based discrimination, that is, the attitude of humiliation, hatred and untouchability towards the less privileged castes and *bradaris* (kinship groups within castes). It develops caste-based social hierarchies that are more visible nearer to the Indus river basin and in the Thar Desert than farther into the West towards the adjacent province of Baluchistan. By weaving historical with the ethnographic data, I discuss how these caste-based hierarchies are legitimized by the Ashrafia narrative(s), and how Dalits adjust to and contest those hierarchies and the narratives.

2.9.2 Arbitrariness of Categories and the Choice of ‘Scheduled Castes’

The classification of Dalits depends on the way they were documented in historical and official documents, and their own socially ascribed caste names. Classification of castes, ethnic groups and classes by the state matters as it is symbolic of the recognition of their existence. Similarly assigning, changing and hiding caste names, particularly in the case of

⁵⁶ For details see the URL: <http://gulhayat.com/indexsocialorganization.asp>.

Dalits, is also of great significance in terms of their inclusion into the mainstream or to acknowledge their voluntary distance or autonomy to decide about their identity and life. The arbitrariness of the categorization of the marginalized castes and tribes as well as any other ethnic community into the categories of SC, ST, OBC, ‘denotified tribes’ or as ‘others’, becomes evident when one makes cross-regional comparisons⁵⁷. There is no harm in letting identities flow as the context shifts, but arbitrariness can be temporarily stalled and must be so, when these identity markers become the very reasons for exclusion and inclusion, such as in caste of Dalits.

Certain communities are classified exclusively as Scheduled Castes, while others can be found classified as Scheduled Tribes in one state or province and OBC or ‘denotified tribes’ in the other. The Scheduled castes as classified in the government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936⁵⁸, considerably differ from the Scheduled castes listed in Scheduled Castes Ordinance, 1957 issued by the Government of Pakistan to classify Scheduled Castes in West Pakistan. For instance, five castes, namely, Bhangi, Chamar, Chuhra or Balmiki and Koli (Kolhi) were common to both Scheduled castes Orders for Sindh (Bombay Presidency) and Punjab⁵⁹. 25 castes are listed for Punjab in both the relevant documents, whereas for Sindh only 7 castes, namely, Dhed, Bhangi, Chuhra, Chamar, Koli, Menghwar or Meghwal, Sochi match in both the official documents⁶⁰ (Thakur, 1959) Interestingly Bheel and Kolhi, the largest castes have been classified as Scheduled castes in Scheduled castes ordinance, 1957, while the same caste have been classified as indigenous tribal castes as per Government of India Act, 1935. Bheel, Dhed, Gagra, Halal-Khor, Jatia, Kalal, Kolhi, Kuchria, Shikari, and Wagri are the castes that have been listed only in Scheduled Castes Ordinance, 1957. In general, in different Orders issued at different times, several marginalized castes and tribes went missing that continues to live in Pakistan⁶¹. Although Pakistan is a signatory of ILO Convention 107 about the

⁵⁷ For cross-regional comparisons: See Appendix, Table: IX and X, Scheduled Castes and other indigenous tribes in Pakistan, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

⁵⁸ Scheduled Castes Order, 1936, see online, URL: <http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/GOI-SC-ORDER-1936.pdf>, retrieved on , January, 18, 2018.

⁵⁹ As the Sindh was then, separated from Bombay presidency in the same month three weeks earlier on April 1st, 1936, the list of prepared for Bombay should be deemed to contain Scheduled of castes for Sindh. That list contained most of those castes, except Bheels (that were classified as indigenous tribal) that were again classified in Scheduled Castes Ordinance, 1957, by the Government of Pakistan.

⁶⁰ For details of the caste classification see Table VIII and IX in Appendix on Scheduled castes in Pakistan.

⁶¹ See for instance, The Constitution of Pakistan, Part XII: Miscellaneous, Chapter 3: Tribal Areas. URL:

<http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/part12.ch3.html>

rights of tribal communities, the national population censuses, governmental laws and policies do not count tribal communities or tribal individuals. Hence, the censuses categorize tribes as “others”, that, for instance, include Jhabels, Kihals, Mores, and Kutanas, etc. (see Population Census Organization, 2000). Such a poor classification, while at one hand shows the arbitrariness of social categories, it also indicates indifference of the state towards its supposed citizens.

While traveling from one small town to another in lower Sindh, I noticed several communities living in small makeshift huts. When I asked some of them, I found that many of them have not even CNIC, and therefore, official non-citizens. There could be several other indigenous communities and semi-nomadic tribes in Pakistan with undefined or not clearly defined religion, language and traditions and that need to be enlisted and included but because of the definitional narrowness of the state fail to be counted. The confusion over the proper naming and categorization of Dalit as social, economic, religious or political category affects their identification and overall visibility in the society. Dalit communities can be classified into three distinct groups based on a hypothetical oppression-visibility scale from the point of view of their capacity to agitate and to become part of Dalit activism; and, from the perspective of their recognition as equal citizens or the members of a larger community, not a mere atavistic appendage. Out of 40 officially recognized Scheduled castes (Shah, 2007; Raikes, 2009; Harijan, 2005), if we put them on the scale of visibility, only five castes or communities can be said to be active and visible in the mainstream, that are Meghwar, Bheel, Kolhi, Oad, and Baghri respectively with Meghwar being the most visible and Baghri the least. These are the major communities both in terms of population, activism and participation in civil society, which of course, is no way near to any other Ashrafia-Savarna caste. A few of the Dalits from amongst them have succeeded to make headway into the mainstream, in the NGO sector, and educational institutions. A few have managed to be politically influential as well. In that sense, it can be said that these caste groups on the dint of their sheer numerical strength, and concentration in one region (lower Sindh) achieved visibility and managed to benefit from NGOs, the education sector and the democratic processes.

The socially identified Dalit castes in Sindh listed in Table VIII and IX in Appendix, and observed, previously documented by scholars and organizations or reported by locals during fieldwork furnish sufficient proof that several marginalized castes or tribes

have not been documented by any state institution⁶². In Punjab, for instance, certain Muslim Shaikh castes claim to be Dravidians and oppressed, that are identified by Pakistan Shaikh Council as Joiya, Khokhar, Choochan, Gojar, Sarsar, Sandal, Parhiyar, Lootay, Madhar, Teejey, Pabey, Korotana, Sahutra, Cheniyal, Saroey, Hanjra, Sipra, Borat, Dhagge, Wagri, Kalyane, Pundit, Lodhay, Valanex, Sandhu, Gharo, Pereer, Khojey. Some Sindhi Muslim indigenous communities supposedly ex-untouchables are also considered as oppressed by Dalit activists, such as Mangarhar, Meerbahar, Machi, Chuhra Shaikh Khaskheli, Qambrani and 'Sheedi' the former Africans from Tanzania that were traded to India as warrior slaves (also identified by Richard Burton in 1847 (see Burton, 1851; Burton R. F., 1847, pp. 25-26) are considered by Dalit activists as Dalit castes. The persistent marginalization of such tribes and castes requires of the state and governments to identify them and make socioeconomic provision under whatever classificatory scheme they deem appropriate.

While most of the Dalit castes that are scattered and numerically less in strength could not achieve the same caste status, the Muslim Jogi, Mangarhar, and certain other caste groups, most of whom have changed their religion, have greatly anonymized their identities and because of that, it was very hard to identify and locate them, or to assess their partisanship. Bazigar, Hindu-jogi Jandawara, Gurgula, Shikari, Kabootra, Rawra, Barha, Sami, Balimiki, Jatia, Marecha, Bawariya, Mochi, Sansi, Bhangi, Gujarati, Gawariya, Machla, Kucheria, Kokri, Ahir, Lori, Chammar, Changar, Bhatu, Kenghar, Gurajmar, Chootiya, Madari, Pakhai, Dulhar, Dhoor-dhoya and certain other endogamous clan-based communities were found to live in tents and huts the suburbs of major cities, in slums, and small towns of rural Sindh. They are the group of Dalits that do not form the part of civil society and are not even deemed as proper citizens. Some families from these castes have lately got themselves registered and have received CNICs with the help of NGOs, and have started benefiting from some social welfare programs such as BISP. But, in the case of Dalits, a mere holding of CNIC does not enable them to be welcome guests or participants in public meetings or programs, or into any government office. Apart from the above mentioned Dalit caste groups, there is another one comprised of more than a dozen less familiar nomadic tribes practicing different religions and living in complete invisibility if viewed from the mainstream. They are the subalterns to the core, totally cut

⁶² For the detailed lists of the castes and tribes observed during field work see Table VIII and IX in Appendix I on Scheduled castes and tribes in Pakistan, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

off from the so-called village life, civil society and from the everyday life of the city or town. They are living even beyond the margins and give the feel as if non-existent.

Anthropologically tribe is a relatively isolated and independent group but when it interacts more frequently with the mainstream or lives side by side, it becomes caste in South Asia. Kolhi and Bheels in Sindh had long been transformed into untouchable castes. They were not tribes anymore but ‘untouchable’ castes that continued to use the tribal label of ‘*Qaum*’ and lately of ‘*Darāwar*’ to make claims for self-respect. Hence, it is as much because of the treatment of any community as the untouchable that determined categorization as the state’s attempt to regulate its people. Not all Scheduled Castes are Dravidian, even if the dominant Scheduled Castes communities proclaim to be so. ‘Scheduled Castes’, it is not a racial category, and not all listed caste falls in the Dravidian ethnic-racial group. For instance, Sansi caste is known to have Jatt (Aryan) origins. It descended from Bhatti sub-tribe of Jatts. Sansi sub-tribe had downward mobility was turned into the semi-nomadic or gypsy tribe⁶³. Similarly, certain Meghwar activists of Thar region in Sindh claim to be converted from neo-Kshatriyas from within Jati Hindu Jatt subtribes.

Although, the Dalit intellectuals and the activists are striving to organize around the newly evolved social categories, such as *Dharti Dhani* (owners of land), *Darāwar*, *Asloka Waris* (original indigenous owners), many amongst them do not want relinquish the use of the term/label ‘scheduled Castes’ that is asserted by a group of Dalit activists in Pakistan as they do in India, as without its application in official records for political and social inclusions, the Dalits may have not been easily gotten organized, and “due to internal divisions” (Babu & Prasad, 2009, p. 25).

2.9.3 Legitimacy of ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘Dalit’, ‘Savarna’ and ‘Jati Hindu’

We are not Dalits, we are Kolhi. *Darāwar* are we. Parkar is our *mulk* (country). They are calling us Dalits. We do not accept it. Dalits are in India, not in Pakistan. Here all *qaums* (castes) are equals.

Moolchand, a Parkari Kolhi

⁶³ See Griffin, Sir Lepel *Punjab Chiefs*, Vol. 1, p. 219

Singh, Sher (1965) *The Sansis of Punjab: Gypsy and denotified tribe of Rajput origin*; Maharaja Ranjit Singh: the most glorious Sansi, p. 13. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal

Latif, Sayed Muhammad, *History of the Punjab*, p.335 Calcutta 1891

Lethbridge, Sir Roper, *The Golden Book of India: A Genealogical and Biographical Dictionary of the Ruling Princes, Chiefs, Nobles, and Other Personages, Titled or Decorated, of the Indian Empire*, p 215, Aakar Books.

The use of the ‘Dalit’ identity marker was taken as a personal assault, a humiliating remark in (Nagnar)parkar, a Talluka at the frontiers of Sindh where Moolchand Kolhi lived in a small village Adhigam, and where I met with him March 2016 at his guest house. Kolhi *qaum* also locally referred-with minor epistemic variations-as *Zaat* (caste) and *qabeelo*. Here, instead of ‘qaum’ and ‘qabeelo’, I prefer to use ‘Zaat’ or ‘caste’ as the etic category because it depicts more accurately their contemporary socioeconomic status and the identitarian crises. Parkari Kolhi is a demographic majority, but socioeconomically it is one of the most backward castes of Parkar and Sindh. The realization of the socioeconomic backwardness is often decoupled by Parkari Kolhis from their ‘untouchable’ caste status. They proclaimed to be Kolhi Rajputs (Kshatriyas), not Dalits, the fact that belied the widespread caste-based discrimination and untouchability against Dalit castes, including Kolhis. Hence, ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity markers were the subject of controversy within Ashrafia-Savarna dominated Sindhi civil society, and within Dalit communities, as some upwardly mobile Dalits rejected their use, while others actively employed it as the symbols of resistance.

In between these opposing narratives, I chose to follow the categorical logic of a group of local anti-caste activists and Dalitbahujan scholars (see Guru, 1998; Ilaiah, 2002), to refer ‘Scheduled Castes’ as ‘Dalits’, the Marathi term, which means ‘oppressed’⁶⁴. The term ‘Dalit’ is also preferred in academia, in print and social media to refer to ‘Scheduled Castes’, the official term in Pakistan used for 40 castes listed in the Scheduled Castes Ordinance of 1957 of the Government of Pakistan (see Annexure 4 in Appendix; Population Census Organisation, 2014; Election Commission of Pakistan, 2018). Since the Ordinance did not become a law, the legitimacy of the use of the term ‘Scheduled Castes’ is often questioned by anti-Dalits.

Scheduled Castes as the socio-economic-cum-religious category was defined by the British Government of India in 1935 and 1936 and survived in Pakistan after Partition. It exists as the un-noticed leftover of the pre-1971 Pakistan when East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) constituted about 20 percent of the Scheduled Castes population of Pakistan. While the political exegesis, the ‘war of independence’ from West Pakistan as the Bengalis term it, the creation of new state and to keep the Bengali nation united swept away ‘Scheduled Castes’ as the category from Bangladeshi’s constitutional and legal documents,

⁶⁴ I use the term ‘Dalit’ in a broader sense of the meaning to include tribes and castes that are not mentioned in Scheduled Castes Ordinance, 1957, but are locally believed to be discriminated as untouchables based on their caste or tribal location, and may belong to any other religion (see Hussain, 2019).

Pakistan continued to use it and even allocated token reservations for them.⁶⁵ (Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2008).

Hence, due to ambiguity over the relevance, use, and definition of ‘Scheduled Castes’, the anti-Dalits tended to undermine the prevalence of caste discrimination. To supplement their argument, they selectively quoted Nicholas Dirks’s (2001, p.13) proposition arguing that caste is the colonial construct, the argument which has long been challenged by sociologists like T.K. Oommen (2002) and Ambedkarite scholars (Guru.G, 2011a & 2011b)

Due to the contestation among the Dalits and civil society over the use of ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Dalits’ both the identity markers can be termed as emic categories. In this study, however, I also use both the categories in their etic sense of the meaning along with other etic categories, such as ‘Savarna’ and ‘Dalitbahujan’, the self-chosen identity markers often used by the Ambedkarites, to explain the overall contestation from the Ambedkarian perspective (see Table 4).

Table 4: Etic and Emic Categories or Identity Markers

Both Etic and Emic	Etic only
Hindu, Muslim, Jati Hindu, Scheduled Castes, Dalit, Ashrafia, Darāwar, Khatri, Shudar, Vāṇiyo, Sethi, Brahman, Caste, Zaat, Qaum, Qabeelo	Savarna, Bahujan, Dalitbahujan, Pasmanda, neo-Khsatriya, ex-Shudras

The Scheduled Caste identity, although imposed by the state, has played a vital role in helping Dalits to unite in India (Babu & Prasad, 2009, p. 25). Similar attempts were made in Pakistan, and the Dalit activists continue to use it for political purposes.

Kancha Ilaiah (2002) relates Scheduled Castes to Ati-Shudras that were formerly treated as ‘untouchables’ by Savarna castes. According to Kancha Ilaiah (2002), “All those castes that did not fall under the category of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisyas [Savarna castes] were called 'Sudras' and all the so-called untouchables were called 'Ati-Sudras'.” (pg.vii). I also use the term ‘Jati Hindu’, the official term used to differentiate them from ‘Scheduled Castes’. I use ‘Jati Hindu’ when I refer in terms of the official use of the category that includes both the Savarna (Brahmin, Khatri and Vāṇiyo castes) and neo-Kshatriya (ex-Shudra) castes of Hindus. Based on the notion that neo-Kshatriyas are also considerably

⁶⁵ The constitution of Bangladesh does not recognize ‘Scheduled Castes’ or even ‘minority’ the distinct group than Bengalis.

marginalized and often treated like untouchables by the dominant Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya castes, Kancha Ilaiah (2002) suggests to use the term Bahujan (majority) or Dalitbahujan to refer collectively to both the Dalits (ati-shudras or Scheduled Castes) and neo-Kshatriyas(ex-Shudras). While these neo-Kshatriyas are classified in India as Other Backward Castes (OBC), in Pakistan there is no such official designation and they are lumped under 'Jati Hindu' category.

Dalit activists and scholars maintain that "Ambedkar did not want any of the ascribed identity for the Dalit people as it would have meant an internalization of subjugation. He wanted an identity that could be nearer to historical truth and would not further consolidate the inferiority complex that was consequential to the Brahminic ascription" (Raj M. , 2006; Raj & Jyothi, 2014). Most of the Ambedkarites agree to this Ambedkarian categorical logic and avoid fixing 'Dalit' or Scheduled Castes' identity marker. Yet, despite that, they do not subscribe to the idea to relinquish the use of these categories to subsume themselves under the 'Hindu', or for that matter in case of Pasmanda Muslims, under the 'Muslim' blanket term. With this precaution in the foreground, Dalit activists persist with the assertive use of 'Dalit' and 'Scheduled Caste' categories in situations and conditions that treat them discriminatorily, and to demand representation.

The term 'Dalit' was popularized in the 1980s by Dalit Panthers as a political and social category of emancipation, and resultantly, it emerged, as an alternative counterintuitive term for the ex-untouchables to eradicate Brahminic casteism. Given their belief in the arbitrary need of using such terms, Dalit activists, however, have experimented with several alternative terms apart from the 'Dalit' to counter the hegemonic Brahminic ascriptions with the identity markers such as, 'Adivasi', 'Ad-dharmi', 'Adi-Dravida', (Leslie, 2004, p. 46) Muslim Dalit (Pasmanda Muslims), Christian Dalit, Hindu Dalit, 'Bahujan', 'Bahujan-Dalit' and 'Sarvajan' to name a few (Raj M., 2006; Ilaiah, 2002; O'Brien, 2012; Kolhi B. M., 2014; Raj & Jyothi, 2014).

In Pakistan, while the term 'Dalit' has captured the social imaginary of the civil society, the term 'Bahujan' and Dalitbahujan'⁶⁶ (Dalit majority) have not yet entered even into social and political vocabulary of Dalit activists. Given this arbitrariness of the terms and the Dalit activist's tendency to experiment with different identity markers, I merge

⁶⁶ From 1984 onwards the concept of 'Bahujan' (literally meaning 'majority') began to become popular with the emergence of the Bahujan Samaj party (BSP) in 1984, to refer to SCs, STs and OBCs. Kancha Ilaiah coined the term 'Dalitbahujans' to refer to SCs and OBCs to bring to relief the nature of that majority oppressed classes (Ilaiah, 2002). He did not include STs into that category as he believed that STs did not fall under the caste system.

Kancha Ilaiah's understanding with that of Gopal Guru, to use the term 'Dalit' instead of 'Dalitbhaujan' (Dalit majority). I, however, sometimes use both the terms interchangeably in a broader etic sense of the meaning to also include (a) the 'ex-Shudra' castes and (b) and the subaltern tribes or castes not classified as Scheduled Castes, or not listed in any official document but still treated as 'untouchables' and excluded from the mainstream society (see also Hussain, 2019a; Hussain, 2019b).

Unlike Kancha Ilaiah, Gopal Guru proffers a bit different meaning and use of the term 'Dalit'. According to Gopal Guru, Dalit is a person who believes in universal values of dignity, mutual recognition and more importantly in justice and friendship. Ambedkarite is the person who, taking lead from the ideology of Ambedkar consistently stands with the Dalits in their struggle⁶⁷. Taking lead from Gopal Guru, I use the term Dalit and associated behavioral responses in a positive sense as an emancipatory term and the social reaction of agitation respectively. According to Gopal Guru (1998), 'Dalit identity is historically arrived at, sociologically presented and discursively constituted'. Since, to position myself in the field, I was standing by the supporters of the use of the 'Dalit' category, my engagement with its use was an emic experience that I later extended to the etic analysis of the identity contestation. Hence, with the understanding that the meaning of these terms is arbitrary and temporal and, therefore, is contingent on, to a greater extent, the local social, religious, economic and political context, I merge the epistemology of Kancha Ilaiah and Gopal Guru, to use the term 'Dalit' in multiple sense of the meaning, and depending upon the local context to refer primarily (but not exclusively) to Scheduled Castes in Pakistan.

Dalit activists in Sindh applied 'Dalit' both as an overarching plastic category to include as many oppressed communities as possible, and also as the ethnically exclusive category parallel their favorite terms such as 'Darāwar̄s'. This broadening and the narrowing of the meaning were mainly politically motivated that enabled the Dalit activists to claim 'majority in the minority', that is, the largest class of the oppressed. This categorical flexibility allowed them to proclaim historical originality and superiority based on the exclusivity of their Darāwar̄ indigeneity.

⁶⁷ See online: Dalit Is 'Proper Noun', Not An 'Adjective', Says Political Theorist Prof Gopal Guru Published by [NewsClickin](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rciW7_ZGhxU), Published on Jul 19, 2017. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rciW7_ZGhxU (accessed on January, 9, 2019).

2.9.3.1 Dissonance between the Empirically Existing ‘Dalitness’ and the Ideal Interpretation

I use the category of ‘Savarna’, where necessary, to identify the locally dominant Brahmin, Kshatriya (Sodha Thakur⁶⁸) and Vaishya caste groups within Jati Hindus where required to mark the discriminatory class differences. These differences were evident from the normatively sanctioned as well as written codes of conduct that surreptitiously assigned the lowest order status to supposedly ex-Shudra and ‘achoot’ castes. Take, for instance, the excerpt of the locally used codes related to marital contracts between different caste-based classes:

There prevails mutual love if a marrying woman and a man are from the same Verna as per the stars of the both. Otherwise, a man must always be from the upper Verna and a woman from a lower Verna. If the marrying woman is from the upper Verna, and a man is from lower Verna then there will not prevail love among them, and one of them is likely to die in her or his prime, or their children die a premature death, and thus, befall the curse on both of them.

Sundar Tipron (2018-19) by Santosh Kumar Leela Ram Khanwani, and
published by Sundar Sheva Mandli

These sanctified guidelines served the multiple purposes for the Dalits, that is, to ensure caste purity through caste endogamy, and to assign Dalits a Shudra (Hindu) identity and to normalize caste hierarchies based on the four-fold Verna system. These kinds of written codes, interpreted differently, surreptitiously hierarchize castes to assign the lowest order to Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, etc. I read these lines in a Tipron, a booklet of Hindu astrology written in Sindhi, handed over to me by Ashok Guriro. Guriro Mahraj is the priestly caste traditionally assigned the task to solemnize the rites of passage of Dalit castes. Each Dalit caste has its own priestly caste, which is considered lower in status than the Mahraj (priests) of the Savarna castes. I met Ashok Guriro in a remote village in the frontier region of Nangarparkar, Sindh. I asked him to explain ‘Varan (‘Verna’ that as per Vedic mythology means ‘Class’). He told me that there are four Vernas (classes), namely, Brahmin, Khatri (Kshatriya), Vaish (Vaishiya) and Shudar (Sudras). He classified his Guriro *zat* (caste) as belonging to the Brahmin class, and his matrimonial Meghwar clients as belonging to Shudar castes. Unlike what many Hindu activists asserted that Verna classification is based on achieved occupational status, the Guriro Mahraj and the local Hindus to whom I met in

⁶⁸ Sodha Thakur feudals continued to have a social, economic and political leverage in Tharparkar and Umerkot districts mainly because of Sammat hegemony, the group of Hindu and Muslim castes that saw for them more opportunities in Pakistan after the departure of Lonhan/Sethia class of Hindus. It was primarily with that understanding that Rana Arjun Singh (of Umerkot, Sindh) contested the 1946 elections on All India Muslim League ticket, resisting all pressures by the Congress to join it. It was with Sammat-Ashrafia understanding that Sodha Rajput feudals continued to be elected to legislative assemblies of Pakistan.

the villages of Nangarparkar, defined Vernas and Jatis as hereditary ascriptions. Some of them maintained that the scriptures have been purposefully written as such to punish the Darāwar castes. Others argued that the scriptures did not mean it and that people misinterpret them. These different opinions marked the difference between the ‘layman Dalit’, the ‘Dalit activists’, the ‘layman Hindu’ and the ‘Hindu activist’. The layman Dalit did not necessarily assert Dalitness as did the Dalit activists. Similarly, the layman Hindu did not accept the idealized interpretation of Verna System whereby a change of occupation was supposed to bring about change in one’s social status. Hence while the Hindu activists asserted that Verna can be changed, a layman Hindu or the Dalit denied that Verna does not change, and that caste is appended with it. The ground reality seemed to support layman’s narrative, as far as the local interpretation and practice were concerned, Meghwar, Kolhi, Bheel seemed to be treated like a Shudras by the Savarnas and the Ashrafia classes independent of their existing professions or occupations⁶⁹.

In the everyday discourse of the locals, change of occupation was not conceived as the change in the status of Jati (caste) and Verna (class). To fit into the Brahminic Verna hierarchy, layman Dalits classified themselves as Shudar, the fourth class in order of respect. The casteist activists within them tended to classify themselves as Khatri (Kshatriyas), the warrior tribes and the Darāwar, the proud identity constructs. This casteist tendency defied the Dalitbahujan logic to initiate the anti-caste struggle, yet was considered by many Dalit activists as emancipatory for the Dalits as they were priding in their past to feel self-esteem and achieve self-respect.

Table 5: Dalit/ Dalitbahujan Communities in Pakistan

No.	Generic group	Castes
1	Scheduled Castes	Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, Baghri, Oad, Sami, Sensi, Kalal, Kutcheria, Marecha, Ad Dharmi, Bangali, Bawaria , Banjara, Chamar, Chanal, Charan, Dagi and Koli, Dhanak, Dhed, Dumna, Gagra, Gandhila, Halal-Khor, Jatia etc.
2	Pasmanda Hindus (neo-Kshatriyas/ex-shudras)	Suthar, Rabari, Gadiryia Lohar, Sonara, Rangrez, Bajeer, etc
2	Dalit Christians	Chuhra, Bhangi, Balimiki, Katchi Kolhi, Gurjrati etc.

⁶⁹ On caste hierarchies in Sindh see also the datasets:

Hussain (2019z), “*Types and Nature of Dalit Exclusion in Sindh*”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/589kvr8hzn.2

Hussain (2019za), “*Typological presentation of hierarchies of oppression and intersectionality in Pakistan*”, Mendeley Data, V3, doi: 10.17632/kvbx52mdw5.3

3	Nomadic Tribes	Bazigar, Hindu-jogi. Jandawara, Gurgula, Shikari, Kabootra, Rawra, Barha, Sami, Balimiki, , Mochi, Sansi, Bhangi, Gujarati, Gawariya, Machla, Kucheria, Kokri, Ahir, Lori, Chammar, Changar, Bhatu, Kenghar, Kanjar, Gurajmar, Chootiya, Madari, Pakhai, Dulhar, Dhoor-dhoya etc.
5	Pasmanda Muslims	Machi, Mallah, Kori, Mochi, Langah, Mangarhar, Kumbhar, Bajeer, Chuhra Shaikh, Jogi, Rajpar, Khaskheli, Sheedi etc.
6	Dalit Castes specific to Punjab	Jhabels, Kihals, Mores, Kutas, Gojar, Sarsar, Sandal, Parhiyar, Lootay, Madhar, Teejey, Sahutra, Hanjra, Sipra, Borat, Dhagge etc.
7	Scheduled Castes and subaltern nomadic communities that converted to Ahmedi, Buddhist and other religions, or belonging to undefined religion.	

Source: Author (2018)⁷⁰

Departing from this inherent categorical desire of the layman Dalit to be included into Hindu caste fold, as did Moolchand Kolhi to deny caste discrimination, and reject ‘Dalit’ category under the assumption that caste parity prevailed in Pakistan, I follow the Ambedkarian way of classifying the Dalits as ‘Dalits’ on the basis of their existing socio-economic status whereby they continue to be treated like ‘achoots’ (untouchables). This approach was in line with the Dalit activists of DST, BIF and some of the leading Dalit activists of PPP, the ruling party. For instance, a group of Dalit activists within PPP believed that, if ‘Dalit’ rights and issues were framed in anti-Brahminic framework, it would be in line with the state narrative as well as in line with the aspirations of the Dalitbahujans. A Dalit activist belonging to Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) also shared similar views. He said:

To identify as a ‘Dalit’ in Pakistan can also provide strong diplomatic leverage to Pakistan vis-à-vis India, and as for the Dalits and pasmanda Muslims in India and Pakistan, it will mean an international recognition of their oppressed status and the condemnation of Hindutva.

This perception of the political leverage vis-à-vis Savarnas affords strategic strength to Dalit activists to push for Dalit rights in Pakistan. This epistemic priority afforded to the ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ terms by the local Dalit activists is the major reason that I use this term as the category of analysis in this thesis. (see also Hussain, 2019a; Hussain, 2019b).

2.10 Casteism: Native View of the Researcher

Before discussing in detail, the Dalit identity assertions under the Ashrafia hegemony, I deem it appropriate to briefly draw an ethnographic sketch of the extent of the normativity of casteism in Sindh. I deem it appropriate to briefly extrapolate it in this chapter section, as my theorization is primarily grounded in the ethnographic insights that I had during my

⁷⁰ See Table IX and X in Appendix for further detailed classification

fieldwork and also as the native Sindhi. The discussion in each chapter that follows, however, will further unfold my claims made in this section.

Zat, Qaum, caste the tribe and kinship lied at the base of the local politics. The Ambedkarian notion that ‘caste is closed class’ (Ambedkar B. R., 1916) seemed to hold in the case of Sindhi society as well. Caste did not exist as an isolated phenomenon but as the interconnected web of relations of domination and subordination, exclusion and inclusion affecting the whole groups of castes. Caste consciousness was more salient than class consciousness and thrived on the accumulated social capital that created extended structures of caste-based networks of equally privileged and the underprivileged caste groups.

Caste as an identity was not just a symbolic or nomenclatural appendage but had materiality as it was appended to the person by birth and place. At the very empirical level, the rules of caste endogamy were being followed even by the Ambedkarites. Inter-caste marriages were a rarity, particularly among the Dalits and the Savarnas. These rules of caste purity seemed to get extended to the political domain as they reflected in the political patronage (Bradari vote casting, political alliances with certain castes and political parties). Hence, it can be argued that the landed property or economic wealth, by itself did not qualify the person to acquire the political power unless the support of one’s caste community was ensured, or the caste lords of different castes in any electorate were taken into confidence. Villages were often known by the caste dominating in the village, and the political constituencies too were often known by the dominant caste groups (see also Hussain, Mohyuddin, & Mahesar, 2013; Hussain, Mohiyuddin, Ahmed, 2013; Hussain & Mohiyuddin, 2014; Hussain, Mohyuddin, & Ahmed, 2014).

Caste groups continued to be hierarchically relevant social categories, be it for a Hindu Savarna, Scheduled Castes or the Pasmada and Ashrafia Muslim majority. Birth certificates, Scheduled caste certificates, primary school leaving certificates, national identity cards, scholarship quotas⁷¹, census forms, constitutional provisions, legal codes, electoral politics, matrimonial advertisements, inter-caste marriages, registers of religious seminaries that maintained credit records of the Dalits converted or willing to convert, Sanad-i-Islam (the conversion certificates), the writings on the tombs and shrines were found to use caste as the socially relevant category. It was relevant as it symbolized the

⁷¹ Further on structure of caste hierarchies in Sindh and reservation or quotas for SCs, Age Relaxation and scholarships see dataset: Hussain (2019), “ An Ethnographic Study of Dalit Activism in Sindh (Supplementary Thesis Data)”, Mendeley Data, v2<http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/ftcwpfhvws.2>

social worth of the individual or the group to which a person belonged. Hence, this also reflected the hierarchy. For instance, the primary school reports were found to make the hierarchical list of the students based on their caste status. Similarly, the Scheduled Castes and the Dalit Christians were specifically asked through newspaper advertisements to apply for the jobs of sanitary worker and the sweeper⁷².

In this study, I will discuss in relation to Dalit identity politics that this process of persistent voluntary or forced identification with caste not only produced *zaat-parasti* ('casteism'), but also the culture of caste hierarchies whereby certain favorably positioned Ashrafia and Savarna castes dominated social and political spheres while Dalitbahujan castes were further systematically marginalized or excluded. This hierarchical social structure orients the individual's behavior and cognition to imagine the caste privilege or the lack of it in terms of social exclusion and inclusion imagining Dalit castes as a peripheral appendage of caste order. Casteism manifested itself through (g) political statements of Sardaar (caste-chief culture) or feudal-capitalist politicians, and (h) Jirgra culture, inter-caste wars or conflicts between Sindhi Sammāt and Baloch castes. Even if the conflicts were within two factions of the same caste, the negotiating idiom or identity employed was invariably 'caste'. Such intra-caste conflicts were understood as the conflicts between two factions of the same 'baradari' (caste)⁷³.

The economic capital (landed property etc.) or the social capital (connections with bureaucracy), that the Ashrafia class tribal chief or the Vāṇiyo of the Savarna class possessed, served as the means to assert caste ethic, defend their kinship and caste community, and in turn, use that tribal-casteist capital to maneuver in politics. This then, also determined the social and the political structure of rural Sindh that influenced both the division of laborers (which caste-classes will be more frequently employed as cheap laborers), relations of production (e.g. from which caste any person could have more sugar mills in Sindh), and relations of domination and subordination (which tribal castes or the persons from which tribal castes can make to legislative assemblies, and which could remain excluded from the mainstream). Differential caste capital that each individual and caste group inherits by default determines which castes will be leading in all spheres of society. Hence, while caste structure was sustained through the institution of caste

⁷² Also see an application form for the post of sanitary worker, p.27 in a dataset: Hussain (2019), "An Ethnographic Study of Dalit Activism in Sindh (Supplementary Thesis Data)", Mendeley Data, v2 <http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/ftcwpfhvws.2>

⁷³ For instance see online URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-Pjx-Y5LE>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-Os8lgdwHI>. Retrieved on September 8, 2018.

endogamy, the consciousness of caste was developed out of the kinship/cousin and cousin rivalries, inter-caste conflicts, and feuds. Each caste had some privileged families that contested with each other to have a greater influence on the caste fellows, while caste as the social and the political identity always remained there to serve as the political unit to jealously own and use as the token in politics to bargain.

Casteism also manifested in the form of caste discrimination against the Dalitbahujans. It was evident from social structures (social segregation and exclusion), from the use of public spaces at temples, mosques, and shrines, in the form of segregated Dalit neighborhoods, under-representation of Dalits in social and political organizations, and social exclusion in the form of hate speech reflected in political statements of Ashrafia political class. Casteism thrived on the templates afforded by the religious and the tribal folk narratives on the one hand, and the modern nationalist narratives on the other. In Sindh, it became evident in the form of Sayedism, Pir-parasti and the indigenous caste assertions of Dalits and Sammāt castes. The Sindhi society was found structured such that Baloch, Sammāt and the Vaniya castes dominated both culturally and politically with Sayed castes having the leading hegemonic influence over the rest of castes.

Pir and Sayed (spiritual leader), Sufi Shrine, the title of Sardar were interpreted as symbols of sacredness and power and served a measure of caste capital that each individual or community could possess. This Sayed-dominated caste order developed the attitude to discriminate against those castes having the least contact or the association with the Sayeds, Ashrafs. Since the Schedule Castes had the least association with the Sayeds and the Ashrafs, as well as with the Savarnas, they continued to discriminate on that basis, and Dalit castes continued to be stigmatized.

Looking from the Dalit activists' standpoint these caste hierarchies can be explained as a system of graded intersectionality with the Scheduled Castes and or the Dalitbahujan majority placed at the bottom of it. Dalits castes were also internally hierarchized and divided along caste lines with Meghwar dominating both culturally and politically followed by Bheel and Kolhi castes. Ultra-subaltern castes or tribes remain excluded and ignored by the Dalit political class.

In the chapters that follow, I will further discuss that how this consciousness of living in the hierarchical society pushed the Dalits to construct their histories and recast their identities so that they could rise in the caste hierarchy. I will explain how the structured discrimination provided Ashrafia and Savarna classes the reasons for pride in their caste identity while creating feelings of humiliation among Dalits to hide their castes.

The Ambedkarian lens, thus, allows me to refute Louis Dumont's argument that caste-based hierarchies may not generate functional caste-class categories in non-Hindu societies (1980 & 1970)). Hence, implicitly interrogating Dumont, I will discuss differential caste capital as it generates graded socioeconomic inequalities, and it was not necessarily a Hindu relic but the production of amalgamation of Hindu-Muslim and Savarna-Ashrafia culture.

2.11 Conclusion

Since scientific research is understood not as wholly neutral, and research objectives are partly grounded in researcher's values, in this chapter, I extrapolated upon my positioning as the various ways my privileged caste background could influence data collections and subsequent analysis. To render my caste positionality, legitimate vis-à-vis Dalit activists, I elaborated upon the self-reflective dimension of research in the light of Dalitbahujan or Ambedkarian perspective. This helped to synchronize local Dalit politics with Dalit ideology. To justify and validate research claims the on-going research, collected data, and possible results and analysis were shared with some local Dalit activist and Dalit academicians that could be accessed during the research process. This self-reflective criticism set the limits of overall analysis and further delimited the interpretation of Dalit assertions, narratives, and discourses.

The chapter also discussed the legitimacy of using terms 'Dalit' and Scheduled Castes' from Ambedkarian perspective to refer to more empirically grounded 'Hindu' or 'minority' categories. It was explained that the use of the terms 'Dalit' and 'Scheduled Castes' was problematized by the Dalit activists within the limits of a discursive field dominated by Savarna-Ashrafia interlocutors. This empirically existing reality of Ashrafia-Savarna domination greatly determined the acceptance or the rejection of the identity labels employed by the Dalit activists, and alternatively, influenced my choice of emic and etic categories for the analysis.

The relevance of 'caste' as the social category was explained by drawing forth the ethnographic sketch based on my observations as the native researcher. It was sufficiently explained that *Zat* and *Qaum* (caste and or the tribe) *formed* the basis of local politics. The next chapter will further elaborate upon the argument about the empirical bases of 'caste' as forming the interconnected web of relations of domination and subordination, exclusion and inclusion affecting the whole groups of castes. Yet, so far, based on the discussion in this chapter, it can, therefore, be argued that Ashrafia advantage over Dalits in Sindh, by

and large, was the product of pre-existing historical hegemonic relations than any conscious strategy, or directly imposed domination. The caste hierarchies that were sustained through Ashrafia ethics did not fade away with the onset of modernity or the creation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Instead, the biopolitics that emerged during and after partition redefined the pre-existing caste-based hierarchies consolidating Ashrafia hegemony and showing indifference towards Savarna domination within the minority. The religious gloss, perfected by the master narratives, invisibilized the Dalit status of Scheduled Castes, and led to the erasure of Scheduled caste-based identity markers considered politically vital by the Dalits to raise their issues. Hence, although in the Indian context one may primarily evaluate casteism concerning the Hindutva ideology that rationalizes Brahmanism (see Tambs-Lyche, 2016), in Pakistan where laws and norms are shaped by Islamic ideology, it will be befitting to analyze the same by looking into the essentially Islamic and Sufi forms of (de) politicizing casteism. With this epistemological gap in perspective, in the chapter that follows, the biopolitics of caste during and after the Partition of the sub-continent as it affected the Dalit assertions and redefined their identities will be discussed. This will enable to understand how the religious gloss, perfected by the master narratives, has invisibilized the 'caste', and led to the erasure of 'Scheduled Castes' identity marker and shaped the post-partition enumeration, classification and the representation of caste groups.

Chapter 3: Historiography of Dalit Activism in Pakistan

3.1 Introduction

Sindhi progressive movement was deeply inspired by the European Enlightenment literature and modern nationalist ideas (Hussain, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c). Like their Western counterparts, it was driven by the local bourgeoisie that can be best be classified as the Ashrafia-Savarna class of feudals, Pirs and Vaniyas (Hindu merchants). They formed the dominant classes of Sindh that hid their casteist bias in the sublime struggle for the autonomous Sindh. The Sindhi nationalist narrative promulgated by these classes before and after Partition has grown over the decades to construct the social imaginary of the locals through print media, literary circles, and lately through social media to see Sindhi people united against the external and internal forces. Such an ‘imagined’ nationality (Anderson, 1983, p.77) did not identify the Ashrafia-Savarna elite as the internal oppressor. In this chapter, I present the historical sketch of caste groups, particularly of Dalits vis-à-vis privileged caste groups, and discuss the literary-political hegemony of Ashrafia-Savarna classes. I critically analyze the social use of caste metaphors (the text and speech) as it is reproduced in vernacular literature and used in everyday literary politics (social context), in Sindhi civil society as it perpetuates casteism, patriarchy, and religiosity. This demands the explicitly self-reflective anti-caste stance from the academicians and critics to criticize the hegemonic conditions that (re)produce casteism and graded inequalities embedded in local discourses and religious or neoliberal narratives (see Guru, 2011a; 2011b; Kumar, 2018).

The reason why the academic literature on caste politics, particularly on Dalit activism, lacks in Sindh has been discussed. In the end, a brief overview of how Ashrafia-Savarna classes have historically evolved to dominate the culture and politics has also been explained. The purpose is to underline the hegemonic narratives that shape the laymen Dalit’s narrative and obfuscate their freedom of identity of choice.

The narrative of the Dalit activists about their political activism as it was shaped by the historical changes over the decades has been presented to expand the discussion on the social-structural givens that facilitated or constrained Dalit agency. The nature of Dalit activism as it relied on Savarnization and Ashrafization and is increasingly departing from individual caste assertions to Dalitization has been extrapolated. With the purpose to bring forth Dalit agency, the brief analysis of the way attempts were made by ‘Savarnas’ to organize Dalits as docile ‘Harijans’ and Hindus in need of assistance, and the ways Dalit castes were redefining their past and posing the political difference has been discussed. In

the end, political opportunism of dominant castes within Dalits and the issues that the Dalits problematize has been briefly extrapolated.

3.2 Historical Background

The history of the Dalit activism in Pakistan is connected with the history of Dalit activism in India as it unfolded in the pre-colonial and colonial India. The anti-caste activists in India often trace their struggle to the ancient past as it is metaphorically presented in the Vedic myth of Rakshahas or Asuras, the indigenous people, resisting against the Aryans (see Ilaiah, 2002; Thapar, 2003; 2014). Buddhism followed by Bhakti movement is often understood as the anti-caste resistance against Brahmanism. Similarly, the indigenous tribal resistances against the British are also valorized as anti-caste resistances (see Thapar, 2003; 2014). Some notable rebellions of Dalits against the British were: Great Kuki Invasion of 1860s, Gond rebellion, begun by Ramji Gond in Adilabad (1860), Koli revolt (1859), Bhopal Patnam Struggle (1795), Bheel rebellion (1822–1857), Santhal Revolt (1885–1886), Maria rebellion (1842–63), Bheel rebellion, begun by Tantya Tope Bheel in Banswara (1858), First Freedom Struggle (1856–57), and Rani rebellion (1878–82). During all such episodic battles and upheavals, caste and tribe have served as the basic identity marker to align, otherwise, oppress, dominate or subjugate (see A.R.Desai, 1979; Guha, 1982; Guha, 1997).

During the late 19th and early 20th century British rule, some Dalit and Pasmanda reformers emerged on the scene, such as Jotiba Rao Phule followed by Periyar and Ambedkar, the pasmanda Muslim resistance was led by Molana Asim Bihari (see Faizie, 2017). Yet the locus of these struggles was Maharashtra, Bengal, Bihar or UP. There is, however, no record available showing the Dalits and Pasmanda Muslims the geographical regions now constituting parts of Pakistan having pro-actively resisted against the Ashrafiya and Brahminic hegemony during the British period.

3.2.1 B.R.Ambedkar's Support for Jinnah and League

Though Pakistan was born as an Islamic republic based on the two-nation theory, the Dalit ideologue, B.R. Ambedkar and Jogendar Nath Mandal supported its making and stood by Muslim League's demand for a separate nation for Muslims. During the pre-partition phase of communal politics, Ambedkar always looked towards the Muslim leadership against the Congress, which he saw as the representative party of the 'upper castes'. For instance, in October 1939, Ambedkar had asked Jinnah to act as the spokesperson for Dalits in his talks with the Viceroy (Keer, 1971, pp.325-329). In

December 1939, Jinnah and Ambedkar celebrated a “Day of Deliverance” to mark the resignation of the Congress ministries in eight provinces to protest the inclusion of India in the Second World War. To that end, the two leaders conducted a joint rally in Mumbai’s Bhendi Bazar (Keer, 1971, p.330).

Ambedkar’s ideological stand against the Congress and his support for the Muslim League and the making of Pakistan can also be evidenced in *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, a polemic written by him in 1945 to support Jinnah’s demand for Pakistan. Published within eight months of the Lahore Resolution, the *Partition of India* was meant to support the Muslim League’s partition plan. The book did not go unattended by Jinnah himself, who remarked that “Dr Ambedkar has understood the constitutional position in this country and the stand taken by the League in its Lahore resolution on the “Pakistan Scheme” (Keer, 1971; Daniyal, 2021). Ambedkar, for instance, argued that “If there is nothing shocking in the separation of Karnataka and Andhra, what is there to shock in the demand for the separation of Pakistan?” (Ambedkar, 1945, p.14). He further argued that constitutional safeguards had “failed to save them [Muslims] from the tyranny of the Hindu majority” (Ambedkar, 1945, p.19) and termed the Congress as a Hindu body, arguing that “A body which is Hindu in its composition is bound to reflect the Hindu mind and support Hindu aspirations” (Ambedkar, 1945, p.20).

3.2.2 Jogendar Nath Mandal and the Making of Pakistan

Scheduled Castes activism in Pakistan can also be traced back to 1945. It was the period during which Jogendar Nath Mandal started the Bengal provincial branch of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s All India Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF). He hoped that the Federation would be a catalyst in making a Dalit and Muslim peasant alliance. With that goal in perspective, the SCF leadership of Bengal, including Mandal supported Pakistan Resolution. They thought that it would ensure the rights of minorities, including that of Scheduled Castes (Tan & Kugaisya, 2000, pp. ix-327; Jaffrelot C. , 2009, p. 18). Yet, the SCF, in its early phase, remained a political organization of the Dalits of East Pakistan, having little foothold among the Dalits in West Pakistan. The politics of SCF was centered in UP, Bengal, Orissa, Asam, Punjab (parts now in India) and Maharashtra in Bombay Presidency in India (Jaffrelot C. , 2009, p. 18), that did not include Sindh or any part of present-day Pakistan. Notwithstanding that, Jogendar Nath Mandal, Namasudra leader from East Bengal and SCF president tried his best to take occasional notice of the plight of Scheduled Castes in West Pakistan as well (Mandal, 1950; Sen, 2018; Sen, 2012; Sen,

2012). However, there did exist Sind Scheduled Castes Federation (Sen, 2018, p.184) whose influence, as the local elderly told me, at the grassroots was negligible as most of the Scheduled Castes leadership in Sindh was aligned to Congress and Gandhi instead of Ambedkar. Hence, in Pakistan, particularly in the Dalit belt of Sindh, it was Congress that dominated both the Hindu-Harijan politics even before Partition. The Harijan Sevak Sangh had brought almost all indigenous tribes and castes into Hindu fold. Therefore, the early Dalit politics in Pakistan can be termed as divided into the Harijanised Dalits of the West and the Scheduled Castes of the East.

The Scheduled Castes' politics of both the wings of Pakistan converged during formative years of Pakistan the issues, such as 'separate' electorates for Scheduled Castes and Hindus, or joint electorates with Hindus and Muslims (Tan & Kugaisya, 2000, pp. ix-327; Jaffrelot C., 2009, p. 18). The legislation to allot separate electorates to Scheduled Castes could have been a vital factor in organizing Dalits. But, SCF failed to achieve that. Instead, the Scheduled Castes and Jati Hindus were put under joint electorates. This constitutional feat to give Scheduled Castes a Hindu identity determined how, in the future, the Dalit identity would shape and organize in Pakistan. The growing power of Islamic nationalism of the Pakistani state unmistakably ascribed Dalit a 'Hindu' minority identity (Bandyopadhyay & Chaudhury, 2014).

Dalit politics went into hibernation after the resignation of Jogendar Nath Mandal in 1950. I interviewed Ganpat Rai Bheel, a member of the existing Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan (SCFP), asking his opinion about the failure of that early Dalit activism. He told:

Dalit movement in Pakistan failed to rise primarily because of two reasons. Firstly, the state policies to minorities Dalits, Hindus and Christians suppressed caste-class questions. Geographical barrier, the physical distance of the Dalit majority in the East Pakistan from the Dalit minority in the West Pakistan was also one of the potent factors that Dalit politics in West Pakistan could not have a foothold in (West) Pakistan. Thirdly, Pakistani establishment's reluctance to devolve power to its administrative and ethnolinguistic units within the spirit of 1940 Resolution. It was the demand of provincial units, including Sindh that was also supported by Scheduled Castes leaders of Pakistan. If the East Bengal-centric SCF's demands for the proportional representation, special educational facilities for SC students, and its pro-peasant agrarian reform agenda had been materialized, it would certainly have positive impact on the Scheduled Castes' politics in West Pakistan. Moreover, the Dalit-Muslim alliance remained a dream as the Muslim majority seemed reluctant to recognize a separate identity of Dalits apart from Hindus. SCF failed to overcome communal politics based on Hindu-Muslim binaries.

Ganpat Rai Bheel argued that the resignation of Jogendar Nath Mandal did not lead to the political reaction among the Dalits in Pakistan. He hinted that a few Dalit activists in the

Thar region of Sindh did launch a social movement. But that movement was far removed from the radical program of Ambedkar and was more in continuation with the Gandhian anti-revolutionary Harijan agenda. It is because of it, lamented Ganpat, that among the Dalits in Sindh, the tendency to resist has given way to timidity and conformism. This study digs into these purportedly conformist tendencies of Dalit and the ways through which they strive to transcend conformism and assert their agency and identity.

3.2.3 Scheduled Castes' Reclassified as a Religious Minority

Mr. President; Sir, I rise to offer you my heartiest congratulations on your election as the President of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. On behalf of myself and on behalf of eight million of the Scheduled Castes living the State of Pakistan, whom I have the honor to represent in this House, I offer you the most sincere congratulations. [...] Although I have been trying to render them the best service and doing my utmost to uplift them economically, politically and socially, I feel I am' not strong enough to carry out my mission, and it may be that you will always find myself alone to raise a single voice on behalf of the eight millions of Scheduled Castes of Pakistan. [...] Sir, you will kindly forgive me, and the House will also kindly forgive as I shall always appear to be very ambitious and as I shall always be found asking more and more for the backward minorities. But I feel the House will realize and, Sir, you will realize that unless the backward section of the people of your beloved Pakistan is raised to the level of the other people, the State of Pakistan cannot be prosperous, happy and peaceful.'

Jogendar Nath Mandal (August 11, 1947)⁷⁴

The litany of the failure of Dalit politics in Pakistan begins with the disappointment of Jogendar Nath Mandal,⁷⁵ leader of the Scheduled Castes from East Pakistan. On the 11th of August 1947, Mandal, the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly, congratulated Muhammad Ali Jinnah in the capacity of the leader of Scheduled Castes, declaring him the elected President of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (see Government of Pakistan, 1947). Jogendar Nath Mandal had joined the cabinet as the Minister of Law and Labour hoping that the rights of Scheduled Castes will be protected in Pakistan, the country supposedly made on the principle that discriminations based on caste, color and creed would cease to exist in so conceived Islamic polity. On several occasions, Jinnah also affirmed that resolve. For instance, on March 22, 1948, before the delegation of 'Achoot Federation' said:

I assure you of the good intentions and of the fact that we care for the welfare of 'Achoot' castes because you have been oppressed for centuries. Therefore, in

⁷⁴ Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, August 11, 1947 (page 15-16). Source: National Assembly Debates, National Assembly of Pakistan archives. URL:

http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1434523779_849.pdf, Retrieved on January 8, 201.

⁷⁵ Mandal was from Namasudra community of West Bengal, the part of British India that became East Pakistan after partition. As a leader represented all the Scheduled Castes and minorities of both the wings of Pakistan.

comparison to any other community, you deserve the most. I have always advocated for your rights and will continue so.

(Dahomal Dothi 2007, p.32)

All such assurances proved hollow, and the Mandal's dream of Dalit emancipation also could not materialize. Instead, the politics of Mandal was drifted into Hindu-Muslim binaries, as the two-nation theory began to restructure the political economy of Pakistan. Dejected and disappointed, Mandal resigned on the 8th of October after secretly escaping on September 14, 1950, from Karachi to Calcutta to take political asylum in India where he spent the rest of his life in total obscurity (Bandyopadhyay and Chaudhury, 2014, p. 3). Mandal's letter that expressed his deep anguish at the failure of the Pakistani state to safeguard the rights of Scheduled Castes and minorities, was made public just a few years ago. Yet, like the plight of Dalits, that historical document too goes unnoticed by the mainstream Pakistani historians and the analysts. Mandal's whole political career as the founding father of Pakistan has been virtually reduced to a mere footnote to Pakistan's history. Particularly, after the cessation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), to which he belonged, Mandal was completely scrapped from the history, discourse and the narratives of and on Pakistan, and with it was sealed the fate of Scheduled Castes that were left behind in (West) Pakistan (Mandal, 1950; Sen, 2018; Sen, 2012a; Sen, 2012b). The framers of the succeeding constitutions and the institutions gradually departed from the empirical givens to a highly idealized narrative that since Pakistan is an Islamic state, therefore, there is no difference of caste, color, and creed. This performative imagination instead led to the denial of caste-based discrimination that is still assiduously guarded by the political class in Pakistan.

Particularly, after the departure of Mandal, the ethnolinguistic politics between the dominant Ashrafia West Pakistan and the pasmanda East Pakistan (ethnically Bengali) got further intensified. The problem of caste was thrown into the backburner as the ethnic discord between the 'marginalized' and suppressed Bengali majority and the dominant Ashrafia elite of West Pakistan became the main feature of Pakistani politics. It resulted in the cessation of East Pakistan in 1971 and its reformation as the newly independent state of Bangladesh. Hence, Bengali-Urdu and East-West ethnolinguistic politics strengthened Bengali ethnic identity in Bangladesh, and Urdu-Muslim or 'Pakistani identities in Pakistan (Talbot, 2010; Jaffrelot C. , 2003; Jaffrelot C. , 2015; Ansari S. , 2016). Resultantly, the major identity constructs that were shaped on the anvil of two-nation-theory diluted the caste question in both the countries (Pakistan and Bangladesh) that were further carved out

of pre-1971 Pakistan. Due to the secession of East Pakistan in 1971, about 90% Dalit population of Pakistan was separated from existing Pakistan. The 8% that were left behind were so marginalized and meager in terms of population that their voice could not be heard. It was because of that major geopolitical change that Dalits in Pakistan remained almost completely as subalterns till the Meghwar rise after the late 1980s. In the post-1971 era, the internal problem of Pakistan came to be identified as an ethno-nationalist discord between different provinces.

The hegemony of military and allegedly ‘Punjab-dominated’ establishment and claim to nationhood by Ashrafia class of Sindh, by the tribal-caste elite of Baluchistan and NWFP (now KPK) came to be identified as the major problems of Pakistan. Such a polity did not allow reckoning with tribal or caste-based discrimination as a major issue in Sindh and Punjab. This indifference, wittingly and unwittingly, sanctioned hegemonic legitimacy to Ashrafia castes (of Sayed, Sammāt and Baloch origin) as they increasingly came to be elected to legislative assembly and occupy all important ministries and posts (see Talbot, 2010; Jaffrelot C., 2003; Jaffrelot C., 2015; Cheesman, 1997; Ansari S., 2016; Ansari S., 2005; Ansari S., 1992). The Dalit existence was assumed to be non-existence, and reduced to a religious ‘minority’ status.

It will be interesting here to mention that, before partition, the areas that now constitute Pakistan were considered as predominantly Muslim with a little Dalit population living within it. It was because of that while defining the cartography of Pakistan Chaudhary Rahmat Ali assigned Dalits the land in the area that now lies in the middle of India, that is, the Gangetic plain, and named it *Achootistan* (the land of the Achoots/Dalits⁷⁶). It meant that Dalits could be conceived as the major ethnic group that could at least be apportioned a proportionate share in the newly founded political economy, if not the province of their own. Yet, the demographic dispersion of Dalits and relative marginalization nearing to subaltern status precluded any chances of ‘Dalit cause’ being attended at the macropolitical level. Hence, apart from what Mandal and the early Dalit leadership (mostly from East Pakistan) expected, and the founders of Pakistan failed to deliver, the local pre-existing geographic and demographic and political landscape also determined the fate of Dalits.

Looking retrospectively, before the partition of the sub-continent, the land area that now constitutes Pakistan was inhabited by a small population of Scheduled Castes and

⁷⁶ Rahmat Ali, *Dinia: The Seventh Continent of the World*.

Dalit Christians that were concentrated in certain marginalized districts of lower Sindh, and in ghettos or the slums in major cities. It was the section of the population that had either been sufficiently Christianized or Hinduised by missionary revivalists. Saithiyā/Vaniya castes (Savarnas) controlled the economy of Sindh and had balanced their political power by establishing caste-based solidarity associations and trans-local commercial organizations in major cities in India, particularly in Bombay. Compared to Savarnas, Scheduled Castes remained virtually excluded from both the politics and economy. Savarnas were quite apprehensive of the socioeconomic marginalization of Scheduled Castes and the ever-increasing domination of Sindhi Muslim castes. Therefore, to bring Scheduled Castes and tribes into Hindu fold, Savarnas and their political parties and social organization embarked upon the mission to Hinduise them through socioeconomic reforms and social welfare services (Dharani, 2015; Mal, 2000).

The lack of class consciousness as the oppressed group among Scheduled Castes during those pre-partition or partition days could be easily gauged from the level of penetration of Congress among Scheduled Caste population of Sindh, the opening up of several Harijan or Gujarati schools, ashrams (a Hindu hermitage) and Harijan colonies by Harijan Sevak Sangh in Tharparkar and lower Sindh, and the huge number of leading Dalit political activists that aligned with the Congress and Hindu organizations (Dharani, 2015; Mal, 2000). Hence, when Pakistan came into being, its Western Wing inherited a small but vibrant section of Scheduled Caste activists that were affiliated with the Congress and other Hindu organizations and continued to harijanise Scheduled Castes. The same was, however, not equally true of Eastern Wing of Pakistan.

As the decades passed, the minority-majority narrative got consolidated that divided Pakistani citizens into two major categories, that is, Muslims and non-Muslims. (Talbot, 2010; Jaffrelot C. , 2003; Jaffrelot C. , 2015; Cheesman, 1997; Ansari S. , 2016) Instead of fulfilling the secular promise, the state of Pakistan framed its constitution and laws in line with Islamic principles making Islam the state religion. The 'Objectives Resolutions', that form the preamble of the constitution of Pakistan, passed in March 1949, ensured that Pakistan was going to be religious. The Resolution defined social categories in terms of religions, and minoritized non-Muslims with the assurance that the 'adequate provision shall be made to safeguard the rights of minorities.' It contained the terms 'backward and depressed classes' (the terms that were formerly used for Scheduled Castes and other backward classes) and assured to make 'adequate' measures to safeguard their rights. In latter reports such as in census reports, 'lower caste' indigenous tribes and castes

came to be categorized as ‘Scheduled Castes’, a category of ‘Hindus’ but different from ‘Jati Hindus’. This constitutional trajectory had made Dalit leadership conscious from the beginning that Pakistan was going to be a religious state. In 1950 Jogendar Nath in his resignation letter wrote:

The bulk of the upper-class Hindus and politically conscious Scheduled Castes have left East Bengal. Those Hindus who will continue to stay accursed in Pakistan will, I am afraid, by gradual stages and in a planned manner be either converted to Islam or completely exterminated.

Resignation letter of Jogendra Nath Mandal, (Mandal, 1950)

Hence, because of the state-imposed gloss of the religion over the caste, the definition and the classification of Scheduled castes has remained problematic ever since, such as in article 106 of the constitution of 1973, Scheduled Castes were lumped together with Jati Hindus without clearly defining whether both were caste groups or the religious sects of the Hindus. This categorical confusion lies at the core of identity contestation within Scheduled castes and Jati Hindus. Yet, it is obvious that Scheduled Castes’ constitutional status as a socioeconomic category of the group of ‘depressed classes’ was primarily constructed in the sense of religious minority. It is evident from the Sardar Abdur Rab Khan Nishtar’s contention against Mr. Prem Hari Barma (East Bengal) in the Constituent Assembly in 1949 (see Government of Pakistan, 1949). Prem Hari Barma suggested removing “the word “depressed “is not palatable to the Scheduled Castes and they dislike it as it primarily connotes social degradation.”⁷⁷ The amendment was moved to replace ‘and depressed classes’ with the words ‘classes and ‘Scheduled Castes’, but it was opposed by Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar the next day who argued that the generic term ‘minority’ and ‘depressed and backward classes’ are sufficient enough to represent ‘Scheduled castes’⁷⁸. Nishtar’s suggestion to adopt ‘minority’ as a blanket term for non-Muslims is the typical response of the general Pakistani mindset of the legislator who is oriented to construct any ethnic non-religious groups, and in this case, how depressed classes as a whole came to be framed as a religious minority, a category of ‘non-Muslims’ in Pakistan. The amendments to the draft suggested by non-Muslim leaders were vehemently criticized by certain Muslim members of the constituent assembly defending Islamic principles as richer than any

⁷⁷ Mr. Prem Barma in Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, March 9, 1949. Source: National Assembly Debates, Government of Pakistan., URL: <http://www.na.gov.pk/en/debates.php>

⁷⁸ Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar, Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, Thursday, 10th March 1949, URL: <http://www.na.gov.pk/en/debates.php>.

secular eternal principles of equality and justice⁷⁹. For Dr. Ishtiaque there was “no inherent contradiction; only in Islam the meaning is richer and it is fuller” and since he assumed that ‘Muslim majority’ was the true believer in the principles of equality of all castes and ethnic groups, the rights of ‘zimmies’ (minorities) should be supposed to be well guarded (Government of Pakistan, 1949). Minority as the blanket category was introduced by the Constituent Assembly into formal state policies with the formation of Committee on Fundamental Rights and on the Rights of the Minorities in 1947. It was followed by the “Report of the Basic Principles Committee, as adopted by the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on the 21st September 1954, Interim report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights of Citizens of Pakistan and on Matters Relating to Minorities, as adopted by the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on the 6th October 1950. Report of the Committee on Fundamental Rights of Citizens of Pakistan and on Matters Relating to Minorities, as adopted by the Constituent Assembly” of Pakistan of the 7th September 1954. (Khan H. , 2005; Pakistan. Constituent Assembly (Legislature), 1954).

Following the demands and amendments suggested by the leadership of Scheduled castes, the drafters of the first Constitution in 1956 not only differentiated between Scheduled Castes and backward classes but also made certain special provisions in Article 28, 205, 206 and 207. The article 204 of the 1956 constitution defined that:

The castes, races and tribes, and parts or groups within castes, races, and tribes which, immediately before the Constitution Day constituted the Scheduled Castes within the meaning of the Fifth Schedule to the Government of India Act, 1935, shall, for the Constitution, be deemed to be the Scheduled Castes until Parliament by law otherwise provides.

(Article, 204, Constitution of Pakistan, 1956)

While in India, during the same years, census reports stipulated ‘religion’ as an open category meaning not only ‘religion, but also ‘nationality’ and classified Scheduled Castes as ‘special groups’ along with ‘Scheduled Tribes’⁸⁰, and can be both the Hindus⁸¹ and non-Hindus, in the population census of 1951 in Pakistan, the Scheduled Castes were defined as a sub-category under the main category of ‘religion’ (Government of Pakistan, 1951, pp. 1-15). A census form was issued that gave separate columns for “Caste Hindus” and “Scheduled Castes” in the option for marking religion. The latter statistical tables and

⁷⁹ For instance, Mr. Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi (East Bengal), contended non-Muslim members on March 9, 1949, in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. See National Assembly Debates, Government of Pakistan. URL: <http://www.na.gov.pk/en/debates.php> .

⁸⁰ *Indian Census in Perspective*, Census of India, 1971, Census Centenary Monograph No. 1. Delhi: Government of India Press. pp. 16–8, 160.

⁸¹ See Shri K.M. Munshi, *The Constituent Assembly of India*-Volume V, Wednesday, 27th August 1947.

reports added the word “Hindu” to Scheduled Castes, thus two categories of Hindus, namely “Scheduled Caste Hindus” and “Caste Hindus” to mean having same religion, that is, Hindu but ethnically diverse (Census Organisation (Pakistan), 1958). That religious connotation was carried into latter census enumerations. Second Census held in 1961 and 1971 did not apply the tag of “Hindu” to Scheduled Castes as it is evident, group labeling was not fixed (see Census Organization (Pakistan) Office of the Census Commissioner, 1961, p. 139 & pg.iii; Latif, 1976). The religious tags printed in the schedule were (1) Muslim (2) Caste Hindu (J) Scheduled Castes (4) Buddhist (5) Christians and (6) Parsi. The last blank box was intended for persons who claimed a religion other than those recorded on the schedule. If a person claimed no religion "None" was written in the blank box. In 1951, 1961 and 1971, Savarna or ‘upper caste’ group has been labeled as ‘Caste Hindus’, whereas Dalit castes have been labeled as either ‘Scheduled Castes’ or Scheduled Castes Hindus’. In 1981 both Jati Hindus and Scheduled Castes were lumped together under the generic tag ‘Hindu’.

The exercise of complicating ‘Scheduled castes’ with religion and in particular with ‘Hindus’ continued during the Islamisation era of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1980s. During the 1981 population census, in the instruction manual for census enumerators, no guidelines were provided as regards the status and marking of Scheduled castes. Instructions related to column no.8 about religion contained 8 codes for different religions but did not contain any information or mention of Scheduled Castes (Population Census Organisation, 1981).

Table 6: Religion and Caste status as given in different Census Reports

Census Year	Religion/Non-Muslims	
1951	Caste Hindu	Scheduled Castes \ Scheduled Caste Hindus
1961	Caste Hindu	Scheduled Caste Hindus
1971	Caste Hindu	Scheduled Castes
1981	Hindu	
1998	<i>Jati Hindu</i>	Scheduled Castes
2017	Hindu	Scheduled Castes

No distinction was made between ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Jati Hindus’, not to mention the distinction between Savarnas and neo-Kshatriyas within Jati Hindus. Scheduled castes as a census category was completely scrapped that led Scheduled Castes to mark ‘Hindu’ in the Census of 1981. (Population Census Organisation, 1984, p. 9). Yet again during the

census of 1998 during the Nawaz government, the distinction between ‘Jati Hindus’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ was restored. Independent of the reasons for the restoration of the Scheduled Castes category (that are unknown so far), the scrapping of it in 1981 irrevocably damaged the Dalit’s political positioning coupled with the joint electorates with Jati Hindus (during Zia regime). It further reoriented the Scheduled Castes populations to accept Hindu identity as the primary marker in politics and society. Its impact became starkly visible during 1998 population census whereby Scheduled Castes population have had a steep decline while Jati Hindu population have had a steep rise, ‘Scheduled castes’ has been inserted into column of religion as one of the religions with an ambiguous note on it given in the Census manual that explains that SC is not ‘religion’ but a class of socioeconomically marginalized castes. Instead of helping to clarify it rather confused both the Scheduled Castes and the enumerators. The manual note read:

Religion: You must ask about the religion of each person in the household and in the answer, sheet marks the relevant number given in the column. Five codes have been given for marking the religion. Code “1” is for Muslims, code “2” is for the Christian, code “3” for Hindu, and code 4 for any of the persons belonging to Qadiani, Ahmadi, Bohra or the Lahori group; for Scheduled Castes mark code ‘5’. Scheduled Castes is not any separate religion but a group of people under the caste system of those that are identified based on their socioeconomic activities, and those names, in fact, have become the identity of their *zaat* (caste). Therefore, in the column of religion mark them under the code of Scheduled Castes. Apart from that any other person belonging to any other religion must be marked under the code “6”.

A Dalit activist opined that:

Till it is rectified, it may continue to be the major reason for the undercounting of Scheduled castes and the over-counting of caste Hindus in census reports and the statistic will continue to betray the empirical evidence about demographics of Sindh observed and evidenced.

Keeping in perspective the Dalit apprehensions of being stigmatized because of caste vis-à-vis their newly acquired religious identities of being Hindu and Christian, it can be argued that Scheduled Castes began marking ‘Hindu’ or ‘Jati Hindu’ right from the first census conducted in Pakistan in 1951. Although the majority of them kept marking Jati Hindu, their overall numbers kept increasing with equal proportion each decade till 1998 when it had a sudden and steep decline due to state-sponsored reclassification or erasure of Scheduled Caste marker. It shows how the biopolitics of enumeration enables the state and those in power to imagine, control and construct the social and ethnic identities of its people. Subsuming of Scheduled Castes under Hindu tag reconstructed Dalit identity more in line with the ‘Hindu’, prompting many Dalit families to begin identifying themselves as Deewan, Vāniyo (Jati Hindu) to rid of the stigma associated with Meghwar, Kolhi, Bheel, Baghri, and other Dalit castes.

3.3 Reasons for the Lack of Academic Literature on Casteism

The research done by Dalitbahujan and Ashrafia-Savarna scholars, state institutions, NGOs, and the UN, furnishes the sufficient body of empirical evidence to argue that caste discrimination and untouchability prevails throughout South Asia including Pakistan (see Ercelawn et al, 2001; Srivastava, 2005, p. 9; Jodhka & Shah, 2010; Sachar, 2006; IDSN, 2013; Thorat & Joshi, 2015; UN's Human Rights Council, 2016; Sachar, 2006; Shah Z. , 2007; Prashad, 1996; Silva, 2017). Despite its prevalence in Pakistan, I could not encounter sufficient literature on casteism as it affected Dalits, let alone on Dalit activism. Most of the literature, as it exists in 'minority reports' in Pakistan uses the 'minority' and 'Hindu' as blanket identities to define communities without exposing caste frictions underlying their social relations (see Ercelawn & Nauman, 2001, 2001; Maliha et al Shazreh, 2004; Rai, 2007; Geregory, 2012; Rahman, 2012; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2019)⁸².

Starting in the 1960s, the ethnographers began breaking away from an atemporal vision of the caste system (see Eglar, 1960; Ahmed, 1973; 1976; 1981; 1983). Yet these studies, primarily aimed at understanding the caste structure of villages communities, or of Muslim pockets in relation to Hindus neighborhoods, or if caste is a relevant political and social category. Premised on the assumption that caste cannot be the primary social unit in an Islamic society, most Pakistani and Indian academicians observe aloofness towards the problem of casteism. This did not help much to understand how caste functions as the oppressive and discriminatory instrument for certain sections of society. Notwithstanding that, some studies attest to the fact that casteism exists among Muslims. They, however, attribute its existence in Pakistan to the impact of Hindu code based on four-fold Verna system of castes (see Marriott, 1960; Ahmed, 1978 (1973); Zainuddin, 2003; Jodhka et al, 2010; Falahi, 2009; Falahi, 2012; Singha, 2015; Jaffrelot, 2015).

According to Joel Lee, "the prominence of caste in South Asian Islamic life has been almost entirely obscured in global representations of the region [by, among several factors, the] non-recognition of Muslim caste by the postcolonial states of India, Pakistan, and their neighbors; to be ignored by the census and related technologies of modern governance is in significant ways to be rendered invisible to the world" (Lee 2018, p.168).

⁸² For the detailed discussion on the nature of relevant literature see dataset: Hussain (2019d), "*Literature on Dalit Activism: Excerpts, Review and Notes: 2014- 2018*", Mendeley Data, v1<http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/jgfkxrw54b.1>

This study is an attempt to confront with this taboo on caste in Pakistan, and provide the thick description of casteism as a political process as it becomes the reason for the exclusion of Dalits, and subsequent Dalit assertions.

3.3.1 Partition Effect

In Pakistan, most of the so-called Christian and Hindu population, which is about 6 million (figures are contested though that I will discuss in sections 6.6.7 and 6.6.8), make up the largest segment of Dalitbahujans. Pakistan and India share not only religious but also caste-based histories and both the countries (including Bangladesh that was then East Pakistan) have much in common as far as basic social structures of societies. When Pakistan came into being in 1947, it was geographically based on two wings, that is, East Pakistan and West Pakistan, separated by 1255 miles with India sandwiched in between. According to the 1961 census, 18.4% of the population of East Pakistan was Hindu (see Bina, 2011) In 1951 East Pakistan had 22.05 percent of the Hindu (mostly Scheduled castes) population, whereas in the same year West Pakistan had only 1.6 percent of the Hindu population with Sindh province having nearly 10 percent (minus Karachi) of the Hindu population. Till 1951, Karachi that became the capital of Sindh was predominantly Savarna city with (estimated 51 percent) business class (Vaniya or Lohana) (see Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). During these formative years of Pakistan, the internal geopolitics played a major role in shaping the identities and in the redistribution of resources among different caste-based classes. The dominance of Ashrafia elite of the West Pakistan over the East Pakistan (predominantly Dalit Muslim and Scheduled Caste in structure) shaped the political contours of the nascent state that could not tackle the problem of ethnic discrimination (see Mandal, 1950; Sen, 2012; Sen, 2012; Sangi, 2013; Kamran, 2015; Sen, 2018).

According to Masood Ahmed Falahi (who is a pasmanda scholar), the hatred against East-Pakistanis lied in the Ashrafia ideology that was reformed at Aligarh by Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan in the 19th century (Falahi, 2009; Falahi, 2012). Pakistan movement argues Falahi, was the Ashrafia- led religious movement for the revival of Ashrafia hegemony in the name of Islamic culture and civilization, and the rights of the ‘Muslims of North-West (Pakistan) and Central Provinces (which has parts of current-day Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra). The casteist bias, that reflects in certain writings or statements of (Sir⁸³) Syed Ahmed Khan is often presented as the proof of Sayed’s

⁸³ He was given the title of the ‘Sir’ by the British and is read as such in Pakistan.

biasedness towards pasmanda Muslims including Bengalis of East Pakistan. For instance, in his most celebrated book *Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind* (Causes of India's Mutiny), written in defense of Muslim culture and civilization and the British, Sir Sayed writes that “The position of the Julahas had got thoroughly undermined and this inferior-lowly people (badzat) were most active in the uproar (1857 rebellion) (Khan S. S., 1958, p. 60). Masood Ahmed Falahi in his thoroughly researched work on caste system in Islam in South Asia has cited several such historical examples that show that Ashrafia political class had been biased towards Pasmanda Muslims and had been caste-blind (Falahi M. A., 2009); Falahi M. A., 2012). Ashrafia narrative continued to shape the politics of Muslims in India speeding up the process of Ashrafization and Hinduization of multi-religious and multi-ethnic communities of South Asia. Hence, the decades before Partition constitute the period in the history of South Asia during which Islam came to be presented by Ashrafia class as the modern religion and Muslims (and Hindus) as distinctive nations.

3.3.2 Effect of Sayedism

The casteist bias of Ashrafia class steeped in *Sayed-parasti* (Sayedism) continues to this day and is seen by Dalits as being influenced by Brahminic practices as well. Sayedism is the social attitude of reverence of and for Sayed caste based on their real or presumed genealogical linkage⁸⁴ with Prophet Muhammad, and the resultant tendency among Pasmanda Muslims to ‘ashrafize’ (Buehler, 2012; Belle, E M.S, Shah.S, Parfitt, 2010), that is, to associate with the Ashrafia class. The Sayeds dominate under various sanctified glosses, such as Pir, the epithet often used to refer to a spiritual leader of Muslim (but also of Hindu) origin, and Shah, the Persian term used as an epithet of respect for spiritual leaders. The term ‘Shah’, beginning with the 17th-century Mughal rule increasingly came to be applied in Sindh to Pirs of non-Sayed origin as well. It was probably introduced by Mian Naseer Muhammad Kalhoro (upper caste) (1657-1692) who had launched a Mianwal Movement, a religio-political resistance of the Sufi Suhrawardi cult against the Mughal rulers. While ‘Sayed’ in Sindh is commonly used refer to a particular caste instead of a mere title or epithet of respect, ‘Shah is used as the title by the Pirs (spiritual or religious leaders) of non-Sayed caste as well as by common individual

⁸⁴ A genetic study shows that the Sayeds of India and Pakistan were most probably Arabs but not necessarily the genealogical descendants of the Prophet, Ahl-i-Bayt or Imams. See: Belle, E M.S, Shah.S, Parfitt (2010). *Y chromosomes of self-identified Sayeds from the Indian subcontinent show evidence of elevated Arab ancestry but not of a recent common patrilineal origin*. *ArchaeolAnthropolSci*.2:2:217-224. DOI:110.1007/s12520-010-0040-1.

belonging to Sayed caste. Hence, there are several Pirs in Sindh who are non-Sayeds but known as Shah. Yet, most of the local people mistake every Shah for Sayed, and do not go deep enough to dig out the actual caste of the person known as Shah because ‘Shah’ itself connoted a supplementary caste-based epithet usually appended to a person of Sayed Caste whether he or she be Pir or not. It was because of that, the categorical metaphors of *Shah* (for Muslims) and *Pir* (for both Hindu and Muslim) serve as intermediary identity labels to ashrafise or create a deliberate confusion so that the non-Sayed Pir could be associated with Sayed caste.

3.3.4 Why Caste is not the Subject of Critical Inquiry in the local Sindhi language?

In postcolonial Sindh, the Ashrafia progressives and conservative sections of civil society have come to assume the hegemonic role by capturing the institutions of the production of historiographies and the literary political interpretations (Hussain, 2019a;2019b;2019c; 2019d). The progressive’s endeavors, in particular, aim at erecting national icons and constructing a homogenous political narrative in which events and narratives of the Dalit subalterns sometimes appear primarily to validate the epistemic superiority of the dominant social groups, and to project the egalitarian literary-cultural core inclusive of all marginalized sections of society.

The bulk of the Sindhi literature is published in the form of books, magazines, newspapers⁸⁵. Inspired by the international modern progressive movement in politics and literature during the 1950s and 1960s, the Sindhi writers identified themselves as ‘Taraqqi-Passand’ (progressive) (see Malkani, 1993; Hussain, 1997; Memon, 2002; Siraj, 2009; Paleejo, 2012; Paleejo, 2014; Chandio, 2016). ‘Progressiveness’ is explained by Dr. Ghafoor Memon, a Sindhi literary critic, as ‘an attitude, perspective and the movement that has been there in every era’ such as during the Greek period ‘when Socrates rebelled against the traditions of his time and gave forth a new philosophy, and stood for truth.’ (Memon, 2002, p.279, or when European populace began resisting against feudalism, religiosity, and fanaticism during French and October (socialist) revolution, and in process, rationality and scientific thinking symbolic of progressive attitudes, emerged (Memon, 2002, p.279). The

⁸⁵ To have an idea of the literature being produced in Sindhi language, see the following online libraries and Publishing houses:

1. Sindhi Salamat.URL: <https://books.sindhsalamat.com/>. (accessed on June 6, 2019)
2. Sindhi Adabi Borad. URL: <http://www.sindhiadabiboard.org/Index.html> (accessed June 6, 2019)
3. Sindhi Language Authority. URL: <http://www.library.sindhila.org/home>.(accessed on June 6, 2019)
4. Roshini Publications.URL: <https://www.roshnipublication.com/>
5. Sindhika Academy. URL: <http://www.sindhica.net/English.htm>. (accessed on June 6, 2019)

post-colonial political crises compelled Sindhi progressive Ashrafia to redefine Pakistani state', the newly migrant Urdu-speaking settlers and the dominant Punjab province as its new 'other' (see Siddiqui, 2012). The literary genealogy of this progressive section of Sindhi society has changed little over the decades. Most of the prominent writers, poets and the scribes from Qazi Kazan (1463-1551, the first known poet) to Shah Abdul Karim, Sachal Sarmast, Shah Inayat⁸⁶ and the even the post-partition and contemporary scholars and intellectuals identified as progressive hail from the same historically privileged families and groups of castes.

After Partition of the subcontinent, the literary political legacy left by the Savarna progressive writers were carried forward by their Ashrafia counterparts, the prominent amongst them were Hyder Bux Jatoi, Rasheed Bhatti, GM Sayed, Muhammad Ibrahim Joyo, Najam Abbasi, Shaikh Ayaz, etc., and a few Savarnas particularly, Sobho Giyan Chandani. (see Junejo, 2015; Joyo, 2014(1946); Chandio,2016; Shah,1997; Siddiqui, 2012). According to Allahdad Bohiyo, one of the prominent literary critics of Sindh, Sindhi progressive writers have been under the influence of socialism. He writes:

'Anjuman-i-Taraqi Pasand Musanifeen' [Association of progressive writers] can be presented as one of its examples. After that, Honorable Jamaluddin Bukhari, Sobho Gayan Chandani, and other prominent literary figures such as Late Hyder Baksh Jatoi [Baloch], Barkat Ali Azad, Jamal Abro, Saen G.M.Sayed, M.I.Joyo, Rasool Bux Paleejo, Munshi Ibrahim, have in one way or another attempted to cope up in their respective domains with the problem of [Marxist or socially driven] literary production (see Bohiyo, 1980, p.105)

That probably is true, as in their classical Marxist-Maoist interpretations, many of them did saw caste as the pre-capitalistic and the primordial appendage that will vanish away when the society will get industrialized. The Marxist concept 'pre-capitalist' in fact recurred again and again while having a conversation with the Marxists or the Marxist nationalists. It was being used as the conceptual tool to convince the non-Marxist activist that caste is not a political category worthy of taking seriously in politics. Sami, a Dalit activist told that 'they use it to belittle our assertions and undermine the issue of casteism. This then leads to the suppression of Dalit agency and denial of Dalit exclusion as well'.

Hyder Bux Jatoi's nationalist slogan of 'Jeay Sindh' assumed the new political meaning and purpose in the Post-Partition Pakistan, whereby the socialist and the

⁸⁶ Sufi Huzoor Bux (2007) narrates a story in his book that shows that Shah Inayat's ancestors had migrated from Baghdad (now in Iraq) to Uch (now Multan, Punjab), and from there had come to Sindh after having sought permission from the Jeelani Sayeds of Uch (pg. 16-17).

nationalist goals were combined to highlight the socioeconomic disparity between Hari (peasant) and *wadero* (landlord), and to achieve the unity of Sindh irrespective of internal class and caste differences, in their poetry and prose (see Chandio, 2017; Paleejo, 1974; Paleejo, 2014; Huzoorbux, 1981; Latifi, 1981; Junejo, 1983; Junejo, 2004). Jatoi, under the influence of Qazi Faiz Muhammad, a Sindhi peasant activist⁸⁷, Khan Ghaffar Khan (a Pashtoon leader nicknamed Frontier Gandhi) and Molana Bhashani, the peasant leader from the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), wrote recast the slogan of ‘Hari Haqdar’ (the tenant is the rightful owners) in a verse, ‘Hari jo Zamano (the coming good times of the peasants)⁸⁸. He writes:

The breath of Sindh, the chief, and the darling Peasant,
 You were looted by Pirs and your tribal chiefs,
 At last, you felt your honor being disgraced,
 And thus, came the final Judgement with the slogan,
 ‘The tenants, the rightful owners.

Translated from ‘Hari jo Zamano’, by Hayder Bux
 Jatoi. Source: Radio Voice of Sindh (May 22, 2018).

The progressives gathered momentum particularly in late 1960s in reaction to the political disenfranchisement of the Sindhi Ashrafia in the federation of Pakistan and the merger of Sindh into One-Unit, the administrative scheme introduced by the then President General Ayub to merge Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, and NWFP into a single province of West

⁸⁷ Qazi Faiz Muhammad, Khan Ghaffar Khan and Molana Bhashani had formed National Awāmi Party (NAP) in July 1957. Many progressive literary personalities of Sindh joined NAP. After joining NAP, Qazi Faiz Muhammad tried to revitalize Elati Tehreek (Land allotment movement) and, like Hyader Baksh Jatoi, borrowing the idea from Molana Bhashani, raised the slogan of ‘Hari Haqdar, Jageerdar Dastbardar’ (Tenants are the rightful owners; Landlords should abdicate), but his own party members, most of whom were big landlords and the feudals, turned against him and started complaining against him to Chief Minister of Sindh. (Muhammad, 2008, pp. 28,39). Hence, although NAP could not have much foothold in Sindhi Ashrafia, it did certainly influence its Sindhi nationalist-Maoist-Marxist version of engaging with the local peasant communities, and consequently ‘Hari Committee’ was reinvigorated (Muhammad, 2008, p.41).

⁸⁸ Influenced by the Maoist ‘Gherao’ (literally, ‘encirclement’) strategy of Molhan Bhashani, and in continuation with his ‘Hari Haqdar’ movement, the Sammat and Baloch peasant activists launched the parallel movement in Chamber Sindh, the area concentrated with the Kolhi and Bheel and pasmanda Muslim peasants (Bhandar Sangat, 2012). Despite that caste-class embeddedness at the empirical level, the casteist dimension of the movement itself and the local communities was not problematized by the comrades at any stage of their activism. The question of oppressed ‘Dalit’ castes within the peasantry did feature neither in their political programs nor in the literary poetic renditions.

Pakistan to achieve parity with the East Pakistan (see Qureshi, 2013; Levesque & Bui, 2014⁸⁹). To restore the province of Sindh the dissemination of Sindhi nationalist literature through the Sindhi language was adopted by the Sindhi Ashrafia and Savarna classes as a cultural weapon and political strategy. This reframing of the enemy identified outside Sindh diluted the question of looking inwardly to confront structural inequalities such as caste-based discrimination. Consequently, the progressive literature produced in the Sindhi language presented specifically Sayed (usually Sufi and religious) and Sammāt (both Ashrafia and Savarna) ways of expression and living as the cultural standard for all the ethnolinguistic groups. It was the period during which image of the 18th century Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif was firmly established as the national(ist) and revolutionary poet of Sindh reached its apex, and Shaikh Ayaz (b.1926) emerged as the leading progressive poet (see Sayed,1986; Sayed,2011; Sayed, 2012 (1974); Chandio, 2017; Paleejo, 1974; Paleejo, 2014; Huzoorbux, 1981; Latifi, 1981; Junejo, 1983; Abro, 1985; 2016b; Siraj; Memon, 2002; Junejo, 2004). During that period, Shaikh Ayaz wrote several poems that questioned class disparities but did not explicitly question casteism. The notion that caste-based class formation exists, did not fit in the progressives' ideal modern nationalist and the Marxist literary framework. His poems depict poverty and the marginality in terms of Sindhi ethnic and regional subalternity that does not reflect the relations of exclusion and domination that exist between the Dalit castes and the dominant Sammāt, Baloch and Vaniya castes. Take an example of his free verse, *Baghi* (the rebel) for the peasants:

May not workers strip their bellies in hunger!
Nor do peasants drench their land with their blood.

Shaikh Ayaz (Translated from '*Baghi*' in Das, 2005, p.189)

In Ayaz's poems '*Thari Baar Jo Geet*' (The song of a Thari Child) the regional marginality of the people of Thar Desert is depicted. Similarly in '*Mazdoor je bar jo geet*' (The song of laborers son) in which, unlike the Dalit's interpretation, the character of '*Seth*' (wealthy merchant) is depicted without the reference to Hindu merchant caste (Vaniya, Deewan, Seth) or the Muslim merchant castes (Memon, Shaikh, etc.). This is the typical of progressives who portray Businessmen, Merchants, peasants, the feudals and Pirs without

⁸⁹The reinvigorated literary assertion of Sindhi nationalists during the 1050s that reframed the narrative of Marvi was also noticed by Levesque and Camille Bui (2014) in their cinematographic study of first Sindhi movie '*Umar-Marvi*' made in 1956. They argued that the movie 'contributed to the construction of a modern national imaginary for Sindhis in post-Partition Pakistan' (see Levesque et al, p.119-121).

referring their caste location. In his Nationalist-Marxist vein, they try to project the whole of Sindh as oppressed in need of emancipation from the external invaders, occupiers and the exploiters such as in the following verse of Ayaz:

<i>Sahando kair mayār ao yār!</i>	Who could carry on the burden of the
<i>Sindhī te sir kair na dindo?</i>	responsibility towards the nation, O
<i>(Sindhi)</i>	friend!
	Who could shun from dying for the
	beloved Sindh!

Ayaz was criticized by the conservative literary and religious circles and Shaikh Ayaz, in particular, was blamed for blasphemy by the Islamists (see Chandio, 2016; Paleejo, 2014). To defend the progressive Ashrafia-Savarna elite against the Conservative Ashrafia elite, Rasool Bux Paleejo emerged, not only as of the leading leftist critic of the religious conservatism but also as the leading progressive politician on par with Fazul Rahu and GM Sayed.

In the decades that followed both Paleejo and GM Sayed further fortified the progressive Ashrafia legacy, particularly under the gloss of democratic struggle against the establishment of Pakistan, such as during the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) in 1980s against the Martial regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, against the building of Kalam Bagh Dam and for the due share of Sindhi province in the federal pool. These are the issues that continue to hold relevance for the progressive section of the Sindhi civil society and serve as the popular vehicle to express the patriotic sentiments addressing several issues of both the ‘Hind’ (India) and Sindh (Chandio, 2016, p. 100), particularly the issue of Sindhi Hindu diaspora (Savarna Hindus). As inspired they were by Marxism and the Enlightenment literature, the problem of caste discrimination in India or Sindh did not feature in their writings.

The character of both the oppressor and the oppressed depicted in their writings in final decades of the 20th century did not include the conceptual and the ideological markers that could explicitly recognize the existing caste disparity between Ashrafia-Savarna and the Dalitbahujan castes, that the Dalit activists in Sindh were terming as the internal colonialism. They, however, made the peripheral mention of Dalits in some of their writings. For instance, based on the selective archeological evidence Ruk Sindhi (2016a and 2016b), and Siraj (2009) mention Darāwar, Kolhi, and Bheel (Dalits) being considered as ‘untouchables’, and attest to the fact that caste hierarchies did exist in ancient Vedic

Sindh (see Sindhi), as well as during the latter periods, that there existed both the ruling and ruled classes. Based on that, they argue that the literature produced during those epochs must be the literature of the ruling classes (see Junejo, 2015; Siraj, 2009; Hussain, 1997). These archeologically qualified confessions are peripheral to their major claim of civilizational egalitarianism whereby they assert that caste disparities become meaningless in a culture of interfaith harmony made possible by Sufi saints and Sufi poets. They imagine casteism as not as problematic as sectarianism, religious bigotry, religious discrimination or Hindu-Muslim discord. The remnant negative effects of casteism are supposed to vanish away once the heterodox political Sufism will completely prevail (see, for instance, Sayed, 1952; Bohiyo, 1980; Siraj; 2009; Sayed, 2013; Junejo, 2015; Ruk Sindhi, 2016a; Ruk Sindhi; 2016b). This discursive trajectory of the predecessors that harbors on the denial of casteism is carried forward by the budding intellectuals and scholars. For instance, one of the rising proponents of politicizing heterodox Sufism is the Rafique Wassan (2019), a doctoral scholar, who through his vernacular writings⁹⁰ partly inspired by Amartya Sen's 'Argumentative Indian, keeps insisting on organizing the progressive sections of Sindhi civil society to resist the perceived threat of radical Islam, the foreign instruction into supposedly heterodox Sufi essence of Sindh⁹¹. Similarly, Masroor Shah⁹², a young Marxist writer, taking lead from the postcolonial writers such as Partha Chatterjee and Nicholas Dirks (2001), persists with his allusion to the 'ethnographic state' that was aimed at administering India by the British⁹³. Both these self-

⁹⁰ Wassan often writes short pieces on Sufism and musicology in local online Sindhi newspaper Penhji Akhbar. See for instance, 'Tassawuff khe samaji karij mein arirn ji zaroorat'. Posted on September 29, 2019. <https://www.pahenjiakhbar.com/articles>.

⁹¹ Wassan summarizes his ongoing doctoral work as being focused on the analysis of 'the progressive cultural activist use of Sindhi Sufi cultural identity narrative, practice and performance in the backdrop of the rise of religious radicalism'. Read his summary of the thesis online at his university's website. URL: <https://anthropology.cuso.ch>.

⁹² Views of Masroor Shah have been taken from his published and unpublished Sindhi articles on Sindhi society and Sindhi intellectuals written primarily from the Marxist perspective.

⁹³ Nicolas Dirk's (2001) argument and similar assertions that are forwarded to create the impression that caste is primarily the colonial construct are interpreted differently by different scholars. Particularly for Dalit scholars it does not mean the denial of the existence of casteism in pre-British India, but a reconstruction and re-projection of it which, in various ways, was both beneficial as it opened up avenues for affirmative action, and harmful for the Dalits and Adivasi tribes, as for instance, many tribes were

complementing narratives, even though casteism remains resilient in Sindh, presume the peripherality caste, and the primacy of religion and class thereby failing to advance the postcolonial argument further, as Suraj Yengde (2019a; 2019b) a young Dalit scholar complains, thereby undermining the liberating ‘radical voices of dissent from among the lower castes, demand, and failing to acknowledge the subaltern agency of Dalits in making use of the colonial caste-categorization in shaping their immanent narratives and the direction of emancipatory politics.

3.3.5 Taraqqi-Passand Solution to Ashrafia-Savarna domination

While Imdad Hussaini’s poetic expression (discussed in section 4.2.2) is performative and aims at uniting all Sindh castes irrespective of their gradation, some pragmatic progressive aka Sindhi nationalist writers and the activists furnish more grounded explanations as regards how to get along the reality of caste discrimination and untouchability that pervades across religions in Sindhi society. Apprehensive of the genuine concerns of the Dalits, they give forth their plausible explanations and the alternatives to unite the Sindhi nation, which was their primary purpose.

In this section, I explain how mediated by the Sindhi nationalists, the Dalits try to dissipate the ‘dissonance’ (Festinger, 1962; Hussain, 2019) by deciding not to convert.

One of the potent ways to counter or legitimize narratives and thus dissipate dissonance is to use literary medium, such as short stories to render the narrative accessible to the common people. To draw an illustration, I analyze the Taj Joyo’s (the Ashrafia Sindhi nationalist activist and the writer) reframing of the short story *Kafir* (infidel) on Dalit (re)conversion⁹⁴. It tries to prove, and rightly so, that the recurrent failed or abortive attempts at conversion to get rid of ‘untouchability’ and caste stigma has convinced many Hindu Dalits and semi-nomadic Hindu tribes⁹⁵ not to convert, as it hardly helps to change their ‘untouchable’ lot.

Kafir (infidel), a short story written in the 1960s by Naseem Kharal, the Ashrafia class feudal, furnishes one of the exceptionally counterintuitive anti-caste narratives. The

labeled as ‘criminal’ and further excluded. (see Guru, Ethics of Receptivity, 2012; Guru, 2009; Guru, 2012; Ahmed I. , 2003)

⁹⁴ See online blog written by Sufi Ghulam Hussain (me) on December 9, 2017 titled [Why Dalits in Pakistan are reluctant to convert to Islam en masse!](http://roundtableindia.co.in/) URL: <http://roundtableindia.co.in/>. (accessed on March 19, 2019)

⁹⁵ For instance, Sindhi Rabari tribe or caste of Badin district worship Raj Seen Soomrani (Nando, Badin) the disciple of Ghaus Bahauddin Zakarria (Sayed Pir), and unlike many other Savarna Hindu castes, they bury their dead.

story is often presented by the progressives as the explanation of both the religious and caste discrimination that pervades across religions in Sindhi society. It is presented to prove that Sufi nationalist path is the most appropriate one for the (Hindu) Dalits to mutually coexist in the predominantly Muslim Sindh. Before, further elaborating upon it, I quote from the story, a dialogue between a supposedly Hindu Dalit convert to Islam and a Mukhi (a community head):

Mukhi, the panchayat headman of Oad [Dalit] community begged in the name of holy Gita and even threw his turban at Seetal's feet, but Seetal just didn't care much and replied:

"Mukhi! Do whatever you like, but I shall change my religion.

Mukhi: "But why after all you want to change your religion?"

Seetal: My choice, my wish simply.

Mukhi: Even then?

Seetal: I just don't like my religion. That's it.

Mukhi: Alas! Why on earth don't you like your religion?"

Seetal: Alright Mukhi. Tell me, who are we?"

Mukhi: We are Hindus.

Seetal: Why then Hindus cremate the dead, whereas we bury them?"

Mukhi: It's our ritual.

Seetal: Alright. Why do we eat goat after butchering it (like Muslims)?"

Mukhi: This too is our ritual—since the times of old ancestors.

Seetal: But these are the rituals of Muslims?"

Mukhi: These are theirs. But ours too!!

Seetal: Then how can you say, we are Hindus?"

Mukhi: Then what the heck are we, crank?"

Seetal: Half Hindu-half Muslim. (We have) body of sheep, head of goat."

(Excerpt translated from *Kafir*, a short story by Naseem Kharal⁹⁶)

In this conversation, Seetal stands accused before the Oad (Dalit) community of betraying communal norms to convert to Islam and proclaim that the Hindu religion is based on falsity. Although infuriated, members of the Oad 'panchayat' (caste council) were not very harsh at Seetal, as they believed that Seetal had been bewitched by a Mullah (Islamic cleric). They tried to convince Seetal that he had made a blunder, but Seetal remained adamant that he was happy with his conversion. Having seen his resolve Mukhi made the final attempt to convince Seetal saying, 'Remember Seetal! No matter how lavishly you harness donkeys like horses, they will remain donkeys, and never become horses.' (i.e., no matter how good a Muslim you become, you will remain untouchable in their eyes). Seetal's adventure eventually ends up with his realization that in case his ailing wife (who had also

⁹⁶ Source: 'Naseem Kharal Joon Kahariyoon' (2007), a compilation of short stories in Sindhi language by Danish Nawaz. Roshini Publications, Kandiaro. URL: www.sindh-salamat.com. This story was written in 60s by Naseem Kharal, the renowned upper caste landlord (wadero), and one of the leading Sindhi progressive writers of the 60s and 70s.

converted along with him) dies, he cannot be given woman for marriage from Muslim castes, simply because he was considered as 'lower caste' or 'untouchable'. Ultimately, Seetal converts back to his former faith. The story, thus, ends with the bigoted disappointment of the Molvi (religious) at the re-conversion of Seetal, who says the 'Infidel is after all infidel'. Hence, from this narrative, it becomes evident that the writer of the story conveys the social fact that although Mullah (religious cleric) primarily expresses his social imaginary through religious binaries, yet caste comes into the foreground when it comes to actual relations. Unlike a Mullah, the Hindu Dalit community is presented as more realistic as they imagine caste and religion as embedded in each other. They are presented as cognizant of the fact that they even cannot marry into Shaikhs (converts from Savarnas). But what if Muslim Oad families also existed as do Shaikhs converts from Bheels, and Baghri Muslim families? The story/narrative does not help understand the consequences of voluntary conversions in such cases. Hence, although at the generic level, the story brings out very sharply that caste discrimination is a trans-religious phenomenon, and even stronger than religious affiliations, yet the progressives try to bring into focus its religious dimension more than the caste-related. .Rita Kothari (2009), a Sindhi (Savarna) based in Ahmedabad in India has translated 'Infidel' from Sindhi into English and has discussed primarily to show that such stories were the product of nostalgia of business class (Jati) Hindus and the post-Partition redemption of Sindhi Muslims who desired to reclaim their imagined syncretism that supposedly existed before Partition between Sindhi Hindus (mostly Savarnas) and Sindhi Muslims (see, Kothari, 2009)⁹⁷. With her emphasis on Sufi identity of Sindh⁹⁸, Kothari, however, does not shed much light on the anti-caste dimension

⁹⁷ Rita Kothari (2009) has translated from Sindhi into English some 22 short stories mostly written by Sindhi nationalist writers, mostly (Jati) Hindus or Savarna Sindhis (living in India or in diaspora) and Ashrafia Muslim progressives living Sindh.

⁹⁸ Unlike her writings on Indian society and culture, which are quite critical of casteism and Dalit oppression (see for instance, her article on 'Short Story in Gujarati Dalit Literature' (2001), Kothari frames the society of Sindh primarily from Sindhi Savarna-Ashrafia lens. See also her blog post 'Of Men, Women, Caste and Cinema' at <https://kafila.online>, in which she assuming the feminist standpoint problematizes the misogyny of the producer while criticizing the deliberate absence of caste in Hindu cinema and the pretension 'that the upper-caste characters are casteless.'

of the story and rather treats both religion and caste as being equally implicated⁹⁹. In this particular case, deviating from the progressive's typical stance, Dr. Ghafoor Memon, however, argues that major import of the story is to show that cultural and class/caste-based norms are stronger than religion. He argues that Muslims are proved to be hypocrites as on the one hand, they believe that there is no discrimination in Islam based on caste; while on the other hand they continue to discriminate as do the Hindus (Memon, 2002. p.345). Rasool Bux Paleejo, a leading Marxist-nationalist also affirmed the factual relevance of the story:

One the one hand we surpass all limits of exaggeration and slogan mongering to prove that there is not caste system in Islam and on the other, in reality, we are the leading custodians of the system of untouchability and casteism.

(Rasool Bux Paleejo in Memon, 2002, p.346)

The recognition of casteism, however, does not bar the progressives to resort to Marxist and nationalist explanations as an antidote to it. The moral of the story that is often upheld by them emphasizes 'interfaith harmony' instead of patriarchy and casteism that is embeddedness under the gloss of religion. As Memon argues, this story 'Infidel' supports the argument of the communists that social equality (devoid of casteism) can be achieved through socialist change or communism, and that would eventually eradicate casteism and untouchability (Memon, 2002, p.346). In this manner, this conventional Marxist-nationalist approach relegates the problems of casteism and untouchability to the second-order issues supposed to vanish away once communism would prevail.

'Infidel' is also presented as the explanation of caste discrimination by the Muslims against the Hindus, in general, to convince the Dalits that conversion cannot bear the requisite benefits. For instance, motivated by Taj Joyo (the Ashrafia Sindhi nationalist activist and the writer), who reframed that story¹⁰⁰ to prove that the recurrent abortive attempts at conversion to get rid of 'untouchability' and religious discrimination do not

⁹⁹ Listen her lecture online, 18 | Prof. Rita Kothari | Sufism in Sindh | 18 April, (Aug 28, 2017) published by IIT Gandhinagar. URL:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0sg_F6bZW0. (accessed September 8, 2019).

¹⁰⁰ See online blog written by Sufi Ghulam Hussain (me) on December 9, 2017 titled [Why Dalits in Pakistan are reluctant to convert to Islam en masse!](http://roundtableindia.co.in/) URL: <http://roundtableindia.co.in/>. (accessed on March 19, 2019)

work. Taj Joyo, for instance, wrote in Hemandas Chandani's (Scheduled Caste activist and poet) book¹⁰¹:

I remember for sure that it was the night of December 11, 1977, when I met at Hemandas' home. I had a chit chat with Kanji Mal (officer national bank), Ganesh Balani, Bhani Mal, Sarvan Kumar, Naraern and Heman [all Dalits of Meghwar caste]. If I remember correctly, either Ganesh Mal (or any of the friends present) put up a proposal that 'we Meghwar are considered as lower-class Hindus, by caste Hindus. Therefore, our survival lies in converting to Islam'. There, I opposed that thinking that it is not the solution, because caste-based class discrimination also exists among Muslims. No Sayed Muslim will allow marrying his daughter into any other caste, not to mention of Machi Muslim (fisherman caste considered the lower among Muslims). Although the days have much changed now, even then, I narrated them the fiction story (based on the social reality of casteism among Muslims) of Naseem Kharal. Finally, we came to a consensus that the solution to social discrimination lies in 'education and only education'. Today I feel proud that it is the effect of my ideas and the fiction story of Naseem Kharal narrated by me, that Ganesh Balani's four daughters have now reached the highest educational achievement: Shabnam Rathore made Sindh famous by doing Ph.D. from Germany in 'Underground Saline Water'. Another Pushpa Kumari has done M.Sc. from Agricultural University Tando Jam. Third daughter Nimrita is a lecturer in Sindh University's microbiology department. Fourth Sushma Devi who did M.Sc from botany and serving as a lecturer in Karachi".

(Taj Joyo, Preface to Hemanda Chandani's *Humerche Hoongar*, pg. 12)

As it is evident, Taj Joyo suggested the Dalits get Sindhisised without conversion. He tried to convince them that there were caste discrimination and untouchability even among Muslims. This suggestion was in line with the Sindhi nationalist ideology that desired unity between Hindus and Muslims, and that did not offer the political way out of the caste discrimination and untouchability. The best of the solutions that Joyo proffered to these structural and political issues was the uplift through educational achievement at the individual level. Dalit activists seemed to take the suggestion of Joyo, as they began to discourage conversions.

As Joyo did, the progressives have convinced many Hindu Dalits not to convert and express their fidelity with the Muslim dominated and Ashrafia-led Sindh through the Sufi nationalist medium. This has rather led Dalits to get ashrafised or adopt certain norms of dominant Muslims that reflected in their expressed reverence for Sayeds, Pirs and Sufis. This form of ritual inversion to adopt Ashrafia values without conversion, however, does not seem to resolve the fundamental problem either, that is, caste discrimination and untouchability. Resultantly 'dissonance' (Festinger, 1962; Hussain, 2019) persists between the assumption of being Sufi Sindhis and the empirically existing caste-based

¹⁰¹ The book by Heman Das Chandani titled *Humerche Hoongar* (Sindhi) was published in 2017.

discriminatory practices (see Hussain, 2019b). Moreover, contrary to the claims of progressives, the Ashrafia intervention into Dalit spaces of decision-making and identity (re)formation proves the persistence of the hegemonic influence of Ashrafia elite. This, I argue, tantamount to the appropriation of Dalit's epistemic space as it disallows and discourages Dalit activists to come up with alternative counter-hegemonic narratives (see Guru, 2011a).

There are, however, very few among Dalit activists, particularly the Ambedkarites, that radically depart from the Sufi-nationalist trajectory. The consciousness of being sandwiched in between Brahminic and Ashrafia hegemons, these Ambedkarites have turned into crypto-Buddhists, that is, while politically they tend to follow B.R. Ambedkar and cherish Buddhist practices, but also loosely adheres to the normatively sanctioned Hindu and Ashrafia practices. These varied approaches to living a dignified life, however, does not bar a common Dalit to try out conversion to Islam, Christianity or Ahmedia sect/religion. Generally, at the level of society, the voluntary conversions of Dalit families, particularly the poorest and the most vulnerable ones, continues unabated, and often go unnoticed (See Wajid, 2017; CIFORB, 2018). This proves that while progressive's politically motivated narratives may influence Dalit activists, particularly the Dalit middle class not to convert, such as through the specific rendition of short story 'Infidel', the poorest or the ultra-subaltern castes or subcastes and the most vulnerable Dalit families may often see conversion as an open option.

3.3.6 'The Prisoner of Karoonjhar' and the Appropriation of Dalit Heroes and Spaces

The inversion of the history of a Dalit rebel/ fighter is exemplified in 'The Prisoner of Karoonjhar'¹⁰² (Kārūlnjhar jo Qaidi), a short story written by Ali Baba (Rind Baloch by caste). In this story, Rooplo Kolhi is depicted as the hero of Sindh who fought bravely during the middle of the 19th century when the British attempted to establish its writ over Parkar, a small mountainous region surrounded by Rann of Katch on the south and Thar Desert of Sindh on the North (see Figure below painted by a Kolhi for book on Rooplo Kolhi). Rooplo Kolhi, as the locals believe, was a *Girasia*, that is, the tribal chief

¹⁰² Karoonjhar is an isolated mountain about 7 kilometers in length at the center of Parkar, the hiding place for the rebels during the British occupation of Tharparkar.

recognized as such by rulers of the time, particularly by the Mughals (see Mal, 2000; Kolhi V., 2011; Kolhi B. M., 2014). Although the narrative depicted in Ali Baba's (1994) story is not much different than most of the Kolhis and Sindhi people believe in, yet it gets problematic when Dalit activists undermine its pro-Savama history and let the Ashrafia elite to appropriate their agency. Hence, it has both the emancipatory as well as hegemonic and counter-hegemonic aspects depending upon who patronizes whom.



Figure 8: The painting by Poonja Ram Kolhi, first appeared Paru Mal's (2000) book Lok Sagar Ja Moti. It was popularized by Parkari Kolhis depicting Rooplo Kolhi along with his rebel friends attacking the British in Karoonjhar Mountains at Parkar, (Source: Parkari Audio-Visual Project, PCDP).

Ali Baba's (1994) narrative of Rooplo's bravery portrays Rooplo as if in confrontation with the British, and it goes like this:

As if the British canons were roaring. [...] As if hearts of Samma, Soadha, Soomra, Thakur, Rabari and Kolhi women were being ripped asunder. [...] Rano, Tkhakur, Khoso, Rathore, Samon, Soomro, Parmar, and Kohli all had sacrificed their lives for the sake of Karoonjhar (pg.14).

[...]

[The battle was not over yet] the English would trigger the canons because Ranas [Sodha Thakur rulers of Parkar] has not given up yet. Thousands of Kolhi, Bheel, Rathore, Samma, and Khosa were roaming secretly in the valleys of Karoonjhar Mountain (p.14-15)

[...]

No sooner did that nightfall, Kolhis would begin attacking the pickets of the British army.[...] The British did not confront such a kind of rebellion in any other part of the Hindustan [...]. When captain Tyrwhitt received an indictment from Sir Charles Napier, he simply sent a reply, 'I regret. Here we are not fighting with the people but with the terrifying volcanic mountain'. The poor captain Tyrwhitt felt himself at his wits ends. He was unable to devise any way to control Ranas (Sodha Thakurs) and Kolhis (p.g 15).

[...]

[Compares Rooplo Kolhi with Hindu Vedic Gods]

That Kolhi was tall and dark brown like the Shri Kirshan Mahrarj of Hindu sacred books, and as resolved and steadfast as Arjun Maharaj (p. 15)

[The British new that whom they were fighting with]

‘Roopa [Rooplo Kolhi] we do not want to kill you. You just simply tell us the whereabouts of Ladhoo Singh and his accomplices. We will confer upon you the fief as per your desire’.

[The writer begins reframing Rooplo as the self-motivated fighter who damn cares about Ladhoo Singh]

‘This whole land is mine. Who the hell are you to give that back as a fief to me?’

‘Were you not a slave of Rana Ladhoo Singh?’

‘No, I would have shoot Ladhoo Singh, if I had felt that I were a slave of him’ (p.19).

[Rooplo’s wife is depicted as steeped in patriotism]

‘Roopa, I have come to see you the last time. Never ever make me the object of ridicule before Kolhi women. Never give up. Otherwise, I shall abandon you. Moving her hand over the pregnant belly I shall proclaim that this child is not begotten of Rooplo, but of someone else’ (p.17)

[Writer dilutes caste disparities by showing that Meghwars were anti-national and assisted the British]

‘They were Ladhoo Singh and Rooplo, from whom you had escaped to seek refuge under the tannery of Meghwars’ [p.18]

[Ends the story by showing the colonialist minds as psychologically disappointed after Rooplo’s resistance]

For the first time, Trywhitt felt that no alien nation can occupy the lands of a foreign nation for more than 25 years, but they might be compelled to vacate Karoonjhar probably even before 12 years.

As it is evident from the above excerpts of the story, Rooplo Kolhi is depicted as the independent freedom fighter that fought against the British to reclaim his ‘*Mulk*’ (Parkar). The impression is created that Parkar was a part of Sindh and Rooplo, therefore, fought for Sindh. Karoonjhar symbolizes Sindh in miniature and the local castes symbolized the Sindhi nation that was resisting against the British. In the latest progressive compilation of essays in Sindhi, Rooplo Kolhi’s confrontation with the British is projected not just as fidelity to the local ‘upper caste’ rulers but to the nation. For instance, equating tribal ethic to stand by the side of the local ruler with the national patriotism, Dr. Azad writes:

By having a look at the overall scenario during that period, it becomes evident that it was the period during which to remain loyal to the local ruler under the given tribal system was considered as loyalty to the nation. By and large, the same kind of struggles can be evidenced during the Mughal era against the British.

(Qazi, 2015, p.11)

This nationalist reframing, that legitimizes the subordination of the oppressed castes to the local oppressor castes for the sake of freedom from or resistance to the external forces (the British), undermines the agency of the Dalits both in the historical past as well as in the present by suggesting Dalits to play second fiddle as loyal subordinates to the Ashrafia-Savarna castes. In contemporary Sindh, where these caste-based or the tribal relations of domination and subordination still exist with some minor variations though, this nationalist logic that has re-identified Pakistani establishment or Punjabi domination as the new ‘other,

in a way, allows the subordination of Kolhis or Dalits to Sodha Thakurs, Khosas, Mir Talpurs and even to Sayeds. Hence, this tribal-nationalist ethic even applies today and may continue to be applied by the Ashrafia-Savarna castes on the excuse of the external threats to the internal tribal-caste (dis)harmony.

Before that appropriation of Rooplo Kolhi by the Sindhi nationalists, it was almost vice versa. The review of the vernacular literature written by Parkari Kolhis, and the conversations held by me with the local Parkaris in 2019 indicate that Parkaris did not always imagine Parkar as the part of Sindh. A Tharparkar based Dalit activist inverted the nationalist narrative in the following manner:

Mado Meghwar, who gave refuge to *Trawat* [Tyrwhitt¹⁰³]. Do you know why he gave refuge to *tarawat*? Very few know. You must see, during that period, the poor classes...in the 1800s.the first Dalit woman who wrote a letter...she only was class VIII pass. She was ...Savatri Bai Phule...she writes that they were the English people who came in and freed us from clutches of the upper castes. They see the coming of the British as the precursor of emancipation. They supported the British. Similarly, during the 1857 war, the Sikhs allied with the British to get rid of Mughal persecution. Similarly, Meghwar like Madhu, and the people of Parkar, particularly Dalits, sided with the British as the emancipators who got them rid of the domination of Sodha Thakurs. And this [Rooplo], who was the paid mercenary of Sodha Thakurs, is now reckoned as the hero in history. But those like Madhoo Meghwar who supported the British to get rid of Sodhas persecutors are condemned as the rebels.

Like Dalits themselves, this counter-narrative is also very marginal and very few even among Dalit activists subscribe to an essentially Ambedkarian perspective on history and historiography. Yet there are many points on which they converge and that deviate from the Ashrafia-dominated nationalist narrative. Before the Partition of the subcontinent, Parkar was imagined by Kolhis as well as by other Parkari communities as '*Mulk*' (literally, a country different from Sindh) (Mal, 2000; Kolhi V., 2011; Kolhi B. M., 2014).

This social imaginary often sometimes reflects in the political claims of ownership of Parkar made by Kolhi activists (see, for instance, the pamphlet in Figure 18, of local Kolhi leader which reads 'Parkar is not the private property of anybody, but our fatherland').

Given the historical profile of the characters, which is very vague though, this story by Ali Baba (1994) cannot be interpreted like the other two discussed above that are essentially based on fictitious characters. In this story history is inflated through fiction; while in the previous stories, fiction is created to depict contemporary social reality. Hence, the characterization of Rooplo Kohi through Ashrafia literary narrative has the historically

¹⁰³ Trywhitt was a British appointed captain and administrator at Parkar and was assigned the task to subdue Sodha Thakurs.

real import for Kolhis, Dalits and the progressives alike. It has contemporary political relevance as it seems in line with the Dalit's tendency to Ashrafize (see Hussain, 2019b; Mal, 200) by labeling Rooplo as 'Shaheed' (Arabic-Sindhi term for the martyr), and by tracing the existing descendants of him. Off and on, individual Kolhis claim to be Rooplo's grand-grandsons¹⁰⁴ and are invited in anniversaries organized to pay homage to Rooplo as guest speakers. This desire to associate with Rooplo is the post-1970s phenomena, resonates with the Sindhi nationalist narrative as it was reframed through political speeches and the politico-literary writings as that of Ali Baba.

The narrative of the story, however, loses its historical grounding and authenticity as there is not much historical evidence to support the facts related to Rooplo or Kolhi community's role in the fight against the British. The historical chronicles, mostly written by the British officers, do not mention any such dramatic debacle involving Rooplo Kolhi (see, for instance, Raikes, ((1856) 2009). Although the narrative looks emancipatory for Dalits as it highlights Rooplo Kolhi, yet it loses ground as it fails to fully discredit the dominant role of Sodha Thakur rulers of Parkar.

Ali Baba's (1994) narrative undermines the fact that Rooplo fought as tribal chief of Kolhi's Gohel sub-caste under the supervision of Ladhoo Singh, a Kshatriya or upper-caste Hind ruler (see Raikes, ((1856) 2009). Parkar had been under the control of SodhaThakurs during the past several centuries. Talpur and Kalhora rulers of Sindh occasionally used to intervene in Tharparkar to establish their writ, which was often thwarted by the Sodhas. Sodhas of Parkar had their communal system of management that they used to call 'Gurr Raj', and variant of land tax collection called 'Raney jo Jalang' (sack of Rana) was in vogue by virtue of which all Rajputs /Sodha Thakurs were exempt from the land tax (Qazi, 2015, p.7-8). While Parkar had its semi-autonomous political economy, it was not completely independent of the influence of the rulers of Sindh and was given various exemptions and waivers to collect taxes from the local pastoralists and peasants.

¹⁰⁴ During the conversational interviews, Dalit activists told that Satram Das of Atran Mori claimed that Rooplo is his grandfather. Comrade Bhagat Padhmon Kolhi of Sindhin jo wandyo filed a case to get 50 acres of land of Parkar based on his claim that he was grandson of Rooplo. Veerji Kolhi (advisor to minister) and Krishna Kolhi (senator) claimed to have descended from Rooplo Kolhi. Lately, a team of local progressive-minded researchers led by Mir Hasan Arisar, Tahir Mari, Nawaz Kumbhar, Muhib Bheel, Sadam Dars and Ranshal Das attempted to locate the true ancestors of Rooplo Kolhi. According to their findings, Rooplo had a son called 'Harkho', and that Kheto Mal and Gulab Rai were the true grand-grandsons of 'Shaheed Rooplo'.

(see Ojha 1966, p.104). When the British conquered Sindh in 1847, they reduced Rana's right and share of taxes to half, while allowed them to maintain their jagreers (fiefs) (Qazi, 2015, p.7-8). Similarly, both the Ali Baba as well as Parkari Kolhis do not bring into framework the fact that Meghwar community (Dalits) had already submitted to the British to emancipate from the Sodha Thakurs. They also undermine the fact that Talpur rulers of Sindh were also subdued by the British and even employed against the Sodha Thakurs (Mal, 2000; Kolhi V., 2011; Kolhi B. M., 2014). They also neglect the fact that it was the army of Talpur rulers of Sindh that fought together with the British to crush Sodha Thakur resistance in Nangarparkar (see Raikes, ((1856)2009). They do not acknowledge that Parakari Kolhis fought as army men for the Sodha Thakur (Savarna) rulers of Parkar, who did not even consider Kolhis as proper Hindus.

The historically anomalous ethnic and geographical status of Parkar can also be confirmed from the fact that before the annexation of Parkar to Sindh by the British, Parkar was under the jurisdiction of Bhuj (Katch, now in India), and that both the Dalits and the Savarnas of Parakar were ethnically and politically aligned more with their respective caste fellows and co-religionists in Kutch than with the land and people of Sindh the borders of which lied wherefrom the Thar Desert began (see Mal, 2000; Kolhi V., 2011; Raikes, ((1856) 2009); Kolhi B. M., 2014). Similarly, the local narrative about the British agent Tyrwhitt, who is now demonized as the persecutor, was hailed as a local hero by Tharparkari people. Abdul Qadir Junejo writes:

Thari people have the unique instinct of liking and making heroes for themselves. Mughal Emperor Akbar was a legendary figure for them only second to local deities, so was General Taroot (Tyrwhitt). Even though Taroot was the one who overwhelmed Sodha Rajputs and hanged Rooplo Kolhi, he was highly praised and eulogized by Tharis in folk songs, and folklore during and after Taroot's times.

(Junejo, 2010, p. 126)

This pre-colonial narrative was gradually overtaken by the postcolonial nationalist narrative whereby the praise of Tyrwhitt was considered as symbolic of the slavish imperialistic attitude. Given this ambiguous history, it can be argued that the progressive's narrative of Rooplo Kolhi, that is inadvertently, picked up by Dalits as well, is premised on the self-serving all-unifying nationalist fantasy that more than giving the emancipatory push to the Dalit cause rather hampers it. Kolhi activists, consider this representation as the sort of recognition of the value and worth of Kolhi community within the comity of Sindhi castes, and see this re-nationalization of 'Amar (eternal) or 'Shaheed' (Martyr) Rooplo Kolhi', as the drive to create social and political space for their marginal community (Mal, 2000; Kolhi V., 2011; Kolhi B. M., 2014). Hence, except the minor antipathy towards

Ashrafia-dominated Sindh that sometimes reflects in Kolhi's hidden script, Parkar is largely imagined by them as the integral part of Sindh, and Rooplo as the foremost Sindhi national hero, the recognition that could not be had without the approval of 'authentic nationalists' (i.e. Ashrafia-Savarna elite).



Figure 9: Snaps from two different programs organized by Kolhi activists to celebrate the death anniversary of Rooplo Kolhi. The chief guests invited belonged to the ruling Talpur and Mirza Ashrafia castes. Source: Author (2016)

To reciprocate that recognition and to reaffirm their fragile bonding with the Ashrafia class, Kolhis invite Mirs, Sardars, and Sayeds as special guests in their programs held to commemorate the martyrdom of Rooplo. See, for instance, Figure p in which Nawab Yousif Talpur (local Ashrāfiyā politician from the ruling elite stands in the middle surrounded by local Kokhi activists during the 157th Anniversary of Rooplo Kolhi at Ghousia Complex, Umerkot on August 20, 2016. Yousaf Talpur, in his capacity as a member of the National Assembly, announces additional school building for a Kolhi village. To demonstrate their closeness to and confidence in Yousaf Talpur, local Kolhi activists Nemdas Kolhi, Poonjo Mal Bheel (Ex, MPA),Asu Bai Kolhi and other Dalit activists stand close to Yousaf Talpur on the stage. Affirmations and the egalitarian rhetoric, for instance, follow from the mouth of Ashrafia elite in the following manner.

‘To be Kolhi is a matter of pride. Civilization cannot be erected by becoming Sayed.’
(Sardar Shah)

‘I will try to convince my party leadership to ensure representation of Kolhi community in the parliament.’¹⁰⁵ (Sardar Shah)

‘Rooplo Kolhi fought the battle against the British forces for the Sindh, and sacrificed his life. The youth should follow the example’. Nawab Yousaf Talpur

‘We are proud of Rooplo Kolhi. He fought the war for the survival of Sindh’. Nawab Taimur Talpur (MPA)¹⁰⁶

‘Rooplo Kolhi memorials will be built in each major city including Karachi’ (Ibrat daily, Sindhi newspaper).

‘The Dravidians and politicians of Sindh declared immortal Rooplo Kolhi, the son of the soil.’¹⁰⁷

This ritual of inversion by Ashrafia elite to arbitrarily identify with the Dalits, under the influence of Sufi nationalist narrative, dilutes the question of casteism such that Rooplo Kolhi (a Dalit), Hoshoo Sheedi (an Afro-Sindhi descendant of slaves), Dodo Soomro (Sammāt ruling caste elite) and Raja Dahar (7th-century Brahmin king of Sindh)¹⁰⁸ are reframed as standing on the horizontal socioeconomic plane that demands of them to struggle for Sindh. It creates the false dichotomy between the two groups of Ashrafia-Savarna classes, namely the Sindhi nationalists and separatists, and the pro-state feudal Sindhi Ashrafia class. For instance, a Kolhi activist aligning himself with the nationalists as against the ruling feudal class of Sindh uploaded a Facebook status:

The 159th anniversary of Shaheed Rooplo Kolhi was celebrated by Jeay Sindh Mahaz at Sachal village, Karachi. Chairman of Mahaz, Abdul Khaliq Junejo said that Raja Dahar, Hoshoo Sheedi, and Rooplo Kolhi are our valiant heroes and that Muhammad-bin-Qasim is historically condemned as the imperialist. He said that the anniversaries of Rooplo are being celebrated lately by the ruling elites for the last two-three years to appropriate Rooplo for their vested interests. But they must remember that the resistance of Rooplo was not simply for capturing a seat in legislative assembly or to appease any specific sect, but for his land Sindh, the legacy of which rule-hungry elite cannot be the inheritors.

(Ranshal Kolhi, Facebook Status, 24th August 2019)

¹⁰⁵ Source: Daily Ibrat (Sindhi newspaper, Dated, 28th August, 2017. URL:

http://www.dailyibrat.com/beta/pages/jpp_28082017015347.jpg

¹⁰⁶ Source: Sindh Express (daily), Monday, August, 28, 2017. URL:

http://sindhexpress.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow.aspx?newsID=130546486&Issue=NP_HYD&Date=20170828

¹⁰⁷ Source: Daily Sobh (Sindhi newspaper), Dated, 28th August, 2017. URL:

http://www.dailysobh.com/beta/epaper/news/news.php?news_id=236 .

¹⁰⁸ Some historiographers depict Dahar as an unpopular Brahmin king that ruled over Buddhist majority, and Chach, Dahar’s father is believed to be the usurper of Buddhist Rai Dynasty (see Nicolas, 2006; Naik, 2010, p. 32.)

These acts of counter-appropriation, condensation and equalizing Savarna-Ashrafia and Dalit heroes in the name of resistance against the non-nationalist ruling elite are not liked by some of their co-Dalit activists, best classified as Ambedkarites. For instance, an Ambedkarite interviewed by me lamented:

It's not just that simple, that democracy fascinates Dalits. Under it, they eagerly sell out their heroes to nationalists, and give away their gods to Brahmins and *Lohanas*; they are willing to banish all their ancestral gods to exclusively worship Ram, Krishana and Ganesha.

(A Dalit activist, Personal Interview, 2016)

The unabated influence of Sindhi progressive narrative had been lately (between 2016 and 2019) disturbed by the group of activists affiliated with Dalit Sujaag Tehreek, who were working within several other splinter groups. The change was noticed during the 160th-anniversary celebrations held at Judho and Hyderabad by Sindhi Kolhi Itihad and Pakistan Kolhi Itihad in which they consciously took the decision not to invite, as chief guests, the feudal or political class person elite. Yet this not yet institutionalized and abrupt change is not without ideological problem as the majority of Dalits continued to imagine Rooplo and Dalits through Marxist-nationalist lens instead of Ambedkarian one. Pahlaj Kolhi, the organizer of the anniversary at Jhudo post on Facebook a happy note:

This was the apolitical anniversary. On this anniversary there was no minister, advisor or senator. Despite that, the sea of people flooded in, which proves that people have now do not accept this *waderko-bhotarko* (feudal) system.

This supposedly apolitical statement about the program in which they awarded Dalit activists affiliated with different political parties for raising the voice of indigenous 'Darāwar' communities, framed the issue in a Marxist language of class struggle that obfuscates the problem of casteism. Hence this Dalit agency that is carried away by the Marxist-Ashrafia ideology, many Kolhi activists see this re-nationalization of 'Amar Rooplo Kolhi' as the drive to create social and political space for their marginal community (Mal, 2000; Kolhi V. , 2011; Kolhi B. M., 2014). Given this ideologically confused nature of Dalit activism, many of them are not much optimistic that the social hierarchies would alter in any fundamental ways.

Looking from the Ambedkarian perspective, this anti-colonial narrative could have been truly emancipatory, if it had also brought into focus the internal colonialism based on the exclusion of Dalitbahujans. Since it was not the case, and the Sufi nationalist presentation of the progressives undermined caste (also gender) as the political factors of oppression and exclusion, the postcolonial emancipation from the British imperialism cannot be understood by the Ambedkarites as the Dalit emancipation from the internal colonialism. Hence, the story of Rooplo Kolhi, as it is depicted and reframed seems quite

the reverse of the Ambedkarian way of hero-making. For instance, it is quite the opposite of the battle of Koregaon, often mentioned by local Ambedkarites in Sindh, in which about 500 Mahar (Meghwar) of Bombay Native Infantry of the East India Company fought against the Peshwa rulers. The event is considered as the revenge of decades of treatment of Mahars as untouchables, and which is presented as the source of revolutionary inspiration by the Ambedkarites. Millions of Dalits gather each year on the 1st of January in Bhima-Koregaon village in Pune, India to celebrate the event (Zelliot, 2011; Kumhoikar, 2012).¹⁰⁹

To sum up, the symbiosis of the Dalit and Ashrafia progressive narrative seems counterproductive for the Dalit's emancipation, as it does not allow Dalits to protest against the Ashrafia-Savarna elite and rather dilutes the question of existing caste discrimination, reciprocal respect, social inclusion, and justice. By showing that Rooplo stood for Parkar, the geographical region which is now reframed as an integral part of Sindh, the progressives suggest standing for Sindh against the external enemy that may be the British or the Punjabi-Pakistani establishment. Many Dalit activists, mostly Parkari Kolhis, however, do not buy the progressive's narrative wholeheartedly and do not consider Pakistani establishment as their enemy. Moreover, they could not have forgotten the persecution that they suffered at the hands of the local Ashrafia and Savarna elites of Parkar. For instance, Mavo Kolhi, in the anniversary of Rooplo Kolhi lamented the fact that:

A decade after Rooplo's martyrdom, in 1964 when the British were still there in Parkar, the incident happened in *Holi Garho* in *Pithapur* where Thakurs of *Dedhvero*, and Khosas of *Kabri*¹¹⁰ attacked the Chatro Kolhi and his son (would-be groom). Thereafter, many Kolhis decided to leave Parkar to migrate to Barrage area of Sindh to settle there permanently instead of returning seasonally¹¹¹.

The progressives' reconstruction of history could have been truly emancipatory for the Dalits if they had also brought into consideration these narratives of the Parkari Kolhid that implicate the local Ashrafia and Savarna elite. They, for instance, could show that Rooplo

109, The Battle of Bhima Koregaon Documentary Film Official Release | Director - Somnath Waghmare, Published by Roundtable India on Aug 20, 2017, Direction and Camera - Somnath Waghmare, Editor - Deepu (Pradeep K P), URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDw43hJf_IY&feature=share.

¹¹⁰ Holi Garho is small village in Pithapur which is union council of Nangarparkar. Dedhvero and Kabri are also villages of Nangarparkar that were dominated by the Thakur (Savarna) and Khosa (Baloh Ashrafia) caste groups.

¹¹¹ Transhumance has been a common migratory practice among Parkaris, who used to migrate from Parkar to the plains of Indus (locally known as 'barrage area'). Before Partition of the Sub-continent and the sealing of borders, they used to migrate to Kutch and Malwa in Maharashtra (see Mal, 2000).

along with his community of Dalits had been depicted as fighting against the British or ‘Company’ with the consciousness of the fact that the Dalits were internally colonized and humiliated by the Sodha Thakurs and Ashrafia castes. But, as it seems, Sindhi short story writers, being under the influence of Ashrafia Sufi nationalist narrative could not have gone to that extent to frame their narratives against their own political and literary class.

Given the epistemological disparity between the huge volumes of the Progressive literature that ignores casteism and the politically significant demographic strength of Dalits, this Ashrafia (Savarna) intervention into Dalit spaces seems highly problematic. Ali Baba’s (1994) depiction of Dalits and women, as it is inspired by Gandhian progressivism, is comparable to the Hindi short stories of Munshi Premchand.¹¹² Premchand has given space to Dalit characters and brings forth Dalit’s exploitation in his stories, but his antidote seems to have been in line with the caste-functional approach of Arya Samaj, Dayanand Saraswathi, and Gandhi, as it resonates with the idea of *shuddhi* (purity) and was against religious conversion (Rabbani, 2016; Trivedi, 2017). Hence, the progressive’s narratives are unlike of Ambedkar’s Dalit, who is courageous and infused with zeal to fight against untouchability and exploitation, and to live with dignity.

To evade this sociological challenge posed by Dalit urgency, the progressives give forth the post-hoc interpretations of the historical narratives, such as in the case of Rooplo Kolhi, they reconstruct it as the Sindhi nationalist, enabling them to appropriate Dalit subjugation and oppression. It thus diluted the problematization of casteism (also of gender discrimination) and highlighted the problem of religious persecution, fanaticism and also feudalism.

As it is evident, the narrative of Rooplo Kolhi can be utilised for both the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic purposes depending upon whether it is constructed in a more realistic language to infuse resistance against the Ashrafia-Savarna castes, or to serve the very purpose of Ashrafia-Savarna domination. Its nationalist reframing creates false pride in Rooplo as the hero of Dalits. By suggesting Dalits to play second fiddle as loyal subordinates to the Ashrafia-Savarna castes, the Rooplo’s narrative in a way dilutes the relations of domination and subordination existing between the ruling Ashrafia-Savarna and the ruled Dalit castes. Hence, for the Ambedkarites, since Rooplo did not primarily fight against Savarna-Ashrafia domination,

¹¹² To read online some notable short stories of Premchand, see : URL:

<https://www.rekhta.org/stories/eidgah-premchand-stories?lang=ur>. (accessed June 6, 2019).

and instead for restoring the Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony against the British (colonial) domination, he cannot be invoked as a hero of Dalits but Dalit hero of Savarnas.

3.3.7 Romance with the Oppressed Castes

This Sayedist-Brahmin narrative, inadvertently, threw the Dalit narrative of the Darāwaṛ (Dravidian)¹¹³ roots of Indus Civilization, presented by the Dalit activists, into the backwater. ‘Darāwaṛ Sindhi’ identity marker picked up Dalit activists was initially promoted and used by the Ashrafia-Savarna classes as the Dalits constituted a significant majority in lower Sindh required to be more fully incorporated into Sindhi mainstream. This nominal historical recognition, however, could not lift the Dalits to the level of Savarna-Ashrafs as the dominant narrative, through its multifarious symbolic, literary, cultural and political tropes, continued to privilege Savarna-Ashrafs.

I had the first-hand experience of how the discursive indicators of Ashrafia hegemony constrain Dalit agency, during my fieldwork in 2016 when Dalit Sujaag Tehreek was formed to highlight the caste-based discrimination, appeared in the form of the opposition to a small group of Sindhi poets and the writers, mostly from the marginalized caste groups, and from the Dalit-concentrated region of lower Sindh, that deviated from the Ashrafia norm and put the Dalit experiences into the literary frame for their emancipation. To have an idea of how progressive literary poems, prose and the narrative emergent of it is selectively used by the Dalit writers in their essays and articles, read, Bheel (2016), Bheel (2014), Bheel (2014), Bheel (2015), Bheel (2016), Bheel (2017), Bheel (2017), Bheel (2018), Bheel (2016), Dharani (2015), Kolhi (2014), Mal (2000), Mangi (2016), Qaimkhani (2008), Rathore ((2016)). Take an example of the following excerpt of the anti-caste poetry:

How I trespass your boundaries,
 Look at my untouchable feet,
 Please, keep away your sacred utensils,
 O, simpleton! Drop the water on my palms to quench my thirst!
 Please, keep the distance from my shadow,
 And do not cast your gaze on my ugly face.
 In this system of caste discrimination,
 Your weigh heavier than me,
 How come you say its Diyari [Hindu festival of lights]
 How come I proclaim, I am a Hindu?
 First, I have to shoulder the corpse of the untouchable,

¹¹³ Following the Aryan-invasion theory and basing their claim in the fossilized Dalit bodies found from Mohen-jo-Daro, the Indus Civilization cite in Sindh, Kolhi and Bheel castes identify themselves as Dravidians and believe that they founded Indus Civilization before the Aryans displaced them.

Killed with his hands by Ram [Hindu deity].

Vijay Sagar Meghwar (Translated from Sindhi, Source: Dalit Sujaag Tehreek, 2016) This kind of exposition of the prevalent caste discrimination was received by the dominant Ashrafia class with the ridicule. Chander Valasai, A.B.Arisar, Aijaz Mangi, Amar Sahar, Vijay Sagar, Hafeez Kumbhar, Khalid Kumbhar Roohal Kalroo, Ayub Khoso, Dolat Thari and, also include Ambedkarites such as Ganpat Rai Bheel and Muhib Bheel, were some notable contemporary pro-Dalit Sindhi poets and the writers. For the lack of powerful anti-caste poetry and prose available in Sindhi language, the Dalit writers and the activists attempted to employ the poetry and prose tinged with romance with Sindhi nation. For instance, Muhib Bheel (2018), although apprehensive of the fact that caste-based forums of the Dalit communities are the social and the political imperatives in the casteist society, condemned the caste-based associations and fraternities by expressing his concern for Sindh in the popular verse of Shah Latif. Similarly, pro-Dalit writers also referred to the same Ashrafia-oriented texts for the oppressed castes of Jogis, Samis, Mangarhar, Kolhi, and Bheel, etc. produced by the Sindhi progressive writers, to frame their anti-caste narratives (see Bheel 2018). But that literature loaded with sympathy for them did not seem to give them the desired emancipatory agency. Instead, they were ridiculed by the progressive literary Ashrafia intelligentsia, who, either showed indifference to the literature produced by the Dalits, or termed it irrelevant to the contemporary, progressive and the egalitarian Sindhi Sufihood sanctified through the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif and proselytized by the likes of G.M.Sayed (1952 & 2011), Sufi Huzoor Bux (1981 & 2007), Siraj (2009), B.M Adwani (2008); Saleem Bhutto Latifi (1981), Abdul Jabbar Junejo (1983), Abdul Jabbar Junejo (2004), Badar Abro (1985), Dr. Ghafoor Memon (2002).

Guru Ravidas, a Dalit poet of the 15th and 16th centuries, is hailed by Professor Ronki Ram as the ‘prophet of Dalit liberation’ in Punjab. According to Ronki Ram, by choosing Bhakti (hitherto upper-caste privilege) as a path of social protest, Guru Ravidas did not only challenge the Brahminical tradition of caste-based privilege but also laid the foundation of Dalit consciousness from below, perhaps for the first time in India’ (Ram, 2011,p.29). He ‘imaginatively chose poetry as the method for a non-violent social protest towards the establishment of a casteless society free from all forms of structural bindings and social dominations’ (Ram, 2009, p.1) This probably holds true of most of Bhakti radicals including Kabir (see Omvedt, G et al, 2008). Could the same be said about the poetry and prose of Sindhi Ashrafia class writers as do the Sindhi Progressives claim, begs a lot of questions. The romance with the oppressed and the fetishization of occupational

Their suits are full of dirt
But, despite that, Raja (ruler) pays visits to their guesthouse.

گند جن جي گوڏ ۾، ڀاپوڙا پوشاڪ،
انين جي اوطاق، راجا ريجهي آنيو
Source: Kaliyan Advani
(2009) *Shah SainJo Rasalo*

Here Shah Latif romanticizes the plight of Dalit castes, their semi-nomadic status, and marginality.

Today in the guesthouses, I do not find Jogis,
I weep all night long remembering the wanderers,
Those I long for, those mendics migrated away.

اڄ نه اوطاقن ۾، سندي جوگين ذات،
ساري سنڀاسين ڪي، رنم ساري رات،
مون جنين جي تات، سي لاهوتي لڏي ويا.
Source: Kaliyan Advani (2009) *Shah
SainJo Rasalo*

This example finds a parallel in Vedic mythology, often discussed by the Dalit activists, in which Lord Ram condescends to eat the berry fruit offered by the Shibri Bhilin, the mythical example often presented by the Dalits to prove that in Vedic era casteism did not exist as such. G.M.Sayed, the Sindhi nationalist ideologues, sees in Shah Latif's such projection of Sammāt rulers (see Sayed, 1952) the essential characters of the ideal leader for Sindh that, sometimes, descends to embrace the 'untouchable'. Here, Sayed, at least seems to attest to the fact that untouchability exists. Yet, in his latter works when he had significantly developed his ideology of Sindhu Desh (a separate homeland for Sindhis), he used the same authority of Latif to deny the existence of untouchability in Sindh. He writes that under the patronage of Shah Latif, the saints of Sindh established culture of Hindu-Muslim harmony in Sindh such that unlike India, caste differences, untouchability and the impulse for violence are absent in this land as perhaps nowhere else" (Sayed, 1986, p5, Sayed, 2008, p.12).

Latif's poetry is replete with internal contradictions if evaluated on the rationality principle. Some of his verses allude to persistent 'lower status' of the Dalits, such as:

The friend and country, only the shameless
(indigenous) can forget,
Woe to them, who abandon their land

سڄڻ ۽ ساٿيھ ڪنهن اٿاسي وسري.
حيث تنين ڪي هوءَ وطن جن وساريو.

Rigveda calls the aboriginal Indus people `anaas (nose less), or in other words 'shameless'. There exists in Sindhi colloquial language its another derivative word 'be-naku' (without nose), which is used derogatorily for the shamelessly stubborn fellow in Sindhi language (see Adwani, 2008). This Sammāt morality, and Sayedism with the humanitarian face as presented by the Sindhi progressive literary writers (Sayed, 1952, p. 79), that celebrates the exceptional cases caste mobility as the normative facts, romanticizes the culture of poverty, the meekness of the Dalits and the modesty of women folk.

From Shah Latif till Budhal Fakeer, all the classical poets and the writers either narrated the skills of the laborers or the occupational castes or have adopted their caste names to symbolize humbleness. Most of the poets and the writers romanticize with the simplicity, meekness and the rustic way of life of the Samis, Jogis, fishermen, nomads, travelers and other marginal or the subaltern groups, but they fail to afford them agency to confront the hegemonic castes or classes. This normalized casteism attenuated with Sayedism, engages with the Dalit castes such as Samis and Jogis, and depicted as the acts of condensation, is line with the Gandhian ethic to treat ‘Harijans’ ‘with humility and take care of them. This functionalist approach sets up the discursive tone that runs across literary representations of caste in Sindh. It does not take any single ideological stance in most of the Savarna-Ashraf poets and the writers such that in one instance they seem to stand by the oppressor and in another with the oppressed.

3.4 Ashrafia-Savarna Historiography as the Subject of Critique

Before I discuss how the Dalits and the Dalit activists were being constrained by the ethnocentric ashrafised Sufism and Islam, I deem it necessary to shed light here on the historical background of how they could relate to Dalits and the Savarna classes. When it comes to religion, the majority of Scheduled Castes in Sindh identify themselves with Hinduism. But, the version of Hinduism that they practice considerably varies from the Hinduism in practice in India. I have explained in a paper on the caste politics in Sindh as regards how the Brahmanism in the name of Sanatan Dharam¹¹⁴ and Sayedism discursively fuse in political Sufism in Sindh to render the problem of casteism and Dalit exclusion irrelevant (see Hussain, 2019a; Hussain, 2019b; see also Sindhi, 2016a; Sindhi, 2016b, p. 31; Siraj, 2009, pp. 7-11; Ojha, 2015; Adwani, 2008; Syed, 1986; Syed G. M., 2012 (1974); Thakur, 1959; Panhwar, 1993; Ali, 2015; Hussain, 2019). For instance, largely based on the critique of the Persian book Chach Nama (story of the Chach) the 12th century A.D by Ali Kufi (b. 1158) (Manan, 2012), which is one the main sources for history of Sindh, the

¹¹⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica defines **Sanatan Dharam**, as a ‘term used to denote the “eternal” or absolute set of duties or religiously ordained practices incumbent upon all Hindus, regardless of class, [caste](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sanatana-dharma), or sect.’ (See [URL:https://www.britannica.com/topic/sanatana-dharma](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sanatana-dharma), Accessed on December 4, 2018). The term Sanatan Dharam as a neologism for egalitarian caste-based Hinduism by popularized by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, a politician affiliated with Indian National Congress. Malaviya, was against the separate electorates for Muslims and ‘depressed classes’, and along with MK Gandhi, was the founding member of Harijan Sevak Sangh.

criticism is done in defense or in opposition of Raja Dahir, the last Brahmin who ruled Sindh till early 8th century AD when the Arabs defeated him and conquered Sindh. While the defeat of Raja Dahir is projected by Sindhi nationalist as the colonization of Sindh by the Arabs, the Islamists and the state reframes the conquest and the preceding Ashrafization of Sindh as the spread of Islam. The Buddhist Rai dynasty (524-632 AD) believed to be of Shudra rulers that preceded the Brahminic dynasty of Chach is merely mentioned as a passing reference for two reasons. Firstly, there does not exist any comprehensive historical record to write in detail about the Buddhist and the Shudra rulers of Sindh (see Friedmann, 1984, pp, 31-32; Manan, 2012). Secondly, the history of the Brahmin-Ashrafia ruling elites that followed fascinates the contemporary historians as their hegemony continues till this day. Hence, like the history of any other region of South Asia, the history of Sindh, mostly written by Sindhi writers, has reframed the ancient Sindh as based on egalitarian values with some necessary social hierarchies of castes and tribes existing to regulate the society. The 'untouchable' castes and tribes, peasants, workers, occupational castes, outcastes are just mentioned as a passing reference to prove that Sindhi society, in its essence, has been egalitarian.

Pro-Sayed and Pro-Brahminic tendencies often find common cause in the progressive's condemnation of Islamic or Muslim extremism and fanaticism. For instance, the era of Raja Dahar, which has been chronicled in 12th-century text Chachnama written by Kufi, is marked by the progressives as the beginning of the nationalist history of resistance in Sindhi nationalist movement. Chachnama was written by Kufi to praise of Muhammad-bin-Qaism, and legitimize ongoing Arab domination. Unlike the progressives, this tendency to celebrate Arab conquest as Muslim conquest lies at the basis of contemporary Sindhi conservative and religious sections of society. While the progressives, and also those affiliated with Shia sect condemn Chachnama as based on Arab (Ummayad) Muslim narrative and thus declared as anti-Sindhi, the conservative sections of society herald Muhammad bin Qasim as the harbinger of Islam and peace (see also Sheedai, 1999). Both the Progressives and the conservatives, however, undermine casteist dimension of actual history or the historiography of Arab invasion/conquest. For instance, they ignore the fact that Chachnama was dedicated to a Sayed Ain-al Mulk Fakhr al-Din Hussain, the son of the ruler Qabaccha (Manan, 2012).

Raja Dahar is reframed by progressives as the warrior king who fought valiantly against the Arab invader Muhammad Bin Qasim. GM Sayed in his book *Sindh-ja-Soorma*

(Heroes of Sindh) paid the tribute to Raja Dahar (a Brahmin King of Sindh before 712 AD) by using the following verses.

I won't say, he fled. He was killed, this I will believe;
Bruises on his face look graceful, I love to cure;
Would be utterly ashamed, had his back been injured.

Shah Latif (Translated by the author) Source: G.M.Sayed (1974, pg. 15)

This historical nationalist reframing of a Brahmin King bypasses the historical fact that Muhammad-bin-Qaism did not bring about any change in the class structure of Sindh. Instead, he reinstated Brahmins and perpetuated exclusion of 'lower caste' natives of Sindh (see Friedmann, 1984, pp, 31-32; Manan, 2012). To counter the progressives, the Dalit activists, depict Rai Sehasi, the Buddhist king as their hero who ruled the predominantly Buddhist Sindh before Chach. Drawing historical clues from Chachmana, Dalit activists allege that the father of Raja Dahar took over allegedly through deceit.

The sociocultural details of Sindh that follow after the Brahmin Dynasty, are generally found in history books as chronologically divided into the Arab, Soomra (1011-1351), Samma (1365-1521), Arghun(1520-1591), Tarkhan (1554-1591), and Kalhora (1701-1783) and Talpur (1783-1843) dynasties under the Mughal (1592-1843) patronage(see Burton 1847; Sheedai, 1958; Ahmed 1984; Ali, 2015). The Ashrafia ruling elite, mostly from the local Sarmāt and Baloch tribes and castes converted to Islam but continued to practice their Savarna customs and continue to practice those rituals and practices that are presented as symbolic of Hindu-Muslim cultural syncretism, a kind of religiopolitical culture that increasingly came to be identified as Sufism. Nonetheless, savarnization gradually gave way to Ashrafization, and resultantly, Soomra, Samma, and Kalhora indigenous castes (locally known as Sarmāt) were further ashrafised. After conversion to Islam they intermarried with local Arab landowners and thus had acquired great influence and power. By furnishing *Tuhfa-tul-Kiram* and *Beglar Namah*, the two books on the history, as the reference, they reconstructed their genealogies to have roots in Arabs and association with the Sayeds. Hence, the Soomras claimed to be Sumerian Arabs, Sammas the descendants of Jamshed Abbasi of Persia and Kalhoras traced their descent to Abbasid Khalifas.

Ashrafization of local Savarna tribes had much to do with the early Islamic-mystic missionaries, particularly the Ismaili (the saints of a Shia sect, and mainly Sayeds by caste). Ismailis mystics adopted the strategy to disguise themselves as non-Muslims and locals and induce gradual conversion (see Schimmel, 1975; Erwing, 1983; Ansari, 1992)

to a version of Islam based on hereditary superiority of Sayeds. Ismailis would sing *Ginan* (Bhajan) on the pattern of Hindu Bhagti folk songs to attract non-Muslims. In *Ginans* of Pir Sadruddin, who was had converted from Savarna (Iohano) caste, Adam becomes Shiva, Muhammad becomes Brahma, and Ali becomes Vishnu. Ismailis initially targeted the privileged Savarnas to convert en masse. They had initial successes as many Rajputs and Vaniya castes converted to Islam. The Sammas, for instance, were brought within the Islamic fold by Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya, Jats by Shah Qadiri (in lower Sindh) during the fourteenth century, Memons (formerly Vaniya/Vaishiya class), were converted by Qadri saint Saiyid Yusufuddin ((see Schimmel, 1975; Erwing, 1983; Ansari S., 1992. Pg 23).

Although Ismaili missionaries had begun to arrive in Sindh as early as 9th century A.D, the Hibari (Arab) dynasty (855 A.D. to 1010 A.D.) which had become independent from the Abbasids who ruled parts of Sindh from 750-855 A.D., opened up the gate of Sindh for the Ismaili missionaries sent by Fatimid Caliphs see Schimmel, 1975; Erwing, 1983; Ansari, 1992). Thus, in a way, it issued a license for the Ismaili Pirs and Sayeds to migrate and settle in Sindh as the sanctified caste. Soomra rulers, that followed the Arab rule continued to invite Ismaili Arab and Persian Ashrafia (mostly Sayeds) and confer land grants.

Many Sayeds and Ismaili Khojas¹¹⁵ or Khuwajas came into Sindh on their own, or after having accepted the invitations from rulers to fleeing the persecution of Abbasids and Halaku Khan in the Middle East (Burton R. F., 1847, pp. 27-28). They were welcomed, and sometimes even invited by the ruler of Sindh. Hence, apart from the conscious attempts of Ismaili mystics, there were other reasons for Sayeds to settle in Sindh in large numbers¹¹⁶. Shia Sayeds had made inroads into Sindh prior to Hanafi Sayeds, but could not wield as much influence as did the Sunni Hanafi Sayeds (Burton, 1847, pp. 17-18; Schimmel, 1975; Erwing, 1983; Ansari, 1992)

Ismaili Khojas were strictly casteist as grounded the belief in the supremacy of Imams (immediate descendants of the prophet) and the belief that it continues till today in the form of physically existing Imam creates the religio-political culture having casteist

¹¹⁵ The term Khwaja, pronounced Khoja in the [Gujarati](#) and [Sindhi](#) languages, is a Persian honorific title, first bestowed by the allegedly Nizari Ismaili [Sadardin](#) (died c. 15th century) upon his followers during the lifetime of the [Nizari Ismaili](#) Imam Islam Shah (1368-1423 CE). In Sindh Pir Sadruddin had his grand lodge in Sind and it was he who conferred on the new converts the title of Khwaja (Khoja), meaning honourable.

¹¹⁶ See also: Schimmel, Annemarie (1982). *Islam in India and Pakistan*. Brill.

overtone even stronger than the Brahminic ones. The Khojas, who are believed to have been originally Lohana rajputs, were followers of Sadr- al-din who regarded Adam and Ali as the avatars of Vishnu, and explained Mohammad as another name of Mahesha. The Khojas were not sure to which religion they belonged and it was the English court which declared them to be Shias of Islamic branch. According to Burman:

The Khojas drew many parallels between Hinduism and Islam. The word 'Om' written in Sanskrit was equated with 'Ali' written in Arabic... The Hindu pantheon of nine avatars was accepted readily and the tenth, the Kalki avatar... was claimed to have appeared in Arabia. The word Kalki was transferred to 'Nakalanki' meaning spotless, pure to correspond to the belief of Imams and the Prophet being sinless and pure (masum)". (Burman, 1996, p.1213)

Hence, amid the sectarian Sunni-Shia controversy that began during the 11th century A.D, both the Sunni and Shia (Ismaili) mystics continued to shape the contours of Sufism premised on the sanctified superiority of the tribe and or caste of the Prophet Muhammad. Presented through the allegorical and tragic representation of the war between Arab tribes during 680 A.D known as the battle of Karbala, the descendants of the Prophet are characterized as the epitome of tolerance and sacrifice for the sake of ultimate truth, and as the revivalists of the faith freedom and the justice. Shia Islam, in particular, is fundamentally premised upon the martyrdom of Ahal-i-bayt at Karbala and constructs the faith-based history of tribal politics of Arabs, believing in the divine authority and the right of Sayeds to rule and guide Muslims and the world at large. They, thus, turn the hereditary tribal politics of Arabs into religious dogma. The genealogical lists of Imams often found in the market at the shops and in houses of Shia, Barelvis and Sufi Siddhis show that the belief in the supremacy the birth of the being in any particular family lies at the core of their faith. It sets them squarely with the Brahminic belief in the supremacy of Brahmin caste and the inferiority of certain other castes. This belief in the superiority of Sayeds, owned, inherited, claimed by the Sayeds, and confirmed by the local people lies at the base of ashrafization and or casteism in Islam.

3.4.1 Dargāh (Shrine) as the Casteist Space

Although Soomra rulers during the 14th century did patronize Pirs and Sayeds and invited many from Persia and Arabia and offered them lands to maintain Khanqahs (dwelling place

for Sufi) and Dargāhs (Sufi dwelling built around the shrine or tomb of saint)¹¹⁷, their political influence remained subdued till Samma rulers who followed and who had newly converted, welcomed Sayeds as pillars of Islam and bestowed economic favors on them. By the time the Kalhora dynasty was taken over by the Talpurs (Baloch) in the 18th century, Sayeds and Pirs were virtually turned into spiritual leaders and the landlords many of which would sit on a Gaddi (raised platform) and wear king-like turbans to symbolize spiritual and cultural authority. (Burton, 1847, pp. 17-18; Ansari, 1992). During the Talpur dynasty Sayedism and Shrine culture further flourished along with the rise in the influence of Baloch castes (Ahmed, 1984; Sheedai R. D., 1999(1958); Ali, 2015; Lambrick, 1941 & 1964; Schimmel, 1975). This brought about the power shift between the Ashrafia classes as the former Sammāt-Sayed order was replaced with the Baloch-Sayed (Ahmed, 1984; Sheedai, 1999(1958); Ali M., 2015).

Savarna castes that did not convert to Islam used to worship both their Hindu deities as well as visit Sufi Darghas of Pirs having dual Hindu-Muslim identities. This Hindu-Muslim fusion normalized as a form of Sufism greatly expanded the influence of Dargāh under the patronage of Sayed Pirs and increasingly came to assume the political function as well in early 16th century, and Sayed acting as ‘the spiritual landlords with a considerable stake in the status quo’ (Ansari, 1992 p. 29). The abortive resistance in 1520 AD by (Sufi saint) Makhdoom Bilawal (Sammāt¹¹⁸) against the Arghun occupiers can be termed as the watershed event to mark the beginning of political Sufism in Sindh. After crushing the resistance, and to counteract the Sufi influence in political matters, Arghun rulers adopted the policy to invite rival Sayed castes and Sufis, particularly that of Qadiri and Naqshbandi orders (See Ansari, 1992, p. 29). The further influx of Sayeds and Pirs strengthened their hegemony and promoted shrine culture. Sayeds and Pirs began vying with each other to attract murids (disciples) and to win the favors from the rulers that escalated confrontation within Ashrafia over the ownership of economic and cultural capital. For instance, to counter the rising influence of Shah Inayat (1655-1718), a non-Sayed Pir of Langah (Sammāt) caste, the neighboring Sayeds and Pirs enticed the rulers of the time to crush him

¹¹⁷ Dalits and Savarna Hindus also use the term ‘Dargah’ to refer to the tombs and shrines of their Hindu Sufi saints.

¹¹⁸ *Sammāt* is the major Sindhi indigenous ‘upper caste’ group that is believed to have converted to Islam from ‘upper caste’ Rajput castes. The consciousness of a common genealogy exists between Hindu Rajputs, Muslim Rajput migrants from Rajasthan (Dhat area) and that of Sindhi Sammat castes of Indus basin. Rajput Association was formed in 1960s by Qaimkhani Muslim Rajputs that recognized Rana Chander Singh (Hindu) as their local Rajput Chief.

(See Ansari, 1992, p. 31). With the further influx of Sunni Hannafi Sayeds, Dhargahi (Shrine) culture was perfectly institutionalized during the rule of Kalhoras, the ashrafised Pir rulers. Kalhora had inverted their descent from the local indigenous caste to the Abbasi Arab descent after having claimed the transfer of spirituality from the Sayed Pirs¹¹⁹ (Burton, 1847, pp. 6-7; Burton, 1851). Kalhora, the followers of Sayed Muhammad Mahdi of Jaunpur, in fact, "combined religious legitimacy with worldly power to rule Sind. Since they relied on claims to spiritual descent, they showed great respect for other religious families.' (See Ansari, 1992, p. 32). The surge in the reverence of Sayeds, in fact, rose during the rule of Kalhoras when, instead of mere Wakf properties, the great granting of privilege to religious figures was introduced.

To sum up, both the Ismailis (commonly termed in Sindh as Shias) or the Hanafis (now known locally as Barelivis) promoted casteism that was rooted in their belief in the superiority of Sayeds and was physically organized around the institution of Dargāh or Sufi shrine. Hence, the Sufi shrine under the patronage of Sayed Pirs served as the vital liminal institution that, in a way, furnished the temporary relief from untouchability and caste discrimination. This in-process institutionalized ashrafization of non-Muslims without conversion. Unlike the mosque or the temple, at the shrine people of different religions could gather under the hegemonic patronage of Sayeds and Pirs. It was the strategy of the gradual acclimatization of non-Muslims to Islamic values. This strategy paved dividends and a majority of the non-Muslims converted to a kind of Islam which came to considerably deviate from the teachings of major Sufi schools of thought. Because of that in Sindh, the ideal and the existing forms of Islam and Sufism both had been markedly different from each other as compared to any other regions of Pakistan and India.

According to Sarah Ansari (1992) and David Cheesman (1997), by the dawn of the nineteenth century, Sayeds, glossed under the institution of Pir came to wield huge political influence over the majority of Sindhi Muslims. They were accorded respect equally by both the commoners and the rulers, such as by Mir Talpurs (Balochs), the rulers of Sindh till the British overwhelmed them and managed the Ashrafia-Savarna ruling classes under the new colonial social contract. Although the British left after dividing India on communal lines into Hindu and Muslim states, it inadvertently allowed for the direct political domination of the Ashrafia class in Pakistan (see Ansari, 1992; Cheesman, 1997; Jaffrelot, 2015).

¹¹⁹ See also: Schimmel, Annemarie (1982), *Islam in India and Pakistan*. Brill.

In Sindh, Savarna class also did not lag behind the Ashrafia to share power. The pre-Partition strand of Sindhi nationalism resulted. The Hindu and non-Sayed Pirs affiliated with the heterodox cults were invariably aligned with the Sayeds, so much so that the narratives of the spiritual affiliations of Hindu Pirs or sants with the Sayeds also abound serving the vital Sindhi nationalist claim of syncretic Sufi Sindh. This preexisting syncretism of Sayedism and Sufi Islam was used by the cohort of Jati Hindu writers, beginning with late 19th century, to find the common grounds of existence in the Muslim dominated Sindhi society. To that end, for instance, during the British rule, the separation of Sindh from the Bombay Presidency served as the common goal to unite transcending the boundaries of religion while letting caste function normatively (Hussain, 2019, Khuhro, 1982; Malkani, 1984). To that end, they, for instance, attempted to redefine Shah Latif as the Sufi poet of inter-faith harmony¹²⁰ (see Gidumal, 2017), the notion that has been persistently rediscovered by the Ashrafia ruling class led by Sayeds¹²¹.

Sayedism flourished under the nose of Political Islam, and later under the slogan of modern Sindhi nationalism, a political Sufism premised on the unity of Sindhi people, irrespective of caste and religion, to create an autonomous state of Sindh render casteism a non-issue (see Hussain, 2019a; Hussain, 2019b). The leading ideologue of Sindh G.M.Sayed attempted to patronize Sayeds by, for instance, inducting Sayed Pirs in Muslim League¹²² during the Partition phase (Ansari, 1992, p.129) when he had yet not propounded the Sufi nationalist ideology. G.M. Sayed played an instrumental role in the organization of Sayed-led conferences in villages and Sufi shrines such as Bukera Sharif, Jhok Sharif, Matiari, Hala and Shahpur Chakar (district Nawabshah) to acquaint ‘them with the League’s constructive program’. ‘At these gatherings, pirs participated as organizers, presidents and opening speakers’ (Ansari, 1992, p.121). This preponderance of Sayeds in

¹²⁰ The published contributions of the Sindhi Savarnas on Sufism and Shah Latif began with the Daya Ram Gidumal’s compilation of articles titled, ‘Something About Sindh’. It was followed by the contributions of Diwan Lilaram (1880), Jhamatmal Vasvani, Bherumal, Lalchand Amar Dino Mal, MM Gidvani (1922), Hotchand Gurbakhshani (1923) to mention a few (see Husain, pp 7-13).

¹²¹ Take for instance the example of Sayed Sardar Ali Shah, the Minister of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities, who in 2017 on the 274th anniversary of Shah Abdul Latif (Sayed), a Sufi poet floated an idea to republish the books on Sufism and Shah Latif written by Daya Ram Gidu Mal, Leelaram Watanmal, and Kalyan Advani (Jati Hindus) along with Mirza Qaleech Baig and H.T. Sorley’s contributions. (see Sindhi, 2017, p.5). It resulted in the drive to republish books and organize conferences and seminars on Shah Latif and Sufism.

¹²² ‘League’s drive to recruit more pirs, which was once reinforced by G. M. Syed, with his family links to many pir families, became President of the League after Haroon’s death in May 1942’. (see Sarah Ansari, 1992, pg. 129).

Provincial Muslim Leagues rose concerns that GM Sayed was planning to form the ‘Saiyad League’ and ‘Saiyad Raj’ (Ansari, 1992, 123). Along with the gradual mainstreaming of Sayeds in the democratic process, came the ideologies that combined Sayedism with Brahminic practices disguised as Sufism and Sanatan Dharam (see Jaffrelot, 2009), and that task in Sindh was performed by both the Savarna Sindhis and Ashrafia elite (Sayeds, Pirs and tribal chiefs and landlords). G.M.Sayed emerged as the leading proponent of that version of political Sufism, politically termed by its proponents as Sindhi nationalism (see Verkaaik, 2004; Leveque, 2016; Hussain, 2019a; Hussain, 2019b).

Notwithstanding that, the Sufi Shrine was an Islamic institution that regulated the inter-caste and inter-kinship behavior of the people along with the religious one whereby Sayed or Pir, served as the divine mediator in inter-caste and inter-religious conflicts. This inter-caste-based role of the shrine and Pir suited Dalits more than the Savarnas, as they were less religiously organized than their Savarna counterparts and were willing to adopt any other religious or secular ideology that could promise their emancipation.

This historically oppressive and discriminatory equation of Dalitbahujans dominated by Sayed Pirs reflects in the power structure of contemporary Sindh whereby Pir or murshid (spiritual guide) is often found to be a Sayed, the associate of Sayed, or the distant or near spiritual descendant of the Sayed. Any person without murshid (spiritual guide) is considered as stranded and disserted being. Similarly, *pitt* (curse) of pir is considered as equal to the divine condemnation, and a *pittiyal* (cursed) person is maltreated accordingly. The *pitt* of Sayed pir carries more weight than that of the non-Sayed pir. Hence, Sayedism and Pir-parasti (reverence for the spiritual guide or leader) are usually found embedded in Sindh.

The ongoing casteist bias and the hegemony of Ashrafia are seen by Ambedkarites having links with the Brahmanism. For instance, Surender Valasai (a Dalit politician from Sindh) calls the current Ashrafia class in Pakistan as the follower of Manu Maharaj (who codified caste system), ‘the Brahmin minds whether they are in green or saffron colors’. By green, he means Muslims as they are shown in the flag to make up a larger section of Pakistan’s population. Whereas the saffron is a metaphor commonly used for Hindu sants (mystic) and also for Hindutvadis, that Sono Khangarani (a leading Dalit activist in Pakistan) identifies to mainly originate from three Savarna caste groups, namely, Vaniya/Saithiyā, Sodha Thakurs, and Brahmins. In terms of their hegemony over Dalits, these Savarna castes are second only to Sayed, Baloch, and Sammāt, the three politically, ideologically and culturally dominant Ashrafia classes in Sindh. This domination can be

best evidenced in the form of caste-based hierarchies of Pirs with Sayeds predominating both in terms of numbers as well as caste capital followed by other Ashrafia and Savarna Pirs respectively.

3.4.2 State Sponsorship of Political Islam and Sufism

According to pasmanda scholars, the Ashrafia class has dominated politics in the name of Islam and Sufism, the religious and cultural practices that were recast in an ideology based on Hindu-Muslim binaries (see Ansari, 2009; Falahi, 2012; Ansari, 2016). Hence, the Ashrafia advantage, by and large, is the product of pre-existing historical hegemonic relations than any conscious strategy, and directly imposed domination. The ideology that (the Indian) Muslims are a nation different from Hindus, and that Ashrafia class is superior to Hindus and Bengali Muslims, was initially conceived during the Aligarh Movement (Falahi, 2009). Aligarh Movement was launched in the late 19th century by Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan and continued by his pro-British Ashrafia class. Allama Muhammad Iqbal (from the ex-Brahmin Kashmiri family) further refined the idea of Muslim nationhood based on Hindu-Muslim binaries, during the 1920s and 1930s, that culminated in the form of movement for separate nationhood for Muslims (see Aziz, 1993; Talbot, 2009; Jalal, 2014, pp.25-27). Hence, due to the politics of the Brahminic forces that began at least as early as the 8th century (see Tambs-Lyche, 2016)¹²³, followed by the impact of the Mughal and the British classifications of castes, religions and ethnic groups, the Ashrafia hegemony was reinforced and consolidated both politically and ideologically (see Aziz, 1993; Talbot, 2009; Jalal, 2014, pp.25-27). In Pakistan, at the micropolitical level, it led to the reinvigoration of Ashrafia hegemony under the garb of Islam and Sufism. (see Ewing, 1983, p. 256; Ansari, 1992; Talbot, 2009). Instead of identifying the roots of casteism, that were partly assimilated from Brahminic ideology, and partly lay in Arab customary laws of Kafa'ah/ Kufu' that entered through Muslim Arab migrants, and that pertained to contracting marriages based on *hasb* (social status) and *nasb* (descent) (Falahi, 2009)¹²⁴;

¹²³ In the context of Saurashtra and Tamil Nadu in India, Harald Tambs-Lyche (2016) writes that, “ from around 800 A.D., the Tamil kingdoms of the South ‘imported’ large number of Brahmins and settled them in Brahmadeya-gift-to-Brahmins-villages, clearly to underpin a new type of royalty founded on enormous temples (mainly to Shiva), situate in the royal capitals” (p.27).

¹²⁴ Falahi writes that, to make 'Kufu' the essential part of the law of Islamic Shariah, the All India Muslim Personal Law board and its Ulema Wing published a book titled, 'Majmua-i-Qawaneen-i-Islami' (Compendium of Islamic Laws) (see Falahi, 2009, p.543). In religious seminaries, students are taught to interpret rules of Kufu as based on principles of Islam (Falahi, 2009, p.546) This descent-based system is often legitimized through certain sayings of the prophet Muhammad. For instance they quote 'Take ye care, that none contract in marriage but their

Falahi, 2012), the Islamic scholars attempted to disown ‘caste’ by labeling it as a Hindu thing, the intellectual ritual that Muslim and Pakistani politicians and ideologues inherited from the pre-partition Ashrafia class. The politically motivated denial was considered necessary to construct the sociocultural contrast between caste-neutral Pakistan and caste-ridden Hindu India. This ideological trajectory, wittingly or unwittingly, allowed the state and succeeding governments to take for granted the casteism embedded in localized Islamic and Sufi practices. The state was primarily focused on the best way Islam could be defined, instead of taking steps to eradicate social evils that the newly conceived Pakistani society inherited from undivided India.

The political use of Sufism served the double purpose for Ashrafia Class. On the one hand, it hid Sayedism from the critical political gaze, and on the other sustained the denial of casteism and Dalit exclusion. This re-normalization of casteism and Dalit exclusion often reflects in the political statements of Ashrafia politicians and statesmen (see, the statement of Barrister Zafarullah in section 1.2). The statement contradicted Zafarullah Khan’s own words in his book, ‘Islam and the Contemporary World’. Referring to Pakistani society, he writes, ‘There is not much respect or regard for human rights and the rule of law in our societies, which are mostly sectarian, tribal and caste-based’ (Khan, 2016). The level of ‘cognitive dissonance’ (mismatch between the existential reality of casteism and the counterclaims aimed at justifying or relativizing it¹²⁵) can also be inferred from similar denial-based counterarguments of the state representatives. For instance, in a TV Talkshow General Hameed Gul, the former Chief of ISI¹²⁶ tried to convince Swamy Subramanian, a Hindutva ideologue that casteism is an Indian or Hindu problem, and, therefore, has no place in Pakistan, the country founded on the principles of Islam. ‘[Hinduism] is the only religion in the world in which the class system is based on hatred against their people. They [Dalits] are not allowed to read sacred books and are barred from

proper guardians, and that they be not so contracted except with equals’ (Bukhari, 1862:436). According to Shafiullah Anis (2019), a pasmanda activist, all major schools of Islamic thought except Maliki take inspiration from such sayings of the prophet to legitimize social hierarchies and thus casteism. Maliki school, being rooted in African societies which became victims of Western and Arab slavery, did not formulate elaborate schemes of social statuses based on descent as did other schools of thought.

¹²⁵ On ‘cognitive dissonance’ as the analytic concept, see Festinger (1962) and, Olsen and Schober (1993).

¹²⁶ Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is the secret intelligence agency of Pakistan.

entering temples'¹²⁷, argued Hamid Gul. This kind of counter-argumentation, that denies casteism in Pakistan through the performative reframing of 'caste-neutral' or 'caste-less' Islam, and the casteist Hindu¹²⁸ India, is the common feature of state-driven anti-Indian discourse.

Caste-blindness is also the parallel reason for the neglect of Dalit issue, and that blindness is translated into policy suggestions. Take for instance the data and information on socio-economic inequalities relied upon by the United Nations for Sustainable Development Goals¹²⁹. The Goal no.10, on reducing inequalities, picks up Qaisar Bengali's¹³⁰ article written in Dawn that not only does not mention caste-based discrimination as the major factor but instead misrepresents Dalit issue by reframing nomadic tribal community (Dalits) as urban population pushed by the government to live into shanty houses.¹³¹ Nomadic communities are the ultra-subalterns that have not been accepted to become the part of society at large, not to mention of either urban or rural society.

3.4.3 Political Sufism in Sindh

While the representatives of Pakistani state construct(ed) the master narrative based on Hindu-Muslim binaries that could see casteism in India but was blind to it in Pakistan, the Sindhi Ashrafia class attempt(ed) achieve synergy between Sindhi Hindus and Muslims irrespective of caste discriminations. Based on the idealistic rhetoric that 'Sindh is the land of Sufis'¹³², the attempt was made to draw the contrast between religiously biased Pakistani Islam and the accommodative Sindhi Sufism. This otherization of a 'Pakistani Muslim'

¹²⁷ For the detailed exchange of arguments and counterarguments between Swami Subramanian and General Hamid Gul, see URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=95pIUzSths. Retrieved on October 3, 2018.

¹²⁸ The term 'Hindu' is being increasingly defined by the leading Hindutva ideologues such as Swami Subramanian and Rajiv Malhotra, as the cultural group occupying certain geographical area.

¹²⁹ See 'Pakistan's Challenges: Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030'. URL: <http://www.un.org.pk/pakistans-challenges-sustainable-development-goals-2015-2030/>.

¹³⁰ Qaisar Bengali is a former advisor for planning and development to the Sindh chief minister.

¹³¹ See a picture of nomadic community (Dalits) is explained in this manner: "The state's reluctance to provide low and middle-income housing has pushed over half the urban population into shanty towns. —White Star". URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1286226/pakistans-casino-economy-a-blueprint-for-inequality>.

¹³² In his inaugural address to an International Sufi Conference held in 2018 at Karachi, Sindh, Sayed Sardar Ali Shah, Minister of Culture and Tourism, said, 'Welcome to all of you on this land of Sindh, which is also called the land of Sufis and Saints'. This shows that the narrative of Sufi Sindh is as vibrant as it was some decades back.

and identification with the ‘Sindhi-Hindu’ diluted the question of casteism without addressing caste-based discriminations.

To reclaim their lost ethnic-geographical unity, Sindhi Ashrafia presented Sufi identity of Sindh to bring it into sharp contrast with the Pakistani Islam. This created the cohorts of literary progressive writers and the activists with the secular bent of mind, who were also joined by local Marxists the Sufi representation of Sindh, as both conceived change possible through socialist Sufism (Sayed, 2011). The Sindhi nationalists with Marxist-Leninist and the Moist orientation regarded caste as a precapitalistic institution that was to soon fade away under the influence reformed Sindhi socialist society. The prominent among the politicians were GM Sayed, Shaikh Abdul Majeed Sindhi (Savarna convert), Haider Bux Jatoh (Baloch), Rais Ghulam Mustafa Bhurgri (Baloch), Ghulam Muhammad Laghari (Baloch), Sobho Giyan Chandani (Savarna), Shaikh Ayaz (Savarna convert) and Rasool Bux Paleejo (Sammāt) (Qureshi, 2013). In the idealistic vein, these Ashrafia-Savarna politicians and the activists presumed that the problem of casteism has long been resolved by Sufism. They saw the Sardari system (tribal or caste units headed by the tribal chief) either as neutral instruments of identification, or the aberrations of an otherwise egalitarian tribal and Sufi culture that Sindh inherited.

GM Sayed, a founding member of Anjuman Saadat (Sayed) association¹³³, and the founder of Bazm-i-Sufiya-i-Sindh (Association of Sufis of Sindh) created a genealogical ideology of nationalism that aimed at proving him the political inheritor of the Syncretic Sufi movement of Sayed Makhdoom Bilawal that wanted to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity as against another Sayed Mian Muhammad Jaunpuri who had launched a Mehdvi Tehreek, the Bralevi Islamic movement¹³⁴ that supposedly preached pro-Islamic version of

¹³³ In his early years of political career, in March 1924 G.M Sayed established Anjuman Saadat in Matiari and Sann for the educational uplift of Sayeds. GM Sayed’s close associate during the days of Partition, [Pir Ali Muhammad Rashdi](#), a feudal politician founded a caste-based party called Anjuman Senate Rashidiya, and contested election from its platform. He also issued a newspaper Al-Rashid and became its editor in 1938 to promote and publicize its members. In post-partition Sindh in 1955, Rashdi played an instrumental role in convincing Sayeds and Pirs of Sindh to support One-unit (merger of Sindh into West Pakistan province) proposal of the federation. His book ‘*oohe deenh, oohe sheenh* (translated, ‘Sindh: Ways and Days: A Medley of Memories, Hunting, and Sport’, Oxford University Press, 2003), provides insights into his feudal casteist mindset in which he draws biographical sketches of local caste lords in relation to their favorite pastime, that is, hunting.

¹³⁴ See Paigham-i-Latif (1952), the online translated book of GM Sayed, URL: <http://www.gmsyed.org/latif/book4-chap10.html>. Accessed on, January 22, 2019.

Sufism. Haider Sanai, the great grand grandfather of GM Sayed was a close associate of Makhdoom Bilawal¹³⁵, the ancestral legacy GM Sayed was very proud of. Tracing the history of Sindh from mythical Vedic age to independent Sindh in times of Raja Dahir (700 AD), a Brahmin king, and anchoring Sindhi nationalist ideology in Shah Latif, another geological ancestor, GM Sayed defined Sindhi Sufi nationalism having roots in Vedantic ideology of Hinduism and socialism, and antipathy towards Shrine culture and capitalism. Drawing the connection of Sindh with Vedantic ideology G.M Sayed explained that “In India and Sindhu Desh, the theory of one God was produced [by Aryans], which was called *Monis* [Unity], [and as per] interpretation of Sankara. [Monis or] *Vehdaniat* was non-existence of Duality’ and the merger of parts in the whole, the theory that was further explained through “the code of Maunoo Sumarti, which took different lines from the code of Messes’ (Sayed, 1982).

Following in the syncretic ideological mixture that relied on the real or mythical history of the Dravidian, Aryan, Buddhist and Brahmin Sindh with the primacy accorded to Aryan-Vedic interpretation explained through Islamic mystic jargon, the Savarna that were previously attacked as casteist began to be reimagined as Sindhi Sufis and their migration to India was lamented as the great economic loss for Sindh (Malkani, 1984, Sayed, 2013). At that juncture, pre-partition attempts of Savarna to construct syncretic Sindhi Sufi identity was brought to the fore to articulate Sindhi Sufi identity as a unique blend of Sanatan Dharam¹³⁶ (the religious practices assumed to be rooted in Indus/Vedic civilization and ‘based on the doctrine of the Upanishads, especially in its monistic form’¹³⁷) and Islamic mysticism. A person having reached spiritual sublimation following Sanatan Dharam is called Sant. To seek the unique fusion of Hindu-Muslims, the sants and the Sufis of the past, particularly Ismaili Pirs with Hindu genealogical background, such as Rama Pir and Pir Pithoro, Jhuley Lal, Zindah Pir, were recast as proof of historical legacy of Sufi Sindh (see Sayed, 1986, pp-6-7).

Hence, with GM Sayed’s efforts, ‘Sufi’ emerged as the blanket term that meant any Hindu ascetic or Muslim mystic usually of Sindhi origin. GM Sayed and Sindhi progressive

¹³⁵ Makhdoom Bilawal belonged to the ruling Sammo caste (Sammat) of Sindh and is known for putting up a vigorous opposition against Shah Beg Arghun in Sindh in the 15-16th century.

¹³⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica defines **Sanātan Dharam**, as a ‘term used to denote the “eternal” or absolute set of duties or religiously ordained practices incumbent upon all Hindus, regardless of class, caste, or sect.’ (See [URL:https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sanātana-dharma](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sanātana-dharma), Accessed on December 4, 2018).

¹³⁷ See English Oxford Living Dictionaries.

URL: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/vedanta>. Accessed on December 8, 2018.

writers published literature on Sufism that considerably departed from Islamic version of Sufism, and resonated more with the desi¹³⁸ Hinduistic narrative of Gandhi (Sayed, 2013), and the Hindutvadi ideology of Golwalker and Vivekanand Swamy, the political ideologies that were, according to Ambedkarite scholar G Aloysius (2013), meant to re-establish the Brahminic order in post-British India (Aloysius, 1998,p 213). This resonance was not unconscious assimilation of ideas, but a well-thought-out political strategy. The fact that GM Sayed knew very well the ideological connections between Sindhi and Hindu nationalism in India can be gauged from his views on separating Sindh from Pakistan to make the confederal part of India, and from his presentation of ‘Religion and Reality’ (a book banned in Pakistan) to Congress and RSS¹³⁹ delegates in Delhi during his visit to India in 1987 (Malkani, 1984, 145-46). The Savarna Sindhis that migrated to India were (are) aware of their historically grounded linkages with Sindhi nationalism, and did (do) not spare the opportunity to express their patriotism for Sindh that is usually framed in a Savarna pride in Brahma Samaj, RSS, and other Brahminic organizations that, in their viewpoint ‘transformed Sindh from a slimy backwater into a small but significant province.’ (Malkani, 1984, 68). Many Savarna intellectuals and scholars of Sindhi origin were members of the RSS even before the partition of the Subcontinent; they continued to correspond with the Sindhi nationalist leaders who had become antipathetic towards the state of Pakistan. For instance, ‘Gangaram Samrat, a staunch Arya Samaji, an RSS sympathizer and writer of vitriolic books against Islam, continued to share warm correspondence with G M Syed and other Muslim leaders in Sindh’ (see Kothari, 2006, p.3013).

GM Sayed’s ideology, however, considerably departed from essentially fascist influences of the RSS that it had borrowed from Nazism. Instead, Sayed blended Vedantic and Islamic mysticism with the ideological currents that emanated out of European Enlightenment, French Revolution and Marxism (Sayed, 2013). This remarkably original blending of the modern and the local culture continues to hold appeal for the Sindhi intelligentsia and the public at large, particularly for the lower middle class of Sindhi Ashrafia.

¹³⁸ On the notion of ‘desi’ from the Ambedkarian perspective sees Gopal Guru (2011). The idea of India: ‘Derivative, Desi and Beyond’. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(37), 36–42.

¹³⁹ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Brahma Samaj are believed by Ambedkarites as the fascist and extremist Hindu organizations.

3.4.4 Minoritisation of Dalits

The terminological and ideological twists at the state level set up the tone for the political narratives in which ‘minority’ emerged as the major signifier for all non-Muslim and the Scheduled Castes or the Dalits. Most of the popular literature in Pakistan uses the ‘minority’ and ‘Hindu’ as the blanket terms to define and classify Scheduled Castes or the Dalits. with the result that the state-sanctioned category for Dalits, that is, ‘Scheduled Castes’ is avoided, skipped, and sometimes termed pejorative by the in the civil society, and instead, the ‘minority’ as is proffered. Dalit activists too are, thus, compelled to pitch their demands from the ‘minority’ platforms that view the caste and class and issue from the lens religion. To show the brighter side of the minority status in Pakistan, the state often portrayed minorities as a well-attended, secure and very productive section of the society. For instance, the Government of Sindh’s, Minority Affairs Department gives a brief background of minorities in Sindh that reads: “The Hindus in Pakistan are well educated and active in business and agriculture and contribute to the GDP of the Country. Hindus and other minorities living abroad contribute to sending foreign exchange to the province of Sindh.”¹⁴⁰ This interpretation and the use of the ‘Hindu’ marker, Dalit activists argue, serves for the Savarnas as the kind of political instrument to hide the ‘Scheduled Castes’ category that signified the sharp contrast between the Dalits and Savarnas.

The Dalit status of the poor class of Hindus does not feature much in such minority reports since they can be subsumed under the Hindu or minority category. (Malik, 2002; Samad, 2007; Castellino & Redondo, 2006; Ispahani, 2016) Minority reports underrepresent and gloss over oppression and discrimination that the poor class of Hindu (Dalits) suffers. It happens because the constitutionally sanctioned category for Dalits, that is ‘Scheduled Castes’ is skipped in governmental procedures, in public, and civil society circles. The ‘minority’ as the blanket identity is proffered by both the state itself and also by the United Nations. The U.N. recently recognized the limits of addressing casteism from within the minority rights framework, as the Dalits groups “may not strictly fall under the category of minority groups.” (UN’s Human Rights Council, 2016). Still, most Human rights committees formed by Pakistan’s government do not appoint or invite any ‘Dalit’ in the capacity of the representative of the ‘Dalit’ but as a minority. Change, however, has occurred after the formation of DST, and the Dalit activists, that were previously dormant,

¹⁴⁰ Background of Minorities in Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Minority Affairs Department. URL: <http://www.sindh.gov.pk/dpt/MinorityAffairs/backgroundofminority.htm>. Retrieved on 29th of August 2017.

have begun speaking from within minority-based forums. Resultantly, some of them have been inducted as members of different committees. For instance, Sindh Human Rights Commission¹⁴¹, which had been headed by a Syed (Rizvi¹⁴²) since its formation, along with the privileged caste fellows who have been appointed as its core members. Deviating the norm, however, it appointed five out of 11 as committee members from among the pro-Dalit activists, two members of which belonging to DST. Hence, although there were only one Dalit and four Savarnas from within Jati Hindus, ten Ashrafia, and one Christian woman on the list, the appointment of 5 pro-Dalit members was a positive sign, that probably could not have been possible if Dalits had not been assertive. A DST activist working with different Human rights and minority organizations told that ‘they have kept Dr. Sono Khanagarani¹⁴³ on the committee’s panel lest Scheduled Caste activists make hue and cry’. It means that although it was indicative of the coming change and paradigmatic shift it is too early to say that Dalit activism ultimately prevails to convince the state, government and the social or political organizations to take Dalit issues on board. The general referential tags like the ‘minority rights activist’ and the ‘human rights defender’, continue to shroud over caste-class fault lines and fail to show which castes or communities are thus underrepresented or excluded from committees made in the name of ‘minority’. The minority narrative is constructed in such a manner that it flattens the victimization of Dalits within minorities and pits them against the dominant Muslim majority. This discursive trajectory is politically at variance with the Dalitbahujan claim of constituting the ‘majority-in-minority’ across religions. Resultantly, the Savarnas within Jati Hindus castes are also allowed to claim victimization based on alleged forced migration, forced conversion, kidnapping for ransom and temple desecration. The upwardly mobile Dalit

¹⁴¹ Justice retired Mrs. Majida Rizvi, a Syed, has been appointed Sindh Human Rights Commission for four consecutive tenures since the formation of commission. the Commission shall comprise the following members: Two members of Provincial Assembly of Sindh to be nominated by Speaker (already nominated Sharmila Farooqui, MPA and Ms. Kulsoom Chandio, MPA); Syed Hassan Shah, Retired District and Sessions Judge; Ms. Shamshad, Arshad Academy Hyderabad; Ms. Rubina Brohi, Advocate shall be members while Director, Directorate of Human Rights to be member/ Secretary. The Chairperson and the Member shall, unless resigned or removed earlier, hold office for a term of three years. Source: URL Website: <http://sindhinformation.gos.pk> Retrieved on 29th of August 2017.

¹⁴² Rizvi are believed to be the descendants of the 8th Shiite Imam and a descendant and successor of Prophet Mohammad through his daughter Fatimah married with Ali ibn Abi Talib, Imam Mohammad al-Taqi al Jawad. Since the Rizvi clan trace their lineage to Fatimah al Zehra, they often to use the prefix Syed (or its synonyms) in front of their name. URL: <https://www.geni.com/surnames/rizvi> . Retrieved on 29th of August 2017.

¹⁴³ Sono Khangarani is believed by many local Thari Dalits as the Ambedkar of Pakistan.

activists are often influenced by Savarna propaganda to twist economic and social vulnerability into the issue of religious persecution. These religiopolitical issues make the core of the minority politics while the economic oppression in the form of bonded labor, untouchability and sexual harassment that mainly affects are either ignored or constructed as the generic ‘minority’ issues. What goes missing in the process is the domination of Savarnas castes and the resultant political exclusion of Dalits, and the usurpation of ‘minority’ funds. This domination of the ‘minority’ paradigm then translates even at international forums (UNHCR, 2012, p. 31-33) thereby becoming the major reason for the alienation of Dalits at the international and the global level. In this study, I mount the Dalibahujan critique of this state-sponsored alienation of the Dalits, as viewed by the Dalit activists.

3.5 Harijanized Activism: Dalit’s Historical Imaginary

All human beings including the Brahmins and the Baniyas must learn to live with the kind of confidence that the Dalitbahujans have. What is that confidence? ; The confidence that 'our tomorrow is guaranteed by our labor. That is possible only when they begin to think in terms of the Dalitization of brahminical society.

(Kancha Ilaiah, Why I am not a Hindu, 2002, p.119)

While Kancha Ilaiah suggests to Dalitise (decastify) the Brahminic world in India, the Dalitbahujans in India and Pakistan do not seem ready or rather willing to realize that goal and continue to be exploited under the Ashrafia and Savarna hegemony. Instead, as Dalit activists argue, they are being further lured into accepting Hindutva ideology. The vernacular literature shared by the Dalit activists as well as by the anti-DST individuals coupled with the conversational interviews and ethnographic observations informed me that the earliest anti-caste activists in Sindh, more than Ambedkarites, were the followers of Gandhi.

I will further explain in this section how the Dalits in Pakistan were either Christianized or Harijanized by the time the Partition of the Subcontinent occurred (see Mandal 1950; Mal, 2000; Jaffrelot, 2003; Talbot, 2010; Dharani, 2015; Jaffrelot, 2015; Ansari, 2016; Sen 2012a; Sen 2012b; Sen 2018). Long before partition, in Punjab, most of the Dalits belonging to Chuhra community had converted to Christianity, and others to Islam to be known as ‘*Mussalis*’ (little Muslims), or Sheikh Muslims (Streefland, 1979; O’Brien, 2012; Singha, 2015). In Sindh too, however, Dalitbahujans and Savarnas converted to Islam in large numbers, and to abet it, Arya Samaj Movement was also launched. Yet, the existence of the majority of the non-Muslim population estimated 20 to

60 percent in urbanized and the southern parts of Sindh before partition is the proof that several castes and communities did not convert to Islam although they were heavily influenced by it and in turn had influenced Sindhi Muslims. That had resulted in the syncretic culture of which Sindhi nationalists feel proud of (Malkani K. R., 1984; Levesque, 2016). This syncretic equation brought Savarna proselytes affiliated with the Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj and the RSS in a favorable position. The purpose was either to Hinduise them to pit them against the Muslims, or to Harijanize to better fit into the Gandhian program to Harijanize or in a local context to Sindhize Dalit communities to improve the demographic and political standing of 'Hindus' vis-à-vis dominant Muslims. To achieve that goal, for instance, Harijan Sevak Sangh opened up Harijan Schools, hostels, *asharams* (hermitage) and Harijan colonies, and awarded scholarships to Dalit students to mainstream them into Hindu culture (Kolhi, 2014; Dharani, 2015).

Before Partition, the Dalits were concentrated in the Thar Desert and were under the subjugation of Sodha Thakurs. Sodha Thakurs were feared by them as they belonged to Hindus of Kshatriya (warrior) caste. Before Partition, Indian National Congress was also very active in Thar region and adopted the two-pronged strategy to reform Hindu society and ensured Dalit inclusion in the modern Hindu society. It established Harijan schools for Dalits and dug up wells (Dharani, 2015, p. 147-148). Dalit activists having no other option expressed similar eagerness to be mainstreamed as they did (or do) when evangelical or missionary service proffers them monetary and social security benefits. Congress and the Hindu missionary organizations adopted a similar strategy. It shows that Dalit marginality and socioeconomic deprivation also greatly affected the political decision that the leaders took at different times. For instance, a local Dalit activist, Kelash Kolhi, told that Punho Mal Hamriani (Meghwar) from Tharparkar Sindh met with Ambedkar in the 1930s, got impressed by B.R. Ambedkar but ultimately end up joining Congress in 1935 after meeting with Swami Krishnanand who became a member of Sindh Assembly in pre-partition phase. Swami Krishnanand also arranged his meeting with Gandhi that resulted in the opening of 30 Harijan schools in Tharkparkar, Sindh (Dharani, 2015, p. 112). In this manner began the organization of Dalits in Sindh as the Harijans, the so-called Hindus that required to be disciplined.

Over time, many Dalits were turned into Harijan activists and were made members of the Congress and other Hindu organizations. Eighty-year-old Ravto Meghwar told that his father was a chief of a village panchayat and would participate in almost all major protests and movements initiated by Gandhi or the Congress. According to Somji Dharani,

a local Meghwar activist, Punhumal Haimarani and Sarup Chand Gohel of Pholgari village of Parkar Parkar actively participated in the 'Quit India' movement and other non-violent political protests from the platform of Congress. With the assistance from Congress, Sarup Chand succeeded in opening up Gujarati schools in Kolhi Veri and Pholpuri in 1922, and in Nangarpark he opened up Harijan Asharam for Dalits where they were imparted education in English (Dharani, 2015). It was the popular appeal of Gandhi and the materiality of the immediate provision of educational facilities proffered by Hindu missionary organizations that fascinated Dalits more than the ideologically radical anti-caste politics of B.R.Ambedkar. Hence, under the Savarna patronage, Dalits as Harijan activists emerged. The notable among them were Punhoo Mal Hamirani Meghwar, Alam Chand Kolhi, Sugarchand Seju and Ghaman Singh Bheel who chose the Gandhian way to bring their communities into the mainstream (Dharani, 2015). Punhoo Mal Hamirani Meghwar, Alam Chand Kolhi, and Ghaman Singh Bheel established 'Harijan Samaj Sudhar Sangat' in 1948 and facilitated the employment of Dalit youth (Dharani, 2015). In 1954 again Harijan Movement was re-launched with its first session held at village Veerhar, Talluka Diplo. Amar Ghaman Singh was elected its central President. Punho Mal Hamirani, Maharchand Balani (1917-1990), Sugarchand Sej (Parkar), Karu Mal (Islamkot), Alam Chand Kolhi and Ghaman Singh Bheel were some of the leading Congressite Dalits or rather Harijan Sevaks. They played an instrumental role in opening up several Harijan schools and ashrams in Tharparkar and lower Sindh that triggered the wave of harijanization\sanskritization that, in process, made Adivasi tribes and castes more Hindu than ever before. Harijan schools served as nurseries for the Congress to prepare social and political workers for the Congress. 'Harijan' students would be instructed to attend and listen to the speeches of Congress leaders and act upon the principles of Hindu Dharam. For instance, Alam Chand Gohel, son of Sarup Chand, got his early education in local Harijan School and after partition rose as the prominent Harijan political leader of a socialist mindset.

Harijanization had become normalized by the time the subcontinent was partitioned. Several Harijan colonies sprang up in small towns in Sindh and Harijan Associations were formed. Harijan activists even sought the assistance of Fatima Jinnah to open some more schools in the Thar region (Dharani, 2015, p. 76). Harijanization was accepted as a norm even by Muslim educationists. (Dharani, 2015, p. 192). Khushiram Trust would award scholarships to both 'Lower caste' Muslims and Scheduled Castes. It continued to award such scholarships even and till recent years (Dharani, 2015, pp. 228-29). Rana C. Rathore,

a leading Dalit activist, who founded Scheduled Castes Educational Committee and Scheduled Castes Association (SCA) in 1972, has also been its member. It shows the gradual departure from essentially Harijan identity to Hindu and Scheduled Caste. During that period, the Jati Hindu socialist and the leftist reformists (mostly Savarnas) from the Muslim feudal class also began indulging in Dalit reformation.

Over time, Dalits of Tharparkar began to settle in the barrage area of lower Sindh as landless peasants and wage laborers. As they settled on the land provided by the local landlords mainly for agricultural labor, they were not allowed to indulge in other social activities. Gradually circumstances began changing for a few of them but with the support of local leftist activists from the Ashrafia and Savarna classes. For instance, the first-ever permanent Parkari Kolhi village in Barrage area at Mirpurkhas was established in the late 1970s by Paru Mal Kolhi was supported by Comrade Ghulam Muhammad Laghari and Mir Muhammad Talpur. The school was built on the land left by Hindu families of Manohar Lal and Gogar Bai who migrated to India after the 1971 Indo-Pak War (Mal, 2000, p. 153). Mir Muhammad Talpur was reputedly known as an anti-feudal landlord and the staunch advocate of land reforms. He was the one who helped refine Bhutto's socialist agenda of '*Roti, Kapra aur Makan*' (Meal, Clothes, and House) that Zulfikar Bhutto used for his popular socialist politics. Mir Muhammad Talpur, together with Miskeen Jahan Khan Khoso would visit Nangarparkar to tend to Parkari Kolhi. Both Comrades were political friends of Parkari Kolhi leaders Alam Chand and Chitir Bhuj Kolhi. (Mal, 2000, p. 153).

All Sindh Kolhi Association (ASKA) was formed in the early 1970s. Bhooro Mal Kolhi emerged as one of the leading Dalit activists from the Kolhi community during that period. He was an assistant editor of weekly "Sachai" and newspaper 'Bedari' of Comrade Ghulam Muhammad Laghari. (Jani, 2014, p. 37). Together with Paru Mal, he celebrated the first Rooplo Kolhi anniversary at Nabi Sar, Mirpurkhas in 1973. He arranged for the education of several poor children from the platform of ASKA. Bhooro Mal campaigned for the scholarships of Dalit students during Zia's era and succeeded in convincing the government. Scheduled Castes students are receiving that scholarship even to this day. He has been the staunch supporter of the peasant movement in Sindh and remained the close associate of peasant leaders such as Comrade Qasim Pathar, Jam Saqi, and Faqeer Muqem (Jani, 2014, p. 37). He also wrote a treatise on "How Thar and Parkar can be developed" that was subsequently published in daily Ibrat. He contested in B.D elections from Islamkot, Tharparkar, and PS-62 Nangarparkar. (Sindhi Language Authority, 2014)

Dalits were also used as proxies in tribal-caste political rivalries in Sindh. For instance, Moolchand Kudecha was pitted by Arbab family against Sodha Thakurs during the 1957-58 local government (BD¹⁴⁴) elections. These were the early years of the shift in political leadership in Thar in which the power of Sodha Thakurs was on the decline. Arbab family, their maternal Muslim cousins were emerging as their rivals, and to out beat, each other to have control over Dalits was considered a must. In a Muslim country, Sodha Thakurs, who were steeped in Hinduism and would treat Scheduled Castes as virtual untouchables could not sustain their social and political hold for long. Dalits were, however, also encouraged by socialist or the leftist political workers to contest against the Sodha Thakurs. For instance, Alam Chand Gohel (Kolhi) had the full support of peasant socialists such as Comrade Mir Ali Baksh Talpur, Mir Muhammad Talpur, Miskeen Jahan Khan Khoso, and Comrade Ghulam Muhammad Laghari. Alam Chand was elected as Chairman in the local body's elections in 1966 and in it, he defeated Sodha Rajput Rana Achal Singh. It was celebrated as the first known Kolhi-Dalit victory over the hegemony of Sindhi feudals of Tharparkar. Although after the 1971 war, Alam Chand left Parkar and Sindh and migrated to Desa in Gujarat, it was the political inspiration of Alam Chand and his father Sarup Chand Gohel that paved the way for Kolhi and Dalits in the fields of politics, education and other occupations. (Mal, 2000, p. 178; Hussain, 2014)

Many of the Jati Hindu Congressites were Seth (Vaniya) and were in a position even to help Dalit students and families financially to win their favors for the Congress (Dharani, 2015). Bheel activism after the partition continued to be anchored in Harijanized legacy left by Harijan Sevak Sangh. With the efforts of Harijan activists, political consciousness was raised among the people with the result that several Dalits got elected as members of their respective Union councils in local government (BD Election) in 1966. Amar Ghaman Singh Bheel contested for the Chairmanship of the UC¹⁴⁵ against Habibullah Sand (Ashrafia). Both got the equal votes and it was, therefore, decided that each of the two would be chairman for the period of 2 1/5 years. It was an informal Baradari-based decision. When the tenure of Habibullah Sandh ended up, he did not comply with the baradari decision.

¹⁴⁴ Basic Democracies (BD) was the system of local government introduced by the President of Pakistan, General Ayub Khan during his rule in late 1965s.

¹⁴⁵ Union Council (UC) is the administrative unit consisting of several Dehs (clusters of villages)

Alam Chand, Sugarchand¹⁴⁶, Ghaman Singh and Punhoo Mal had also embarked upon the drive against untouchability and Brahmanism (Dharani, 2015). They wrote pamphlets and books. They launched a campaign against untouchability at public places and broke the utensils or Soneri (Golden) cups kept at hotels for the Dalits to serve them meals and drinks separately. This early Dalit leadership also allied with local Muslim social workers to uplift the oppressed and the marginalized. For instance, Amar Ghaman Singh Bheel would actively work for the rights of the Dalits even when he was recruited in the police as Jamadar. After being pressurized by the local Ashrafia landlords and the officers, he left the job of the police in 1953 to join the group of social workers of Thar namely, Miskeen Jahan Khan Khoso, Sachal Janjhi, Sugarchand, and Punho Meghwar. This shows that although Dalit leadership was conscious of their marginalization and exclusion, they did not take the radical path to align with the Ambedkar. Instead, they preferred to follow the Jati Hindu-led medium, firstly to join Congress and to have quick access to education that led to their Harijanization.

After partition, they again adopted a similar strategy to pay homage to the leading 'upper caste' politicians and to become subservient members of Hindu or 'minority' based associations to confront the immediate and very local level discrimination. Some of the activists innovated to combine both the Scheduled Castes and Hindu issues, such as Pakistan Meghwar Council, Mutahida Meghwar Forum, Scheduled Castes Association, Scheduled Castes Rights movement, and very recently Bheel Intellectual Forum, whereas others reverted to Hinduism after indulging with Dalit or Dravidian activism. For instance, Nihal Chaglani, Jhaman Jaan and Sangram Dapan that wanted to construct Dalit identity on Darāwaṛ nation abandoned activism when they got government jobs. Nihal Chaglani was an activist of SST, and now he is Sub Engineer at Lakhra Coal power plant. He was a sub-editor of 'Darāwaṛ publications' during 1985-86 in Sindh. Mr. Sangram Darpan has retired as Zonal Chief from Zaraee Tarqiyaati Bank and is a devout/ fanatic Hindu now. Dr. Jhaman Jaan is Senior Research Officer at Veterinary Research Laboratory Mithi and is a member of certain Hindu associations. He used to write articles and still supports Dravidian cause, but he has become inactive after physical ailments. Veerji Kolhi from Nangarparkar, who asserts Dravidian roots of Kolhi, finds a common cause with the Jews and the Hindus. That can be inferred from his online activities to contribute articles and

¹⁴⁶ Sugarchand also established Parkar Meghwar Panchayat and wrote a book 'Achetan jee Awaz' (The Voice of Untouchables'). During the 1971 Indo-Pak war, Sugarchand Seju migrated to Katch Bhuj in India and established a village Sugarpur near Bhuj.

share local data on atrocities against Hindus with the Hindu-Jewish Alliance of the International Forum for Unity and Equality¹⁴⁷.

Similarly, the Scheduled Castes Rights Movement (SCRM) that was formed in 2008 was active for some time for the rights of Dalits under the explicit patronage of Hare Rama Foundation, a Hindu reformist Association of Southern Punjab, and Guru Sukh Dev Bheel, a local Sanatan Dharmi reformist. Ramesh Jaipal Meghwar, son of Bhaiya Ram Anjum (PPP worker and now DST president Punjab), coordinated his activities with Hare Rama Foundation of which he also became the director in 2010. Hare Rama Foundation had played the leading role in the eradication of untouchability from public places in Rahim Yar Khan. Scheduled Castes would be served water in plastic shoppers and tea in separate cups. Very much like ‘Harijan’ activists of Tharparkar, activists of Hare Rama Foundation launched a drive against untouchability and created awareness against caste discrimination. With the time, food/eating-related untouchability has greatly disappeared the credit of which is given by Dalit activists of Punjab to Hare Rama Foundation. Hare Rama Foundation, however, was not much different from any other former Harijan Association managed by Jati Hindus, yet it was relatively advanced and progressive in approach. Dalits that were mainstreamed into Hindu religion were given social space to form their Scheduled Caste forum, and resultantly, SCRM was formed with the implicit understanding they would agitate for the rights and representation but would not criticize Hindu religion. From their perspective, the Hindu caste system and the Hindu religion are not necessarily coterminous. Another predominant trend that emerged due to the impact of Minoritisation was the creation of some ‘minority’ forums or even political organizations, such as Hindu Christian Tehreek with some Dalits as its core members¹⁴⁸.

This tendency to remain attached to ‘Hindu’ and ‘minority’ can be attributed to the ‘Harijan’ legacy left by the former Dalit activists and that is now idealized as the great Scheduled Castes activists. It is also reflective of the impact of the state policies that constructed Dalit or Scheduled Caste identity as ‘Hindu’ and ‘Christian’ ‘minority’ Harijanization remained and still to a greater extent remains, unproblematic. Segregated colonies, schools and individual castes named Harijan are still found in Sindh. Even the

¹⁴⁷ Advocate Veerji Kolhi, an indigenous Dravidian rights activist from Tharparkar Sindh was an International Director Pakistan, International Unity for Freedom and Equality, while Zemira El Natan, a Jewish-Israeli lady was its director. See online their activities at their organizational blogs: URL: <http://internationalfreedomequality.blogspot.de/2014/12/>.

¹⁴⁸ Patel Madu Ram Hunwar (Meghwar) from Samaro was its Central Deputy General Secretary.

trend to open segregated schools in Harijan colonies continued until the early 1990s (Dharani, 2015, p. 130). Harijanization solidified Dalit identity as ‘Hindu’, and with the state’s emphasis on religious identities, eventually ‘Hindu’ emerged as the major signifier for Dalits.

Hence, although Dalits, in general, are conscious of their marginalized and their ‘untouchable’ status, they want to tackle it from within the ‘Hindu’ fold. They aim at the internal reformation of Hindu society by purging untouchability and caste discrimination out of it. Several Hindu Panchayats and *sheva mandilis* (social welfare associations) work on that agenda. They do it by organizing Sat-sang programs, publishing or translating religious scriptures and advocating rights of ‘Lower caste’ or ‘Pasmada jatis’ of Hindus. They even go to the extent to scrap out controversial verses from translated religious scriptures to project Hinduism as the most egalitarian, the most ancient and the most original religion., Sandesh Group, BIF (Bhagchand Group), SCRM and caste-based panchayats of Dalits and the Hindu welfare associations such as Sunder *sheva mandilis*, Hare Rama Foundation (Punjab) or the Jati Hindu Panchayats that have given nominal space to Dalits as well, work within that Hindu reformist narrative.

At macro-political level, the last major attempt was made in 1999 by Rana Chander Singh, the ex-ruler of Thar and a veteran Savarna Sodha Rajput. Following an essentially Savarna feudalistic Hindu minority narrative, Rana Chander Singh left PPP and formed Pakistan Hindu Party (PHP), an essentially Hindu party (Kumar G. , 2007; Iqbal, 2009). A Dalit activist opined, “It could not work in the predominantly Muslim country whose ideological roots lie in anti-Hindu communal history. It was a Hindutvadi party through and through.” A few years back some Hindu activists of Pakistan Hindu Post, a virtual community organizations, whose members are also affiliated with local Pakistan Hindu Seva (Welfare Trust), a pro-Hindu Sandesh group and certain other Pakistan Hindu Panchayats, and that included some existing pro-Dalit as well as anti-Dalit Hindu activists as well, also came up with the plan to devise an essentially Hindu political party and suggested certain names for it but failed to materialize it at any level¹⁴⁹ (Kumar G. , 2007). These Savarna experiments, that were also partly inspired by the similar unsuccessful

¹⁴⁹ Following names were suggested for a Hindu party. “1. Pakistan Hindu Alliance (PHA), 2. Pakistan Hindu League (PHL), 3. Pakistan Hindu Congress (PHC), 4. All Pakistan Hindu Party. Source: Gopinath Kumar (January, 27, 2011) Pakistan Hindu Post, URL: <http://pakistanhindupost.blogspot.de/2011/01/call-for-hindu-party-due-to-betrayal.html>. Retrieved on 25, 02.2017.

experiments of the Christians¹⁵⁰ (Kumar G. , 2007), did not work also because Dalit majority did not trust them enough. Moreover, they had the option either to rely on the Savarna, whose power was diminishing or on the Ashrafia class, whose power had already begun to be felt more than ever.

3.5.1 Hinduizing Dalits during 1971 Indo-Pak War

After the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947, Parkari communities were trying to find ways to adjust to state-imposed Hindu-Muslim binaries, the increasing Ashrafization, and the process of harijanization initiated by Gandhi that continued to shape the religious orientation and political thinking of Kolhi and Meghwar. But the Hindu Dalits that were concentrated in districts in Sindh that bordered with the Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan did not bother much about the state narratives even after Partition. The Hindu Dalits, as well as, the Muslim pastoralists would freely travel long distances across Rann of Kutch and Dhat region of Thar Desert. For the locals, Kutch, Rajasthan, and Tharparkar were the interconnected Mulks (countries) imagined as the region having its own identity independent of Sindh. They had not sufficiently developed the sense of living on the borders of two nation-states till the 1971 Indo-Pak War. The 1971 War was the watershed event for the local populations to reconcile their identities with that of the identity markers acceptable to the dominant narratives that prevailed in their respective nation-states. Scheduled Castes, the majority of whom were Hindus, readjusted their locations and the identities, some migrating to India, others prefer to stay in Tharparkar.

The sealing of borders after 1971 gradually hardened their identities, at least as far as their public script, to identify with Sindhi and Pakistani nations respectively. During the interviews conducted with the local Dalit and Muslim communities of Nangarparkar, I came to know the boundary-making had reoriented these borderline communities by shifting their loyalties to the dominant groups at the core of civil society or nation-states. Farhana Ibrahim had also come to the same conclusion as regards the boundary-making and the identity reformation of the Harijan migrants from Adhigam Nangarparkar Sindh, and Maldhari (Muslim pastoralists) communities living on the other side of the border in Kutch, India (see also Ibrahim, 2005; Ibrahim, 2011). The discussion with the local Parkari

¹⁵⁰ Following Christian parties were registered in Pakistan “Pakistan Christian National Party, Maseeha Millat Party, Christian National and Liberation Fronts, All Pakistan Maseehi Itihad, Pakistan Christian Movement, Christian Labour Party, Pakistan Christian League, Pakistan Christian Congress. Source: Gopinath Kumar (January, 27, 2011) Pakistan Hindu Post, URL: <http://pakistanhindupost.blogspot.de/2011/01/call-for-hindu-party-due-to-betrayal.html>. Retrieved on 25, 02.2017.

activists of UC Adhigam, Nangarparkar revealed that during the 1971 Indo-Pak war that the Dalit and Muslim communities took different decisions at the critical junctures during the Indian occupation of Nangarparkar in 1971. It seemed that the migration of Muslim castes was pushed by the sense of insecurity created by the random bombings by the Indian Army during its raid over the Nangarparkar. Several incidences of those days when Parkar remained under the Indian occupation were still fresh in the memory of the elderly of UC Adhigam, who were at that time young boys. After having controlled the whole Nangarparkar region, the Indian Army tried to quell the fear of the Muslims by treating them humanely.

Khokhars (Muslims) of Kharirio explained the situation of local Muslim communities during the Indian occupation. Shahban Khokhar told:

The army came in suddenly. First, they came to Parkar. When we heard, some of us planned to flee to Sindh before the Army comes in. But many of us could not do so. Army overwhelmed us. They were quite friendly and cooperative except that they asked us to say 'Jai Hind' when they arrived. We may have stayed in Parkar but Thakurs and Kolhis began disturbing us. They looted our cattle several times. A local Army commander who was Sikh by religion was quite friendly to us. In one instance, the Indian Army captured a Thakur who took away our cattle. Army personnel hit him on his head with the rifle butt and he died instantly. But it rather infuriated Thakurs. One day, after the 3 months of Indian occupation, the Sikh commander came to us and advised us to leave as he was to be posted somewhere else, so he could not guarantee us security. The next night, we departed with our cattle but Thakurs and Kolhis again followed.

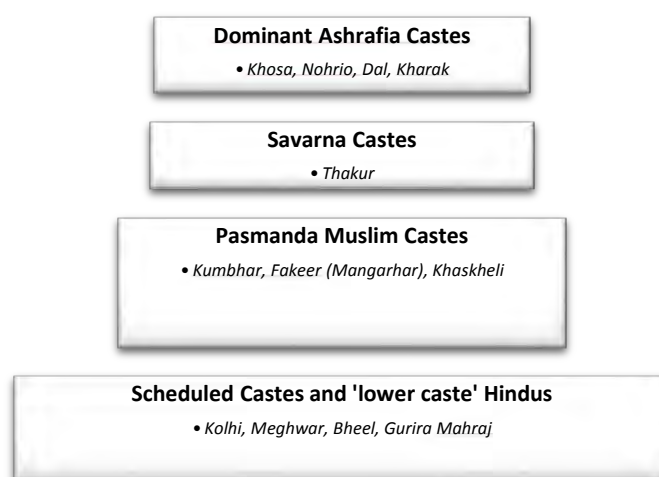


Figure 10: Caste and class structure of Nangarparkar (Major communities)

Source: Author (2018)

After having occupied Parkar, the Indian Army had begun Indianizing the Savarnas, Hindu Dalits as well as the local Muslims by disciplining them through martial parades on a daily basis. For instance, during my meeting with the elderly in a local Pyaro Meghwa of Adhigam village narrated:

It was early in the morning when I was in the field when I saw Army men in a jeep approaching us. They gathered us all Hindus and Muslims at the center of the village and asked us to say, 'Jai Hind'. They called Muslims 'Mian' and kept an eye on them. All raised the slogan 'Jai Hind'. Each day in the morning, they would call us to a parade and ask to say, 'Jai Hind'. We were given wooden sticks. Only one Meghwar had a rifle and he would bring it instead of using wood sticks.

Shivalo Kolhi told, "Thakur went there because their relatives were there". Roopchand Thakur confirmed, "Yes, he is right. It was so. Our relatives were already there in Kutch, so they stayed there". Maghno Kolhi told, "My story is a bit different. We had long left Parkar and had gone to Sindh before the Wars began and settled in Jhudo [a town in lower Sindh]". Ravto Kolhi narrated:

All Kolhis nearly 90 houses left Parkar and migrated to Kutch. Only 3 families returned. We were in fear of repercussions from Muslims. Some incidents of violence and dacoity happened. Thari Muslims entered Thar and took away our cattle. Kharak (Muslims) plundered us.... came in night and forcibly took away our 60 cattle. Some of them encroached upon our land. Kolhis that left Dhengarn and Adhigam and settled in Kutch, their lands have been occupied by Khosas.

Bhagat Meghwar told:

My family was gone to the relatives in Katchelo (Sindh) when India occupied Adhigam. Otherwise, we would also have fled to Sumrasar. They are happier there. They were given lands and jobs. They have Bungalows theirs, cars and all the necessary facilities. They also avail Scheduled Caste quota there. My brother, there has recently retired from the government job.

Raj Kumar Meghwar told 'we went there but returned to Parkar because our sister was married in Kunri in Sindh. His elder brother Kaveer told:

Three of our brothers were living in Sindh in Kunri. Therefore, we returned. Sugarchand Seju (Meghwar) was a retired Mukhtiarkar. He chose to stay there and many of our Meghwar followed him. When Rana Chander Singh was sent by Zulfiqar Bhutto to bring us back to Pakistan, Sugarchand Seju was asked by Rana Chander Singh to deliver the speech and convince Meghwar to return to Pakistan. Sugarchand said I have delivered speeches here every day. Now it is your turn to convince them. Then Rana Chander Singh made a speech and said to the Hindu community that it is the most opportune time to return but remember these times will never return. It was the implicit message to stay there instead of return to Pakistan.

Before having discussed the 1971 war with the villagers of Adhigam, I had met with some Kolhis and Khokhar, Kumbhars (pasmanda Muslims) of nearby villages of Lakar Khadiyo, and Kharariyo.

Kolhis of Larkar Khadiyo told us that they were treated as untouchables in the camps by the Indians.

For instance, Pahlaj Kolhi of Lakar Khadiyo told:

Many of us migrated to Kutch and stayed in camps, but returned. Very few stayed there. We were not secure in camps. So, we returned. Those who didn't lack in *ghairat* (honor). Their women were molested by the Indian Army. For us Parkar is everything. Our hearts were in Parkar. But the love of Parkar is waning. Five years ago, 28 Kolhis crossed Rann to Kutch. They were followed by 20 more after a few days but were captured by the Indian Army and returned to Pakistan Rangers. They remained in jail for 3 years. Their houses were burnt by Pakistan Rangers. That is what they deserved. We love our country. We must be loyal to Pakistan. India is our enemy. If war recurs, we will stand by our Army.

Kanji Meghwar of Lakar Khadio narrated the incident of how they saved the lives of Kumbhars (Muslims). He told:

They suspected local Kumbhar who had planned to leave in the middle of the night but failed to escape. The next day Indian Army raided their house. But we had already shifted them to our houses, gave them our dress. Women were clad in Meghwar dress, and Kumbhar Men were given Hindu names. The army could not recognize them and in this manner, they were saved. The same did happen in Chachro in Thar (not in Parkar) where the Indian Army accompanied by Ladhoo Singh killed hundreds of Muslims. Local Meghwar saved them there too.

Phalaj Kolhi of Lakar Khadio added:

We too did give refuge to Kumbhar for few days. Although the Army did not say anything to them, they were under extreme fear and feeling insecure. Gradually, a few days, their fear subsided, and they went back to their houses.

The stories narrated by the locals informed that before, 1971, Thakurs virtually ruled over Parkar, and the cross border Parkar-Kutch linkages were very fluid and the local Parkari merchants instead of going to the barrage area of Sindh, would frequently visit small towns to Kutch to purchase wholesale items. During the 1971 war, although each Parkari communities had their reasons to migrate either to India or to Pakistan, or to stay at the Parkar, yet there was a caste-class pattern to it. For instance, before the Indian Army withdrew, most of the Thakurs migrated to Kuch and did not return. Similarly, most of the Muslim castes that had migrated to the barrage area of Sindh returned to Parkar. Parkari Kolhi, which is the largest community of the region, also had migrated to India, but they preferred to return mainly due to two reasons, namely a) the lack of facilities and the untouchability meted out to them in the refugee/migrant camps, and b) their pastoral way of life that compelled them to seasonally migrate to barrage area of Sindh in search of pastures, fodder and agricultural labor (see Table 6).

The migration pattern shows that not all Dalits migrated to get rid of Thakurs, who themselves migrated to Kutch, and not simply due to untouchability as maintained by

Farhana Ibrahim (2005) about the migration of Maru Meghwar from Adhigam to Kutch in India during 1971 war. She maintains that Maru Meghwar migration was not driven by any patriotic impulses but to rid of caste discrimination and untouchable stigma, to flee the oppression of Sodha Rajputs of Parkar, and to redefine their identities as Rajputs in a newly found abode across the border in Kutch. Looking from the Parkari location, although getting rid of caste stigma and Savarna oppression was conceived as one of the potent reasons of cross border migration by Meghwars and other 'lower caste' Hindus so that they could redefine their identities as Rajputs (Ibrahim, 2005), and that nationalist patriotism could not be the leading factor, I heard the stories from the residents of Adhigam that contradict Farhana Ibrahim's argument about Meghwar migration to Kutch to get rid of caste discrimination. The narrative of the Meghwars of Adhigam informs that the consciousness of common Meghwar (Harijan) identity, along with the fear of Ashrafia/Muslim repercussions were the major factors that determined both the Dalit and Jati Hindu migration during and after the Indo-Pak war of 1971.

Table 7: Adhigam Village (Household Migration Pattern)

NO.	Caste/ Community	Year					
		1971	2019	Migration 1971-72			Return from Sindh to Parkar after 1971-72
				To Kutch	Return from Kutch to Adhigam	Towards Sindh into Pakistan	
1	Kolhi	150	200	90	80	00	N/A
2	Meghwar	120	60	120	15	00	N/A
3	Vanyo/Lohano	50	00	49	01	00	N/A
4	Thakur	5	00	5	00	00	N/A
5	Bajir	3	00	00	N/A	3	3
6	Nai	8	00	8	00	00	N/A
7	Khaskheli	3	3	00	N/A	3	3
8	Suthar	5	00	5	00	00	N/A
9	Kumbhar	40	50	00	N/A	40	40
10	Chaki	2	6	00	N/A	8	5
11	Fakeer	3	3	00	N/A	3	3
12	Rabari	5	10	5	5	00	N/A
13	Shaikh	2	3	00	N/A	00	4
14	Sheedi	2	2	00	N/A	2	00
Total		398	337	283	101	59	58

Those Meghwars and Kolhis that chose not to migrate from Adhigam to Kutch also did so for the same reason to stay in Parkar to get rid of caste discrimination, with the hope that, after the departure of Sodha Thakurs, they could easily get rid of caste discrimination and claim to be Rajputs on equal footing. This desire was being increasingly whetted by the parallel Sindhi nationalist steam that was penetrating inside Tharparkar. Dalit claims of *asloka waris, dharti dhani* (indigenous Sindhis, Sons of soil), were allowed to flourish by the Sindhi nationalists that wanted to consolidate the boundaries of Sindh through Sufi syncretic rhetoric having space for both Sanatan Dharam, Vedic faith and the Sufi Islam.

The departure of Thakurs brought about a fundamental shift in the local power structure as the Khosa (Ashrafia) Balochs encroached upon the lands left by the Meghwar and Thakurs, although many Thakurs migrants bequeathed their lands to a few thakur relatives that chose to stay back. Some Kolhi, Meghwar and Kumbhar families, however, were also allotted Thakur and Vāṇiyo and the Meghwar's lands. Hence, while pre-1971 Parkar was largely a Hinduised frontier zone of fluid borders, of so-called 'Harijans' dominated by Thakurs, the post-1971 Parkar became the Khosa dominated Pakistani territory on way to ashrafize the remaining Dalitbahujan communities. The impact of Sindhi culture through Sindhi nationalists also sped up, and that of the Pakistani narrative through textbooks and the presence of rangers and the intelligence agencies increased thereafter. In this manner, Scheduled Castes of Parkar were made more pro-state and pro-Sindhi to minimize the social-psychological, territorial and political damage to the interest of Ashrafia class in any further event that may lead to the redrawing the national or state boundaries.

With the gradual sealing of borders, the Thakurcracy subsided but it did not vanish away, the local Khosa Baloch and Sammāt castes rose to power in Tharparkar, Sayedism strengthened, and both the Dalit communities were reoriented towards the state of Pakistan and Sindhi ethnic identity respectively. This pro-Sindhi and pro-Islamic reorientation, however, was adjusted through the rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim harmony, Sufism and Sindhism that did not sink the Hindu-Muslim rift that was being hardened through the parallel Hindu-Muslim binaries promoted by state and its policies. Moreover, the perception that those Scheduled Castes and Savarna that migrated to Kutch are socioeconomically well off further spurs the tendency to Hinduise and the yearning to migrate. This yearning for Hindu India, however, remains suppressed and is expressed through 'hidden script' (Scott, 1990) in close-circle groups within communities and kinship

groups networked across the Sindh-Gujarat-Rajasthan border¹⁵¹. Contrary to that, Scheduled Caste and Jati Hindu's use a different script in everyday life and at the level of civil society where they put up an extravagant show of fidelity to Sindh, Sufism, Pakistani state, Pakistan Army and the intelligence agencies, from whom, otherwise, they fear the most.

Similar kind of redefinition of Jatt (pasmānda Sindhi Muslim) identity in Gujarat, India to express fidelity to the state is termed by Farhana Ibrahim (2011) as a form of inversion of ritual, that “productively re-configure the current geopolitical iteration of space and belonging in contemporary Gujarat as enunciated by the state” (p.439). Hence, in Ibrahim's analysis, the state seems to have the constraining effect upon the community's agency, that I see in case of Kolhis, Meghwars, Khokhars and Kumbhars or the Dalitbahujans in Tharparkar, Sindh, as actively involved in making exaggerated claims of fidelity to the state as in deviating from it making hidden and subtle promises of fidelity to their pre-1971, rather pre-1947 trans-border religious, regional and caste-based affiliations. Because of that hidden fidelity to non-Ashrafia and Harijanized Hinduness glossed under the Sufi rhetoric, both the Scheduled Castes and the Jati Hindus of Parkar maintain their unique Hindu, non-Pakistani character that resonates more with the Hindu majority in Kutch in India than with the Sindhi Muslim majority in Tharparkar, Pakistan. Therefore, it can be inferred that the reluctance of the Dalits not to question the domination of Islamic state and the Ashrafia class, and their unrelenting criticism of the political domination of Vaniya or the Saithiyā class of Savarnas within Jati Hindus should be understood as the result of the hegemonic influence of political Islam and Sufism.

3.6 Change of Masters: Ashrafia Class Displaces Savarnas

Since Dalit agency has been suppressed for decades, if not for centuries (Lyche, 2016), either by Savarnas or the Ashrafia elite. They have been pulling the strings of the Scheduled Caste activists to vie with each other. Before Partition, Dalit leadership was politically aligned with the Savarna dominated Congress, and after partition, they either found the refuge in Ashrafia led military regimes, or the Ashrafia dominated political parties. In

¹⁵¹ According to Suchitra Balasubrahmanyam (2011), Sindhi Gujaratis had migrated to Sindh from Gujarat in the aftermath of ‘the worst-ever drought, the Chhapaniyo. It was an event so devastating that Dalits moved in large numbers from rural Kutch, Saurashtra and Gujarat to Bombay and Karachi, which were large urban areas in the region that promised better livelihood opportunities. Many also left following persecution by landholding Darbars, or to escape humiliating social discrimination. A majority of these migrants, who were of the Meghwal and Bhangi (Sweeper) castes, found employment in the sanitation departments of the Bombay and Karachi municipalities or found cleaning and waste disposal jobs in other organisations in these cities (p.464).

Sindh, the majority of Scheduled Castes began voting for PPP from the times when it contested elections in the early 1970s. Gradually, in Urban Sindh, the domination of Saithiyā class weakened, while that of Ashrafia class increased. Similarly, in lower Sindh, particularly in the Thar region, Sodha Thakur dominated declined with the increase in Sayed and Muslim Rajput and Sammāt influence. During that the power or the influence of Dalit communities neither increased nor decreased. Dalit class, however, continued to be cajoled by the Ashrafia-Savarna elites for electoral purposes. It was not the case before the partition though.

Before partition, the Thar region where Dalits were concentrated had been treated as the border zone having little impact on the politics of Sindh. It was considered as the political legacy of Sodha Thakurs. It was aligned with the Dhat region of Thar lying in Rajasthan. David Cheesman argues that “the Hindu Rajputs played no further significant role in the history of nineteenth-century Sindh.” Mainly because it was geographically isolated and also because the largest section of Thari society, that is, Dalit castes and tribes “had no tribal or caste affinities with—and hence no loyalty towards—the Rajput Sodhas.[...] As to Sind ‘proper’ no Hindu Rajputs were living there in whose breasts the deeds of the Sodhos might strike a responsive chord.” (Cheesman, 1997, p. 45). Contrary to Tharparkar districts, in Urban Sindh and at the center Vaniya/Saithiyā class of Savarnas dominated economy and politics till the Partition of India hit them both economically, as before partition, despite being minority (25% of the population), they held the monopoly over commerce and trade in Sindh (Thakur, 1959; Malkani K. R., 1984; Bhavani, 2014).

Because of these regional, economic, political and cultural differences, the Hindus of urban Sindh and the Hindus of Thar region had little in common except the religion, caste system, that ‘untouchable’ practices. Dalit activists told that Vaniyas would not consider them Hindus or even Sindhis. Ashok Oad told, “They differentiated between Hindu or Sindhi and Achoot. We were Achoot in their eyes, so can we be Sindhis or Hindus. They won’t invite us to their matrimonial ceremonies and would serve water and meal in Soneri plates and glasses”.

After partition, the domination of Savarnas was bound to decline in Sindh which had become part of Pakistan, a country ruled by Ashrafia class. Savarnas, along with other non-Muslims acquired a new identity ‘minority’ at the state level. To survive in an aggressive Muslim majority, they began asserting their newly imposed religious marginality to their advantage. They played ‘Hindu’ victim card, the polarized rival religious identity on which lied the basis of Pakistan. ‘Hindu minority’ emerged as the most

defining identity that subsumed even Scheduled Castes under it. Since Savarnas were already well-positioned politically and economically, they would just have to cling to their privileged political status. Politics of moneybags promoted by corrupt political parties ensured that Saithiyā class of Jati Hindus could buy seats into assemblies in the name of ‘minority Hindus’. In the process, they also learned how to hide the social and political exclusion of Dalits from the gaze of vocal class. It was the reproduced form of political and social untouchability that glossed over the drastic socio-economic disparities between the capitalist Saithiyā class of caste Hindus and the Dalit/SC peasant-labor class. It also glossed over the regional subalternity (marginality of Thar and Laar) of Dalit communities, and regional relative dominance of Kohistani Vaniyas (Savarnas) living in the mountainous belt, and Deewan (accountant caste) living in upper Sindh (Cheesman, 1997, p. 45).

On the other side of the river Indus, Sodha Thakurs ruled over Thar region as traditional Rajput rulers did in Rajasthan. They strongly believed in the caste system and would treat Dalits as untouchables. Malji Meghwar told, ‘Sodhas and Thakurs were more casteist than Brahmins or Mahraj or Muslims. For them, Dalits were nothing but dirty animals’. Sodha Thakurs were conceived as local despots by the Dalit activists, and one of the activists, well-versed in English called it “Thakurcacy” (autocracy of Thakurs). Sodha Thakurs’ were in fact so dominating that they made Dalits migrate with them to India. For instance, Meghwar and Bheel communities of Chachro Talluka migrated because they were under the sway of Rana Lachman Singh. Rana Lachman Singh was a very powerful Thakur ruler, having control over Chachro Taluka of Thar. Sonbho Meghwar told:

He joined hands with the Indian Army, and in fact, helped it to occupy the territory of Pakistan. We, being his subjects, just followed him and migrated to India although many Dalits also did migrate fearing that Muslims may avenge or maltreat them once the Indian Army left.

Contrary to that many anti-caste activists of that time, such as Punho Mal Hamirani, protected Muslims against the Indian Army (Dharani, 2015). Some of the Dalit leaders, such as Gulji Mal Damrani, campaigned to bring those back who had migrated to India (Dharani, 2015, p. 141). This shows that the Dalits began asserting soon after the Sodha power declined. The exclusion of the so-called ‘achoots’ by Thakur turned politically fatal for them as the Dalits began aligning with the Ashrafia elite to rid of Thakurcacy and untouchability. In the beginning, the domination of Sodha Rajput over the people of Thar came to be challenged by the emerging Ashrafia elite, particularly, by Sodha Thakur’s maternal cousins, that is, Arbab family. To out beat, each other both used Dalits as proxies.

For instance, Moolchand Kudecha was pitted by the Arbab family against Sodha Thakurs during the 1957-58 local government (B.D) elections. In 1952-53 elections Sugarchand Seju resigned from the post of Assistant Mukhtiarkar (Magistrate) and filled in election form to contest for MPA seat. Hence after partition, he was the first Dalit who dared take a political stance against Sodha Thakur's dominance. In that election, Rana Chandar Singh's uncle, who contested election, threatened Sugarchand to withdraw from contesting elections against him. But Sugarchand did not back down although he knew that he will lose the election. Sugarchand, Ghaman Singh and Alamchand allied to contest the elections. They picked up the educated youth among the Dalits to appoint them at different polling booths. Sugarchand lost the elections but it did certainly create the much-required political awareness as regards the value of the Dalit vote.

Sodhas, however, continued to sustain their political domination even under Ashrafia hegemony. Pirbhu Mal, told, "Sodha Thakurs, however, were internally united at that time and would regulate internal affairs through their caste-based association named 'Sodha Parliament'". To outwit them, the Dalit candidates were often supported by the Ashrafia elite to contest elections against Sodha Rajputs as well as against Saithiyās and Dewans. For instance, the first Meghwar MPA Gulji Ratanji got elected into Sindh Assembly 1953 and in National Assembly in 1985 from Mirpurkhas with the support of Rais Khair Muhammad Bhurgri (upper caste Baloch). Gulji Mal Damrani was supported by Khan Bahadur Wassan against Sodha Lachman Singh in the B.D elections of 1963-64. He lost in that election from the difference of 60 votes as the majority of Dalits, except the literate youth, vote for Sodha Lachman Singh. When Gulji Mal Damrani was blamed of espionage against Pakistan, and at the instigation of Sodha Lachman Singh, was arrested by the Pakistan Army and kept in Jail for several days, Khan Bahadur Wassan assisted him got him released. Again, with the help of Khan Bahadur Wassan, he won B.D. elections of 1984-85 and defeated Narain Singh Takhur. (Dharani, 2015, pp. 140-141)

Hence, the Ashrafia used internal caste discrimination as the political card to weaken Sodha Rajput through Dalit agents. The political rift between Rana Chander Singh and Sodha Lachman Singh also proved fatal for Sodha Thakurs. It was also understandable that in a Muslim country, Sodha Thakurs, who were steeped in Hinduism and would treat Scheduled Castes as virtual untouchables could not sustain their social and political hold for long. Consequently, Arbabs and the other Ashrafia castes, a few leftover Brahmins and Vāṇiyo (Vaishya) families emerged as the new political within the minority.

3.7 Kolhi, Bheel and Meghwar Emerge as Political Stakeholders

After the displacement of Sodha Thakurs, in lower Sindh, particularly in the Thar region, Dalits acquired a new agency as they directly come into negotiations with the Ashrafia elite. They began challenging the power of Sodha Thakurs and also the local Ashrafia elite of Arabas, but, but only through the mediation of other Ashrafia power brokers. In the political domain, they mainly relied on the caste lords of Baloch (Talpur), Sammāt (Wassan) and Sayeds (Jeelani) affiliated with PPP, the largest neoliberal party of Sindh. For instance, Gulji Mal Damrani, supported by Khan Bhadur Wassan, also remained a staunch supporter of PPP from 1967 till he died in 2013. Similarly, Amar Ghaman Singh Bheel, remained affiliated with Pakistan People's Party till he died. His main crutch was the local Syed politician, Pir Ghulam Rasool Shah Jeelani and Mir Muhammad Bakhsh Talpur (ex-chairman local board Tharparkar). A Bheel activist justified Amar Ghaman Singh's fidelity to PPP by arguing that, "When Amar Ghaman Singh was implicated in false cases and jailed thrice, Pir Ghulam Rasool Shah Jeelani and other Ashrafia leadership got him released". Similarly, a Meghwar activist told:

Pir Ghulam Rasool Shah Jeelani played instrumental in the release of Comrade Omon Mal from the jail and brought him into PPP. In return, Comrade Omon Mal played an instrumental role in the victory of Pir Ghulam Rasool Shah during elections.

Somji Mal Dharani (2015) writes, "It was Comrade Omon that also then brought Khatu Mal into PPP's mainstream politics in 1988, and interceded for giving him MPA seat (p.129). Before that Khatumal was the less familiar low cadre worker of PPP's student wing. Bhooro Meghwar told:

P.K Shahani, a Savarna, opposed giving a ticket to Khatumal and even convinced Benazir Bhutto not to give Khatu a ticket. But Omon Mal used his connection, met with Makhdoom Talibul Mola (Sayed and Pir politician of PPP) and with Nusrat Bhutto, mother of Benazir Bhutto, and convinced them both. Nusrat Bhutto then convinced Benazir Bhutto and the ticket was then finally given to Khatumal. Gulji Mal, Omon Mal, Ghman Singh, and Khatumal all remained staunch supporters of PPP.

According to Somji Mal Dharani (2015), Dr. Khatumal facilitated the entry to Senator Giyanchand into PPP who was initially affiliated with Awāmī Tehreek, the Sindhi Marxist-Moaist party. Hence, as it seems, Meghwar faithfulness was duly recognized by the Ashrafia-Savarna leadership on several occasions, and duly accepted as the much-needed source of self-esteem for Dalits to brag about. For instance, the gift of bicycle given to Comrade Omon Mal by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto is repeatedly mentioned by the Meghwars as a kind of proud token of reciprocal recognition. A similar kind of story prevails among

Meghwars about Engineer Giyanchand, who was patted on his back by Asif Ali Zardari in 2015 saying, “You are my first brave friend from Tharparkar” and awarded him 2.5 million in recognition of his sacrifices and fidelity to the party. This was not considered as tokenism by Meghwar as they seemed happy with it as if that is what they deserved at least and were duly reciprocated.

Not all Ashrafia feudals belonged to PPP, and neither all the Dalit leaders were carried away by the PPP. Some of the Dalits got drifted towards other political parties, such as Bherumal Balani (Mithi), and Kanji Ram Gohel (Rahimyar Khan, Punjab) and were duly appreciated by the party’s top leadership. These appreciations, awards and courteous gestures by the Ashrafia elite are then narrated by the individual Dalits and shared to have the vicarious feel of self-respect. For instance, Somji Dharani writes with pride that, after having impressed by the superb performance Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif “twice pronounced the name of Bherumal Balani¹⁵² on Radio and TV, which is undeniable, a matter of great honor for Meghwar Jati”. (Dharani, 2015, p. 167) With the same priding gusto he writes that “in 1998, for the first time Chief Minister Liaquat Jatoi(PML-Q), Pir Pagara (PML-F), Arbab Ghulam Rahim (PML-Q) and Sher Baz Mazari (PML-Q) were hosted by Bherumal Balani at Balani house Mithi where thousands of Meghwar gave them standing ovation” (Dharani, 2015, p. 167). Mentioning all such events whereby Dalits have been respected or honored by the ‘upper caste’ feudal capitalist is more common among Dalits than in any other caste or community. No other Dalit politician mainstreamed the Scheduled Caste narrative better than Dr. Khatumal Jeewan. Political victimization of Dalit leadership during the Chief-Ministership of Jam Sadiq Ali in 1992 and that of Arbab Ghulam Rahim’s tenure, was weaved into the narrative that explicitly presented ‘Scheduled Castes’ and their leadership as the victims of social and political oppression.

Jam Sadiq Ali (originally from Sanghar district), the Sardar (tribal chief) of Samma caste, became Chief Minister after Benazir Bhutto was forced to step down in August 1990 because of corruption charges. He adopted suppressive policies to win over Dalit vote bank. Both Dr. Khatumal and Engineer Giyanchand were illegally detained kept in prison for several weeks. The allegedly state-driven conspiracies also implicated Dr. Khatumal in the incident, and he was being pressurized by Jam Sadiq Ali through the illegal detention and police torture to leave the PPP. He did not budge down and with the effort of Benazir

¹⁵² Bherumal Balani (Meghwar) was then made the Federal secretary Water and Power and Chairman Khidmat Committee, District Tharparkar by PML-N.

Bhutto, he was eventually released (Dharani, 2015, pp. 157-158). The Scheduled Castes' vote bank was understood as the major reason that Dr. Khatumal Jeewan was illegally detained and tortured. Dr. Khatumal had emerged as the leading Dalit politician and the Ashrafia elite knew that Dalit folks obliged Dr. Khatumal. Again, during the Musharraf era, false cases were filed against Meghwar leadership at the instigation of Arbab Ghulam Rahim in 2002 and 2004. Both the PPP candidates were instructed and supported by the party to contest against Arbab Ghulam Rahim who was symbolically called *Betaaj Badshah* (King having no need to wear the crown) of Thar. PPP pitted Engineer Giyanchand against Arbab Ghulam Rahim in 2002 elections and against Shoukat Aziz (who then became Prime Minister of Pakistan), the state-supported non-local candidate, in 2004, and again against Arbab Ghulam Rahim in 2013. Although each time he lost in the election, yet he secured several thousand votes losing only from the margin of few thousand votes. (Dharani, 2015, pp. 163-64)

Surender Valasai (Meghwar) told that Arbab Rahim would always consider Meghwar and other Dalit leadership as a threat to his social and political domination and would practice caste-based untouchability as the norm. Arbab would not hesitate to play Hindu-Muslim card either. Hence, on a number of occasions, the religious clerics, at the behest of Arbab Rahim, compelled Dr. Khatumal, and Engineer Giyanchand and other leadership to hibernate for few years (see also Dharani, 2015, p. 160). "The reasons were, obviously, Scheduled Caste's vote bank that was impossible to win over without the support of Dr. Khatumal Jeewan or Meghwar leadership" added Valasai. These real and or the fabricated stories of persecution prove counterproductive as Khatumal emerged as a Hindu, Meghwar as well as Scheduled Castes' hero who could bear up all kinds of atrocities to stand tall in the face of Ashrafia and Savarna classes. The enmity of Arbabs and Thakurs with the Dalits in Thar made a small Vaniya (Vaisiya) and Brahmin elite of Thar look like benevolent enemies. Hence, it can be inferred that Meghwar, in a sense, had ruptured the local power structure of Thar and the political victimization was its result. But it was not deep enough to rupture the status quo, that is, the hegemony of Savarnas, not to mention of the Ashrafs.

This mainstreaming of Scheduled Castes has had both the positive and negative consequences of Dalits, particularly for Meghwar community. First: created the sort of permanent slot for Dalits, particularly for Meghwar within PPP. Secondly, it appropriated Dalit cause to the agenda of the oppressors, that is, the Pir and feudal-capitalist class. Dr. Khatumal explicitly played Scheduled Castes' card, and many Dalit activists alleged that

it did benefit him personally as well. He became 4 times MNA, a one-time senator, and two times Sindh Assembly member and an advisor to Chief Minister of Sindh, for minerals and mines department, Secretary Population Welfare, and in 2017 serving as the Special Assistant to CM on Minorities Affairs. He brought Surender Valasai, a journalist into PPP, and with the efforts of them, (Senator) Engineer Giyanchand and Poonjo Bheel were also inducted as the leading activists of PPP.

These Dalit leaders, however, cannot be unilaterally blamed for misusing Dalit card to their advantage, or the advantage of the Meghwar caste only. Although they can be suspected of being ideologically tilted towards the neoliberal feudal-casteist agenda, they did certainly strive for Dalit inclusion to the extent possible for them. In the Ashrafia political culture, mediation with the state was impossible without the Pir or Sayed and the local feudal. Any criminal case or political conflict with the state or the Ashrafia could only be resolved through them. This created the vicious circle whereby the oppressed gets relief with the mediation or support of the same oppressor.

The common tendency towards ‘Hero-worship’ could also be found among Dalits. While for Dr. Khatumal was a hero of Meghwars, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto (Ashrafias) were heroes of Dr. Khatumal. Thanwar Das Danwani, who had established Pakistan Hindu scheduled Castes Association, was fanatically Bhutto cultist. Somji Dharani, in one of his biographical notes on Dr. Thanwar Das Danwani, writes that he would consider Zulfiqar Bhutto as his murshid (spiritual leader) (Dharani, 2015, p. 135). Bhooro Parmar (Meghwar) told with pride:

Bhutto offered Dr. Thanwar Das to be his personal advisor but others in PPP opposed it, just because he was Meghwar, lower caste. Then again, he was offered a lucrative job that was also declined by him as he simply preferred to remain ‘faithful worker of the PPP.

Similar kind of flattering statements often keeps coming from the activists of other castes of Dalits and their leaders praising their Ashrafia patrons. For instance, Veerji Kolhi¹⁵³ made a public statement that Bilawal Bhutto is the incarnation of Shah Latif, the most celebrated Sindhi Sufi poet. This craving for immediate and instant self-esteem in particular sets the limits on Dalit’s radicality, and the fashioning of their own ideological and principled stance. It, thus, delays the achievement of the self-respect that comes when the oppressor truly begins considering Dalits as equals.

¹⁵³ In 2009, Veerji Kolhi was appointed by PPP government as the advisor (Minority Affairs) to Chief Minister Sindh.

As it is obvious from the above discussion, Dalit activists were happy with a token offered to them by the Ashrafia class. This tendency was in continuation with their former approach in the case of Savarna patrons. Beginning with the Scheduled Castes Association in the 1960s, Dalits had been dependent on either Savarna or Ashrafia crutch. Lately, the Scheduled Castes Rights Movement was supported and encouraged by Hare Rama Foundation, a Hindu religious Association managed by ex-Shudras or neo-Kshatriyas. Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum was founded and supported by Khursheed Qaimkhani (Rajput of Ashrafia class)¹⁵⁴. The formation of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek was also not possible without the necessary early intervention and the initiative taken by some de-castified Ashrafia class Dalit activists. Notwithstanding that internal haplessness to rely on Ashrafia elite, the engagement of pro-Dalit activists from the lower middle class of Ashrafia and ex-Shurda Jati Hindus can also be seen as a historical necessity. Dalit activists from within Ashrafia and Jati Hindu castes also have played a vital role in bringing about the social reforms within Dalits, and in highlighting the case of Dalits at national and international forums. For instance, Zulfiqar Shah, Muqem Kumbhar, Miskeen Jahan Khan Khoso, Comrade Ghulam Muhamad Laghari, and Rasool Bux Paleejo, despite their occasional casteist bias, are held in very high regard by the Dalit activists for their pro-Dalit stance.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the reasons behind the lack of critical inquiry in Sindh, Pakistan have been explained. The discussion unfolds the overall status of research on Dalit exclusion shows not only the lack of research on casteism, and its peripherality in academia, progressive literary circles and civil society, but also the level to which the problem of casteism is denied, relativized and ignored, particularly in the Sindh province of Pakistan. The gradual shift from the processes of harijanization to ashrafization was discussed in the historical context particularly in the context of Partition of the sub-continent. The way Dalits as Harijan activists problematized their issues during the decades that followed, and the increasing Dalit dependence on the Ashrafia elite was discussed. Caste-based assertions and in particular Meghwar exclusivism as it thwarted the inter-caste Dalit unity was extrapolated.

Based on the discussion, I conclude that colored in Sufi nationalist ideology, the progressives' definition of 'Dalit's oppression does not help invoke Dalit agency to

¹⁵⁴ See the pictures taken by Ganpat Rai Bheel on the 82nd birth Anniversary of Khurhseed Qaimkhani,, Hussain (2019zzo), "Naonkot meeting, 82nd birthday Anniversary of Khursheed Qaimkhani", Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/2j4gngy2f2.1

emancipate from Sayedism or Ashrafia domination. Resultantly, the Ashrafia reader and the activist, instead of feeling remorse or shame on his or her casteist patriarchy, are led to objectify Dalit (women's) body, labor, vulnerability, and haplessness. The progressives appropriate the spaces, events and Dalit protagonists having the potential of subverting Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony. While the progressives in their writings and the ruling Ashrafia elite through their political acts were critical of religious suppression and casteism, they assumed apologetic posture towards prevalent casteism and did not show any commitment to the annihilation of caste and inclusion of Dalits.

The discussion over the nature of literature in Sindh clearly shows the empirical disparity between the huge volumes of the progressive literature that ignores casteism and the politically significant demographic strength of Dalits that required to be given space in Sindhi literature. Given this empirical disparity, the epistemic intervention by Ashrafia-Savarna progressives into Dalit spaces seems highly problematic. It can also be noticed that after their pre-partition harijanization, the post-partition state-driven Ashrafization ensued under the influence of Gandhi-influenced political Sufism. Because of it, there emerged a persistent tendency among the Dalits to increasingly identify themselves with Sanatan Dharam aka Hindu religion. The discussion revealed that under the garb of Sufi nationalist and the 'minority narratives, Dalits were used as proxies in caste rivalries in Sindh.

To evade this sociological reality, the progressives give forth the post-hoc interpretations of the historical narratives, such as in the case of the narrative of Rooplo Kolhi. These seemingly pro-Dalit narratives do not adequately expose the problem of casteism in a manner that could lead to Dalit emancipation. It was evident that although the Sufi ethic of interfaith harmony arbitrarily invokes Ashrafia morality, and temporarily creates an anxiety in Ashrafia consciousness to confront casteism, yet, at the empirical level, it facilitates the Ashrafia(but also Savarna) elite to appropriate heroes, histories, events, and spaces of Dalits, and invokes token sympathy and compassion for the Dalits and women. Hence, the progressive Ashrafia reader and the activist, instead of feeling remorse or shame on his or her casteist patriarchy, are led to objectify Dalit bodies and appropriate Dalit agency and spaces.

Amar Jaleel, Naseem Kharal and Ali Baba or even Noorul Huda Shah's¹⁵⁵ depiction of Dalits and women resonated with the Gandhian ideology that had also influenced the earliest progressives of the sub-continent such as Munshi Premchand.¹⁵⁶ Although these progressives have given space to Dalit characters and bring forth Dalit exploitation in their literary narratives, yet as an antidote to casteism, they proffer the same caste-functional approach that was formerly taken by Hindu revivalist organizations such as Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Harijan Sevak Sangh. Their reformation was premised on the idea of purity (shuddhi) and was against religious conversion (Rabbani, 2016; Trivedi, 2017), the approach that does not fit in Ambedkarian narrative that invokes Dalits to resist and protest against caste system as a whole instead of merely against untouchability.

Hence, instead of giving emancipating thrust, the progressive's narratives end up abruptly leading the Ashrafia reader (for whose consumption they primarily write) to pity the Dalits and sympathize with them, while leaving Dalits in a state of self-pity. An Ambedkarite might have taken these stories further and have inverted the individual Dalits' tension into the collective resistance at the level of community. Hence, the Ambedkarites may make the counterintuitive demands from the progressives to invert both the pure fiction and the fictionalized history so that the frictions of caste and gender, or the embeddedness of caste, gender and religion could be brought to the fore. Most of the progressives seem incapable to fulfill that demand as it conflicts with their Sufi nationalist narrative.

Related to this epistemological demand, is the lack of privileged space afforded to Dalit writers to express their feelings and emotions that no Ashrafia writer can. Except for

¹⁵⁵ To have an idea of Noorul Huda Shah's literary-political approach read her statements related to the literary production during General Zia's regime, the period during which she wrote several drama serials for state-sponsored TV channel PTV. Further read in DAWN, URL: <https://images.dawn.com/news/1178036>. (accessed June 7, 2019).

¹⁵⁶ To read online Premchand's some notable short stories, see : URL: <https://www.rekhta.org/stories/eidgah-premchand-stories?lang=ur>. (accessed June 6, 2019).

a few, which lie at the margin, there are not noteworthy Dalit short story writers found among the comity of the progressives in Sindh. This situation, at least at the level of epistemic justice or equality, continues to be heavily tilted in favor of the progressive Ashrafia writers whose primary aim, even while giving voice to the Dalits, has been to suggest the unity of all Sindhi castes including Dalit castes against the external Ashrafia oppressor.

Harijanised activism, however, was not wholly fruitless for the Dalits. With the efforts of 'Harijan' activists, political consciousness was raised with the result that several Dalits got elected as members of their respective union councils. The greatest disadvantage of it, however, was that, in relative terms, it did not enhance the Dalit status vis-à-vis Savarna and Ashrafia classes. Dalit leadership continued to pay homage to the leading Savarna-Ashrafia politicians and remained subordinate members of 'Hindu' or 'minority' based associations. It was because of the impact of the 'minority' narrative that the Dalits, in general, are conscious of their marginalized and their 'untouchable' status, they want to tackle it from within the 'Hindu' fold. They aimed at the internal reformation of Hindu society by purging untouchability and caste discrimination out of it. This, however, did not hamper the Dalit agency. Since Dalit agency has been suppressed for decades, if not for centuries, it has always been the Savarnas and Ashrafia elites who had been pulling the strings to allow Dalit inclusion or to afford Dalits some space to assert their agency. Because the Dalit activists did not have complete liberty independent of Savarna-Ashraf patronage, most of the activists reverted to Hinduism after indulging for a while in Dalit or Dravidian activism. A few of them innovated to combine both the Scheduled Castes and Hindu identity markers to raise Dalit issues.

On the other hand, as the Savarnas were already well positioned politically and economically, they would just have to cling to their privileged political status. It was the reproduced form of political and social untouchability that glossed over the drastic socio-economic disparities between the capitalist Saithiyā class of Savarnas and the Dalit/SC peasant-labour class. It also glossed over the regional subalternity (marginality of Thar and Laar) of Dalit communities, and regional relative dominance of Kohistani Savarnas, and upper Sindh deewan/Vāṇiyo class of Savarnas. In Thar region, after the decline of Sodha Thakurs, Arbab and the elite from other Ashrafia castes rose to power, This shift from Savarna to Ashrafia power created conditions whereby Dalits themselves could begin challenging the influence of the Arbabs, but only through the mediation of Ashrafia feudal elite from Talpurs and the Sayeds or Pir, and their political parties, particularly, PPP.

The discussion also revealed that the organization of Dalits in their assertive form largely depended upon the given social and political space within the tribal-caste culture. Any broader formation of Dalits seemed to influence the Dalit community only when it collaborated with the Savarna, Ashrafia, or even with the Pasmada and neo-Kshatriya well-wishers, or with the institutions controlled by the well-wishers of Dalits belonging to Ashrafia and Savarna castes. This shows that Dalit communities and their leadership cannot explicitly and boldly enact upon the anti-Savarna and anti-Ashrafia agenda, and, felt compelled by the structural discrimination, had to compromise to play the second fiddle to the very oppressor, that is, the feudal-capitalist belonging to Savarna and Ashrafia castes. This probably is the general dilemma of the oppressed, the subaltern, the marginalized and the suppressed who have persistently striving to rise up the subaltern status to make their voices heard.

Although Meghwar in a sense had ruptured the local power structure and political victimization was its result, yet that rupture was not deep enough to post the substantial challenge to the casteist status quo. Hence, politically Dalits seems to have been reduced to the third-rate stakeholders as they had to toe the line of Ashrafia parties, Savarnas and the Christian elite, and socially follow the same casteist approach to organize their castes. It resulted in the hegemony among Dalits of a single caste (Meghwar) in Sindh that then began using both the minority and Scheduled Caste card to dominate ‘Scheduled Caste’ politics within the minority framework.

Dalit leadership of PPP, particularly Meghwars, has not succeeded to bring Dalit issues on the party’s agenda. But this should not deny the fact that Meghwar rise to politics has not been easier either. They are also still greatly underrepresented and primarily rely on tokenism. It shows that although the politicization of caste among Dalits may enable them to rise in political standing, yet, as the Ambedkarites maintain, the occasional customary picking of a Dalit for the leadership position is a form ‘dehumanizing tokenism, where one to exist as a ‘Dalit man’ or ‘Dalit woman’ also, in stark contrast to the other ‘humans’ that s/she is sharing the dais with’ (Somwanshi, 2017). Notwithstanding that friction between major Dalit communities, they stood by each other on some social and political forums, and on the issues that were common to all Dalits. On the call of Bheel to protest against ‘Jati Hindu’, Meghwar and Kolhi also joined in. The unity of Dalits, however, was not strong at any level or at any forum to outwit the Ashrafia-Savarna hegemon.

Chapter 4: Discursive Bases of the Denial of Casteism

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss how at the discursive level in everyday interaction the Sayed-dominated Ashrafia culture constrained Dalit activism and functioned as the hegemonic space. Interrogating the superior status of the Sayed caste(s), I contend that the denial of casteism, the opposition to the use of the ‘Dalit’ identity marker and the negation of the Dalitness seemed to have as much to do with the belief in Ashrafia values as it had with the normative sanction of the Savarna values. Both the Savarna and the Ashrafia values seemed to seek legitimacy from the dominant ethnocentric forms of the politicized Sufism. Political Sufism merges the Savarna and Ashrafia norms by means of syncretic narrative based on interfaith harmony and the civilizational rhetoric. Ashrafization (also Savarnization) and the reverence towards Sayeds were the key self-perpetuating hegemonic processes underlying attempts by Dalits and civil society activists to dissipate cognitive dissonance that reflected from empirically existing caste-based discrimination and the apologetic explanations to justify, relativize or rationalize it from within the Ashrafia-Savarna narratives (on ‘cognitive dissonance’ as the analytic concept, see Festinger, 1962 and, Olsen and Schober, 1993). The Ashrafia hegemony influenced Dalits to revere Sayeds and emulate Ashrafia class, the tendency that I argue, was less than successful because Savarna and Ashrafia classes tended to differentiate between the ‘original’ and the ‘fake’ Ashrafs to reposition themselves as the superiors.

4.2 Living under Ashrafia Hegemony

While traveling on a bike from Jhuddo to Naonkot, I had a respite at a small tea shop hut at the roadside. Five persons, three males, two females, and a child were sitting inside the hut. The woman was wearing white bangles made of plastic with her face covered with *goonghat* (scarf-like wrapper that covers half of the face) usually worn by Thari or Dalit women. The skin color and the bodily physique of the men were like Bheels and Kolhis whom I had already met and interacted at various places in lower Sindh. I entered the hut and sat beside them on a cot. They were looking at me with curious eyes. I ordered a cup of tea and asked the vendor to bring water first. While the tea was being prepared, my researcher instinct pushed me to introduce myself to the elderly among them and in return know about their whereabouts. They were Kolhis and waiting for the bus to take them to the shrine of Misri Shah, a Sayed Sufi saint. I asked the elderly Jhaman, ‘Are you Hindu or Muslim?’ Jhaman, the elderly, replied, ‘*Saeen, malik mulk jo ta ooho hi ee aa*

na...Bhagwaan har handh wasse payo' (Sir, after all the owner of this land is that One...Bhagwan [Hindu term for God] exists everywhere'. I asked, for what purpose you go at the Shrine of Misri Shah, he replied:

Saen Misri Shah *sayed ji zaat aa* (is from the superior caste of Sayeds). We visit Misri Shah every two months. My wife has strong belief in his prowess. Once she had *zanani beemari* (female-related complications). Doctors could not cure her. She was in extreme pain. We went to Rama Pir's (Hindu deity) shrine as well, but she could not recover. Then, our relatives living in Digri town told us about Misri Shah. We went there, begged for mercy. From that day, she began recovering, and now we go to her shrine every two months.

While I was listening him, the tea vendor handed over a cup of tea to me. Jhaman was also served a half-filled cup of tea in *Soneri*¹⁵⁷ (golden) cups (special cups kept for use in local hotels to serve tea to 'untouchables'). I also asked him to bring one cup of tea for Jhaman. Our discussion went on for ten minutes until the local bus arrived and Jhaman left along with his family. Jhaman told that he was also affiliated with Sindh Kolhi Itehad, a small group of Kolhi activists that had been the part of the campaign for marking scheduled Castes in census forms. The majority of Dalits in Sindh being strong believers in shrine culture, sainthood and personality cults, were under the hegemonic influence of both the Brahminic caste system and the Sayedism. Dalits did not differentiate much between the Sufi Pir, particularly Sayed, and their deities. The majority of Dalit activists believe in the divine prowess of Sayeds and Pirs and found themselves constrained to raise voice against the structural inequalities rendered normative by it. This unconditional reverence for Sayeds reflected the tendency of Dalits to Ashrafize and thus deny 'Dalitness', the state of being oppressed by Ashrafia-Savarna castes.

The institution of Pir is found even more deeply embedded in Sayedism in Shia Islam that qualifies it further through 'Imaamat'. 'Imaamat' is assumed by Shias to be the institution led by Imam, the divinely ordained Sayed installed as the spiritual leader of the Muslims. In practice, this belief in Imaamat entitles almost every claimant to Sayedhood to be treated as the divinely ordained spiritual descendant, the reverence towards which can potentially guarantee the eternal blessing and paradise in the hereafter for Muslims and the social security for the marginalized Dalits and minority Hindus. This normatively sanctioned principle elevates every Sayed born to the status of spiritual authority and sets

¹⁵⁷ Soneri literally means 'Golden'. Soneri is the euphemism for the cups and utensils specifically kept on most of the hotels in lower Sindh for serving tea, water and meals to the Dalits.

up the foundations of Ashrafization. Further civilizational myths attributed to Sayeds, and the blasphemy laws¹⁵⁸ (originally meant to prevent religious violence) make it almost impossible to question the reverence of Sayeds or the spiritual validity and genealogical originality of any Sayed and or Pir.

4.2.1 Influence and the Impact of Sayedism on Scheduled Castes

Dalit activists were quite apprehensive of the negative reaction from the Ashrafia class, particularly when Dalit candidates won in local government elections. This fear of Ashrafia backfiring, kept Dalit activists in a permanently reluctant state of mind. During my fieldwork, I observed that certain groups of Dalit activists, such as Bheel Intellectual Forum, Scheduled Caste Federation of Pakistan and Dalit Sujaag Tehreek, have some understanding of the Ashrafia hegemony. These groups were resisting against ongoing caste-based discrimination and demanding representation. Yet their major targets were not socio-politically dominant Sayed, Sammāt and Baloch castes, but the politically dominant Jati Hindus, that is Savarnas. This focus on Savarnas instead of Ashrafia class is partly determined by the overwhelming Ashrafia hegemony and the resultant understanding of Dalits that, under circumstances, they were not able to confront Ashrafia class, but the Savarnas, which for them was the easier of the two to confront. The perception prevails that Scheduled Castes are a Hindu religious minority and therefore their political stakes lie within minority framework. It narrowed down the political field for Scheduled Castes to make demands in an open space as equal citizens.

Moreover, the relative indifference towards the hegemony of the Ashrafia class allowed Sayedism to take roots within Dalit's spaces. Sayeds capitalized upon their reverence (their status as the de-facto leaders of the folks) and got elected and appointed as Nazims (District Mayors), ministers and assembly members, to become de-jure patrons of Dalits in districts where Dalits form a significant majority-in-minority. This historical privilege keeps Sayeds and other Ashrafia castes in a permanently patronizing position to sabotage any democratic reform aimed at democratizing and decentralizing communities. For instance, the local government system introduced by Musharraf (Suleman, 2018; Drage, 2015), merely proved to be the state's sanction to the informal local rule of Sayed, Baloch and Sammāt landlords as the reforms were brought without taking into

¹⁵⁸ As per Pakistan Penal Code's PPC) article 295A, the "Use of derogatory remarks etc., in respect of holy personages" is punishable up to 3 years of imprisonment as per article 298 of PPC.

consideration the subversive impact of the hegemony and domination of the pre-existing tribal and caste-based oligarchies.

All such local government level reforms have so far failed to achieve their purported aims mainly because of this Ashrafia hegemony that has sustained Sayedism and casteism. Resultantly, the same group of castes and almost the same kinship groups or families continues to be part of the local, provincial and national governments. This fact can be easily validated from both the local government structures and the caste-class structure of the provincial assembly. For instance, one can argue, based on the analysis of Sindh Assembly members from 1937 till 2018, that makes up about 59 castes and about 22 feudal families from Baloch, Pathan, Sayed, Arab, Central Asian, Sammāt and Savarnas within Jati Hindu castes, make up the ruling class of rural Sindh (see Table 7).

Although the proximate population of Sayeds in Sindh has not been documented, and therefore, unknown, yet after the field observation of the concentration of different caste groups, it can be argued that the Sayed castes wield far higher social, political and economic capital than their demography warrants. It reflects the extent of the normativity of Sayedism and the permissibility for other Sammāt, Baloch and Ashrafia castes that associate themselves with Sayeds. The extent of the normativity of Sayedism can also be had from the following of Sayeds among Dalits. Take an example of the thousands of Kolhi, Bheel, and Meghwar of Thar, that are the devotees of Shah Mahmood Qureshi, and Pir Pagara¹⁵⁹, both belonging to the families of the Sayed that have been in power either directly through the governments, or indirectly using the soft power of shrine worshipping. Sayedism in Dalits penetrates through the trans-religious twist given by them to their subordinated status, or by the Pirs that patronize them. For instance, the legend of Pir Pithoro (Hindu Thakur sant), and that of Dharoo Meghwar, who were authorized by Ghaus Bahauddin Zakaria (a prominent Sayed Pir) to be the spiritual leaders of Meghwar (Dalit), is widely prevalent among Meghwar community.

Table 8: Politically Dominant Ashrafia and Savarna Castes in Sindh

¹⁵⁹ Pagaro is the title of the spiritual leader of Hur Jamaat in Sindh, and the president of Pakistan Muslim League (Functional), the political party formed by Fatima Jinnah (sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah). She made Pir of Pagaro VII, Sayed Mardan Ali Shah-II, the president of party in 1950s. Parago has the significant following among Dalits in Sindh as well. His influence in lower Sindh has been unprecedented throughout the last two centuries (see Sarah Ansari, 1992), and continues to shape the contours of local politics particularly in Dalit-concentrated districts of Sanghar, Mirpurkhas and Tharparkar in Sindh. Currently, Pir of Pagaro VIII, Sibghatullah Shah Rashidi III is the president of PML-F.

Sammāt	Baloch\Pathan	Sayed\Arab\Central Asian	Savarna
Junejo, Kharal, Isran, Jamot, Jokhio, Malkani, Halepoto, Khuhro, Paleejo, Panhwar, Abbasi, Rahimoon, Nohrio, Rahu, Jam, Rajar, Bhutto, Sarkai, Malik, Shaikh (Sanjogi), Abro, Shoro, Mahar, Kumario (Abro), Siyal, Unar, Soomro, Wassan, Thaheem	Bhurgri, Nizamani, Bijarani, Pitafi, Buledi, Chandio, Dahri, Durrani, Gabol, Jalbani, Jatoi, Khoso, Magsi, Marri, Talpur, Zardari, Mazari	Rashidi, Jeelani, Bukhari, Qadri, Sheerazi, Qureshi, Mirza	Lohana, Sodho Thakur (Rajput Hindu), Malani (Pushakara Brahmin)

Source: The data compiled by asking local people and by verifying through online governmental sources. See URL: <http://www.pas.gov.pk/index.php/assembly/past/en>.

This myth of caste-centered Sufi transmission facilitates the hegemonic weight upon Meghwars making the politics of patronage the part of normative social order, the fact that is often exploited by Shah Mahmood Qureshi, the existing descendant of Ghaus, to woo Meghwar votes during elections. The socio-political structuring, based on the Sayed patronage, holds true of most of the districts and subdivisions in lower Sindh. Take an example of the 12 Shah/Sayed Pirs, and the associates of the Prophet Muhammad, that are revered by Kolhi and Meghwar (Hindu) communities of the union council of Adhigam in Nangarparkar Sindh. Although the final decision to support any contestant is taken by the community, the living Pirs (mostly Sayeds) are usually resorted before elections to seek their approval. These rituals of sanctification testify that Hindu Dalits share the belief with the dominant Muslim majority, that the political and social patronage, originates from Sayeds or Panj-tan Pak¹⁶⁰, or from their immediate descendants, the belief that further strengthens the stereotype that Sufi or Pir is often a Sayed or the descendant of the Prophet.

This trans-religious politics of geological patronage negates the Dumontian argument, that non-Hindu ideologies cannot permit the formation of caste-class structure in non-Hindu societies in the similar fashion as they did in Hindu society (Dumont, 1980 (1970)). Instead, as it appears, the Hindu and Muslim culture blends into a caste-class structure having attributes of the both with each caste group possessing certain amount of

¹⁶⁰ *Panj-tan-Pak* literally meaning, the ‘five sacred bodies’, is the common colloquial term in Sindh used to refer to *Ahl-i-bayt* (people of the house) or five immediate descendants of the Prophet Muhammad including himself, his daughter Bibi Fatima, Mola Ali (Hazrat Ali) and his two sons Imam Hassan and Hussain.

‘social capital’, based, for instance, on their ‘accumulated labor (in its materialized or “incorporated”, embodied form)’ (Bourdieu, 1986 (2011), p.81), such as the landed property, the management of the Sufi shrine, and the political constituency bequeathed by the ancestors. This differential caste capital often determines the nature of antagonism at the inter-caste level, and that can be evidenced in the form of inter-caste wars and conflicts within and between Sammāt and Baloch castes¹⁶¹ (Chandio, 2017). Yet the nature of their antagonism, except in the case of Sayeds and Dalits, does not necessarily assume the hegemonic posture. The inter-caste-class solidarity premised upon the indeterminate and ‘fuzzy logic’ (Bourdieu, 1991 p. 234) of Ashrafia hegemony authorizes Sardars (tribal or caste chiefs), Pirs and the feudal lords, to hegemonize politics and culture, and subsequently dominate over Dalit class. This dialectic of the Ashrafia hegemony led to the erasure and the denial of casteism, primarily through certain discursive practices that I will discuss here, particularly focusing my criticism on the nationalist narratives in Sindh and Pakistan.

The relabeling of Hinduism as Sanatan Dharam by Dalits to defy casteism, or to hide casteism, however, could not bar the privileged castes to discriminate and humiliate Dalits. I see this tendency as the not so successful because the Savarnas and the Ashrafia classes tended to differentiate between the original and fake Ashrafias and the Savarnas and reposition themselves as the superiors. It could neither rid them of boded labor and untouchability that they suffered at the hands of Sayed, Baloch, and Sammāt castes. Ideologically the most fatal consequence of this redefinition emerged in the form of Sayedism, the reverence for the most hegemonic political caste disguised in Pir, Sufi and shrine culture. The presentation of such an ideal picture of Sindh that considered the formation of caste-based Ashrafia associations is vital to organize the Sindhi nation¹⁶²precluded the possibility of the identification of casteism as the problem. It shaped the political discourses in a manner that Pir was condemned as a religious figure, as a fake Sufi, but not as a domineering Sayed or Ashraf. Resultantly, the feudal system or wadero

¹⁶¹ According to media reports from January-June 2010 about 1780 people were wounded and more than 400 were murdered in 75 inter-caste feuds in nine districts of upper Sindh. Out of 75 feuds only 25 conflicts could be resolved through informal tribal-caste courts. Source Jami Chandio (2017), *Sindhi Samaj*, page.81. Peacock Publishers.

¹⁶² In a televised documentary, Muhammad Ibrahim Joyo, the renowned Sindhi intellectual and close associate during his middle years of politics told, “Sayed attempted to organize Meerbahar (fishermen castes), peasants and during his early days also Sayeds. His opinion was that no society can get their rights unless they are organized and have internal control. (see URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXYMuPUr1_A, Accessed on January 6, 2019).

was (and is) condemned as a capitalist, an economic louse and a political trickster, but not as an ‘upper caste’ oppressor. This selective use of terms to avoid critiquing caste location can be found in everyday discourse, in the intellectual debates, talk shows, and Sindhi newspaper articles. This erasure of caste betrays the empirically existing level of natural empathy between the Ashrafia nationalist narrative and the Shrine culture, that can be assessed from the fact that Gadi-nashin¹⁶³ Pirs came to be defined as nationalist and socialist heroes such as Pir Sibghatullah Rashidi (Sayed) and Shah Inayat Shaheed (Langah, a Rajput caste).

The revolutionary slogans that were constructed to inspire nationalism or socialism, such as, '*jo khere so khaae*' (a Sindhi slogan that means, ‘one who tills the land have the first right to its grain’), over time became the popular slogan of the Shrine worshippers, and is frequently used by Gadi-nashin of Shah Inayat and their disciples to legitimize their position. This mutual complementarity of Sufism, Sayedism and Shrine culture can also be assessed from the cultural narrative at practice in macropolitical in legislative assemblies. Take an example of an MPA¹⁶⁴ from PML-F, Waryam Fakeer. On 15 May 2018, talking on a point of order in the Sindh Assembly, Waryam Fakeer complained blaming the ruling party PPP that:

سنڌ حڪومت ۽ پيپلز پارٽي پاران سنجهورو ۾ ميونسپل ڪاميٽي ۾ ڀنگي جي نوڪري سيد سگوري
 کي ڏني وئي.....ظلم جهڙي ڳالهه آهي.....ڀنگي سان زيادتي ٿي آهي، سيد سيد جي لائق نه هئي پر
 پوءِ به اها سيد سيد, سيد کي ڏياري ڇڏي

(Sindhi)

Honorable Sayed has been appointed as Bhangi by Sindh Government and People’s party in Sinjhoru Muncial Committee. It is a grave matter of oppression. [Traditional] Bhangi’s right has been usurped. This seat was also equally not becoming of Sayed; the seat that has been given by a Sayed to a Sayed.¹⁶⁵

The silent approval of the complaint of Waryam Fakir, the spiritual disciple of Rashidi (Sayed) Pir, was reflective of the normativity of Sayedism and Dalit exclusion. There have often been appointed, mostly on bribes, several Ashrafia class individuals on the posts of sweepers that are paid salaries but do not perform the job assigned, and no one needs to agitate as such appointments are often hidden from the public gaze. There is a possibility

¹⁶³ Normatively, the living descendant of pir usually holds Gaddi (the traditionally transferable spiritual authority) whereby they are called as *Gaddi-nashin* (the one who sits on the raised platform as the form of symbolic gesture of spiritual authority).

¹⁶⁴ Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA) of Sindh.

¹⁶⁵ Source: A video footage of Sindh Assembly Session shared by a Dalit activist.

that a few Sayeds may also be posted as such and paid without performing the tasks of a sweeping and cleaning. Nonetheless, the complaint made by a Fakir Waryam is not only reflective of the embeddedness of Sayedism and Sufism, but also of the normativity of the appointment of Sayeds on high profile posts and that of Bhangi/Chuhra (Dalit) on low-profile menial posts.

The allocation of jobs based on 5% minority quota is done according to caste location. Sometimes newspaper advertisements even specifically mention the castes of Dalits such as Balmiki or the ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘*Harijan*’ or religion (Christian and Shia) for the posts of Khakrob (sanitation workers)¹⁶⁶. The embeddedness of Sayedism and Sufism can also be evidenced from the unwarranted ownership of Sufi shrines by the Sayeds or the genealogical descendants of Pirs. Sayeds regulate the Pirs through officially and culturally sanctioned Sufi councils or associations ensuring that the caste endogamy continues to be the norm to preserve caste capital. Internal solidarity is externalized through the formation of Saadat/ Sayed associations, and Sufi councils, such as Pakistan Mashaikh Council (PMC) that was established to demand more financial autonomy and the supervision of shrines and a direct say in governmental and administrative affairs¹⁶⁷ independent of the government-sponsored National Ulema and Mashaikh Council (NUMC).

From the analysis of conversational interviews, it became evident that the political workers belonging to any particular caste group blame upon the Wadera culture and the bureaucracy or the police when any crime is committed in the name of honor of the family and caste or kinship group. The field observations and the analysis of conversational interviews allowed me to infer that the question of corrupt bureaucratic and police system does not arise in matters that are supposed to be dealt by the normative laws of caste-based baradari since there are no clear and specific constitutional sanctions and legal adjudication to curtail atrocities committed in the name zaat, qabeelo, and baradari. Nonetheless, the attribution of the problem to secondary or false cause saves the face of the progressive liberals and the leftists alike in the civil society as they condemn one of the secondary causes of the problem (i.e. bureaucracy and its corruption). They create an impression as if bureaucracy and the police were the major forces responsible for most of the systemic

¹⁶⁶ See, for instance, the advertised post by the Government of Sindh, Livestock and fisheries Department for an Accelerated Action Plan (AAP), Government of Sindh, May 17, 2017. URL: <https://www.ilmkidunya.com/jobs/jobs-in-accelerated-action-plan-aap-govt-of-sindh-17-may-2017-117546.aspx> . Retrieved on May 18, 2017.

¹⁶⁷ See Sindh Express, URL: <http://sindhexpress.com.pk/epaper>. Dated, March 13, 2018.

anomalies and were independent of the hegemonic influence of the caste group to which they and the local official belong to. Bureaucratic corruption, to which the progressive liberals often allude, is the secondary and indirect cause. State apparatus functions as a lower order functionary part of the local tribal-caste order. After all, in most of the cases, local government officials as well their subordinates are also from the same locally dominant caste groups. They are not simply officers and legislators, but the powerful members of each tribal-caste community bound to follow the norms and values of the community. Hence, the primary cause and handler is the community of caste(s) and their most cherished patriarch (s) that even regulates local governmental and state offices as per caste and *brādari* norms. The progressives within each caste feel bound to toe the caste line, and therefore, usually, remain silent on issues of caste discrimination. The Ashrafia ethics of caste honor, the respect for Sayeds and the hatred for Dalits, regulated by the Wadera (chief of the caste and village community) are the primary mechanism of controlling the social behavior of the individuals and the institutions, the worst victims of which are Scheduled Castes.

The analysis revealed that political Sufism and Islam in Sindh and Pakistan have harmonized casteism across faiths, which in its hegemonic forms can be observed in practices that promote Sayedism and Dalit exclusion. This revelation justifies the criticism of Sayedism from the Ambedkarian perspective (Guru, 2011a & 2011b; Kumar, 2016a, 2016b & 2005), allowing one to argue that while there can be many other reasons for the existing normativity of casteism, such as the continuity of the primordial tribal-caste traditions (Guru, 2011a & 2011b), or the supposed reclassification of social categories by the British (Dirks, 2001, p. 13), yet when it comes to the question of political articulation, the dominant ‘desi’ (Guru, 2011b) narratives seem to normalize casteism privileging Sayed-Ashrafia castes. Framed in and for the Ashrafia ideology, the narratives have deep roots in culture and history of Islam, in the (mis) interpretation of the religious scriptures, in Fiqah (Islamic Jurisprudence), in the tribal values, in the criterion of the superiority of descent and family background (Falahi, 2009), and in the context of Sindh, its supplemented with preexisting Sufi and Hindu/Sanatan Dharmi culture.

The existence of syncretic or symbiotic relationship between the narratives and the practices fulfills two basic conditions of hegemonic relations: (a) ‘the presence of antagonistic forces in the form of Sayedism/Ashrafia class against Dalit class that makes” [Dalit] articulation possible against the opposite [Ashrafia] camps”, and (b) the instability of the frontiers which separate them’, (i.e., the ‘floating elements’) (Laclau & Mouffe,

2014, p.122) that manifests in the form of identity contestation, and the tendency to Ashrafise. Political Sufism and Islam naturalize ‘caste endogamy’, which is the institution that bars the flow of ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986 (2011) and rather consolidates it into the embodied form in castes or the groups of castes (Ambedkar, 2014; Kumar, 2016a, pp82). It rationalizes ‘the logic of the local configuration of power built up around the caste-based hierarchical’ ideologies (Guru, 2016, p. 240) lending enormous ‘cultural capital’ to Sayed-Ashrafia class.

The casteist bias and the hegemony of Ashrafia class continue to this day and are seen by Dalits having links with the Brahmanism. For instance, Surender Valasai (a Dalit politician from Sindh) calls the current Ashrafia class in Pakistan as the follower of Manu Maharaj (who codified caste system), “the Brahmin minds whether they are in green or saffron colors”, (by green he means Muslims as they are shown in flag to make up larger section of Pakistan’s population). Another hegemonic class responsible for the direct political exclusion of Dalits has been identified by Sono Khangarani (a leading Dalit activist in Pakistan) as the Jati Hindus or Savarnas among Jati Hindus. Comparing the plight of the Dalits in Pakistan with the Dalits in India, Sono Khanarani said:

The situation of Dalits in Pakistan is better in terms of reciprocal respect that we have from the Muslim majority. Yet, in terms of socioeconomic and political uplift, we are lagging far behind, primarily due to the predatory and hegemonic political domination of Jati Hindus.

(In a speech in an International Seminar ‘on February 19, 2019)¹⁶⁸

This ability of Dalits to draw such cross-national comparisons, although put in a diplomatic language, is something to cheer up for Pakistan, yet, as we will discuss further, to confront the hegemony of Ashrafia¹⁶⁹ and Brahminic domination, and its power to regulate society on the bases of caste discrimination, requires the moral-ethical reformation at societal level (Hussain, 2019a; Hussain, 2019b; Guru et al, 2012). As hinted by both Surender Valasai and Sono Khangarani, in the context of Sindh province of Pakistan, Ashrafia¹⁷⁰ and Savarna domination manifests itself in the form of Sayedism, Vaniya/Saithiyā domination and Dalit exclusion.

¹⁶⁸ The International Seminar ‘Hindutva Policies and the State of Minorities in India’, was organized by the Institute of Policy Studies held on the February 19, 2019 at Islamabad. The speech was read by Sufi (Ghulam) Husain (me) on behalf of Dr. Sono Khangarani.

¹⁶⁹ See Table X and XI in Appendix for politically dominant Ashrafia castes in Sindh.

¹⁷⁰ See Table X and XI in Appendix for politically dominant Ashrafia castes in Sindh.

4.2.2 Dissonance between Literary Representations and Local Interpretation of Caste

Dalitbahujans are greatly influenced by the popular literature produced by the progressive Savarna-Ashrafia section of Sindhi literary society. To sustain their hegemony (i.e. the manufacture of the ‘consent’) (see Gramsci, 1971) and to reproduce social hierarchies (see Hussain, 2019 Hussain, 2019a; Hussain, 2019b), the literature in popular genres produced by that progressive literary circle tends to imagine Sindhi society as primarily as based on the horizontal ethnic tribal groups in need of uniting on the single platform, or at best, as the horizontal classes with castes (see Bohiyo, 1980; Junejo, 2015) having not much to do with the graded caste-based formations. They show reluctance, rather evasion to problematize caste and casteism on the vertical plane as the structures of exclusion and oppression. In this section, I argue that this rendition of caste and casteism, or the lack of it, affects the Dalit’s imagination, relativizes Dalit subordination, and legitimizes Sammāt and Sayed domination in Sindh. Sammāt castes are the most dominant and largest Ashrafia group of castes followed by Baloch castes. Unlike Dalit and Baloch caste groups, they speak Sindhi as their mother tongue. The Sindhi language is the cultural universal of the region, in which most of the literary work is written.

I observed during my fieldwork in 2016, that when the ‘Dalit’ question was invoked using the ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity markers by the Dalit activists, the Sindhi nationalists and the that most of the contemporary Sindhi progressive writers and their followers attempted to reject Dalit activists’ re-identification and their claims. They denied and relativized Dalit exclusion, and discouraged the Dalit activists from framing Dalit exclusion in terms of caste-based discrimination (see Hussain, 2019a; Hussain, 2019b).

The anecdotal reframing of the inversion of rituals, such as in the narrative of Rooplo Kolhi (Dalit)¹⁷¹ and Hoshoo Sheedi (of Black African origin) as the valiant Sindhi hero(es), exposed the contradiction in the claims of upwardly mobile lower-middle-class Dalits to have gained equal social status vis-à-vis Jati Hindus and Ashrafia castes, and the

¹⁷¹ Paru Mal Kolhi, a Dalit politician writes that, ‘in the history of Kolhi community only two events can be written, one that of 1859 when Rooplo won the battle against the British, and another when in 1985, two Kolhis got elected as members of provincial and national assembly.’ (Mal, 2000, pp. 54, 55). This selective projection that does not mention the fact that Rooplo in fact fought as the soldier in the tribal army gathered by Sodha Thakurs (Jati Hindus), the typical example of the reconstruction of the history by distortion that serves the postcolonial ideology of Sindhi nationalists and also the Dravidian assertions of the Dalits. Similarly, in case of Hoshoo Sheedi, an Afro-Sindhi slave, who is celebrated as the Sindhi warrior, the fact is undermined that he, in fact, fought along with his tribesmen to express his fidelity to the masters, that is, Talpur Baloch rulers of Sindh.

empirically existing structural reality of social and the political domination of both the Jati Hindu and Ashrafia castes. The general literary-historical trajectory has been to affirm the functionality castes as, for instance, it reflects in the following poetry of (Sayed) Imdad Hussaini (2012), one the veteran Sindhi poet with the nationalist bent of mind:

These Jatt, Ujan and Nareja,
 These Sammāt and Baroch and Sayed,
 Lords of community, Wassan, Dahani,
 Keeria and Kalal, Qambrani,
 These valiant, fighter Jakhrani,
 Jakhra, the pride, and Jalbani,
 These valiant warriors Kalani,
 These Rathore, the jubilant and the restless,
 These knowledgeable Giyanchandi,
 With the smile on the face, and tears in the
 eyes.
 These manly Dodas.
 Sweethearts, the shelter, the owners of
 Dhatt,
 Ganghra, Gadahi, Wagan, Arbab,
 These affectionate, loving Nawabs.
 Kandhra, Bheel, Meghwar, Bhaya,
 These Oad, the snails of the earth may
 remain prosperous!
 May they have good fortune!
 These Paleeja, Panhwar, Penjara,
 These Sochi, the truthful and the beautiful,
 These Thakkar, Thekri, and Thatthar,
 Of brownish, whitish and the black texture,
 Are all loved equally by the mother Sindh!
 These Mangarhar, Bhand, Bhatt, and Bhan,
 Daidaran, Daras, Dal, Deewan,
 What I say further, of their prestige and
 pride!
 These Hingora, Parhiyar, Aaheeri,
 These brave Roopla Kolhi,
 Rawara Baghri, Singhar, Chammar,
 Parsi, Bhatiya, Bhutta, Parmar,
 Suwara, Satta puriya, Generous Chiefs,
 Nahiyān, Koochra, Barra, Kehar,
 These Tuniya, Hajjaam, Hurr, Habshi,
 These Qazi, Kumbhar, Hajana,
 Mangria and Lohar, Lohana,
 These Gopang, these Patoli,
 Of who ear, along with medicine,
 Entered the sweet lullaby of mother.
 These Sareela and Shati, Laari,
 Marwari and Kathiawari,
 These Sodha, Sinhgar, and Sangi,
 These Walhar, apt at fighting,

هي جنوئي، اڄڻ ۽ ناريجا،....
 هي سمات ۽ بروج ۽ سيد،....
 راج راتا، وساڻ، ڏاهائي،
 ڪيريا ۽ ڪلال، قنبرائي،
 هيءُ جهونجهار جُنگ جڪراڻي.
 جڪرا جس ڪرا ۽ جلباڻي،
 هيءُ ڪوپا ڪنڌار ڪالاڻي،
 ٿورڙتويا، ٽچر، تماچاڻي،
 هيءُ رانور، رڄ راجاڻي،....
 هي گياني گيانچنداڻي،
 مُڪ تي مُرڪ، لڪ ۾ پاڻي....
 هيءُ دودا دلير مڙس مٿير.
 ڀول سر- ڇٽ، ڀٽ جا ڍاڻي.
 گهانگهرا، گاڏهي، وڳڻ، ارباب-
 هيءُ نيهي نواب نينهن نصاب.
 ڪانڌرا، پيل، ميگهوار، پيا،....
 هي مٽيءَ ڪوڏ اوڏ اڏجن شال!
 شال تن تي پلا پلانين پال!
 هي پليجا، پنهور، پيجارا،
 هيءُ سوچي سچيت سونهارا،
 هي ٺڪر، ٺيڪري ۽ ٺانارا،....
 سانورا پورڙا، اڇا ڪارا،
 سنٿڙيءَ ماءُ جا سڀئي پيارا!
 هي مگنهار، ڀنڊ، ڀٽ ۽ پان،
 دائنداڻا ۽ درس، دل، ديوان
 ڇا چوان آءُ شان تن جا مان!.....
 هي هڱورا، برهياڙ، آهيزي.
 هيءُ ساونت رُوپلا ڪولهي،
 راوڙا باگڙي، سنگهار، چمار،
 پارسي، پاڻيا، پُٺا، پرمار-
 سوڙا، سنٿ پُريا، سخي سردار....
 ناهيان، ڪوچرا، ٻڙا، ڪيهر،....
 هيءُ ٺٽيا، حجام، خر، حبشي،
 هيءُ قاضي، ڪنڀار، حاجاتا،
 مگريا ۽ لهار، لوهاتا....
 هيءُ گوپانگ، هيءُ پاتولي-
 جن جي ڪن ۾ ٻئي، سٽيءَ سان گڏ،
 سنٿڙيءَ ماءُ جي مٺي لولي.
 هي سريلا ۽ ساهتي، لاڙي،
 مارواڙي ۽ ڪاڻياوڙي،
 هيءُ سوڍا، سنگهار ۽ سانگي،
 هيءُ ولهار ويڙهه جا وانگي....
 هيءُ ماچي ۽ لُند ۽ سهتا،
 مغل، اعوان، شير شر، ڏيڻا،...

These Machi and Lund and Sahita,
 Mughal, Awan, Lion-like Sharr, Detha,
 Rajpar, Rajput, and Rakra,
 These Akhund, Khaskheli, Khushk,
 Their laugh is musk, and smile is aroma!
 These Mahesar and Magsi the lords,
 These Jogi, Kanwtiya, Kancheer,
 Lal the saint that keeps chastity intact, and
 Lakhi, the millionaires,
 These Sameja, wealthy Saithiyā,
 These Mirza, Masih, these Wara.
 These Rizvi, and Kazmi, Naqvi,
 These Qureshi and Moosvi, Alavi,
 These Siddiqui, and these Ansari,
 These Makhdoom, Pir, Mir, and mendics,
 Each is the eager joints of the body of Sindh,
 With their faces laced with pearls,
 The pearls that are admired by everyone,
 The pearls that are as ancient as the times,
 Like the sun, moon and the stars,
 Have been scattered on earth from heaven,
 Verily, their virtues are beyond the mention.

راجپر، راجپوت ۽ رڪڙا،
 هيءُ آخوند، خاصخيلي، خُشڪَ
 ڪل ڪٿوري ۽ مُشڪ جن جي مُشڪ!....
 هي مهيسر ۽ مگسي مهيمير،
 هيءُ جوڳي، ڪنوڻيا، ڪنجير-
 لال لچپال هي لڪي لڪمير....
 هي سميڃا، سُڪاريا سڻيا،...
 هيءُ مرزا، مسيح، هي ورما.
 هيءُ رضوي ۽ ڪاظمي، نقوي،
 هي قريشي ۽ موسوي، علوي،
 هي صديقي ۽ هيءُ انصاري،
 هيءُ مخدوم، پير، مير، فقير،
 سنڌ جي سنڌ سنڌ سڪَ اڪير،
 منهن جنين جي مڙهيل مٿيا آهن،
 جي مٿيا سپڪنهن وٿيا آهن،
 اڄ ڪلهه ڄانه، ڏُر ڏتيا آهن
 سڄ ۽ چنڊ ۽ ستارن جان،
 عرش تان فرش تي چٽيا آهن،
 ڳڻ سندن ڪنهن ڀلا ڳڻيا آهن!

Source: A poetic excerpt from a book in the Sindhi language titled *Kirne jehro pall* (Sparkle-like moment) by Imdad Hussaini (2012)

This abridged excerpt the long poem in which Imdad Hussaini enlists some 350 odd notable castes and the groups of castes (including some Dalit castes) and praises them as forming an integral part of Sindhi nation and as the symbols of unity in diversity, prestige, bravery, and warriorship. Such a representation presents the rosy picture of Sindh that randomly mentioning different castes to meet the poetic and the nationalist-ideological requirements to achieve the dilution of existing caste hierarchies. Hence, the Ashrafia class had its own normatively romantic outlook on caste and casteism. It reflected in their legends, idioms, proverbs and the literature that they had reconstructed during the 20th century. Through that literature, they gave forth counter-arguments to present castes as functional units of the Sufi society of Sindh, and caste lords (Sardars, Wedears, Patels, etc.) as the egalitarian patrons so long as they subscribed to Hindu-Muslim rift before the Partition and to interfaith harmony after the Partition.

This way of diluting caste to reform the caste brotherhood without diluting the caste-based hierarchies is in line with the functionalist-nationalist ideology of GM Sayed (see Hussain 2019). This nationalist ideology, instead of radically confronting the pre-existing normatively sanctioned culture of casteism, uncritically celebrates the civilizational legacy of the ancient golden past. For instance, they believe in the that Priest-

King¹⁷² ruled the whole of Indus Civilization from his seat in Mohen-jo-Daro in Sindh (see Ruk Sindhi, 2016a; Ruk Sindhi; 2016b, Siraj; 2009; B.M Adwani,2008). Some of these cultural and religious myths are further synchronized with the political Sufism by the Sindhi progressive literary circle. For instance, the explanation of Mashkooor Phulkaro¹⁷³, Himself known as *Shah-jo-Parkhoo* (experts in interpreting Shah Latif) (Bhatti, 2017, p.44), in his book on Kohistan (mountainous region of Sindh), in which he claims that Kohistani folks, mostly Sayeds, and Sammāt Caste lords (waderas) are ‘*Shah ja Parkhoo*’ (Phalkaro, 2017, p.129-140). In his ethnographic work, he reconciles that empirical truth with the fact that the majority of people of Kohistan are Sammāt and are organised around caste-based or sub-caste based fraternities, and that ‘there exists extreme kind of “*zaat-parasti*” (casteism) among them’ (Phalkaro, 2017, pg. 117). This shows that Phalkaro does not see any contradiction in being well-versed in Latif and the widely prevalent casteism patronized by those learned caste lords. This shows that the expertise in interpreting Shah Latif does not deter them from being casteist. Sindhi progressive literary landscape abounds with such Sayedist and functionally casteist assertions whereby casteism is deemed as a virtue or, at best, a minor social anomaly.

This belief in the superiority of the Sayeds of Sindh is surreptitiously reconciled with the Imams and the Brahmins, for instance, many Sufi nationalists believe that Brahmins went (from Sindh) to fight the battle of justice at Karbala on the side of Imam Hussain. These Brahmins later came to be known as Hussaini Brahmins¹⁷⁴. This leeway then creates the space for the followers of Shrine culture to make even bolder claims.

The conservative Sunnī/Barelvi and Shia Sufis subscribe to the geological and hagiographic imagining of Latif’s life more than the seculars among the progressives do. The belief in Sayedism, in the genealogical superiority of Latif and in the special status of Sindh coexisted as the complementary premises of the same narrative. Some pro-Shia visitors to the shrine seemed to cherish the narrative that Imam Hussain had expressed his desire of migrating to the Sindh. Sunni-Sufi nationalists seemed to believe that Salāfita/

¹⁷² Priest King is the sculpture of a male dating 2200-1900 BC found at the archeological site of Mohen-jo-Daro in Sindh.

¹⁷³ Mashkooor Phalkaro published his book with the cooperation of World Sindhi Congress, Sindhi Sangat UK and Radio Voice of Sindh, the institutions or the groups considered progressive by the literary circles.

¹⁷⁴ Husaini brahmins considered Muinuddin Chisti as a titular Divinity, honoured Mohammad as one of the Hindu avatars, fasted like Muslims during the Ramjan and also buried their dead. They wore brahminical caste-marks on forehead but accepted alms from the Muslims alone (Ahmed, 1994).

Shehr Bāno, the mother of Imām Zainul-Abidīn (a descendant of Ahl-i-Bayt), was Sindhi. Based on that historical construct, they claimed that Sindh is the maternal land of Sayeds, and that according to Hazrat Ali, it is the land from where the ‘sun of knowledge rose. Qalab Selānī, a middle-aged mendicant told in an ecstatic vein that even ‘Prophet had spoken of the cold breeze blowing towards him from the direction of Sindh (Sayed, 1974, p. 11).

The post-partition literary progressive, which is believed to be the progressive section of Sindhi civil society (Hussain et al., 2014), wittingly and or unwittingly allows for the functionalist civilizational myths or the facts supportive of Ashrafia-Savarna morality. This performative trajectory is rooted in the redemption of a section Sindhi Ashrafia class at joining Pakistan, and the subsequent demand of the autonomous Sindh, and the nostalgia of Savarna diaspora that frames it in Vedic-Aryan legends¹⁷⁵ and Sayedism (see Sindhi, 2016a; Ruk Sindhi, 2016b; Siraj, 2009; Adwani, 2008; Sayed, 1986; Sayed, 2011; Sayed, 2012 (1974); Chandio, 2017; Jotwani, 1996; Paleejo, 1974); Paleejo, 2014); Huzoorbux, 1981; Latifi, 1981; Junejo, 1983; Abro, 1985; Memon, 2002; Junejo, 2004; Malkani, 1993). Equating Sayed with the Brahmin further symbolized the reconciliation of the spiritual elite of both the Hindus and Muslims and helped justify Hindu and Dalit (Scheduled Caste’s) submission to Sayeds. ‘Sayed’ was thus turned into a magical identity, the association or the identification with which (for other castes) brings the social prestige and open up the doors to economic and political power.

4.3 Discursive identifiers of Ashrafization in Contemporary Sindh

It is not uncommon in Sindh to observe Dalits hiding their caste names. This tendency was more common among the young Dalits and middle-aged than the elderly people. While traveling in local buses and the vans during my fieldwork, several times I tried to identify the Dalits to establish rapport and expand the reach of my research. When I asked them about their identity, their initial reply was that they were Hindus. After repeating my query for a couple of times some would tell that they were ‘Deewan’ and ‘Shaikh’, that is, their pseudo-caste names. Only a few of those strangers with whom I interacted told their original castes, yet that also with either Savarna prefixes such as Rajput, or the regional

¹⁷⁵ According to Rita Kothari (2009, xxi), ‘in the Sindhi Muslim’s right to self-determination, the Sindh nation is defined by the river Indus, by Mohen-jo-Daro and by the Sufis. The Sindhi Hindus use the same tropes to emphasize an Aryan continuity. However, the nation remains elusive for both, constructed, fantasized and shared only in literary space and, now, cyberspace.’

suffixes such as Katchi, Parkari, etc. attached. Although many of them professed to be Hindus, they told that they would visit Muslim saints and had a strong belief in them. This way of knowing one's caste background, as I did, is the common way people in Sindh tend to interact when they meet for the first. Knowing caste, along with the name, is important as it alludes to the person's socioeconomic and the religious background, the factors that are considered important to become intimate or maintain the distance. Although, I was native Sindhi, I was not much apprehensive about the prevalence of such a tendency among lower castes, particularly, Dalits. Gradually, I came to realize that hiding original caste is very common among Dalits. Unlike Dalits, the Ashrafia or the Savarnas tend to be outspoken about their caste background. The normatively sanctioned superior status of Sayeds sets up the principles of upward mobility by means of association to or subordination to the Sayeds. This cognitive dissonance emanates from the Dalit's and the civil society activist's self-contradictory statements, indifference to casteism, the silence over Dalit oppression, and denial of Dalitness expressed through the hegemonic narratives and the practices in the spaces dominated by Ashrafia, and to a certain extent by Savarna, classes (see Table 8). For instance, during my field visits in 2016, when I asked about the prevalence of caste discrimination, Haji Khan Marri, a peasant activist (of Baloch caste) from Naonkot town told, 'Here we do not have any problem. All bradaris (castes) live with peace. Muslims do not offend Hindus. People consider Bheel a lower caste, but they do not harm [inflict physical or psychological injury upon] them.' When asked about the status of Marri caste, he replied with pride, 'We are Baloch qaum (caste)'.

Table 9: Types of Dissonance

Theme	Sub-theme	Dissonant statements	Background Ideology/Goal
Contradictory overt Assertion	a) Positive affirmation	There is caste/casteism/Sayedism, but it is good for society.	Unity of Sindh/Sindhi nationalism/Sufism/Pakistan/ Two-nation
	b) Negative affirmation	There is caste/casteism/Sayedism and it is bad for society.	
Indifference and Silence		Casteism/Dalit exclusion is irrelevant. It is non-antagonistic.	
	a) Relativization Defensive justification	There are oppressed and the poor in all castes.	

Denial of casteism/Dalitness	b) Explicit Denial	There is no caste in Sindh/Islam/Pakistan.	theory/Islamic ideology
	c) Shifting blame	Casteism is the product of Pakistani state. Its an Indian malady creeping into Sindh.	

About the status of Sayeds he said, ‘Sayed are the descendants of our holy prophet, therefore respectable’. He added, ‘But not all Sayeds deserve equal respect. Some are bad, but people revere them because they are gifted by God’. This social imaginary of Ashrafia class peasant makes believe that living amicably with the peace that prevails between Hindus, Muslims, lower caste Bheels, the proud Marris and the spiritually superior Sayeds is what makes the normatively acceptable structure of the society. Yet there are few, who cognizant of the vulnerability of the Dalits, draw a bit more contrasting picture. For instance, during a conversation over a cup of tea at a local tea shop in Naon Dumbalo town, Daad Muhammad, a Barelvi Sufi affiliated with PML-F¹⁷⁶, a conservative party patronized by the leading Sayed (Pir) argued:

Sadly, we have caste-based associations of all sorts, but we do not have any united Sindhi front. There is only one caste that is supreme to all, and that caste is Sayed. The rest is the dust of their feet.

Daad Muhammad’s desires to flatten all castes, except the Sayeds, because only Sayeds are entitled to be reckoned as superiors echoes the sentiments of the most of those locals who are either affiliated with any Barelvi and Shia school of thought, religious organizations, Sufi cults, or with the political parties that are either led by the Sayed Pirs.

There are some among the Ashrafia class who hold quite a realistic opinion and confess that caste-based discrimination is undesirable, but in their everyday life, they follow the same Ashrafia norms to discriminate against the Dalitbahujans. For instance, Nasir Shah, a Sayed himself and a Sindhi nationalist said, ‘There should not be any casteism. However, the curse is that Sayed is for Sayed and Meer is for Meer. Chandio is for Chandio, and then this oppressive tribalism.’ Nasir opined that although Sayeds are superior by virtue of their spiritual prowess and the blood relation with the Prophet, they

¹⁷⁶ Pakistan Muslim League Functional (PML-F) is the political party lead by Pir of Pagaro VIII. ‘Pagaro’ is the title of the spiritual leader of Hur Jamaat in Sindh, and the president of Pakistan Muslim League (Functional), the political party formed by Fatima Jinnah (sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah). She made Pir of Pagaro VII, the president of party in 1950s. Parago has the significant following among Dalits in Sindh as well. His influence in lower Sindh has been unprecedented throughout the last two centuries (see Sarah Ansari, 1992), and continues to shape the contours of local politics particularly in Dalit-concentrated districts of Sanghar, Mirpurkhas and Tharparkar in Sindh.

should, like G.M.Sayed, think about the welfare of the Sindhi people instead of only about their own family and Pir-Mureedi (Pir-disciple relationship, or the fatherly Shrine's supremacy). Mushtaq Samo, a police constable sitting nearby agreed with Nasir, but put hold *ummatis* (non-Sayed followers of Sayeds and the Prophet) equally responsible for deviating from the path ordained by the Prophet. He said, 'it is because we do not act according to the message of our Holy Prophet: I leave two things amongst you: one Holy Quran second is Ahl-i-bayt (Syed)'. The dissonance seemed more starkly visible when the debate explicitly turned to the issue of discrimination against Scheduled Castes or Dalits. Ahmed Jalbani (Baloch) who was the staunch supporter of JSMM, a hardline separatist Sindhi nationalist faction, mockingly argued:

The existence of caste or baradari system is not something to wonder at or waste one's time on debating it. There are oppressed in all caste groups. Even Sayeds and Brahmins can be found in a more oppressive and poverty-ridden condition than many Dalits. Therefore, the real problem is not casteism but radical Islam.

This is the usual trajectory of the conversations that I held with the locals at different places in towns and villages in lower Sindh. From the functionalist outlook on caste hierarchies to the exceptional superiority permitted to the Sayeds, the debate turns into an outright denial of caste discrimination through relativization. While the contradicting and changing opinions reflect the dissonance of Ashrafia class, it shows that the Ashrafia activists may oppose each other on political grounds, they often concord with each other on the functionality. It shows that Sindhi civil society desires unity of Sindh without confronting the internal dissonance, that is, the contradictions existing between their Sayedism and the resultant degradation of Dalits.

As also discussed in the paper on the 'hegemony of caste in Islam and Sufism', the occasional confessions of the political activists reflect their performative representation to unite Sindhi nation, which simply requires them to synchronize caste affiliations with the Sufi and Sindhi national sentiments (see Hussain, 2019). Ashrafia class, seemed to have sanctioned casteism so long as it helped unite Sindhi castes, and so long as it did not lead to inter-caste wars. Thinking in the spirit of Aryan-Invasion theory, they harbored sympathy for Dravidian (Dalit castes), and did not directly deny the relevance of casteism but, like the Marxists rather ignored or relativized it by expressing fears that under given circumstances Sindhis, in general, are facing state-imposed marginalisation. This peripheral position of casteism in a Sindhi nationalist narrative, as analyzed in the chapter on theoretical framework, provides ample space to a common nationalist to deny casteism

as a major problem, or, in the Gandhian vein, affirm it as less harmful and rather necessary part of society, that reflects in opinions of political workers of major Sindhi nationalist (JSQM, JSMM, STP, QAT, AT, AJP) and non-Sindhi nationalist (PML-F, PTI, PPP) political parties (see Table 9). The conversational interviews conducted with 59 political workers in Mirpurkhas division were analyzed to assess the prevalence, normativity, and rationalization of casteism (see also Annexure V for Interview Guide). The verbal indicators that I focused upon to assign the score to each tendency were related to see if the political worker:

- a) Mentions caste as the social identity, considers it superior/inferior, assigns class, traces genealogical roots, and considers Sayeds superior or Dalits inferior.
- b) Explains the formation of electorates and local politics in terms of caste affiliations.
- c) Relates his or her caste in terms of political ideology/party agenda.

Table 10: Sayedism and Casteism in Sindhi Political Workers and Political Parties

(Score Scale: 1 represents the lowest and 5 the highest scale of the normativity of casteism)

1=do not exist/affirm, 2=to some extent..., 3= exists/affirms, 4= greatly exist/affirms, 5= fanatically casteist/confirmist

N	Political party*1	N=5	Normativity						Average score/percentage
			Leaders & Saints are born in Ashrafi	Caste is a basic identity	Sayeds are superior	Shrine worship is not bad	Dalits are responsible for their exclusion	Dalits are unjustly excluded/discriminated	
1	AJP	4	1	2	1	2	1	3	33%
2	AT	4	3	2	1	1	1	3	36%
3	QAT	4	3	2	1	1	1	3	36%
4	STP	5	3	2	3	2	2	2	46%
5	JSMM	5	4	3	3	2	2	2	53%
6	SUP	5	4	3	3	2	3	2	57%
7	PPPP	12	3	3	3	3	3	3	60%
8	JSQM	7	4	3	3	2	3	3	60%
9	PTI	6	4	3	3	3	2	3	60%
10	PML-F	7	4	4	4	4	3	3	73%
Average Score			66%	54%	50%	44%	42%	54%	51%
Total Average Score			51%						

Casteism in political parties*

*1: Political Party names and political orientation:

Federalist/Parliamentary Parties: PPPP—Pakistan People's Party; PML-F—Pakistan Muslim League Functional; PTI—Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf

Pro-state Nationalist Parties: QAT—Qaumi Awāmī Tehreek; STP—Sindh Taraki Pasand Party; SUP—Sindh United Party

Sindhi Nationalist-Marxist Parties: AT—Awāmī Tehreek; AJP—Awāmī Jamhoori Party

- d) Considers caste as a politically relevant/irrelevant identity/Wants to eradicate or sustain the caste system.
- e) Holds religious views (shrine worship, Sayedism, Sufism, etc.) along with the affirmation or the denial of casteism.
- f) Is intimate with or committed to a Sayed/Pir/Sufi.
- g) Believes/disbelieves in hereditary politics/ in the power of person/caste/family.

Applying the Ambedkarian criterion that demands the explicit anti-caste stance that should not only explicitly recognize Dalit exclusion as the political issue but also avoid the casteist tendencies, it becomes evident from the percentages calculated in table 9 that political workers of Sindhi nationalist parties are not by any means least casteist although the major parliamentary or the federalist parties are more casteist than they are.

The nationalist Sindhi Ashrafia class completely ignored the widely prevalent casteism, particularly Sayedism within Sindhi Muslims. After the lapse of a few years after partition, when they saw that Punjabi and Urdu-speaking Ashrafia class dominated politics at the state level, the Sindhi nationalist narrative took a U-turn redefining Sindhi identity as based on an exemplary religious syncretism between Hindus and Muslims.

The analysis of conversational interview conducted with the political workers, summarized in Figures 9 and 10 show that the prevalence of dissonance between the prevalent casteism and the performative representation of the society by the political workers of the mainstream.

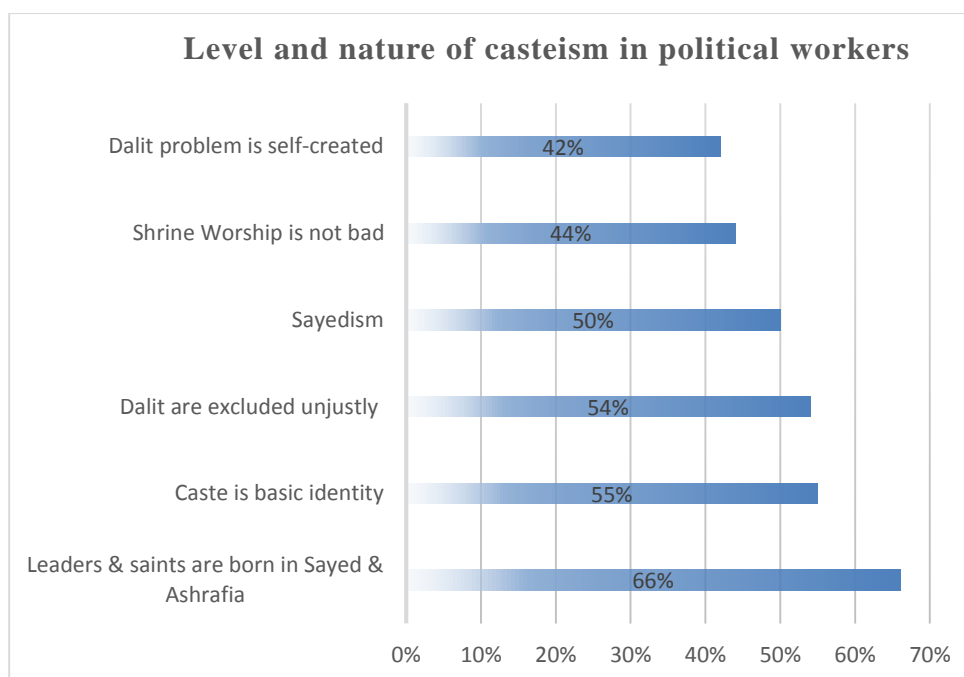


Figure 11: Level and nature of casteism in political workers.

Source: Author (2019)

Assessing from the Ambedkarian perspective, to be anti-caste the score or percentage of the normativity/affirmation of caste of any political activist and the party should not exceed 1 (20%). The analysis reveals that none of the political parties meets that criterion.

The political workers of PML-F (Sayed-led hereditary party) who were found to be the most casteist believed that Sayeds are superior and Dalit are in a way excluded because they are inherently inferior. While the leftist parties had the greater realization that casteism is the problem, whereas the far-right and center-right parties--like the PPP--do not view casteism (and Dalit exclusion) as the problem, they did.

From the analysis of conversational interviews, it became evident that caste is the micropolitical institution that regulates even the judicial matter of the people, including that of the political workers' kinship and inter-caste issues. Since there are no formal legal codes or laws that may regulate the normative casteist politics, no one can be legally held responsible for crimes and atrocities committed in the name of the honor of zaat, qabeelo, or baradari (caste).

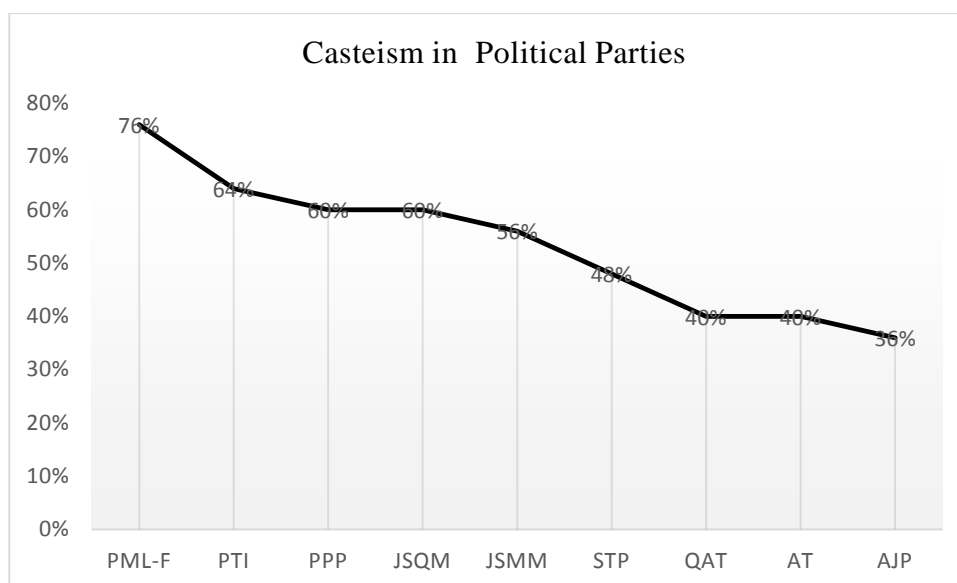


Figure 12: Casteism in political parties.

Source: Author (2019)

The realization among political workers was at very low ebb that the state apparatus at local level is a mere lower-order functionary part of the local tribal-caste order, or that the local government officials as well their subordinates, being from the same castes, cease to be simply officers or the neutral representatives of the people, and that the bureaucracy and the police were not independent of the hegemonic influence of the casteist norms that need to be tackled in mainstream politics. The detailed conversations revealed that although they nominally condemned casteism as a form of political ritual, in their everyday life they were conscious about the honor and prestige of their caste that needed to be guarded socially. They also expressed their attitude of difference and the symbolic respect for the dignitaries of their caste that included Sardars, Waderas, successful lawyers, businessmen, district officers, and the leading politicians, etc.

It shows that although casteism may be problematic for party workers on certain counts, it is not considered as a major social evil worthy of being put on the party agenda. Most of the activists showed their utmost reluctance to criticize or confront the deeply ingrained belief in the supremacy of Sayeds, as in case of the political workers of PML-F (Sayed-led hereditary-religious party) who were found to be the most casteist believed that Sayeds are superior and Dalit are in a way excluded because they are inherently inferior. While the leftist parties had the greater realization that casteism is the problem, whereas the far-right and center-right parties--like the PPP--do not view casteism (and Dalit exclusion) as the problem, they did.

The dissonance is hidden under the token representation of Dalits that is flaunted in media beyond proportions to prove that the parties are now increasingly accommodating the Dalits in politics. For instance, the leftist party AJP in 2018 became the first political party in Sindh to elect Vishnu Mal Maheshwari, a Dalit, as the central President of the party. A party worker told me that the auditorium was full of the Maheshwaris when Vishnu Mal was being elected. Although the party officially did not recognize the role of caste in their internal matters, it was evident beyond doubt that the Vishnu Mal's election was due to his caste-based stature within his caste that was organized by him under his chairmanship of All-Maheshwari Jamat, a Dalit caste-based association. While the party, being pro-nationalist undermined the role of caste in Vishnu's election, the civil society celebrated it as an occasion of 'lower caste', or 'Darāwar' empowerment. Tokenism, to take another example, was observed during the selection of Krishna Kolhi, sister of a Dalit activist, by PPP for the seat of a senator, or the use of Dr. Khatumal to woo Meghwar voters. It shows that although the politicization of caste among Dalits may enable them to rise in political standing, yet, as the Ambedkarites maintain, the occasional customary picking of a Dalit for the leadership position is a form 'dehumanizing tokenism, where one to exist as a 'Dalit man' or 'Dalit woman' also, in stark contrast to the other 'humans' that s/she is sharing the dais with' (Somwanshi, 2017). In the Ambedkarian imaginary, then Sardars (customary chiefs of Sāmāt, Baloch and Sodha Thakur castes), Sayeds, and Vaniya (Vaishiya) politicians become the subject humans in the political arena in Sindh that are embellished at the periphery with a few Kolhi, Bheel and Meghwar (Dalit) subordinates (see also Hussain, 2019). Dalits are, thus, ashrafised and savarnised only to assume the subordinate position under the Ashrafia-savarna classes.

4.4 The Sociocultural Impact of Ashrafization on (Hindu) Dalits

According to Gopal Guru (2012), Dalitness is created by the state, and therefore, it is imposed upon the Dalits from the outside. Since the state in Pakistan is led by the Ashrafia class, they should be held accountable for caste discrimination. Hence, it is not Dalits who want to maintain caste order which discriminates them, but the Ashrafia-savarna classes having vested interests in maintaining that order. The denial of such imposition of the Dalitness by the Ashrafia-savarna classes and the denial of Dalitness, that is, the humiliating present and or the past condition by the Dalits through the idealized argumentation, therefore, tantamount to absolving the Ashrafia-savarna hegemony from their social responsibility to create and maintain caste order. During my fieldwork and the

later social media interactions, I observed that many among the Dalits, supported by the Savarna-Ashraf Sindhi civil society, were denying Dalitness, and absolving the Ashrafia and the state of its responsibility. On that basis, they were further rejecting the use of the term ‘Dalit’ alleging that it rather amplifies their inferiority complex. Contrary to that, a small number of anti-caste activists among them were asserting Dalitness by suggesting reflecting upon the ‘untouchable’ past and the ongoing caste discrimination. The suggestive reflection was, for instance, meant to sharpen the political vision of the would-be Dalit activists to recast their demands of political representation by contrasting their exclusion with the over-representation of Savarnas in the legislative assemblies. This assertive Dalitness is believed to be a ‘source of confrontation and an essential ‘process towards achieving a sense of cultural identity’, with the potential to achieve ‘one’s total entity’ and ‘justice for the entire mankind’ (Paswan et al, 2003; Guru, 2012).

Since the domination of Dalits is not absolute, space is left for the interplay of dissent, that in the process not only allows Dalits to assert but also creates dissonance between their anti-caste assertions and the caste-based drive to Hinduize and Ashrafize. The dissonance turns out to be more complicated when one observes the widely prevalent reverence for Sayeds and Muslim Pirs along with the worship of their supposed Hindu deities, and the concomitant denial of Dalitness. For instance, when I asked Chandan *Koochrio*¹⁷⁷, ‘who do you worship?’, he told:

First of all, let me tell you that we are not *Koochriya*. Our ancestors were [Koochriya] when they used to steal the property of others. There are, however, a few left among us that do the same. But originally, we were Sensi Rajput. We are Hindus but we also worship Qalandar Shahabaz [Sayed], Shah Latif [Sayed Poet and Pir] and Badshah Pir [Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jeelani].

Contrary *Koochrya*, Achar Fakeer, a Shikari Bheel did not classify himself into any religious category. When I asked him about his religious rituals, he replied:

Brother, we summon Mullah [Islamic religious cleric) to solemnize our marriage, but we do not read the Quran, neither go to Mosque, or temple. We revere every saint of Allah; may it be Hindu or Muslim.

I asked, ‘then are you a Muslim or Hindu?’. After a moment’s pause, he replied, ‘don’t know’. Unlike the ultra-subaltern Dalits, the level of religiosity among the Dalits, particularly Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, Baghri and Oad castes is relatively high. The majority of them, without hesitation, identify themselves with the Hindu religion, although, they too

¹⁷⁷ *Koochrio* is one of the Scheduled Castes usually associated by Ashrafia castes to the occupation stealing and burglary. *Koochiro*, themselves, however dislike being called *Koochrio*, that literally means the ones who ‘escape after stealing property’. Instead they want to be called either Sensi Rajput or Sochi.

are highly syncretic in practice. This increased Hindu consciousness became starkly visible when I, along with other anti-caste activists as the members Dalit Sujaag Tehreek¹⁷⁸, interacted, with some Bheel activists. When a Dalit activist asked a veteran Sindhi nationalist Comrade Lalchand Bheel (Dalit), to support Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (an anti-caste group of activists), he advised in a complaining tone:

Please! Do not fan caste discrimination by talking about ‘Dalit’. Except for a minor issue here and there, all castes are living amicably. Sindh is the land of Sufis. Bheel, Kolhi, Mari, Bajeer, Laghari all are Sindhis and must be united on a single platform instead of seeing them divided against each other.

‘Dalit simply means “untouchable”, therefore humiliating for us” agitated Rawto Kolhi when a Dalit activist insisted arguing in defense of the use of the term ‘Dalit’. In most of the encounters with the upwardly mobile Dalits, the use of the term ‘Dalit’ was countered by asserting association with the Sindhi and Sufi whole. The civil society activists argued that the use or the mention of terms such as ‘Dalit’ or the caste name that may invoke stigmatized past or the past condition, humiliates Dalits, and further foments casteism. The use of the term ‘Dalit’ was construed as divisive and an attempt to conspire against the unity of Sindh. Those with the Marxist bent of mind believed that casteism is epiphenomenal and will vanish away on its own; or that ‘caste’ and ‘Dalit’ is an Indian thing (see also Hussain, 2019). Hence, the cognitive dissonance emerged as the explicit rejection of the term ‘Dalit’ to gloss over the Dalitness or the existing caste-based discrimination was not corresponding with the equal rejection of the supposed superior status of Sayeds, Sodha Rajputs and other Ashrafia-Savarna castes. Instead, as evident from the reconstructed identity of Chandan Koochrio, they aspire to be known as Rajputs (Kshatriyas), or want to be reckoned as honorable communities with the dominant Sayed and Ashrafia castes. Hence, they are not rejective of casteism as such as they are of Dalitness, the rejection of which hardly better their standing vis-à-vis Savarna-Ashrafia castes. Dalits remain Dalits and their claims are not taken seriously as genuine. Savrana Rajputs continue to mark their discriminatory difference from the Kolhi, Bheel and Koochriya Rajput. Hence the Rajput tag, or the tag of *mureedi* (discipleship) of the Sayed Pir, instead of raising their caste status to the equals, merely reaffirms the pre-existing caste order.

Particularly in caste of Sayeds, Dalits do not seem to make conscious attempts to reason out causes of their humiliation that is perpetuated by their submission to Sayeds,

¹⁷⁸ Dalit Sujaag Tehreek is the semi-formal open forum of anti-caste activists established in May, 2016 in lower Sindh.

and thus, do not perceive Sayeds as the equally hegemonic factor as they do perceive any wadero (village head) or Sardar (tribal chief) and feudal (landlord) of Ashrafia class. This paradoxically assiduous reverence for Sayeds is so normalized that it exists in folklore and can be found in idioms at the everyday level. For instance, I heard the Sindhi idiom '*Sayed mero ta b sawa sero*' (Sayed is superior even if he were dirty/poor) for the first time from Vinod Kolhi, a Dalit peasant with whom I met in semi-permanent settlements on the bank of the watercourse in Haji Khan Laghari, a village near Naon Kot, which is a small town in lower Sindh. We are Kolhi Rajput, but Sayed is Sayed', said Vinod when I asked him who he votes for in elections, 'Vote always belongs to Wadero Dadal Khan Laghari, the head of our village. We will vote anyone he recommends. Vinod's praise of the Sayed caste and his realization that his caste is inferior shows that Sayedism is normalized in Sindh. The 'poor Sayed' and the 'rich Dalit' are elusive categories, sort of oxymorons as even the exceptional economic thrift of a Dalit does not in any way make him/her the social and political equals to Ashrafia castes.

The logic of power follows from the caste endogamy as most of the Sayeds, rich or the poor, living in villages are kins to other rich and the poor Sayeds. Consequently, there is, for instance, a rising lower middle class, particularly among Meghwar (Dalit) community, but none of them is wealthy and powerful enough to politically vie with Sayed or any Ashrafia caste fellow as the power in the caste-ridden society is not merely based on individuals economic capital but on the collective caste capital of the each caste. Dalits are pragmatic enough to know this power differential, as in case of Vinod, who had the realization that, as compared to Sayeds and Laghari Baloch, his caste was not only considered genealogically 'inferior' but also powerless, as they didn't have the same social connections available to any poor Sayed or rich Baloch landlord supported by powerful Sardars (tribal chiefs). Unhappiness with this situation was writ large on Vinod's face, and this reflected the Dalitness discussed earlier (i.e., the feeling of humiliation a Dalit has when they are not treated equally. To overcome that anxiety emergent of 'untouchable' identity, Vinod redefined his identity as Rajput, the caste-based epithet usually used by 'upper caste' Hindus of Tharparkar in Sindh and Rajasthan in India. I call this re-identification with the 'upper caste' Hindu as Savarnization, which in Sindh is supplemented with the equal drive for Ashrafization, i.e., the tendency to associate or identify with the Sayeds and other Ashrafia castes of Muslims (Buehler, 2012) without conversion.

Particularly, in the context of caste-based discrimination, the experiences of those Dalits that converted to Islam taught them the lesson that the stigma of ‘untouchability’ associated with their caste remains attached even after conversion, as the change of caste markers was easily apprehended by the locals, particularly by Ashrafia and Savarna who are always keen to know the caste background of the suspect Dalit. Usually, after having known the caste background of a Dalit, the Ashrafia and Savarna individual(s) ignore, discriminate, humiliate and relabel them back as per their Dalit caste names that may have assumed the derogatory connotation because of casteism. For instance, Bheel convert to Shaikh caste is relabeled as Bheel Shaikh, or Chuhro Shaikh, the markers that are considered derogatory symbols of lower, and untouchable caste status.

This fear of humiliation, once the caste background and the associated stigma is revealed, as one of the potent factors of the denial of Dalitness (the condition of being humiliated) leading them to hide their original or previous caste labels. For instance, when I stayed a night at Kaloī (a small town in Tharparkar district, Sindh) at the guest house of Harchand Jaipal in May in 2016, I observed how the shrine of Gahiyo Fakeer, a Hindu Dalit sant of Jaipal subcaste of Meghwar (Dalit), who was the disciple of Razi Shah (a Sayed Muslim Sufi), was being revered by Dalits while they were denying their state of Dalitness. When satsang (devotional Hindu-Sufi music program) began, there erupted a short but heated debate between two of the Jaipal men.

‘Sindh is the land of Sufis. There is no caste, no Dalit’, rebutted Rampal, the elderly and the organizer of the Mela (festival), when Moolchand, university student tried to convince him that Jaipal community is officially classified in Pakistan as Scheduled Caste and that they should politically identify themselves as Dalits, the oppressed class. After contemplating for a few seconds, Rampal continued, ‘Yes, we were turned into untouchables; we suffered extreme humiliations. But now the time has changed. We are still discriminated but we are no more Dalits’. This contention over the use and misuse of identity markers went on within Dalit family members, some arguing for the use of ‘Dalit’ and ‘SC’ terms, others suggesting ‘Hindu’ and Darāwar, yet others simultaneously embracing all these identities.



Figure 13: Satsang Program organized by Jaipal community of Kaloi.
Source: Author (2016)

This caste-based specificity of the place, the event, and the Sufi figure gave solace to Meghwar that a Sufi/Sant can rise from within their community as well, and that they have somehow defied ‘untouchability’ as their sant was sanctified by the Sayed Sufi, the proof that casteism is on the wane and do not anymore require the drive against untouchability or caste discrimination. This assumption is buttressed by the examples of interfaith harmony that involved Hindu Dalits and Jati Hindus participating in Islamic religious festivals, such as observing reverence for the Ahl-i-bayt during the month of Muharram (1st Month of Islamic Calendar), or the invocation of *Mola*¹⁷⁹ Ali when in trouble or seeking amulets from Sayeds and Muslims. For instance, a Dalit, in an attempt to convince of existing commonness of faith told:

Do you know brother! In Chachro there is Imam *Bargah*¹⁸⁰ of a Hindu Sindhi managed by Hazrat Allama Ravi Shankar. In that *Bargah*, regular *Majlis* are held. The local Hindus participate in it. We also go there to pay homage to the martyrs of Karbala and Mola Ali. The naïveté of this logic of equality—promoted by a tiny class of upwardly mobile Meghwars—became evident to me when I saw that the Dalit’s reverence for Sayeds was not being reciprocated by Ashrafia castes. For instance, in UC Adhigam of Nangarparkar, the region that borders with India and is considered as the frontier region, I observed that about 12 shrines of Sayed/Shah existed in the area that were often visited by Kolhi and Meghwar communities that formed the largest communities in UC Adhigam. Both the Sayed and ‘Shah’ are the colloquial term in Sindhi (borrowed from Arabic and Persian

¹⁷⁹ ‘*Mola*’ is interpreted to mean ‘God’, is the colloquial epithet father of Imam Hussain

¹⁸⁰ *Bargah* literally meaning ‘court’ is locally used to refer to a place where usually Muslims or Shia sect gather to symbolize their presence before Imams, thus, also called Imam Bargah.

respectively). Both the terms literally mean ‘honorable’. While the term ‘Sayed’ was used by Parkari communities to refer to a particular caste instead of a mere title or epithet of respect, ‘Shah’ was used both as title attributed to both Sayed and non-Sayed Pirs (spiritual or religious leaders).

In UC Aghigam there were two Meghwar sants as well, but Muslim castes (Khokhar, Kumhbar, and Fakeer) and Thakur or Mahraj (Jati Hindus) did not show equal reverence towards them. No Sayed family was living in the area. Kolhi community was in majority but there was no pir/sant known to exist from their caste. This disparity in the distribution of spiritual/religious capital across castes determined the level of reverence or the respect that could be offered to any Sufi pir, Sant or the caste to which they belonged to. I also noticed the interesting phenomenon of the posthumous conversion and Ashrafization of Dalit pirs. For instance, a Dalit activist from Mirpurkhas told that Umedo Bheel, Gulab Bheel (Hindu Dalits) and Raja Vir have been renamed as Umeed Ali Ghazi Bukhari (Sayed), Gulab Shah, and Rahmat Ali Shah Bukhari, the Sayed caste titles. In another instance, the graveyard named after Chando Fakeer Bheel, the disciple of Shah Inayat (Muslim sant) was occupied by Mallah and Nohri castes. Jaro Bheel told, ‘Nohris installed a board over graveyard naming it after Sayed Noor Ali Shah, arguing that this Sayed’s grave here. Previously Muslims would convert us to Machi and Shaikh (lower castes), but now they are turning us into Sayed’. This forced grabbing of sanctified places of Dalits leads one to believe in the narratives of the Dalits that want to reclaim their past spiritual legacy. Dalit activists, for instance, claimed that their Dalit mystics were turned into Savarnas during the course of history. To prove their point, they give examples of Bago fakeer Bhil, now called Bago Birham or Par Birham (Barham), and Peru Fakeer Bhil, (at village Jahiroo Sharif) now called Par Birham by the Savarnas, and Rama Pir Meghwar, who is now believed to be a Thakur (Savarna).

Interestingly, some of the Bheel activists did not see any problem with that Savarnisation and Ashrafization, and the change of caste names suggested in part when they adopted the Ashrafia caste. Naroo Mal Bheel, a peon in a local school in Jhudo town, even argued that ‘Bheels should also have the right to become Sayed’. It reflected their desperateness to get rid of the caste identities having the ‘untouchable’ stigma attached to them. To achieve that while some were just deliberately hiding, others were avoiding talking of the ‘untouchable’ past, or to skip it to glorify the ancient (mythical) past, yet others suggesting to gloss with the Ashrafia identity markers such as Sayed, Pir, Sant or Sufi, Hindu, Rajput, Sindhi, etc.

The extraordinary reverence for the Sayeds observed by the Hindu Dalits is an attempt to redefine the standing of their caste, through the inversion of the ritual, to attest to the Islamic belief in the sanctified superiority of the Sayeds and the profane status of the commoners (including non-Muslims). This drive for caste-parity is monitored by the Savarna and Ashrafia classes to discern between the supposed actual or original Savarna and Ashraf, and the Dalit aspirant. Caste superiority thus becomes the matter of relative prestige that generates caste hierarchies and graded inequalities with, for instance, the Ashrafia and Savarna Rajputs always considered as superiors than the neo-Savarna or the neo-Ashraf Rajput converts. Hence, the maneuvers to Ashrafize and Savarnize did seem to enhance their self-esteem, that is, their judgment of the self, yet in one way or another, it failed to afford them the self-respect that is contingent upon the reciprocal reverence for Dalits coming from the Sayed or Ashrafia castes. Consequently, Dalits tend to express denial and difference towards their Dalitness, to the Dalit identities, the existing or the past 'untouchability' or to the humiliating attitude that they may experience. To reduce the pain involving the 'cognition' of the resilience of 'untouchability' and caste discrimination, they adopt hegemonically given Ashrafization and Savarnization as the pain-relieving cognitive strategies to reduce dissonance. In this manner, Dalits help Ashrafia hegemony to sustain under the false assumption that casteism and the Dalitness do not exist, waning, or are politically non-antagonistic.

Looking from the Ambedkarian perspective (Guru, 2011a & 2011b; Kumar, 2016a, 2016b & 2005), this strategy to forget the past and wish to improve their present through Savarnization and Ashrafization does not work to the advantage of Dalitbahujans, and, paradoxically, attests the superiority of Savarna-Ashrafs and the inferiority of Dalit(Bahujan), and instead, sets up the social and political field of contention to sustain, emulate, appropriate, deny caste capital (Kumar, 2016a; Kumar, 2016b). The interaction of different castes continues to develop the self-image of the individual or the caste group based on the perception of the worth of the social capital each caste inherits, that develops the feelings of superiority or inferiority among the individual or caste group. The hegemonic narrative compels to believe that Sayeds, Sammāt, Baloch, and Vaniya (Vaishiya) castes have more cultural and symbolic capital than Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, Bajeer, Mangarha (Dalitbahujan castes). This realization of the differential lack of capital made agreeable by the Ashrafia narratives of political Sufism and Islam psychologically compel Dalits to deny Dalitness, hide their caste identities, and to Ashrafise. The denial of Dalitness is, therefore the dissonant reaction of the oppressed, that has been inculcated in

Dalits or imposed upon them or rationalized through the Ashrafia narrative that reflects the cognitive dissonance on the issue and the practice of casteism and caste-based discrimination.

Looking retrospectively, although I made use of the term 'Dalit' in the specific sense for Scheduled Castes, as well in a generic sense for the similar overlapping communities, its use was problematized. Those who assert Dalitness having the positive value as a form of transformative social protest (Gurua, 2012; Paswan et al, 2003) to acquire the capacity to mount a resistance against Ashrafization and Savarnization, are far fewer in numbers. The reasons for the 'Dalit' identity contestation were many depending on the location and the political affiliations of the people. For instance, while Sindhi nationalists considered the use of the term 'Dalit' as divisive of Sindhi nation, the Dalits themselves primarily opposed it because it was bringing to the social and political surface their 'ex-untouchable' caste location that they were taking pains to hide through Savarnization and Ashrafization. This denial of Dalitness of varying kind and intensity lied at the base of the dissonance between the empirically existing 'Dalitness', the denial of it, and the affirmation of Sayedism prevalent in Dalits and the Sindhi civil society activists. This denial of Dalitness by Dalits was their negative reaction to hide the caste identities to facilitate upward mobility through Ashrafization.

Hence, in the final analysis, in Sindh, the hegemony of the Ashrafia-savarna class determines the acceptance and or the rejection of the identity labels employed by the Dalits. Each ethnic identity carries the cultural capital and, therefore, symbolizes power and richness or the lack of it. The term 'Dalit', Scheduled Castes or any such terms that alluded to the past or the existing lack of caste capital that those identities carried is unacceptable to the majority of Dalits. That was, however, not the case with the Ashrafia Sindhis who tended to relativize Dalit oppression only when their belief in Sayedism or Ashrafia legacy was questioned. This defied the Ambedkarian demand to understand and use collective or the plural caste identities, including 'Dalit' and 'Scheduled Castes' in the positive and emancipatory sense, and as the markers of social protest,¹⁸¹ and to draw the marked contrast between the Dalit(Bahujan) and the Ashrafia-savarna classes. The use of the plural class categories of the oppressed castes is deemed by Ambedkarites as politically necessary and sociologically useful to make the point that Dalitness is not the Dalit's own choice, but

¹⁸¹ See online: Dalit Is 'Proper Noun', Not An 'Adjective', Says Political Theorist Prof Gopal Guru Published by [NewsClickin](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rciW7_ZGhxU), Published on Jul 19, 2017. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rciW7_ZGhxU (accessed on January, 9, 2019).

the oppressive condition imposed upon them by the Savarna-Ashrafia castes. The majority of Dalits and Dalit activists in Pakistan, however, are not yet conscious of that Ambedkarian imperative.

4.5 Hegemonic Narratives and Practices

After discussing the nature of Ashrafia hegemony, the intermediary role of Sarvna class, and the hegemonic impact of their narratives, I feel confident to argue that casteism is deeply entrenched in Sindhi society which dates back to colonial encounter, survive colonialism and continue as the form of internal colonialism of the historically oppressed castes, particularly Dalits. Political Sufism and Islam have harmonized casteism across faiths, particularly Brahminic and Ashrafia practices.

This revelation justifies the criticism of Sayedism, allowing one to argue that, while there can be many other reasons for the existing normativity of casteism, such as the continuity of the primordial tribal-caste traditions (Guru.G, 2011a & 2011b), when it comes to the question of political articulation, the dominant ‘desi’ (Guru.G, 2011b) narratives seem to normalize casteism by privileging Sayed-Ashrafia castes. It shows a theoretical departure from Loui Dumont’s (1970) generalizations about the singularity of Hindu-specific sanctity of castes based on the norms of ritual purity and pollution (Dumont, 1980 (1970)). The extraordinary reverence for the Sayeds observed by the Hindu Dalits proves that the sacred status of Sayeds and the profane status of the commoners (including non-Muslims) are employed by the Dalit class to sanctify their caste location and make claims to respectable social positions and the right to have an equitable share in society and politics.

The existence of a syncretic relationship between the Ashrafia (and Brahminic) narratives and the practices rather fulfills the basic conditions of hegemonic relations: the presence of antagonistic forces in the form of Sayedism/Ashrafia against Dalit class, it fails to enable Dalits to articulate their resistance against the Ashrafia class as the syncretic spaces also create room for Ashrafization, (i.e., the ‘floating element’ (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p.122) that keeps the identity frontiers unstable in favor of hegemonic Ashrafia class). Dalits are, thus, ashrafised and Savarnized only culturally as subordinates and without political empowerment.

Table 11: Social spaces and hegemonic narratives and practices underlying dissonance

Spaces/places that reflect hegemony and dissonance	The narratives that assist 'dissonance'	Practices that reflect Dissonance
Qaum , Qabeelo, Zaat (caste)	Tribal and caste-based traditions and customs	Casteism (Sayedism, Dalit Exclusion)
Dargāh (Shrine), Temple, civil society, political society	Political Islam/Pakistani nationalism/Two-nation theory	Ashrafization
Sufi, Pir, Sant	Political Sufism/ Sindhi Nationalism	Ritual Inversion
	Sanatan Dharam/Hinduism	Shrine worship
	<i>Imaamat</i> Shia and Bralevi Islam	Hero worship

From the literary and ethnographic examples discussed above, it is evident that religious identity markers in everyday discourse override the caste, despite the fact that caste and or class plays as much a vital role in the as religion. The examples related to conversions show that caste discrimination against Dalits and Ashrafia hegemony prevails under the supposed cover religious syncretism promoted and claimed primarily by Sindhi nationalists, which in itself hides the bigotry of Mullahs and the blind faith of the would-be Dalit converts. This post-partition shaping up of the political culture has developed among the socially ambitious Dalits an urge to Sindhize and be identified as Pakistanis, which are the localized processes of Ashrafization without conversion. Sindhization is a process that demands of Dalits to praise Sindhi culture, prefer to speak Sindhi language instead of their mother tongue and cherish Sindhi nationalist sentiment. Similarly, Ashrafization, in general, demands them to follow the state-sponsored narrative.

Considering the above discussion, the hegemonic narratives that assist dissonance and become the reason for the reproduction of casteism through the practices flourishing in particular physical places and social spaces can be summarised as in Table 10.

4.6 Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is evident that the projection, representation and interpretation of casteism in the Sindhi Sufi nationalist literary discourse is disconnected from the actual use and interpretation by the Sindhi-speaking people. The *tarkari-pasand* or the progressive literary productions and the interpretations do not do the explicit criticism of casteism, racism and gender disparities, and lack the egalitarian, inclusionary potential to question the social practices and the social structures that sustain the caste-

based inequalities and the hegemonic relations existing between the Ashrafia-Savarna and the non-Ashrafia-Savarna classes.

The analysis shows that the denial of casteism and Dalitness has much to do with the belief of the Dalits and the political activists in Sayedism, which was the result of the historical privileges conferred upon them by ruling elites and the religious authorities, and that grew to get institutionalized in the form of 'Dargāh' (shrine). The normative sanction of the Sayeds as superiors and that of the Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar or the Dalits as inferiors was not uniform in expression as it generated the dissonance. The dissonance was regulated through ethnocentric discursive and performative practices of political Sufism as it reflected in their denial of Dalitness, that is the realization of being humiliated and oppressed by the Savarnas and the Ashrafia classes, particularly by the Sayeds and Vaniya castes. Hence, the denial of casteism, the opposition to the use of the 'Dalit' identity marker and the negation of the Dalitness seemed to have as much to do with the belief in Ashrafia values as it had with the normative sanction of the Savarna values. Both the Savarna and Ashrafia values seemed to have found their expression in the dominant ethnocentric form of political Sufism. Political Sufism merges the Savarna and Ashrafia norms by means of the syncretic narrative based on interfaith harmony and the civilizational rhetoric.

The analysis further made evident that the rationalization of casteism by the political workers of Ashrafia background and by the Dalits, was the cognitive reaction to dissipate dissonance while coping up with the issue of the reverence for Sayeds. The casteist practices were evident from the dissonance, the rituals of inversion to hide caste names, and the narratives related to the rites of passage, particularly caste endogamy, surreptitiously hierarchized castes to assign the lowest order to Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar and other Dalit castes whereby the Dalit caste names become their 'untouchable' identity markers. Because of the hiding tendencies, the term 'Dalit' itself was the subject of controversy and contestation between the anti-caste activists and the anti-Dalits prone to Savarnization and Ashrafization. The intervention of Sindhi civil society, particularly that of Sindhi nationalists, in the Dalit discursive spaces of decision-making, showed how Sindhi Ashrafia continued to hegemonize the (re)construction of the identities, and the (re)formation of the narrative(s) for the Dalits.

Looking from the Ambedkarian perspective, civilizational greatness such as that of Hindu-Muslim harmony were employed to dissipate dissonance that threw the Dalit narrative (or myth) of the Darāwar (Dravidian) roots of Indus Civilization into the backwater of contemporary social and political discourse. Savarnas and the Ashrafia

classes tended to differentiate between original and fake Ashrafs and the Savarnas and reposition themselves as the superiors. It meant that Sindhi civil society desired the unity of Sindh without confronting the internal dissonance, that is, the contradictions existing between their Sayedism and the resultant degradation of Dalits. Therefore, I argue that, although the active use of the term 'Dalit' by the Dalit activists and the state of realization of being humiliated seemed to be failing to reproduce the positive Dalitness that may infuse the transformative spirit to struggle, the tendency to hide and change caste the names also did not seem to succeed either. The suppression of the negative Dalitness did not help much to gain the desired self-respect. But it did not mean the absence of friction between the Dalitbahujans the Ashrafia-Savarna classes. The Dalit's attempts to dissipate the cognitive dissonance underlying the existing caste discrimination can also be understood as the kind of social-psychological friction prompting them to bridge the caste disparity between themselves and the Savarna-Ashrafs. I, therefore, conclude that the social imaginary rooted in ethnocentric forms of Sufism as it manifested in the form of Sayedism defies the Ambedkarian approach to society and politics that argues for the eradication of casteism. It also minimizes the chances of Dalits to come up with their own counter-hegemonic narrative(s) that may transcend the Sufi nationalist performative projection of Sayedism and casteism and may prepare the ground for the moral-ethical reformation of society.

Chapter 5: Mobilizing Around Multiple Identity Markers

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, different strategies adopted by Ambedkarites and Dalits activists to organize their contestation around Pakistani, Sindhi, Hindu, Sufi Darāwar, Dalit and Scheduled Castes identities are analyzed. Like in India, where the contestation over the public use of the ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Caste’ markers is debated by the Dalits and the Indian public (Karuppan, 2018; Raj & Jyothi, 2014; Baudh, 2016), the Dalit activists in Pakistan are also contending their use as against those who do not want to be identified as ‘Dalits’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’. The ‘Dalit’, ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Hindu identities assumed greater social and political significance while I was doing fieldwork, particularly in the context of the debate on it generated after the formation of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (DST). Therefore, having explained organizational strategies that revolved around identity contestation(s), I explain the choices of identity markers available to Dalit activists and the reasons why Dalits prioritize one identity over the other.

5.2 Which Identities Signify Sameness and Difference?

The complex of identities that define the ‘self’ of a person (Meijl, 2008; Jenkins, 2010; Jenkins) in a deeply identitarian society, as it is in Sindh, cannot be simply understood as classificatory categories on a horizontal or vertical plane of difference. Therefore, probably the best way to understand the multiplex of identities-in this case Dalit identities-is to bring to relief the social relations of different identitarian groups in the given social milieu by explaining the diversity of meanings attached by actors- in this caste Dalit activists-to their identities.

I observed that the Dalit activists juxtaposed their chosen identity markers with that of the Savarnas to make the point that they were not only historically different but also discriminated against. In many ways, their identity markers diverged from the Savarna-Ashrafia identity markers. For instance, while the Savarnas asserted themselves primarily as Sindhi Hindus, the Dalit activists tended to mark their difference from Savarna Hinduness by asserting their version of Sanatan Dharam and the Darāwar ethnic identity along with regional Thari and national Sindhi identity markers (see sections 5.5 and 5.6). They presented Sanatan Dharam as immune from Brahmanism as it did not subscribe to Manusimriti, the Hindu religious scripture that sanctions the caste system. They were also

skeptical about the religious authority of Bhagwad Gita, Mahabharata, and other Vedic and Post-Vedic religious scriptures. Contrary to their anti-Brahminic stance, and as compared to Savarnas, they cherished very positive views of Buddhism and Islam. Hence, although they identified themselves as Hindu along with Scheduled Castes and Darāwaṛ, they had a very critical view of many religious and cultural practices of Hindus that looked down upon ‘lower castes’.

Dalits activists, in particular, were very critical of Hindutva that they considered as a fascist form of Hinduism. Hindutva is the ideological and cultural force that manufactures consent over the notion that the Verna system (caste-based classes) is the functional necessity in South Asia (Narayan, 2009; Shakuntala, 2018). Dalit activists in Sindh considered all those who justified Verna System and Manusimriti as Manuvadis and Hindutvadis. For instance, in a speech read by me in an international conference on behalf Dr. Sono Khangarani, a leading Dalit activist, an Ambedkarite argued:

There is only one reason behind this historical structural injustice and exploitation, and that is, Hindutva or what we Ambedkarites call Brahmanism, the cultural dimension of the political ideology of Hindutva. Brahmanism is the social practice of discrimination based on ascribed status assigned by virtue of birth in a particular caste and is legitimized through the fascist ideology of Hindutva.

(In a speech in an International Seminar ‘Hindutva Policies and the State of Minorities in India’ held on February 19, 2019, at Islamabad).

This shows that the Ambedkarites in Pakistan hold Hindutva responsible for the Dalit exclusion from the Hindu-Muslim or Savarna-Ashrafia mainstream as the Dalits were thrown outside the fourfold Verna system (that included, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudras), and classified them as ‘*achoot*’ (untouchables). This inclusion-exclusion sanctioned by Manusimriti¹⁸², and jealously guarded by the Brahmin class, was questioned by Sono Khangarani who condemned the imposed Hinduness of Savarna class and differentiated it by explaining the alternative version of Sanatan Dharam. Radha Bheel, DST chairperson also differentiated between Hinduism of the Savarnas and the Sanatan Dharam of the Dalits during her heated debate at press club Hyderabad with the Krishan Lal, a Vaniya (Savarna) activist, who was attempting to convince her to work for the solidarity of Hindus. Krishna Lal objected to Radha Bheel’s persistent use of the colloquial Islamic phrases, like *Bismillah*, *Insha Allah*, *Allah bhali kando*¹⁸³, that are commonly used

¹⁸² See Manusimriti, The Oxford International Encyclopedia of Legal History (2009), Oxford University Press.

¹⁸³ ‘*Bismillah*’ is short for Islamic Arabic register, *Bismillah-hi-rahman-r-Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the most merciful, the beneficent). *Insha Allah* is an Arabic phrase meaning ‘If god willing’. Similarly, ‘*Allah Bhali Kando*’ is the Sindhi variant of ‘If God willing’. All these phrases are used interchangeably by secular Hindu and Dalits.

in Sindh as the conversations go on to greet and bless colleagues and friends. Dalits also quite often use the same. For them Allah and Bhagwan sometimes become synonymous, and the temple is referred to as the abode of Allah. Radha explained her use of these phrases to the Savarna activist in this manner:

Look, brother, the truth is what it is. Please tell us which word we may use in place of Insha Allah and Bismillah. I am a Sindhi woman and the disciple of Latif (Sayed saint). I live in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. So, it's natural for me to spontaneously utter those words to greet and bless the people. Indian Muslims may also be speaking many similar Hindu terms like we Dalits do in Sindh. Now, if you worship temples it is your concern, but you cannot force me to do that. It is the matter between me and Khuda (God). Nobody needs to interfere.

Krishan Lal replied:

The problem is not that you say Inshallah or Mashallah. But here you strangely talk of outrightly abolishing temples as if you were not a Hindu. If any Muslim were talking about his religion like that, he would have long been killed by the Muslims. You must protect and support the Hindu religion only.

Radha replied:

Yes, that is a true brother. Muslims would have killed that person. But my religion is Sanatan Dharam although I am also Hindu. Sanatan Dharam does not draw the boundaries as you do. Boundary marking is the Brahminic trick, and I am not going to fall into it. Because of the Brahminic tricks, our people of Sanatan Dharam convert to Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and other religions because in those religions there is no Verna system, there is no caste discrimination. You are defending that faith which turned us into achoot, you are talking of the Dharam that is fundamentally different from our Dharam.

Ganpat Rai Bheel, a leading Ambedkarite, however, has a slightly different notion of Sanatan Dharam. He argued when I met him and asked about the political prowess of Dalit forums, that:

Most of the forums of Dalits and the Dalit activists are far removed from Ambedkarian ideology and instead follow their Ashrafia-Savarna masters. They are pygmies and opportunists, and just want to remain the lackeys. Their Sanatan Dharam is a yet softer version of Hindutva that can only perpetuate Brahmanism.

This interpretation of Hindu religion, culture, and Sanatan Dharam is obviously at variance with and rather contradictory to Savarnas religion, culture and values premised fundamentally on Vedic myths of Mahabharata, and the legends of Ram and Sita. Dalit activists alleged that inspired by the Vedic mythology, Hindutvadis want to create Akhand Bharat (literally, the Greater Hindu Rashtra) aimed at imposing one religion (Brahmanism), one nation (Hindu) and one ideology (Hindutva). They called it the fascist narrative aimed at the domination of all South Asian countries including Afghanistan. This, they feared, was being increasingly fed into the brains of the Dalits and other non-Muslim groups by

Hindutva ideologues, particularly by the Sangh Parivar, its main branch RSS, their crafty public speakers, Gurus, and Babas, and Hindutva intellectuals of intentional renown. Whatever may be the level and the extent of caste-based class hierarchies and the resultant Dalit exclusion, the Dalit activists identify with the Sanatan Dharam that condemns the Brahminic beliefs and practices that are believed to (re)produce caste discrimination.

Unlike Dalit activists, a layman Dalit who was not sensitized to assert Dalitness, seemed to follow the empirical hegemonic givens and were less articulate about making such differentiation. DST, SCFP, BIF, Pakistan Darāwar Itihad and several other forums made deliberate use of the combination of identities, such as شیبیول کاست (Scheduled Castes), دلت (Dalit), اصل ترتیء ڈٹی، آدیواسی (Dharti Dhareen (sons of soil)¹⁸⁴ /Adivasi), پیرھیل طبقا مظلوم ء تکاریل، دراوڑ (Darāwar), باگڑی، کولھی میگھواڑ، پیل، (Bhil, Kolhi, Meghwar, Bhagri, etc.), اقلیت (Minority), سناتن دھرم (Sanatan Dharami, Sindhi-Dalit, indigenous Sindhi, indigenous Pakistani identities to mark their difference from the Savarna-Ashrafia classes. They, however, made use of the ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity markers selectively depending upon the specific opposite identity marker. For instance, while some Dalit activists interpret ‘Dalit’, ‘Adivasi’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ in opposition to ‘Hindus’ and Jati Hindus’, others considered them as complementary or parallel identities to each other. These identity markers were further complemented by several other multiple regional, linguistic, ethnic identities such as Thari, Parkari, Darāwar, Sindhi and Pakistani, etc. Those who preferred to use the term ‘Dalit’ also append different combinations of the above identities to construct the self or group identity. Still others, particularly the Kolhi and Bheel communities of the Thar Desert region, preferred to use Adivasi (indigenous) or Dharti Dhareen (sons of the soil) as alternative terms for both social and political purposes. Yet other social and non-governmental organizations (BIF, SCFP, PDSN) preferred to use the official category of Scheduled Castes to demand SCs representation. However, in real-life politics, all the above contesting identifications were used interchangeably by the Dalit activists.

Hence, the notions of the self and associated identities varied from one individual and caste group to another. This variation in identities one way or another, reflected upon their socioeconomically marginalized status in the society. For instance, a Kolhi (Dalit

¹⁸⁴ Dharti Dhani ‘is the common phrase used to mean ‘sons of soil’ by literate class of Dalits and Ashrafia-Savarnass in Sindh. It gravely reflects the patriarchal polity of Sindh. The phrase could be ‘daughter of soil’ or the more gender-neutral and inclusive phrase could be ‘sons and daughter of the soil’ or rather ‘people of the soil’.

caste) was considered by Dalit activists as a Dalit and a Hindu minority, who seasonally migrated from the drought-stricken frontier region of Sindh, to turn into the peasant dependent over Ashrafia landlords in Barrage area of Sindh. Hence, a typical Parkari Kolhi was attributed with the multiple identities; some imposed, others self-chosen that reflected their marginality and Dalitness.

Within Dalit activists, there were two trends related to identification with their respective castes. The first groups consisted of those who wanted to be labeled as Dalits for political purposes but did not want to question the Hindu Brahminic system and worship all major Hindu Gods. Casteism and untouchability were assumed by them to be extraneous social factors, the later appropriation of Santana Dharma (ancient and original Hindu faith). They did not wish to annihilate caste. Instead, they wanted to maintain castes as indigenous appendages of the golden past, the markers and the reminders of the Darāwar greatness (see section 5.5.1). The other group was that of hardliners who wanted to subvert Hindu mythological traditions and even suggested and aspired to convert to any other religion to get rid of untouchability and casteism.

Despite harboring highly overlapping ideological and strategic differences, they formed a kind of loosely coordinated Dalit network with some members of each group holding membership of another forum or group. This complimentary use of identities, for instance, can be seen in the statement of a local Adivasi activist, Ranshal Kolhi. He narrated Adivasi oppression by using the ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity markers in this manner:

Open history books on India. Adivasi tribes whom we call Dalits have always been ruled by Rajput and Brahmin. They are like vicious beasts for the oppressed tribes. But whenever Hindustan has been attacked by the foreign invaders, these Rajas never resisted. Instead gave away their daughters and sisters in marriage, made them their kith and kin. Resistance only came from Adivasi tribes. Even today upper class is ruling over Scheduled castes.

(Ranshal Kolhi, Personal Interview: January 16, 2016)¹⁸⁵

Politically charged Ranshal Kolhi combined different identities that are used by him and other Dalits to identify the self or the Dalit group. Starting with the *Adivasi* (aboriginal) tribal identity, he generalized putting it under Dalit identity, and differentiated between the privileged castes and the marginalized Dalits by classifying ‘Adivasis’ as ‘Scheduled Castes’. Ranshal Kolhi claimed to be Adivasi and the leader of Kolhi community. He was

¹⁸⁵ Similar blog-post was shared almost one year later by Ranshal Kolhi, on Facebook on January, 27, 2017 Original post in Urdu language, online available on:
URL: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=623634177831922&set=a.179821392213205.1073741828.100005560354544&type=3&theater> .

the president of Sindh Kolhi Itihad. Although SKI worked independently, Ranshal Kolhi himself had been active worker of Pakistan Muslim League (N), the ruling political based in Punjab. He then joined Pakistan Muslim League (F) the party of traditional pir-cum-feudal. This was the common political approach of the Dalit activists to seek patronage of the dominant Ashrafia parties so that they could have a chance to grab the reserved seat in legislative assemblies, or to secure any other local office. The common idiom to appeal the dominant Ashrafia party leadership was to bring into their attention the oppressed and the marginalized status of their communities by using Dalit, Adivasi and or Scheduled Castes markers. This example shows that the different and overlapping identity markers are employed by the activists for the social and political reasons to mark their uniqueness, greatness, historical superiority, historical oppression, existing marginality, and the claims of representation.

Table 12: Preferable Identity Markers of Pro-Dalit and anti-Dalit groups

Priority . No	Minority rights Activists	Indigeno us rights forums	PHC, Hindu, Panchaya ts	Pakistan Darāwar Itihad	SCFP (Scheduled Castes)	DST, PDSN	BIF
1	اقلیت (Minority)	ترتیء کئی (Indigenous)	ہندو (Hindu)	دراوڑ (Darāwar)	شیدیول کاسٹ (Scheduled Castes)	دلت (Dalit)	بیل (Bheel)
2	ہندو (Hindu)	اصل، اڈیواسی (Adivasi/)	اقلیت (Minority)	ہندو (Hindu)	دلت (Dalit)	شیدیول کاسٹ (Scheduled Castes)	دراوڑ (Darāwar)
3	شیدیول کاسٹ (Scheduled Castes)	اقلیت (Minority)		Scheduled Castes	دراوڑ (Darāwar)	دراوڑ (Darāwar)	اصل، اڈیواسی، ترتیء کئی (Adivasi/)
4	دلت (Dalit)	دراوڑ (Darāwar)		اقلیت (Minority)	اصل، اڈیواسی، ترتیء کئی (Adivasi/)	اصل، اڈیواسی، ترتیء کئی (Adivasi/)	ہندو (Hindu)
5		ہندو (Hindu)			اقلیت (Minority)	اقلیت (Minority)	اقلیت (Minority)
6						ہندو (Hindu)	شیدیول کاسٹ (Scheduled Castes)
7							دلت (Dalit)

Source: Author (2017)

Notwithstanding the complicatedness of the overlapped identity markers, there seemed to be a pattern emerging from their conversations in terms of the use of identity markers. While pro-Dalit activists preferred to use ‘Scheduled Castes’ followed by the ‘Dalit’ identity marker, the anti-Dalits instead preferred to counter them by juxtaposing ‘Hindu’

and ‘minority identity’ markers. The anti-Dalits made use of the term ‘Dalit’ primarily to criticize and ridicule them, whereas the pro-Dalits made use of ‘Hindu’ and the ‘minority’ primarily to explain the epistemological differences and the political necessity to use the ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity markers.

5.2.1 The basis of Dalitness: Identity and Materiality?

According to scholars, the imposed identities are perceived by the labeled individuals and the groups as ‘poisoned’ or ‘injurious’ liabilities, as a kind of ‘burden’ and ‘a form of imprisonment’ prompting them to modify and change through, what Tariq Rahman, a Pakistani linguist, calls ‘onomastic strategies’ (Rahman T., 2014) adopted by the enslaved¹⁸⁶. In the context of Dalits in Sindh, the institution of ‘caste’ allows some flexibility within the framework of the given hegemonic narratives and the hierarchies to get rid of the toxified identity labels, by claiming a different and the supposedly higher-order identity marker. The change of labels or identity markers, however, did not seem to work as desired as Dalitness was primarily embedded in the material conditions instead of merely in the label(s) only. The untouchable state of the Dalit defined his or her identity and social status instead of the identity marker which primarily labeled such an existing condition of ‘untouchability’.

During my fieldwork, I observed that to overcome marginality and the ‘untouchable’ stigma, Dalits tended to hide their caste names, the ritual inversion that has also been noticed among Dalits and the ‘lower castes’ in India and Bangladesh¹⁸⁷ or the Buraku¹⁸⁸ and Ainu¹⁸⁹ do in Japan, and to redefine their identities that may sound respectable to others (Guru, 2011; Guru & Sarukkai, 2012).

Table 13: Digging out Caste Identities

¹⁸⁶ See for instance, Vivian de Klerk, ‘Changing names in the “New” South Africa: A diachronic survey’, *Names*, 50:3 (2002), pp.201-21; James E. Jacob & Pierre L. Horn, ‘Comment vous appelez-vous?: Why the French change their names’, *Names* 46:1 (1998), pp.3-28; Mary Louise Nagata, ‘Why Did You Change Your Name? Name Changing Patterns and the Life Course in Early Modern Japan’, *The History of the Family: An International Quarterly*, 4:3 (1999), pp.315-38.

¹⁸⁷ The Untouchables of Bangladesh, Jamil Iqbal, See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTEzCqhP76Y>

¹⁸⁸ “There are an estimated 6 million Buraku people living in Japan. The Buraku people face discrimination in Japan because of an association with work once considered impure, such as butchering animals or tanning leather and their place in the Japanese caste system.” See” <http://idsn.org/countries/japan/> .

“In 1969 the government of Japan passed Special Measure laws for assimilation project, and they nearly 12 trillion of yen to end discrimination in Japan. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xoLMLb_pNM .

¹⁸⁹ “The Despised Ainu People (1994): A look into the modern-day situation of the Ainu people of Hokkaido in Japan”. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjBYtYAOsJc> .

Asking Identity	Answers of Dalit Bahujan, Adivasi	The intention of Savarna and Ashraf
Who are you?	Hindu, Masih, Sikh (tend to hide caste because of the fear of being discriminated)	Tries to dig out caste location and treat (discriminate) accordingly

Hence, for instance, after conversion to Islam Bheel family becomes Shaikh, and Jogi Hindu becomes Rajpar. Similarly, a Kolhi adopts a sub-caste and projects it publicly. In this manner, Kolhi is replaced by Makwana, Gohel, Parmar and Solanki, etc., the castes that are found among so-called Jati Hindus as well. Similarly, Meghwar begins calling himself Rathore and Punwar, etc. adopts the name of great grandfather to call himself Dharani, Valasai, Khangarani, Ghamwani, the names that sound like the Savarna Hindu names, such as, Ladhani, Motwani, Advani, Malani, Vankwani.

Similarly, some of the Kolhis, being influenced by Virat Kohli (ڪوھلي or 'Kəʊhli:' in Sindhi), a Punjabi Rajput from Khukhrain caste (Gupta & Kapoor, 2009, p. 121) and an Indian cricketer, brought about the spelling change to be known as Kohli (Kohali) instead of Kolhi (Koolhi), to make believe that Virat Kohli belongs to their Rajput Kolhi community. Not only that, they celebrated Virat's cricket performance as much as they celebrated his marriage with an Indian film star Anushka Sharma. When Krishna Kolhi became the senator, they even got the fake news published in the local Sindhi newspaper in which Virat Kohli congratulates Krishna Kolhi on becoming the senator. They also idealized Kelash Mehta Kohli, chief justice of Baluchistan high court, without bothering to know their actual caste background. Similarly, any Dalit personality belonging to Thar becomes the reason for celebration for all Dalit castes to express their regional attachment to Thar, and through the expression of Thariness to Sindh. It shows that the constant symbolic humiliation and the past legacy continue to keep Dalits in Sindh in lowly and discriminatory positions despite the rise in their economic capital and the change of occupation in certain cases.

I was told by Dalit activists several stories of untouchability that attest to the fact that untouchability is still rampant. A Dalit activist Pancho Kohli narrated to me his story of how he was slapped on his face while drinking water on at a local hotel when the owner came to know about his caste identity. During my fieldwork, I visited many hotels where food untouchability against Dalits had been systematized. When I went into a local tea shop at Matiari, I saw a 22-year-old man being served tea in a broken cup kept separately

in the corner of the table. Not only that, he was served water in a disposable shopper. Whereas, I was served water in a jug and glass immediately after my arrival. I sat at a distance from him intentionally to observe the scene and take some snaps while he was drinking tea, while water-filled shopper hung over the desk on which he was seated. I asked, a hotel owner, why you served him water in the disposable plastic instead of in the glass, he replied, “you know, he is baghri, a *ghair mazhab* (out-of-the-religion). When he left the hotel, I followed him and asked why he was given water in a plastic bag and tea in a broken cup. He told, ‘I am Baghri. They give us that way’.



Figure 14: Laloo Baghri sipping tea in a Soneri cup at a local hotel. Water served to him in a plastic bag. (Face has been blurred to anonymize).

Source: Author (2016)

Similarly, I visited two tea shops and a hotel at Kotri, a small town adjacent to Hyderabad city. Tea shops were exclusively for Dalits and run by Dalits, whereas a bigger hotel serving meals was owned by Ashrafia. Both the tea shops had four distinct types of cups known as Soneri cups in conventional language. Each type of cup was specifically of one particularly caste (Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar), whereas the fourth type of cups were specified for the beggars. I sat there and drank tea in a Meghwar cup, had a chit chat with them discussing their food taboos. At a nearby restaurant, I found golden cups and plates exclusively kept serving food to Dalits. When I asked the hotel owner he replied, “Our business will come to a standstill, if we do not do that. Muslims will not come to our hotel if they knew that Kolhi and Bheel are served in the same plate”. During whole fieldwork, I visited several such hotels in different towns in lower Sindh, where either Dalits themselves had separated

their utensils or specified for their different communities, or the caste Hindus or Muslims did that for them. Looking at such practices continued, it seemed that anonymization is not easy, that the casteist mind of the ‘upper caste’ is enacted to pick up subtle clues to assess the caste location and social connections of the ‘Dalit’ or any other person.

A Dalit activist lamented, “Not accepting the social fact is what discredits us everywhere. What could be the height of suppression when a person had to hide his/her real name while moving in a so-called civilized society.” That is what happens with a Jogi and Sami when they pursue their snack-charming occupation in cities and towns in Sindh. They change their Hindu names and either temporarily or permanently adopt Muslim names. Heman becomes Hashim, Mirchoo becomes Meer Mohammad, and Lalan becomes Lal Dino¹⁹⁰. They do so to avoid expected social discrimination with them at public places and in general dealings with the dominant Ashrafia society that jealously guards its exploitative hierarchies. A Dalit journalist told that hundreds of families from Oad and other communities working in factories at SITE areas in Hyderabad Karachi have hidden their real names and adopted alternative names to avoid expected social discrimination with them. Many others are entered in CNIC as either Muslims or as Jati Hindus, although most of them are still unregistered.

This anonymization seemed to serve multiple purposes for the Dalits to avoid untouchable treatment on identification and thus be saved from humiliation, and to equalize to elevate one’s caste status. Sarah Singha, in her doctoral thesis on Dalit Christians of Karachi, quotes several examples of eating and drinking-related untouchability. She attributes it to an acute Muslim consciousness of ritual purity and pollution rooted in the notions of *pak* (clean) and *na-pak* (unclean) to treat Dalit Christians as untouchables. (Singha S., 2015, p. 54 & 85) Similarly Pieter Streefland also reached a similar conclusion arguing that Punjabi Christians (ex-Chuhra) deny being identified by their caste names even though it did not work for them and continued to be treated like untouchables (Streefland, 1979).

This desperate denial and hiding of caste identities and the desire to redefine their identity, to achieve self-respect in the society by associating themselves with any newly acquired religious identity, and with the famous and respectable person of society, can be found prevalent in almost all Dalit communities. The use of the terms and labels ‘Scheduled

¹⁹⁰ Heman (Das), Mirchoo (Mal), and Lal (chand) are the personal names often used by Dalits of Hindu faith. Hashim, Meer Muhammad and Lal Dino are Muslim names derived from Arabic roots.

Castes' and 'Dalit' was also rejected or accepted on similar social-psychological grounds with some of the Dalit community members actively using these terms and labels as positive and emancipatory, while others considering them as derogatory and humiliating. Hence, even when the looking markers were the same, the meaning and the interpretation of those markers varied from one caste group to another. This difference in interpretation can be understood as the counter-hegemonic strategy either to invert the meanings of the given identity markers or invent, borrow and recast the existing identity markers so that the stigma of untouchability attached to their caste identities could be removed.

Unwritten and taken-for-granted norms of untouchability develop a sense of humiliation and feelings of self-alienation. Coupled with poverty and economic exploitation, the pain becomes unbearable for many that then leads many to commit suicides. Ranshal Kolhi maintains that the increasing rate of suicides in Kolhi-peasant community was due to double oppression. According to Ganpat Rai Bheel, the social alienation, commensal segregation and the widely prevalent norms of untouchability are the major reasons that keep a Dalit under the conditions of double oppression, that is, economic as peasants, laborers, etc., and social by virtue of being treated as untouchables (see also Bheel, 2017a). Similarly, Dalit activists told that their women were deemed fit only for servility, assaults, harassments, and exploitation by both the Savarna and Ashrafia. Kanji Meghwar from Mithi, told:

Dalit girls are employed on very low wages as domestic workers at the homes of Maheshwaris and Brahmins. Whereas, the daughters of Maheshwaris and Brahmin are adopted as family members by Muslim. Kolhi, Bheel and Meghwar girls do not have that privilege. They are merely employed to clean their shit.

In one incident, a 16-year-old young girl, Sapna Bheel, employed as a house servant at a Seth Ratan Kumar Lohano's (caste Hindu) home at Sanghar allegedly committed suicide as reported by Seth himself. But the parents of Sapna did not accept that explanation and alleged that their daughter had been murdered. Dalit activists that visited Sapna's family told:

A few days before the fateful day quarrel had occurred at Seth's home involving Sapna. Sapna had left the job, but Seth brought her back to his home only to return her dead body the day after.

Dalit activists protested for several days, but the verdict upon it was at the police station in the presence of SHO¹⁹¹ in a Jirga (informal court) patronized by a local Wadera (headman)

¹⁹¹ Station House Master (SHO) is in charge of the local police station.

of Marri (Baloch) caste who was the *mureed* (disciple) of Pir Pagara (Sayed). Sapna's parents were forced to accept the blood money among 500 thousand rupees and the case was, thus, informally closed without reaching the court of law. This shows how the cultural hegemony of Ashrafia and Sayed functions in collusion with the Savarnas and the state institution (police) to suppress such cases involving Dalits and the poor classes. The reason for suppression seems, invariably, to lie in the stigma and social status attributed based on caste location.

Take another example of Sardar Jagit Singh, a Sikh convert from Hindu (Meghwar) caste. He claims to be Moolnivasi and Adivasi, decries Hinduism, and acts and dresses like a Sikh. He told that he was humiliated and ridiculed even after conversion and instead was alienated by both the Meghwar (Hindu) and Muslim communities. Having felt the pressure of internal casteism prevalent among Meghwars, Jagjit retracted a bit and suffixed 'Megh' to his name 'Jagit Singh Megh' to symbolize bond with Meghwars. Similarly, newly convert Shaikh Bheels were also observed to live an 'untouchable' life no better than when they lived as Hindus. Such attempts of ritual inversion to readjust the self and relocate the community, however, indicate one important aspect of Dalit assertion that is to subvert the structural foundations of society no matter it fails or succeeds. It shows that the change of labels and names in the caste-ridden society hardly works so long as a person's caste is identifiable by his overall background.

Hence, labeling the Dalits as inferior or treating them like 'untouchable' seemed grounded in the social-material conditions rather, merely, in the labels. Dalit caste identities such as Bhangi, Kolhi, Churho, Balo, Kanjar, Bazigar, Dedh were used as a slur and slang words by Ashrafia and Savarna classes because these labels were embodied representations of the organically existing human subjected to discrimination, exclusion, and humiliation by Savarnas and Ashrafs. It proves that the Dalitness is embedded in material conditions instead of in label(s) only. The untouchable state of the Dalit defines his or her identity and social status as a Dalit instead of any identity marker that primarily labeled such materially existing conditions.

5.3 Mobilizing as 'Dalits'

'Hindu' and 'Sindhi' identity markers were the master signifiers promoted by the Savarna-Ashrafia classes that set the discursive field of identity contestation for the Dalit activists. Unable to pitch their claims through these master signifiers, the Dalit activists felt the need to come up with the counter-intuitive alternatives or the parallel identity markers. One such

attempt was made in 2016-19 by the Dalit Suaag Tehreek (DST) to make the deliberate use of the ‘Dalit’ identity marker. It was because of that reason, that DST was named as such in the first place. DST employed it with the purpose to anticipate counterarguments deemed necessary to generate the debate on caste-based discrimination against Dalit communities.

Although DST generated the debate and popularized the Dalitbahujan or the Ambedkarian narrative, the term ‘Dalit’ was already in use among Dalit activists in Sindh. It was first actively used for the sake of mobilization by Dolat Thari in the early 2000s who attempted to popularize it through the monthly newsletter ‘Dalit Awaz’ in 2004. He was followed by Ganpat Rai Bheel, who along with Khurheed Qaimkhani, had popularized it through Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum and their Dalit Adab a quarterly digest in 2007. Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum published several volumes of Dalit Adab, in which original and translated articles were published on Dalit issues¹⁹² (Bheel G. R., 2014). Apart from that several other organizations and advocacy-based NGOs and the local intellectuals have often made use of the term ‘Dalit’ to refer to Scheduled Castes in Pakistan. For instance, Sujaag (NGO) and Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation (SGRHF). SGRHF, a Lahore-based NGO supported by trust and managed by the Punjabi Ashrafia elite who would continue to publish Mino-view and hold seminars and lecture programs specifically highlighting Dalits issues in India. This pre-DST-led narrative on ‘Dalits’ was limited to specific locations of micropolitics and did not exist at the level of public discourse as such.

Social identities ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’, however, began appearing with much frequency in local and national newspapers and on TV as well as Radio programs after the DST-led activism. Leftist-Marxist organizations print media (except some Sindhi newspapers), as well as Urdu channels and academicians in Pakistan, who were reluctant previously, also began using the term ‘Dalit’ along with ‘Scheduled Castes’ to identify ‘hetheen zaat’ or ‘nichli zaat’ (lower caste)Hindus.

5.3.1 Dalit Identity: Derogatory or Emancipatory?

To get rid of that humiliating feeling, the state of untouchability and to avoid caste discrimination, Dalits performed certain rituals of inversions that manifested in the form of their tendency to adopt any Ashrafia-Savarna name to hide the stigmatized caste names by redefining their caste roles, and by changing ideological stance or by reconstructing their

¹⁹² See dataset Hussain (2019k), “*Dalit Adab (April-May and June-July Editions)*”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/fxfhc32ct.2

history. Looking from the Ambedkarian perspective, this cannot be termed as a successful strategy as the Dalits, in most cases, remained Dalits despite Ashrafization and Savarnization (see Chapters 3 and 4). Notwithstanding that, it shows that an individual Dalit can be conscious of her Dalitness that he or she actively asserts to gain self-respect as well as wittingly denialists rejecting both the state of Dalitness and the term 'Dalit'.

From local Dalits' vantage point, a lot was at stake, such as to decide what is to be the hidden script and what to project in public. But any such strategic decision was to be framed in any of the given or constructed identities. Dalit, Scheduled Castes, Darāwar, Adivasi, Dharti Dhani, and Hindu were such identities that had to be intermeshed with Sindhi, Pakistan, Thari, Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, etc. to make a statement. The discourse was very fluid, and the ideological inclinations were changing at the same speed as the debates on social media and at local guest houses.

To draw an illustration of how any identity marker is constructed, contested and asserted as emancipatory, and denied as derogatory and humiliating, I give an example of the discussion between the pro-Dalit and the anti-Dalit activists whom I interacted in lower Sindh. I was being hosted by Bhalji, a senior Bheel activist, and stayed for a week at Naon Kot, a small town of Barrage area of lower Sindh at the margins of Thar Desert. During the daytime, I would roam around on a bike to nearby small villages in an attempt to engage them with conversations. I would invite an interesting and willing person to have *Kaccheri* (traditional meeting) in the evening after having a meal. Bhalji Bheel and I, both were the members of DST. One day, while we both were passing by a Nao Kot town, we saw Jhaman Meghwar driving his car in the direction of his village. Bhalji told, 'I handed over DST's manifesto to that man, but he rejected it without even reading a word.' Jhaman also saw us stopped the car. He seemed to belong to a well-off family and was quite confident. After an abrupt exchange of greetings, we offered him to have a cup of tea with us. But he declined but knowing that I am also staying nearer to his village, he promised to meet in the evening. To convince him about our program, we also had invited Janib Bhil who was a political worker of QAT and Rupo Kolhi and Lajpat Bheel, the Dalit activists who were the supporters of PPP as well. All the expected friends reached before time. Khomon Kolhi also came with Jhaman to be part of *Kaccheri*. Therefore, the conversation began before we could have a meal. The issue that crop up, around which we began conversing, related to the support of DST by Dr. Khatu Mal and the counter-allegations by the Hindu rights activists. A day earlier some Hindu rights activists had alleged that Dr. Khatumal could not

do justice to the Hindus, as he has launched the movement against Hindus, Brahmins, and Sanatan Dharam.

Lajpat Bheel: To seek the due rights that have always been under Vaniya hands, this time we will get marked as Scheduled Castes and Dalits to wrest our rights.

Me (researcher): Yes, Lajpat, we should mark Scheduled Castes but present our issues by using 'Dalit' word.

Kishore Meghwar: Still you call yourself Dalits, Lajpat! Strange that it is still an oppressed class even if they can get a ministry on demand.

Lajpat: That is not true. 'upper caste' Hindu MNAs and MPAs have always been silent and will remain so. Because of them the merchants of breweries. We poor do not have enough money to buy a seat. Those Sehtia, these Kohistani, Vankwani, Essrani, Chawla, who are members of Pakistan Hindu Council or those who have factories and businesses in Karachi, Hyderabad...they can do that...We can only request honorable Bilawal Bhutto Zardari Sahab that we do not have money but we have vote bank which these Saithiyās manipulate. Provided we are given the right to separate electorate, then see how we banish them from politics.

Kishore Meghwar: It means, Bilawal should still ponder over it.

Janib Bheel: Jeo Dalit

Kishore Meghwar: Brother, if you had struggled for it collectively, and would not have used the banner of 'Dalit', then I am certain, you will long have achieved your target more than you desire.

Janib Bheel: This is the strange logic of these extremist Bal Thackerays. If the Dalit demands his rights, it pinches their people, but if any usurer Vāṇiyo opens up brewery by looting public money, that is acceptable to them. This to me seems a personal bias, not an ideological dissent.

Kishore Meghwar: we are happy brother Jani Bheel. I respect and honor Dr. Khatumal but I disagree as he represents only to Dalits. And as you maintain they are oppressed so much that their children are getting an education from USA and Canada, and here they are seeking ministries, then how they are oppressed? I feel sorry that you people do not do any real struggle for the people. Dalit Tehreek has merely come into existence to seek funding from donors. The real struggle had to be launched by people like you that are still not part of it. But regrettably, you could not come forward; so sad.

Janib Bheel: Brother! Dr. Sahab is the veteran comrade of PPP, I am a member of QAT. Politically we are miles apart. But he too, like us is the follower of Dr. Ambedkar and I too am the follower of Ambedkar. We both do not belong to DST, but we both are the ideological supporters of DST. The extermination of Brahmanism is inevitable. This is the verdict of history.

Kishore Meghwar: You all, the supporters of DST are well-rounded personalities, writers and intellectuals, and political workers. But time has now changed. The methods of doing politics have changed. We must begin the new struggle. We salute the struggle of Baba Ambedkar, but here things are different as here the country is different.

Lajpat Bheel: Dalit Tehreek will lead the poor against the oppressors who have kept under bondage for thousands of years. The upper caste people feel the pain to evacuate the chair. We Dalits are 95% and Vaniyas are merely 5%. It prickles in their eyes if a single person from among the Dalit advances.

Kishore Meghwar: I completely disagree with you. Those to whom you call oppressed class, today are progressing at a rapid pace. They have made their mark and that of their caste on the dint of education. The time is not far when they will reach their destiny.

Bhalji Bheel: A lot to do. Aren't we being dragged hundreds of years back? Now the battle has just begun. If you can get along with the oppressors, then why not with those who demand rights as Dalits? You must ponder over it. Opposing for the sake of confrontation will further distance us from each other.

Rupo Kolhi: Dr. Khatu Mal is the representative of the oppressed and the Dalits and the poor. He is a friend of Dalits and we salute him.

Khomon Kolhi: Brilliant Rupo Kolhi. Please do not do that just for the sake of your vested interests. You say that, but I must tell you. Today's youth will never accept your that 'Zillat Threek'. We are not 'Dilat'¹⁹³, and those who are with that movement want to divide us. They are all bastards. Many of them have already looted the poor. This 'Zillat' we do not accept.

Our heated conversation went on for about two hours during which we also had tea. After having tea both the Jhaman and Khomon took leave. We could not convince them to join DST or simply support DST, and they also failed to convince us as, we saw, they had no clearly defined agenda to work on. The upwardly mobile lower-middle-class Dalits continued to ridicule DST and the label 'Dalit' by calling it 'Zillat' (humiliation) and attempted to re-identify themselves with the Ashrafia and Savarna personalities and the social labels that symbolized progress and the redemption from stigma and discrimination.

5.3.2 Opposition to the use of 'Dalit' Identity Marker

The acceptance of the 'Dalit' at the social-psychological level, however, has not been achieved without the opposition to the 'Dalit' category. The debate within Dalit activists in Pakistan usually revolved around:

¹⁹³ Many among Dalits pronounced 'Dalit' as 'Dilat', which sounded more natural for Sindhi speakers.

1. Should 'Dalit' be expanded in its meaning and scope, or it should be used to define and represent the specific group of ex-untouchables or Scheduled Castes?
2. Should 'Dalit' be used as the parallel term along with 'Scheduled Castes' and other such official and self-chosen terminologies or not?
3. Should the term 'Dalit' itself be discarded completely and replaced with more suitable and elevating self-chosen terms or not?

'Dalit' was interpreted by many from among the civil society activists to mean '*achoot*' (untouchable). The term 'Scheduled Castes' was also interpreted as stigmatizing label very much like any former ones such as 'harijan'. If a layman Dalit in Sindh were given a chance to opt for either 'Hindu' or 'Scheduled Castes', he or she would always prefer to opt Hindu for the obvious reasons that 'Hindu' was the religious term and also already well-entrenched in the system. Supported by Savarnas, Sindhi nationalists and the dominant state discourse, they believe that since minorities in Pakistan are defined as religious groupings, and the fact that majority of Dalits claim to be Hindus by religion, therefore, so-called Hindus irrespective of caste and class, will benefit more going by the Hindu label. For them, Dalit was an imported label and thus not only unknown to a poor class of Hindus but irrelevant and unnecessary in the context of Pakistan. They demanded equal citizenship and protection through inclusive secular laws under the minority tag or as equal citizens without using the 'Dalit' and 'SC' identity markers.

Since 'Dalit' as a social or political identity was not in common usage except in newspapers (that also became common after recent Dalit activism); it was not accepted by the local people whether they may be Dalits or Ashrafia-Savarnas. 'We are all Hindus and equal. There is no Dalit'. 'Dalit is '*zillat*' (humiliation)', 'Dalit is Indian *thappa* (stigma), and 'People of Sindh have rejected '*zillat*' 'It's an NGO project'. These were the typical reactions largely coming from the new lower Middle class of Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, Oad and Baghri communities. Protests were held and awareness programs were organized by some to beware people of the 'Dalit' conspiracy. Several newspaper articles were written in Sindhi and Urdu newspapers in support or denial of the term 'Dalit' and Dalit Sujaag Tehreek. Some of the anti-Dalit activists vowed to launch an anti-Dalit movement against the use of terms or identities of 'Dalit' and 'Scheduled Castes'. They argued that these terms smacked, of 'untouchability' stigma. Other groups vehemently rejected it calling it '*thappa*' (derogatory label) and an 'upper caste' conspiracy. To illustrate an example, on the third day after the DST's formation in May 2016, the debate began between a group of friends at Hyderabad over the use of the term 'Dalit' and 'Scheduled Castes and the

legitimacy of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek itself. A Hindu activist from the Meghwar community replied when I asked him about the latest drive of Dalit activists. He replied:

I am strongly condemning this act of Government. I am Meghwar and also Hindu, but I am not Dalit, untouchable or Schedule Caste. Now I am not from the *lower caste*, and do not want to depend upon sympathies of politicians. The government should consider us as a Hindu... we know that we are still far away from our destiny, but we will fight with weapons of education, and we have proved this too.

Anti-Dalit activist belonging to Meghwar community, a journalist by profession asserted:

We demand that the blotch of ‘Scheduled Castes’ must be deleted from not only Census Form but also from the constitution as this term disgrace the human dignity of these Hindu communities and marking them as the 4th class citizen in this country.

Another well-known human rights activist, while debating SC/Dalit choice with DST activist, added:

I just said that such type of bifurcation among citizens is not acceptable on any basis. This is a census, there should be religion indeed, but the matter is of schedule caste being counted as religion and all know well that it’s not a religion. So, this must be deleted at all costs.

DST activist rebutted:

I disagree. I fail to understand how the term Schedule caste degrades them. It is narrow mindedness. Census is just counting and maintaining statistics. When other religions are there in the form then why are you allergic about the Scheduled Castes? I suggest the term Dalit be introduced instead of Scheduled Castes because it is now recognized.

Anti-Dalit indigenous activist intervened and said:

Have mercy not only on the existing progeny of indigenous Hindu people but also forgive the future generations. Do not give any such suggestion. You should talk about human equality, not of human division.

As it is evident from the reply of the activists, they not only considered the use of the ‘Dalit’ as potentially threatening to their Hindu and Meghwar identities, but also thought of it as alluding to the ‘untouchability’, the social practice that, according to them, was waning on its own.

5.3.3 Response of DST to Anti-Dalits

DST held several corner meetings to ponder over that identity-based opposition expressed in articles, in private meetings, inside a home, on social media prompted Dalit activists to reconsider the use of the ‘Dalit’, at least as a name tag for the forum. On April 8, 2017, Radha Bheel called me and asked to update the social media status and give a meeting call to the local members of DST at Mirpurkhas to gather at her house on April 15, 2017. On

the appointed day, some ten members gathered at the house of Radha Bheel. Each member gave feedback about their activity in their respective areas and of their engagements with the acquaintances on the issues related to Dalits and DST. The members were very enthusiastic and were reported that the people were taking keen interest and are willing to join DST, yet they had some reservations too with regard to the term 'Dalit' as many were feeling reluctant to recall it in meetings with the locals to convince them to join DST.

I specially traveled from Hyderabad to Mirpurkhas to attend that meeting. I was then known among Dalit activists by my de-castified name Hussain Soofi Baghri (Baghri is a Dalit caste) that I have publicized through Facebook. The name change brought me closer to the members of DST and ensured them about my resolve to stand by them. During the meeting, we discussed the concerns of the people. The agenda of the meeting had already been shared through cell phone texts with those who had agreed to come to the meeting. The agenda was:

1. To consider the name change of the forum as some of the members had reservations and they were facing pressure from their peers to dissociate from DST.
2. To begin the next phase of organizing the oppressed.
3. Financial issues and their solution.

The participants agreed that the main criticism against DST that had come out so far was the name tag 'Dalit'. The participants rethought the name tag and clarified their understanding of the direction that DST was going to take. They decided to tell the people that this movement would mature in due process to become a political party once it gathered sufficient support from the people. They agreed that they would give the party a different and a more agreeable name. Seven out of 11 participants in the meeting, however, agreed not to change the name tag. It was affirmed that the term 'Dalit' was the symbol of resistance and that it should not be changed at any cost. Sanjay Kumar opined:

Those from among the Dalit communities were criticizing DST, are, in fact, victims of inferiority complex, and that wanted to forget the 'untouchable' past and existing discrimination without having compensation.

Dileep explained, 'It is the newly emerging tiny middle class of Dalits that is opposing DST as they have overcome caste oppression at the personal level, or in a way, compensated by upward class mobility.' A senior civil society activist explained by narrating a story:

I was served tea in Soneri cup even in an office of HRCP in the presence of IA Rahman. Now that I have overcome it, that does not mean, untouchability and discrimination have

ended. We need to change our weakness into a strength by agitating based on discrimination instead of hiding it under the carpet.

Radha added:

Those who are feeling inferiority complex will never stand by our cause. I would rather say; they cannot stand by any social or political cause. They only look for immediate personal benefits. Therefore, it will be counted as our political nativity to believe that they will align with us if we change the name of DST. They did not align with us before when our friends formed the Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan.

Mahesh added, 'In this casteist society, only Dalit activism can bring about revolutionary change. With these self-assuring arguments, DST activists made a resolve that training workshops and the lecture programs will be held apart from publishing the necessary introductory literature on caste discrimination. These concerns and the dilemma to introduce Dalit term as the part of anti-caste mobilization move were also expressed by Dr. Sono Khangarani in another meeting held at Hyderabad. He told:

The caste system is so dominant that we cannot impose the 'Dalit' identity upon our people. They think the term 'Dalit' is the label that will replace their caste and religion. They do not accept any other label except their caste name. They do not understand the meaning and use of 'Dalit', and we are not in any way in a hurry to impose it. We have just recently got rid of the 'Harijan' term. We are actively trying to remove the Harijan label given to colonies or certain localities and schools. We are, for instance, suggesting them to rename them as 'Gujarati'. Many people think as if this Dalit is being imposed upon them as a similar label 'Harijan'. Therefore, they react. And we have to go by people's logic.

Sono Khangarani explained the Brahminic hegemony glossed as it was under the Hindu-minority narrative that disallowed to assert any counter-hegemonic identity formation of the oppressed. Khangarani, however, avoided critiquing the hegemonic influence of Ashrafia class or the domination of Sayeds, Baloch and Sammāt castes. This showed the extent of the normativity of Ashrafis domination vis-à-vis Savarnas over the Dalits, as well as the level of freedoms Hindu Dalit, felt to mount the simultaneous criticism of the two oppressor classes. Given these epistemic-hegemonic limitations, the probable reasons for the denial of the use of 'Scheduled Castes' and the 'Dalit' identity markers, that were pointed out by DST members were:

1. State's neglect and indifference to Dalit issues and their identity crises.
2. Compounding and confusing Scheduled castes with religion in census form or defining castes as religion.
3. The persistent cultural hegemony of the Brahminic narratives.

4. Inaccessibility of Ambedkarian narrative to a common Dalit, lack of awareness about the importance of categorization and re-identification to elevate socioeconomic and cultural inequalities and injustices.

The cultural reasons were also deliberated upon, such as the fact that:

1. Dalit is usually born with the Hindu tag.
2. Muslim majority identifies each Dalit as Hindu
3. Hindu and Sindhi identities are often used interchangeably by Savarna Sindhis thereby generating the narrative that keeps the tag 'Hindu' amongst the favorites in Sindh.
4. Hindu and Sanatan Dharma are also used interchangeably to mean culture by Hindu and religion or faith by Sanatan Dharma. It is the more agreeable equation for Dalits who attribute evil of untouchability and caste discrimination to 'Hindu' culture and proclaim to be Sanatan Dharmi.
5. Hindu does not directly allude to untouchability or caste discrimination instead it glosses over it bringing all the indigenous castes into its fold. The same is not the case with the use of 'Dalit'. Although 'Dalit' is not a religious term, it alludes to 'untouchability' and 'caste discrimination in the Hindu religion. Therefore, the term 'Dalit' is not only considered as derogatory and humiliating but also as the potentially threatening to replace their Hindu religion/culture.
6. 'Dalit' identity fits uneasily with their indigenous Darāwaṛ (Dravidian) identity as it reminds what followed, that is, their 'untouchable' status, after the fall of Dravidian civilization. Dalits usually prefer to feel pride in their Dravidian past and keep asserting it, instead of alluding to their existing or former untouchable status.
7. 'Dalit' identity fails to concord with Sindhi and Sufi identity which even suggests ignoring internal tribal-caste divisions and assumes Sindhi unity so the external enemy, particularly Pakistani Punjab could be successfully confronted.
8. Similarly, 'Dalit' as a subversive term also goes against the dominant Islamic narrative that assumes that there is no difference of caste, color, and creed.

With these considerations in the background that showed that a common Hindu-Dalit or the person belonging to Scheduled Castes preferred to be identified as Hindu or by her

‘caste’ and the ethnolinguistic identity instead of ‘Dalit’, DST activists resolved not to push ‘Dalit’ identity to replace ‘Scheduled Castes’, or any other social identity marker. In the light of literature published by Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum and with the eye on the Dalit politics in India, Dalit activists agreed that the term ‘Dalit’ is a matter of controversy even among Dalits and government in India. But, despite that, they agreed to defend its use for political purposes. DST activists also deliberated over the distortion and appropriation of Ambedkar by anti-Dalits when the anti-Dalits began misquoting Ambedkar proving that he was against the term ‘Dalit’. For instance, one anti-Dalit activist put a blog on social media writing:

Friends should learn about the Dalit movements in the past. All these movements were to get rid of the term ‘Dalit’ [...] Bhim Rao Ambedkar struggled all his life against the term ‘Dalit’. I have read some books by Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar. In the book “Wounded Nation” Dr[sic] writes, ‘We were the followers of a great religion, but we were kept backward deliberately by imposing ‘Dalit’ label upon us. But we are not prepared to get rid of Dalit’. When Dr. Ambedkar’s movement for Dalit nations and to rid of the term ‘Dalit’ got a foothold in India, then Gandhi too bowed his ankles before it. But here [in Sindh], the reverse is happening.

(Roshan Jan, Social Media blog, 4th April 2018).

On social media as well as in the meetings of DST, this deliberately made confusion of the members was cleared by giving forth the examples from the writings, speeches and the public statements of Ambedkar, such as the use of ‘Dalit’ term by Ambedkar in his fortnightly called Bahishkurt Bharat. A few of the activists having read some writings and speeches of Ambedkar told enlightened that Ambedkar had used several categories depending upon the context such as the officially designated English variants ‘depressed classes’, ‘Scheduled Castes’ or ‘untouchables’ or his suggestion and use of the term ‘Broken Men’, although he did not like to be called as such or to let these official categories be social identity markers of Dalit class (Ambedkar B. R., 1948 (2017)).¹⁹⁴ The deliberations upon these points enabled DST activists to reach the consensus that the use of the term ‘Dalit’ is not problematic so long as it is not reified and made a permanent tag for those castes or communities that are known by various other similar categories, terms and or identities.

¹⁹⁴ See Dr. Ambedkar Writings and Speeches. Vol.2. Part III: Dr. Ambedkar at the Round Table Conferences Appendix II: Supplementary Memorandum on the claims of the Depressed Classes for Special Representation by Dr. Bhimrao R. Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur R. Srinivasan. Page No. 672. IV. Nomenclature.

5.4 Nature of Dalit Issues and the Relevance of ‘Scheduled Castes’ and Dalit Identity Markers

Cognizant of the fact that Dalitness is materially grounded and that caste discrimination empirically exists independent of the identity labels or markers, the Dalit activists had identified the issues to politicize around any of the generic identities that could get their issues registered with the government and the civil society at large. They seemed to have acquired some agency that manifested itself in the form of token protests, rallies sit-ins, election campaigns, and social media activism, etc¹⁹⁵. Their protests and the demands revolved around the issues of bonded labor, underrepresentation in legislative assemblies, Saithiyā(bania) domination, economic disparity between Saithiyā and the Dalits, untouchability, caste-discrimination, abduction, elopement and the alleged forced conversion of Dalit and Hindu women. Since the Scheduled Castes’ majority shared their religion with the Jati Hindus (both Savarnas and ex-Shudras), many of their social issues converge such as voluntary or alleged ‘forced conversion. This apparent commonality of issues is exploited by Savarnas by invoking ‘Hindu’ identity and by undermining ‘Dalit’, ‘Scheduled Caste’ or any other alternative maker. For instance, in case of forced conversions, supported by Sufi nationalists, Savarnas construct the discursive field of assertion whereby the state is alleged to be involved in the systematic conversion of Hindus.

¹⁹⁵ To have a graphic insight into the Dalit activism, see online YouTube clips published by me and Dalit activists. The links to a few of the clips are given below:

Chetan Bheel (BIF Dalit activist) Scheduled castes Rally at Mithi, Sindh, Published by Sufi Hussain on Mar 27, 2017. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVu8XN2PN4I>.

Amar Sindhu delivers speech on Dalit activism in Pakistan (Dalit Sujaag Tehreek), Sufi Hussain, Published by Sufi Hussain on Feb 6, 2018. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQl6QjA95UA&t=5s>.

Tulsi Balani, coordinator, Mithi, Dalit Sujjag Tehreek, speaking in BIF's Scheduled caste rally, published by Sufi Hussain on Mar 27, 2017, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xolEm2ON0RI>.

BIF SINDH, Published by Lajpat Rai Soorani Bheel on Jul 31, 2016. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jysftxNAQY0>.

Radha Bheel, Chairperson (Dalit Sujaag Tehreek) addressing BIF Welcome Party. Published by Sufi Hussain on Mar 27, 2017 URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ry_JitktGzM&t=4s.

Pakistan schedule caste peoples (meeting of DST), Published by Lajpat Rai Soorani Bheel on May 25, 2016. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02coeQdZ5fc&t=3s>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.

Pakistan schedule caste peoples. Published by Lajpat Rai Soorani Bheel on May 18, 2016. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNUUCdxUEk4>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.

Conversation with Sindhi Dalit (Dalit Sujaag Tehreek). Published by Sufi Hussain on Feb 2, 2018. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Dnggei8B1A&t=1056s> Retrieved on March 18, 2018.

Advocate Haman Das Kolhi in Dalit Sujaag Tehreek's convention. Published by Sufi Hussain on Feb 6, 2018. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=018o6iuHJ-k> Retrieved on March 18, 2018.

This rhetoric of ‘forced conversions’, however, betrays the ground reality and rather serves to hide patriarchal shame and casteism under the religious rubric. This revealed to me when I was allowed to have a peep into the hidden script of Dalit activists. This patriarchal compulsion forced by the elders is further supplemented with the communal rhetoric inflated by Savarna Hindus and human rights watchdogs. Osho Kolhi, a Darāwaṛ activist and a member of Human Rights of Commission of Pakistan told, ‘This is true that girls elope, but our elders do not accept this. So, we have to stand by and demand the release of girls from abduction and purported forced conversion’. Similar confessions were also made by Veerji Kolhi (now Advisor to CM Sindh) when I met him at Nangarparkar.¹⁹⁶ The upwardly mobile Dalit activists were found getting influenced by the Savarna propaganda to twist their issues of economic and social vulnerability of Scheduled Castes into the issue of religious persecution. Although the issue of ‘alleged forced conversion’ reflects the level of Ashrafi hegemony and Muslim domination, yet in the case of Dalit girls, it is rooted in economic and patriarchal realities that deny women’s agency as well as that of the couples who thus subvert the ritual of caste endogamy. In most of such cases, Dalit women had eloped with their Muslim lover with the intention to convert to Islam as the *nikah* (marriage) cannot be solemnized without conversion as per rituals of Shariah prevalent in Sindh. Most of the alleged acts of ‘forced conversions’ are, in fact, voluntary acts of elopements that have to undergo the necessary patriarchal ritual of religious conversion as a normative imperative. The civil society and majority of Dalit activists are carried away by the Ashrafia-Savarna narrative also to hide familial and caste dishonor as both the religious and caste norms are violated by such acts.

Not all Dalit activists were wholly buying into the narrative of ‘forced conversion’. Kelash Kolhi, a DST activist had a different opinion:

Dalits are lured into taking issues that mainly pertained to Vaniya class. Take an example of kidnapping for ransom. Our people are not wealthy, so no question of kidnapping us. Our women are abducted and harassed daily because of their exposure to the landlords and the Muslims. But this is not the headache of the Saithiyās.

“They have their vested interests, mainly political, to play the Hindu victim card so that they continue occupying social and political where we should have been”, lamented a Ranjho Bheel, a DST activist. While Savarna activists primarily demanded ‘minority’

¹⁹⁶ See the opinion of Veerji Kolhi on ‘forced conversions in conversation transcript dataset: Hussain, Ghulam (2019de), “Conversation with Veerji: May 7, 2015”, Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/bfyc2db278.1

rights and the 'Hindu' rights, the Dalit activists demanded the rights of the 'Dalit majority'. In other words, they were demanding their access to resources and the political positions that had always been under the occupation of the Savarnas.

5.4.1 Wealth Differential in Local Industrial Hubs

Local Industrial Hubs make a typical site where one can assess the extent of wealth differential between the Dalits and the Jati Hindus on the one hand, and the power differential between the Dalit labours and the privileged caste Muslim laborers on the other. Jai Parihar Meghwar, a Dalit activist and manager at a rice Mill at an Industrial area one day took me there to show me the prevailing caste-disparities, told:

Look, our class is way lower than the Saithiyās. I am a manager here, and here you will find many Meghwar like me, but from about 22 medium-sized factories in my surrounding 20 are owned by Saithiyā, mostly of Lohano caste, and only two factories by the Muslim community of Rajpars. We are the majority, and they are a minority, but still, they are dominating us. We are not the owners; we are just the managers, laborers and the untouchables.

The Sindhi nationalist and the progressive's narrative betrays this materially exiting class structure in urban and rural Pakistan where, as the author found during his ethnographic interventions, labourers and owners are divided along caste line, and untouchability is practised within labour wings. In January 2019, the author visited 20 out of 250 factories (mostly rice and flour mills) in Sindh Industrial Trading Estate (Industrial zone) of Hyderabad to know the prevalence of caste-based discrimination. The interviews with the workers and managers revealed that most of the rice and flour mills were owned by privileged caste Hindus of Lohana caste, and the privileged caste Muslims. Interestingly, the managers of most of the Lohana-owned factories were from Meghwar (Dalit) caste. The labourers were assigned work as per the reputation of different caste to do the heavy or low-intensity labour. Hence, the Baloch and Sindhi privileged caste worker migrants from central and upper Sindh were assigned the task to loading trucks, whereas the Dalit and pasmanda Muslims from lower Sindh were assigned the task of cleaning or tending to husking and threshing machines. In factories where Dalit workers in majority, all the workers would eat together (Figure 15). Whereas the factories where privileged caste Muslim labourers was in majority, the Dalit workers were observed eating food in separate utensils. There was not any labourer found from among the privileged caste Hindus.



Figure 15: A Truck is being loaded at Rice Mill of Green Food Industries, SITE Hyderabad, Sindh. (Source: Author, 2020)

At a flour mill of a Lohana, when I asked a Dalit labourer about his name, he quipped, 'Aarab'. When I asked about his caste, he feigned disinterestedness. Manager, Green Food Industries, told that 'to avoid untouchability, some Dalits of Mehgwar, Oad, Kolhi, Bheel and Baghri castes are working as labourers under their pseudonyms'. It is easier for them as some of them are officially registered through Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC) either as Muslims or as privileged caste Hindus. Many Dalits are unregistered, and have no CNIC, or they have lost it. Most of the factories owned by the privileged caste Hindus and Muslims are working under informal settings by engaging unregistered labourers and managers assigned with different tasks based on the caste status. The labour union was being controlled by a clique of labourers from the privileged Chandio caste. The president of the union maintained aggressive and bold posture and prided in the fact that labourers of Chandio caste dominated and controlled the labour-related affairs. They considered labourers from the Scheduled Caste communities as inferior to them not only based on their caste but also based on their relative physical weakness to perform heavy labour that the laborers of Chandio caste were capable of. This position at the

grassroots poses many questions for the Marxists that still remain inadequately answered in the context of Sindh at least, and that does not reflect in the writings and activism of the Sindhi progressives who, as will be discussed in detail in the sections that follow, are largely preoccupied with the Sindhi national question. The Sindhi progressives do not show much clarity about the nature, structure and prevalence of caste-based classes as do the Urdu and Punjabi scholars do while writing on the class structure of Punjab.

Later, I visited some factories and even found food untouchability being practiced within laborers against the Dalits laborers. I interviewed some laborers and found that they had established small unregistered unions and were hierarchized based on castes. The union was under the control of Chandio Balochs of upper Sindh. Jai Parihar told that they hired them because they were sturdy and physically strong as compared to the laborers of lower Sindh. We hire them to load rice sacks in the trucks, the task that Kolhis, Bheels, Meghwars, being weak, could not perform efficiently (see Hussain, 2020, 6-7)

5.4.2 Dalit view of structural inequalities and social issues

Dalit activists attributed the depoliticization of structural inequalities to the Saithiyā-driven rhetoric of Hindu persecution by the Muslims. They identified the alleged ‘forced conversion’, the kidnapping of Vāṇiyo or Seth for ransom, extortion of money from Hindu businessmen, coercion to share business interests, temple desecration, religious persecution and the tendency to migrate to India, as the issues that were inflated by the Savarnas. They argued that the Saithiyā class used social media, Hindu panchayats, minority platforms, Human rights organizations, and other public and advocacy channels to highlight these issues and to distort the specifically Dalit issues. They opined that the major issues of the Dalits did not correspond with the typical Savarna problems that Vaniyas/Saithiyās often deliberately inflated to instigate the Scheduled Castes to stand with them against the Muslim majority. Hence, although Hindu Dalits were also sometimes affected by similar problems as any other Hindu or Saithiyā, yet their issues were not being attended on the Hindu minority platform.

Dalit activist’s demands also did not tally with the demands of a common Sindhi, particularly the nationalists. For instance, for a Sindhi nationalist, the issue of the enforcedly disappeared persons (the separatists), and the domination of Army (Punjabi establishment), the share of Sindh in the federation, exploitation of the resources of Sindh, migration, and settlement of the non-Sindhi and the Urdu-Sindhi ethnic discord, hold primary importance. Contrary to that, most of the Dalit activists assert themselves as

indigenous Sindhis, but they differentiated themselves from the far-right Sindh nationalists, and instead presented themselves as the patriot Pakistanis (see sections 5.5 and 5.6). Hence, because of the nature of the issues affecting Dalits, the basic demands of the Dalits diverged and contradicted with that of the Sindhi antinationalist narrative and that of the Savarna Vāṇiyo class.

Apart from that reason, their overall cultural practices demanded that they should have a generic identity to express their distinctive marginality vis-à-vis Vaniyas, Sodha Thakurs, Brahmin and Ashrafia classes. Because of the Savarna hegemony, the dominant trend was to assert Dalits' oppression and the progress as the 'Hindu' or 'minority' case. But the Dalit activists wanted to subvert it by presenting the progressive image of their respective communities to mobilize them on the basis of Scheduled Castes and Dalit identities. For instance, both the Kolhi Students Association which was pro-Hindu and the BIF organized some educational programs, rallies, and seminars during 2016 and 2017. Both the groups differed in their pick of the identities to highlight the issues. While the former tended to organize Dalits, not as Dalits, but as the oppressed 'Hindu minority', the later presented Dalits as 'Dalits' and 'Scheduled Castes'. Claims to indigeneity were mounted by both the forums to prove that they were the indigenous and the original Sindhis. Therefore, they must be recognized as such by giving them equal social and political rights and due respect as given to any other caste group or community. Hence, the Dalit predicament also fundamentally varied from both the Savarna and Ashrafia issues in terms of their drive for self-respect. Therefore, the reframing of the proud and the progressive image of their community was at the core of their assertive politics. To that end, for instance, they publicized the schools opened by Asu Bai (brought into the limelight as the Malala of Sindh) in Kunri¹⁹⁷, Haleeman Bheel in Dahili and that of Baby Baghri in Qambar¹⁹⁸, as the inspiring examples of the Dalit volunteerism and the educational uplift of the women by the women. This conversion of the issues created space for the subversion of the issues that most affected the Scheduled Castes, such as the issue of bonded labor, the increasing rate of suicide among Kolhis and the sexual exploitation of women.

Dalit activists were cognizant of the fact that they could highlight their oppression by rising based on a single caste or under the 'Hindu minority' umbrella. With that understanding, some of the Dalit activists had begun organizing their communities based on Scheduled Castes' or Dalits rights. To that end, that they had begun to revive the use of

¹⁹⁷ School of Asu Kolhi is also funded by Sindh Education Foundation (SEF), a semi-governmental institution.

¹⁹⁸ Baby Baghri, however, was also financially assisted by the local Savarnas in the form of token charity.

Scheduled Castes identity marker, and which was the leftover of the partition, and that had been almost forgotten by the people. There seemed to be a pattern emerging from the discussions revolving around these converging and diverging issues. Both the pro-Dalit and anti-Dalit activists were equally vociferous and expressive about the issues of their particular castes. In other words, Kolhis preferred to highlight the issues of the Kolhis, and Bheels that of the Bheel community, instead of speaking on behalf of all the Dalit or the Darāwar communities. The issues of Scheduled Castes as a whole were secondary to their Hindu minority issues. It showed that they were tilted more towards the Savarna-Ashraf narrative(s) of ‘Hindu minority’ to raise their cast status within the given system than to the Ambedkarian anti-caste narrative that demanded the annihilation of caste. They were less expressive of their supposedly later marginalization and the existing oppression based on caste as they were putting more emphasis on their historical pride in being Darāwar (see also section 5.5.1). It was also one of the reasons that many of them were reluctant to use ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity markers. The leading Ambedkarites and the Dalit activists being apprehensive of that fact held awareness programs, such as the celebration of the birth anniversaries of Dalit heroes such as B.R. Ambedkar, Khursheed Qaimkhani, Comrade Faiz Muhammad, Amar Ghaman Singh Bheel, Rooplo Kolhi, Paru Mal Kolhi, and B.R. Ambedkar.



Figure 16: Sindh Kolhi Itihad celebrating the Birth Anniversary of Paru Mal Kolhi at Nabisar, Sindh.

Source: Author (Sept 8, 2015)

Most of the social work of the Dalit activists was advocacy-based and voluntary, instead of development-related, or the donor-driven. Hence, they used the traditional mediums of communication such as the dissemination of the message by delivering speeches during

intervals in the *satsang*¹⁹⁹ programs. Dalit activists attempted to politicize them to mark Scheduled Castes in the 6th population census. It reflected both the lack of resources and the initial need, as the preliminary step towards the organization, to create social and political awareness about Dalit issues. Since these activities were conducted under the Ambedkarian or the pro-Dalit narrative, it required a completely different set of conceptual, categorical and identitarian tools. The category or the identity of ‘Scheduled Castes’ was at the core of that narrative. This reframing of the ‘Scheduled Castes’ category by the Dalits showed that it was still relevant to them both socially and politically.

5.5 Drive for Caste-to-Caste Parity

I am unable to understand why these Dharmi (religious) contractors, these Brahmin colonialists, and other so-called good saints declared Kolhis, Bhils, and Mehwars as achool (untouchable), *neech* (degraded), *maleech* (dirty), *shoodar* (Shudra) and *paleet* (profane). They conspired against us to make our life hell on our own land. They separated our own kith and kin from us. They hanged in our neck the bottles to spit and forbade us to walk in the streets. According to them, our feet were *paleet*. Because of that they compelled us to attach sweeping brows with our waist. They filled hot iron ore in our ears. What else they did not do to suffocate us. They stopped us from worshipping the temples. Why after all? We were showered with hatred only. They stopped us from reading, from fighting, for wearing good clothes. It was the apartheid having no parallel in history. We could not have read. We could not have spoken. Our basic human rights were usurped. But despite that, we kept following their command and invoked them with the auspicious names of Pundit, Mahraj, Saen, Bhagat, but remain detached from social rights, and they continued playing the all tricks under their sleeve. Manu Smriti was written to codify it as the Dharmic law. The justice that was meted out to us based on those codes; you all know very well. But now some of us have dared to challenge them, with many of us becoming doctors, engineers, lawyers, judges, teachers’ artists, poets, comrades, professors, etc. This stupendous progress of ours is like the black burnt charcoal spread on their faces. If you all could stand with us, as you do now, the day is not far that defeat of the Brahman imperialists will be celebrated as the international day. Jai Bhim!

Chetan Bheel (Translated from Sindhi speech)

This is the excerpt of the speech delivered by Chetan Bheel a BIF activist, during a program in 2016 held at Mithi city in Tharparkar, Sindh. It was a common pattern of the speeches delivered by most of the activists of DST, BIF, SCFP, SKI, and several other forums. Such public utterances were the proclamations of hope from the future and desire to change society by means of re-articulation of the existing socioeconomic disparities between the

¹⁹⁹ Sat-sang programs were held, to sing religious, Vedic and Sufi songs called ‘Wani’. Satang programs were the community events organized by the local caste panchayats.

Savarnas and the Dalit(bhaujans). Dalit activists did not criticize the Ashrafia elite as directly and as often as they did Savarnas aka Saithiyā class of Jati Hindus. They used to target the Ashrafia elite when they were being dragged by the Savarnas into the issues of alleged forced conversion and the temple desecration. while this difference in targeting was due to superior hegemonic control of Ashrafia classes, and the relative weaker non-Muslim or minority status of Savarnas, yet this difference also emanated from the fact that the Dalit activists' foremost goal was to politically displace Savarnas instead of Ashrafia elite, and to achieve caste-parity with the Savarnas instead of with the Ashrafia class.



Figure 17: BIF activists outside Umerkot Press Club demanding inclusion in PHC, a Hindu organization.

Source: BIF (2016)

Before DST was formed, BIF was protesting against Pakistan Hindu Council (PHC) to include Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, and other scheduled Castes communities into their forum. PHC is a registered forum of Vaniya (Bania) castes. Because they named it as a Pakistan Hindu Council, it connoted as if it were for all the Hindus. They did register some 45 members from Dalits and ex-Shudra Hindu castes but its 98 percent of the members with the lifetime chief patron Ramesh Kumar Vankwani was Vāṇiyo. Dalits felt excluded and took as the institutionalized form of untouchability. BIF took the stance and began protesting for Dalit inclusion into PHC. They based their drive in the notion that all Hindus are equal and therefore must be treated equally. This desire for caste-parity with the Vaniyas also reflected in their protests against the bar on their temple entry. I had a conversation with a Ram Japial and Vicky Meghwar, both anti-DST, about this tendency to demand entry into the Hindu council, Ram Jaipal (Meghwar). Ram Jaipal opined:

It will be good for the Hindu council to treat all Hindus equally. We are the indigenous Hindus of Sindh, and we have an equal right to be part of it. If they do not change now, we will change them. Our Meghwar community is making progress in education. The time is not far when they will be begging before us to marry their daughters.

Dharmendar agreed with him by relating entry into Hindu council with the entry into Deewan or Vaniya temples at Karachi:

Brother sectarianism is rampant in *Deewans* (Vaniya). Samadhi Deewans do not tolerate Sadharam, and Sadharam does not want to see Pitafis²⁰⁰. But both of them consider Meghwars as a dead *qaum* (caste). And because of that they sometimes stop us from entering into temples. These idiots do not know that the temple is the abode of *Allah* (God). No one should stop anyone.....). But now we are by no means inferior to them. We only need to change our dressing code.

Ram argued:

That is alright, but even then, I think they would not allow us to enter into temples. If they did, they would treat us only as untouchables. They know that many of us go there to have *parsad* (free meals), not to worship, and to have a respite, a night stay if traveling. At our temples of Meghwars we do not have many of those facilities that they have. We are still far removed from our *Mazhab* (religion).

Ram Jaipal nodded:

Yes, but we need to ensure one more thing. We need to impart *Dharmic* (religious) education to our children so that they know as much as the Vaniyas do. They should know everything about Sanatan Dharam. They should learn not only about Bhagwat Geeta, but also about the teachings of great Sants and Sadhus of Sindh.

Dharmendar disagreed a bit there:

I don't think we need to know about their Sants and Sadhus. We have our own Dharoo Meghwar, Baba Ramdev, Pir Pithoro and Dadi Malhin. They also do not about our deities. But yes, I agree with you, our people should act according to Bhagwat Geeta and follow in the footsteps our great lords Rama and Krishna.

It was evident from the general tendency among Dalit activists in Sindh that they assert caste identities as Hindus, not to assert Hinduness for religious purposes as such, but to (re)claim caste parity with the Savarnas. The drive for caste-parity was regulated by the tendency to Savarnize and Ashrafize (see sections 4.2 and 4.5).

Because of that tendency to Savarnize through upward caste mobility, they prefer to mobilize from the platform of caste associations instead of trans-caste forums. For instance, a Kolhi, affiliated with Kolhi Sujag Tehreek (KST) preferred to highlight Dalit issues from his caste-based platform instead of a more generic and inclusive Dalit platform like DST or SCFP. The same is true of Bheel Sujaag Council, BIF, Pakistan Meghwar

²⁰⁰ Samadhis and Pitafis are two religious and caste-based factions of Vaniyas. Sant Satram Das is a Hindu saint of a Vaniya caste.

Council, Megh Samaj Sath, Mutahida Meghwar Forum and several other such organizations named after their particular castes. It was thus, primarily the caste-driven activism that focused on the uplift of individual castes but with the recognition of the fact that they share social and political front with other castes that require an inclusive and a common platform(s). Hence, it can be said that they were not dismissive of the trans-caste or inter-caste fora such as DST or SCFP or PDSN, etc., but, being pragmatic, they knew that laymen Dalits, being casteist in their outlook, may not get along with such forums. Going by the logic acceptable to laymen Dalits, their caste associations asserted caste identities by connecting with their claims of Dravidian indigeneity, and invert origin myths related to their castes. Hence, in a way, it was their strategy to defy hiding castes to avoid untouchable treatment by Ashrafia and Savarna classes.

Notwithstanding Dalit's drive for caste parity, some of the members of BIF, PMC, MSS, and a few other caste-based forums were striving to bring their activists on the Ambedkarian agenda, but the hegemonic casteist culture seemed to neutralize their efforts. In such a scenario, DST, SCFP or any other forum could induct Dalits as its members with the pragmatic approach to achieve some sort of networking between those forums. With that empirical insight in perspective, an Ambedkarite activist Khomon Kolhi suggested that Dalits should be mobilized on caste lines. He argued:

Sindh Kolhi Itehad, PKST, Kolhi Association, and other communities should form an alliance in Nangarparkar immediately. Peoples Party, Awāmī Tehreek, and Arbab group will not desire to let Kolhi community unite. They will want that Kolhi community remain their underling. Therefore, the need is to access remote communities and think of ways to form an electoral alliance to exchange votes with other Scheduled caste communities. Kolhi community then does not need to rely on any party in case they succeeded in forming such alliances. PPP and other opponents will be compelled to form an alliance with Kolhi and Scheduled caste communities. With the support of PPP opponents and the support of Scheduled Castes, Kolhi community can win at least one seat into the assembly. Seeing Kolhi electoral success, Meghwar and Bheel communities of other Talukas of Tharparkar will also form alliances. Foreigners can be thrown out of politics if the Kolhi community shunned personal ego and formed a greater alliance. If it fails to achieve so, then keep serving wadera parties, and subsist gleefully like Bheel community on bones thrown to them by PPP as it has judiciously doled out, for the first time in history, a respectable position in the party to one of the Bheel. Redemption is not to come from such a charity. We can have political rights only by relying on our internal collective strength, and through struggle and agitation.

(Amedkarite activist, personal interview, 2016)

Another Kolhi activist Parkash told in an ethnically charged tone lamenting the indifference of a leading newspaper and TV channel KTN to Kolhi activism. He said:

In a historic gathering of Kolhi community in which more than 5000 Kolhi participated was given coverage by most of Sindhi newspapers, but the Kawish network that represents

the majority of Sindhi continues to neglect the Kolhi community. Their mentality is like wadera, a landlord. We must boycott it

(Kolhi activist, personal interview, 2016)

Similarly, each Dalit caste, particularly Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, and Baghri wanted to be heard, invited, allowed, educated, respected, but as *qaum* or *zaat* (castes) equal in all respects to the rest of privileged castes. Deeply entrenched caste-endogamy among Dalit communities discouraged them from forming trans-caste Dalit alliance with individuals and groups of other Dalit castes. It kept them segregated from ex-Shudra castes within Jati Hindus as well.

To achieve caste parity, Dalits accept and embrace whatever bones the so-called oppressor offers. For instance, Meghwar, were happy that a few of the seats had been offered by the feudal-capitalist parities to workers from within Dalits, that a few had managed to become legislators and one even had been made an advisor to a minister. Bheel, Kolhi, Meghwar, and Baghri highlighted their success in getting a higher education and governmental jobs. For instance, books and magazines published by caste-based forums and the social media blogs enlisted all those Dalits that had succeeded in securing admission in medical and engineering universities or had become officers in the government. For instance, BIF in one of its editions of Bheel Magazine proudly enlisted in Bheel Hall of Merit, some 25 students enrolled in different medical universities, 9 engineers, 9 officers and 45 students enrolled in agricultural and general public and private universities in different departments.

Like Bheel, Meghwar success in the field of education was celebrated by a senior Meghwar activist Hemandas Chandani by paying homage to a senior Meghwar teacher in the following poetic manner:

Seeing that education is the only way out of dilemma,
Meghwar took it as a challenge;
They opened up North Colony School, named as such;
The great honorable teacher Devji proved true his task;
All and sundry quenched their thirst of knowledge from that school.

(Hemandas Chandani)

Similarly, Meghwar activists on social media shared posts praising 58 Meghwar who qualified Sindh government's examination for Grade-17 posts of Medical officers. The jubilation pales down if one draws the ratio of Meghwar from the total qualifiers. From among 5000 candidates declared successful throughout the province, selection of 58 (1 %) of the Meghwar can hardly be claimed to be a success given their estimated huge population in relation to the population of Ashrafia-Savarna castes.

The fact of the matter is that Dalit castes do not have many caste heroes even though some of them have a very large number of populations, and because of it they sometimes exhibit desperateness to own the famous personalities that may have regional, categorical and even linguistic similarity to their own caste identity. For instance, Somji Dharani chronicled the biography of some 108 Meghwar presenting them as the pride of the Meghwar community (see Dharani, 2015). Assessing based on their population, the level of exploitation and socio-economic disparity, these claims of Dalit success pale down if compared to the success of any other Ashrafia-Savarna individual or the caste group.

Kolhis too claim to have descended from Rajputs and present Rooplo Kolhi as a warrior and Kolhi *qaum* as inherently warrior *nasul* (caste). Dalit activists in Sindh have semi-historical clues about the Dalit-Adivasi movements fought against the British and their ‘upper caste’ ruling agents. For instance, in their magazines, and social media blogs that often posted about the wars that the Bheels fought for their indigenous rights against Mughals and the British, such as the Bheel rebellion, begun by Tantya Tope Bheel. Although most of the revolts were brutally crushed by the British²⁰¹ leading to mass internal migration of indigenous people throughout South Asia (Maxham, 2003), the Dalit activists did not mention them often in their narratives. The self-serving constructs of these wars or the battles and the Savarna oppression were related to the blurred memories of local battles by Rooplo Kolhi, their defense of Sindhi nation against the British forces during war to prove both their mettle and fidelity to the local Sindhi Savarna-Ashrafia classes.

They explained the historical oppression through semi-historical legends about Eklaya Bheel, and Shibri Bheelin. The poetry of Bhagat Kabir, Ravidas was cherished with the mention that both were Dalits, one belonging to ‘Julaha’ caste, and the other to “Chammar” respectively. The political activism of Dalits brought up some contemporary contributors to this list as well. Along with Ambedkar, Jogendar Nath Mandal, Kanshi Ram²⁰² were projected Phoolan Devi²⁰³ now Rohit Vemula, who have become symbolic expressions of humiliation that Dalit undergoes and were risen to leadership status against humiliation and for the dignity. Khatumal Jeevan, Ganpat Rai Bheel, Engineer

²⁰¹ "... Revolts rose with unflinching regularity and were suppressed with treachery, brute force, tact, cooption and some reforms ..." (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 1956)

²⁰² Kanshi Ram was born on 15 March 1934 in Khawaspur village, [Ropar district](#), to a [Ramdasia Chamara Sikh](#) family. Ramdasias are a [Sikh](#) sub-group that has originated from the Hindu [caste](#) of [weavers](#) known as [Julaha](#). The Ramdasias are a [Dalit](#) sect but in Punjab at that time there was relatively little stigma attached to being an untouchable.

²⁰³ Phoolan was born into the [mallah](#) (boatmen) [caste](#), in the small village of Ghura Ka Purwa (also spelled Gorha ka Purwa) in [Jalaun District](#), [Uttar Pradesh](#).

Giyanchand, Surender Valasai, Sono Khangarani, Damro Mal Meghwar, Rana C Rathore, Radha Bheel, Kumari Pushpa, Veerji Kolhi, Lala Lajpat Bheel, and the young leadership of BIF can be said to have qualified as contemporary heroes of Dalits that inspire each other and to their communities. A few attempts have also been made by Meghwar, Bheel and Kolhi writers to write the biographical history of the heroes of their respective castes and to compile the social and political history and biographical sketches of the prominent caste members, the trend which is already deeply embedded in Savarna-Ashraf castes.

Although many Meghwar too proclaim Darāwar and Rajput origins, yet unlike Kolhis and Bheels they are less assertive on that count. They primarily construct their indigenous origin based on a mythical identity of Rishi Megh, a saint who had the power to bring rain to form the clouds, and the educational progress during the last few decades. They juxtaposed it to condemn their ‘untouchable’ treatment in later centuries. They, for instance, often referred to the Peshwa rule in Maharashtra during which Mahars were meted out the extreme level of untouchability and persecution. They, however, seemed unaware of the historical accounts highlighted by Mahars and Dalits in India, such as the Maharashtrian Mahar’s valour, the Bhima Koregaon incidence, and military services performed by Mahars\Meghwars that could become the reason for them to assert their identity as the Kshatriyas. The latest reason to feel pride in Meghwar identity is the result of the progress in the field of education. Because of that some of the Meghwar, who believe in the Verna system, even claim to have become Brahmin-like (teachers), and the claim that is not wholeheartedly recognized by the Savarnas who understand Varnas as genealogical classes.

Meghwar activists argue that although they were suppressed and marginalized, and their history had been decimated by the Ashrafia and Savarna classes, they played an important role in the social and political spheres of Sindh. Meghwars, for instance, claim to have built cities in Sindh. Diplo²⁰⁴ and Juhudo cities are after Dipo and Jhudo Meghwar who gave away their land for permanent settlement. Somji Dharani in his highly rhetorical tone writes:

All the beautiful buildings and bungalows in Sindh constructed in the past, but still, stand elegantly imposing have been built by Meghwar. [...] No other community has as much skill and art as to Meghwar. Today we have doctors, professors, surgeons, education experts, Ph.D. holders, Vice-Chancellors, Judges, Engineers, Majors and captains in Pak Army, Saints, Mahatmas, sculptors, poets, literary person, and winners of presidential awards,

²⁰⁴ According to Somji Dharani, in 1800 AD Tharo Khan Talpur had planned to build Diplo city at village Verhar, the village of current town chairman.

artists and social workers. Comrades to any other Jati (caste), certainly no other caste have persons engaged in all such occupations at such a high level.

(Dharani, 2015, p. 14-15)

Hence, all castes have their caste heroes. They celebrate their personalities and assume that they will be helped by them in case of any major crisis. But, this jubilation, that reflects personality cultism, is outwitted by the Savarna-Ashraf heroes many of which are even worshipped, revered and idealized by the Dalits as well (see section 4.5). This is the general tendency among all Dalit in India as well that has been identified by Gopal Guru as the ‘designated empowerment’, the kind of vicarious feel of empowerment that an individual Dalit cherishes when a well-positioned caste fellow is imagined representing the Dalit community. This, Guru, terms as a subsidy offered by the modern neoliberal democracy to the historically deprived underclass (Guru, 2011). This self-esteem proffered by the rise of Dalit individuals is not often reciprocated by the Savarna-Ashraf classes or reciprocated half-heartedly. Hence, the self-esteem fails to qualify for gaining self-respect as the Dalits as a class still lags far behind economically, politically and in terms of caste capital that is evaluated based on the value, the system created and regulated by the Savarna-Ashraf classes. Notwithstanding their marginality, the strategic numerical strength of Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, and Baghri in lower Sindh also gives them feelings of empowerment to claim parity with the privileged castes. A larger population is boasted off as making a formidable *qaum* (an ethnic group of castes) in itself.

5.5.1 Organizing as Rajputs and Darāwars

Pahlaj Kolhi: We know about our history now. We are also Rajput; we had our *Rajwaras* (small fiefdoms) in Parkar (Nangarparkar, Sindh).

Me: How you came to know about that?

Pahlaj Kolhi: Read Paru Mal Kolhi. He writes in detail beginning from Mohen-Jo-Daro when Kol, Bheel, and Santhal established it. In Parkar we came from Malwa (Madhya Pradesh), but then Parkar became our *mulk* (country). We are *Dharti Dhani* (owners of this land of Sindh)

Me: But in Parkar there ruled Sodha Thakurs?

Pahlaj Kolhi: Sodha did rule, but we were autonomous. Don't you know about Rooplo Gohel? How valiantly he fought for the independence of Sindh from the British. He fought together with Sodha rulers though.

Me: hmmm! But didn't he fight under the command of Sodha Rajputs and against the Army of Mir Talpurs of Sindh?

Pahlaj Kolhi: Brother. Listen, whatever may be the case but, you read Paru Mal. We were also Rajput and *Khatris* (Khsatriyas) like Sodha Thakurs. Look at me. I am Parmar, which is the *nukh* (subcaste) of Rajputs. Similarly, Rooplo was Gohel Rajput. Because our history was erased, people do not about our glorious past. Rooplo Kolhi fought valiantly. Nobody can deny history. But let me also tell you that Parkar was the land of Kolhis. It still is the land Kolhis will remain ours. We are Darāwar of Sindh and our history is 5000 years old.

Pahlaj Kolhi was one of the leading Dalit activists of DST. His response was typical of Parkari Kolhis living in Nangarparkar and the Barrage area (irrigated plain) of lower Sindh. The book written by Paru Mal Kolhi in Sindhi titled *Lok Sagar Ja Moti* is often presented as the historical evidence that proves that Kolhis were Dravidians with 5000 years old history and that they migrated from Malva to Nangarparkar in Sindh, that they had autonomous fiefdoms ruled by their caste lords, that they are Rajputs and Kshatriyas and as brave as ‘upper caste’ Sodha Rajputs. This Rajput or Kshatriya identity construction among Kolhis and Bheels can have strong links with similar attempts in Kutch and Gujarat or Rajasthan. This claim to warrior-ship is the savarnising attempt to align them with Sodha Rajputs, the Hindu rulers, with Nuhrio Arbabs, the political elite of Tharparkar and also with the Sammāt Castes many of whom trace their origins to Rajput or Kshatriya ancestry. More than the Rajput identity assertion in the political domain, they prefer to call ‘Darāwar’ qaum (race). A BIF activist Kishore Bheel told, “Before the Aryans came, there was no caste discrimination, and there was no untouchability. They used to practice Sanatan Dharma.” This weaving of history with religion and the racial-ethnic identity is aimed at otherising the Vaniya, Sodha Thakur and the Ashrafia castes, which they argue are Aryans invaders.

Hence, every non-Dravidian becomes pseudo-indigenous in their eyes. This approach to mobilize the Dalits and to organize them applying the Dravidian idiom is also employed in local politics. For instance, Veerji Kolhi and Versi Kolhi during the local government 2014-15 and the general elections in 2013 at Nangarparkar and in the Badin district resorted to it. Veerji formed a Parkar Sujaag Panel consisting of Kolhi members to contest local government elections. He used multimedia to show the documentary highlighting Veerji’s role presenting him and the Kolhi community as the Dravidians, the indigenous Sindhis, and Parkar as their indigenous land.



Figure 18: Election Pamphlet of Parkar Sujag Panel (in Sindhi) outlining their manifesto in 2013.

Source: (Hussain, 2014)

This identification as an indigenous Darāwar is used to question and discard the rest of labels that may hint at their existing or the former status as ‘achoot’ (untouchable). Because of that majority of the Dalit activists tend to mobilize their communities around ‘Darāwar’ identity marker instead of the ‘Dalit’ the identity that is used by DST, BIF and a few other forums only. One of the social-psychological reasons lies in the feel of historical pride that the ‘Darāwar’ creates in them and that same pride the term ‘Dalit’ cannot. For many, the ‘Dalit’ identity is taken as the opposite of the ‘Darāwar’. Their mobilization campaign falters when they attempt to organize their communities around Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or the Dalit identity instead of their specific ‘caste-based’ identities, or the ‘Darāwar’ or ‘Adivasi’ identity. This rejection of the ‘Dalit’ and the desirability of ‘Darāwar’ also has much to do with the Sindhi nationalist construct of the Indus Valley Civilization. Kolhi and Bheel claimed their historical right over Sindh and identified with it as one of the earliest settlers.

This tendency has been spurred by the Sindhi nationalist narrative that affords them the Dravidian link to make superior claims taking their history as far back to the Mohen-Jo-Daro phase of Indus Valley Civilization). This is the ethnic-racial identity that was

initially asserted by the Sindhi nationalists while re-writing the history of Sindh to mark their departure from the state-sponsored Islamized history of Pakistan (see Sindhi R., 2016; Siraj, 2009; Syed G. M., 2012 (1974); Syed G. M., 1986; Syed G. M., 2013) (Adwani, 2008; Sindhi R., 2016; Siraj, 2009; Syed G. M., 2012 (1974); Syed G. M., 1986; Syed G. M., 2013). Kolhi, Bheel, Baghri, and other castes picked up that strand to construct their version of Dravidian Sindh. The fossilized bodies having genetic makeup matching with Kol, Bheel and Santhal tribes, the picking of that finding by the Sindhi nationalists to construct their Sindhi nationalist ideology, unwittingly, became the motivating factor for Dalit communities to make claims to indigenous Sindhihood in a predominantly Sindhi *Sammāt* and Baloch tribal caste order prevails²⁰⁵.

Dalit' identity marker does not fit in with the both the Darāwar and Rajput identities and often negated by asserting Rajput and Darāwar identities. For instance, when I asked Seetal Baghari if he was a 'Dalit'. He rebutted "We are not Dalits; we are not untouchables. We are Rajputs". And when I asked him how he became Rajput, he narrated a fractured history of his *qaum* (caste), but when I asked why the British labeled Vagris/Baghris as a criminal tribe and put sanctions on them. He replied with confidence, "They must have put any such ban in India, we are living here in Sindh for 1200 years". This idealistic social construct, however, remains to be materialised as the Kolhis are not yet respected as equals by the Sodha Thakurs or by the other Savarnas. Hence, till they achieve it, which did not seem to come through shortly, the question of caste discrimination is diluted as all the castes are flattened on the idealized plane of Dalit-Savarna imagination.

5.5.2 Disconnect between Ambedkarian and Sindhi Nationalist Historical and Mythical Narratives

While Dalit activists were greatly influenced by the historical narratives produced by the Ashrafia and Savarna elite and adopted them, the Ambedkarites within them inverted their narratives to construct their own. For instance, while M.K.Gandhi and Raja Dahir, a Brahmin king of Sindh in 7th century AD are the heroes for Jati Hindus and the Sindhi nationalists, Dalits, or at least Dalit activists, idealize Rai Sahasi, Buddhist King of Sindh, B.R.Ambedkar, Eklavya²⁰⁶ Bheel, the character of epic Mahabharata, Baba Ramdev Meghwal, Dipo Meghwar, Pir Pithoro, and the local indigenous heroes such as Rooplo Kolhi and Amar Ghaman Singh Bheel.

²⁰⁵ See Appendix, Table X and XI on Caste Elite of Sindh: District-wise break-up.

²⁰⁶ Massey then describes a story from the *Mahabharata* of Ekalavya, an indigenous boy who was a skilled archer. When Arjuna, the protagonist of the *Mahabharata* and a 'twice-born' member of the Kshatriya caste discovered Ekalavya's archery skills; Arjuna cut off his thumb. (Massey, *Dalit Theology*, 49.)

This choice of history and heroes often contradicts the ideological differences between Dalits and Sindhi nationalists and Savarnas. Hinting at the ominous casteist nexus of Savarnas and the Sindhi nationalists, Ganpat Rai Bheel writes that “Unnecessary opposition by nationalists to Dalit cause, at the behest of Savarnas, and to declare it a conspiracy against the nation of Sindh, will damage the nationalist cause itself. (Bheel G. R., 2016) Hence, for radical Ambedkarites and also for leftist-Dalits, Sindhi nationalists stand with Savarnas, a tiny minority, and wittingly or unwittingly go against the Dalits’ standpoint. This, according to Dalit activists, is not at all in the larger interest of Sindh, and demand the recognition based on the polarity between Aryans and the Dravidians. “We Bheel had their kingdom in Bheelwar, we were Rajput, but it was usurped by the Aryan race,” told a Kishore Bheel activist with pride. Baghri activist Gokhal Das made a similar claim to Rajput descent and lamented that “certain races came in and overwhelmed us. Prior to this downfall, we had our kingdom in Rajasthan”. Hence, as it seems, the semi-historical legends provide the raw material for the construction of Kshatriya Rajput narrative for Kolhis, Bheels, Baghris, and several other Dalit castes. Whereas, at the ideological level, the politics of the Dalit activist and that of the politics of caste groups considerably varied from each other in terms of identity assertion. The main difference in their stance related to the nature and level of emphasis on ‘indigeneity’, Dravidianism, ‘Dalitness’, and the identification with Sindh and the Savarna Rajputs.

5.5.3 Meghwar Exclusivism and Bheel Activism

There were times, when our people were suffering from extreme kind of inferiority complex, such that they would call themselves as Rathore, Parmar, Chohan, and Deewan. But today, after being enlightened through education, they feel pride in openly calling themselves Meghwar. This is the historical imperative. We are Meghwar. We will live like Meghwar and die like Meghwar. We are neither Harijan, nor Dalit, and neither Scheduled Caste. We are only and only Meghwar and far ahead in the world than any other community.

(Somji Dharani, 2015, p. 15)

The success narrative weaved around the nominal Meghwar progress, emancipatory and self-inspiring for Meghwar though, has the underside as well. It creates an attitude of indifference towards other Dalit castes, which was termed by a Bheel activist Kanji as ‘Meghwarism’, the arrogant pride in Meghwar caste. Kolhi and Bheel, the two major potential allies against caste discrimination, persistently complained of Dalit exclusion due to Meghwar nepotism. For instance, Dr. Sono Khangarani was blamed by Kolhis of Parkar and Bheels of Islamkot to have used TRDP’s (NGO) platform to create jobs for the Meghwar caste. Similarly, Surender Valasai who established ‘Leelan Handicrafts and Arts’

(named after Leelan Meghwar) was blamed to promote homemade cultural artifacts made by Meghwar women only. They also blamed Misri Ladhani who founded the ‘Asha Foundation’ and ‘Thar Foundation’ to support exclusively to Meghwars.

A prominent Bheel activist affiliated with the ruling political party PPP complained blaming Meghwar leaders affiliated with ruling party PPP. For instance, Kako Mehroo Kolhi complained that “Khatumal stands with the Dalit castes only to show off, but in reality, cannot get out of Meghwar circle of influence for a minute. Giyanchand is posing like a liberal too, but he is only for Meghwar.” He blamed that Dr. Khatumal distributed 80 percent minority funds to Meghwar. He lamented that “Now if we openly agitate against Meghwar dominance and injustice, the Maharaj’s [Mahesh Malani, a Brahmin caste leader] position will get stronger.” BIF members also protested on roads several times complaining that Dr. Khatumal discriminated against the Bheel community and other Scheduled Castes and that he favored Meghwars. In a speech protesting favoritism of Dr. Khatumal, Ranjhan Bheel, a young BIF president alleged that Khatumal has done injustice to all minorities, particularly Scheduled Castes. He said:

BIF stood even for the Holi and Raveeta Meghwar, while their own Meghwar leader forgot them. The same reciprocal care and attention have not been proffered by Khatumal to our community and the Scheduled Castes in general.

Chetan Bheel, a senior BIF leader vehemently demanded that their community should throw away such a leader who was regrettably, following the ‘upper caste’ morality to pose like a Sardar (caste chief). Similarly, speaking to a small group of protesters at Kashmir Chowk, Mithi, on 13th May 2018, Lajpat Bheel alleged that, 25 million each allocated for scholarship, dowry of the poor girls, and for the handicapped in minorities, along with 75 million health budget for the deceased, and 300 million for the development schemes were distributed among the favorites of minority minister and his advisor Khatumal. BIF particularly took up the issue of minority student’s scholarship alleging that 28 million worth grant reserved for minority students have been spent either on Hindu other than Scheduled Castes, or preferentially awarded to Meghwar students only. A look at the list of the non-Muslim students shows that Meghwars and Savarnas from within Jati Hindus have been favored over the rest of Dalit castes and other non-Muslims²⁰⁷. Raj Singh Bheel

²⁰⁷ In May 2018, Sindh Non-Muslim Welfare Committee (SNMWC) headed by Dr. Khatumal Jeewan, and three other Meghwar, 1 Kolhi, 8 Savarnas, and 3 other non-Muslim members, allocated and distributed grant amounting 2,85,00,000 in terms of financial assistance to poor or needy students of Non-Muslims.

complained that Meghwar-PPP leaders also discriminate in allocation of local party seats or positions:

:

In Islamkot, there are 60% Bheel, 10% Megwhar, and 10% upper caste, 5% Hingora, 5% Kolhi and the rest are other non-Muslims. Party proposal, for president, contains 3 persons from Hingora caste. Hingoras already have 3 district council seats, one MNA seat, and the District president. After the persistent protest by the Bheel community, recently Poonjo Bheel has been appointed as general secretary for minority wing Sindh. Meghwar leadership, if sincere, can put up such a case as Dalit case on the basis of Dalit vote bank in these constituencies. This political discrimination and exclusion go down even up till the UC level. We persistently protest for Bheel inclusion. While, General Secretary, Rahimon supports us, Mahesh Malani continues to observe criminal silence.

Hence, while other Dalit communities are apprehensive of the discrimination meted out to them by Savarnas and Muslims, they are equally conscious of the Meghwar indifference to their political exclusion. A Kolhi activist lamented that Dalit leadership, particularly Meghwars, cannot withstand the pressure of Ashrafia-savarna elite and is compelled to take their sides. “Meghwars lose nothing, but other marginalized castes remain subdued, suppressed and excluded” he added. Yet, in many cases, the reactions and responses of the Dalit activists with regard to the political exclusion and the domination of Savarnas and Ashrafia classes were quite mixed. In an online Skype session²⁰⁸ with me, Sham Kolhi, a Dalit activist affiliated with a Kolhi association, expressed his satisfaction and gratitude to the ruling party PPP leadership on appointing Advocate Poonjo Bheel as the general secretary PPP minority Wing, hoping that PPP will continue with its party policy to bring Scheduled Castes in leading positions at provincial level. Although he used Scheduled Castes as a term to present all indigenous communities of Hindus as having common concerns and common agenda, he lamented the fact that the Kolhi community remains under-represented. The reasons for the political exclusion of Kolhis, according to him, lay in internal factionalism. Whatever were the reasons for Kolhi's backwardness, it is the caste that becomes the vehicle of asserting Scheduled Castes issues.

Oad and Baghri remained mostly indifferent to the contentions between Meghwar and Bheel communities. One of the reasons of that aloofness lied in demography. Oad and Baghri are dispersed in upper and central Sindh whereas Kolhi, Bheel, and Meghwar are mostly concentrated in the Mirpurkhas division in lower Sindh and share the same political

²⁰⁸ Conversation with a Kolhi activist, a session held on 10th of July 2017.

constituencies. The rest of the Scheduled Castes are smaller in terms of numbers and are much marginalized and largely indifferent to local politics.

Based on the Meghwar thrift, it can be argued that since Meghwars have relatively established themselves politically, they are less agitating about the political rights of the rest of Dalit communities. Contrary to them Bheels are actively demanding their share based on their numerical strength. For instance, when I met Bheel activist Gomon at Islamkot, he presented a list of villages with their population in Tharparkar district. He told that in almost all UCs of Tharparkar, 20 to 80 percent of the ‘minority’ (non-Muslim) population was that of Bheels. Meghwar were, however, in a majority (among non-Muslims) in Chachro Taluka followed by Bheel. ‘In Diplo Meghwar are 40 percent, Bheel 30 percent, Thakur 20 percent, and 10 percent others including Jati Hindus (mostly Savarnas). Hence, in almost all Talukas of Tharparkar excluding Nangarparkar where Kolhis dominate, at least 50 percent of the minority population is either Meghwar or Bheel’ told Gomon. These figures with some rhetoric added to it were frequently presented by Bheel activists to justify their demands of representation.

Meghwar dominance, therefore, is not uniform across Sindh province. In some districts, Meghwars remain marginalized. For instance, in Sanghar district Bheels are more dominant. Apprehensive of that relative marginality, Muttahida Meghwar Forum also submitted an application on 9th of August 2017 to the Deputy Commissioner, Sanghar district for the revision of ‘minority committee for interfaith harmony’ and requested for the inclusion of Meghwar and other ‘Pasmanda’ (marginalized) Hindu castes in minority committee. Hence, Meghwar exclusivism is but a half-truth complemented by the internal frictions within Kolhi and Bheel communities and their bias towards Meghwar. For instance, Bheel activists of BIF told that in a Dalit atrocity or legal matter involving Bheel in Tharparkar, an Army (Rangers) Major wanted to help them and assured recovery\ justice. But Poonjo Bheel, General Secretary, PPP minority Sindh Bheel jumped in, collected 80,000 rupees from Bheel and vowed to contest Bheel case, but failed to deliver and disappointed Bheel community. About a Poonjo Bheel, another Bheel argued that “He does not think for the Bheel community. He has established Bheel Sujaag Council. Its “*chaar chokri*” (the group of opportunists), to use Bheel community for vested interests. He remained MPA (during Dr.Partab’s time power was with them), they even deceived their close friends. How come they become the reason for uniting Bheel baradari?”

This internal contention over the access to resources shows that Dalit castes are politically hierarchized with Meghwar dominating followed by their immediate Bheel and

Kolhi competitors. The political dominance of Meghwar in Dalit-concentrated districts of lower Sindh shows how any Dalit community's relative political leverage and social development may become the reason of the exclusion of the rest of Dalit communities, thereby furnishing reasons for caste assertion at the expense of the larger Dalit alliance. It also shows how Dalit leadership struggles to survive within Ashrafia political party, whether for its individualistic vested interests or the greater good of the Dalit community.

5.6 Mobilizing as Sindhi and Pakistani Patriots

Sindhi Hindus now living in India after their migration in the aftermath of Partition are seen by Dalit activists as very influential members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (formerly of Indian National Congress) and the RSS. Their history as the lead members of the far-right Hindutvadi organizations (RSS, Arya Samaj, and Brahma Samaj) is often discussed by the Dalit activists. "Because of their influence there in Indian nationalist politics particularly in the BJP and RSS, Sindhi separatists succeed in getting sympathetic support" argued a Dalit activist Bhojo Meghwar. Jethmalani (Shiv Sena and Bharatiya Jan Sangh member, and Ex-BJP member) and L.K. Advani (BJP) are the two prominent Sindhi Hindu politicians of India that were alleged by Dalit activists to have never spoken for the rights of Dalits of Sindh or that of India. Although Dalit activists are quick at recognizing that political link, they are not radical in their criticism of it.

While the separatist elements in Sindh and the Savarnas seek the political patronage²⁰⁹ of the supposedly far-right India-based Hindu organizations and Hindu nationalist leadership²¹⁰, Dalit activists in Sindh seek inspiration from the current Dalit

²⁰⁹ For instance, Jeay Sindh Mutahida Mahaz (JSMM), the Sindhi separatist organization and its workers were observed following on twitter Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, BJP Lok Sabha member and RSS's student wings member Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and seek each other's support.

²¹⁰ The statements of Savarna Sindhi Hindus from India are quite enticing for the Savarna Sindhi diaspora and the separatist elements in Sindh. Statements like:

Jewish nation can get back their original country Israel, and then Sindhi nation must try and can get their country Sindh back." Narendra Modi, Indian Prime Minister. A short clip of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, initially prepared by the local Sindhi media Channel KTN, is share on social media in which he praises Gujarati Sindhi's (migrants from Sindh) hospitality, Sindhi language and Sindhi nationalism. A video clip is made out of some parts of two different speeches of Indian Prime Minister that goes viral on social media in Sindh. Clip is edited probably by the uploader and controversial statements related to Jewish references are edited out, and telecasted by KTN, a Sindhi news media channel.

See URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/abdulbaqi.mengal/videos/vb.100001621733988/1219414661455913/?type=3&theater> (Accessed on : 2-02-2017)

movements in India. Hence, While Sindhi nationalist parties ideologically seem to be aligned with India and BJP government, the Dalit activists seem tilted towards the state narrative of Pakistan and rely on the mainstream political parties particularly PPP. This explicitly anti-Indian stance of the Dalit activists, for instance, can be inferred from the statement of Surindar Valasai, the spokesman of PPP (Bilawal House) in a statement against Indian Home Minister said:

Instead of thinking evil for Pakistan and our people, Rajnath Singh and his Alibaba and 40 thieves should stand accountable to entire humanity and the international community for ruthlessly practicing the world's oldest apartheid and holding hostages the Dalits, Muslims, Christians, Adivasis, and tribals.

(Media Cell PPP, 2016)

5.6.1 The Challenge of Mobilizing under State Surveillance

Like most of the civil society activists, Dalit activists were also very conscious of living under the surveillance of the security agencies. This all-pervading sense of being monitored even made them suspect me of man on a mission sent by ISI, the leading intelligence agency of Pakistan. I found that sensitivity more in the Dalits that lived near the border than in the central and the Western region of lower Sindh. Take the example of the Kolhis living in Nangarparkar, the taluka of Tharparkar that is circled by the Indian border on its three sides. Narayan narrated me a story of a Kolhi who in the past had crossed to the other side and caught by the rangers at the border. He was suspected of espionage. In another incident, a Meghwar who was found missing for a year was accused of being an Indian agent, and court-martialed but finally released as it was found that the charges against him were fabricated. I asked Narayan if he would migrate to India, he very cautiously replied "I am committed to this land. My heart says to leave Sindh for Hind, but I can't." Similar confusing sentiments were expressed by a Parkari Kolhi of New Dumbalo, when they were asked about migrating to India; "We shall die here, but not leave Parkar" (Kolhi K. , 2013), "Parkar and Sindh are our 'country'. We are its real inheritors. Why should we leave it"

BJP patriarch LK Advani, a Sindhi migrant to India recently gave a statement that "At times I feel sad that Karachi and Sindh are not parts of India anymore. I was very active in RSS during my childhood days in Sindh. It is matter of dismay. I believe that India appears incomplete without Sindh," See URL: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-incomplete-without-sindh-says-lk-advani/story-PGlgFeDUJ6dqZCY3htG0uM.html> (Accessed on : 2-02-2017)

See also: Hindustan Times (2017), 'India 'incomplete' without Sindh', says LK Advani. Also see Independence for Sindhudesh from Pakistan, [Great India](http://www.greatindia.com), ,Published on Jun 13, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGLSSUOxifk> . 2. Akhand Sandhu Sansar, A NETWORK OF Sindhi Hindus working for greater Sindh from within India., also Global Sindhi Council. URL: <http://thesindhuworld.com/> 3. Ram Jawhrani: Sahyog Foundation: Global Sindhi Council: Sindhi Seminar: Gandhinagar Kolhapur <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNuPH1TjzhM> . (Accessed on : 2-02-2017).

(Kolhi V., 2013; Hussain, 2014). Dalit communities of Tharparkar used to commute to the towns and villages in Rajasthan and Gujarat that were near the border. But after the Indo-Pak war of 1971 ended, the state began sealing the border. From there onwards, the sense of living in a hostile Pakistan state arose among the Dalits of Tharparkar, and they increasingly began to identify themselves more with the Sindhi and Pakistani identities. It, therefore, seems an accommodative response forced upon them by the politics of the frontiers and the Indo-Pak geopolitics and boosted by the Sindhi nationalist identity construct (discussed in section 3.3 and chapter 4) that provides space for the assertion of Sindhi Dravidianism.

5.6.2 Creating Space in the Law-enforcing Agencies and Pakistan Army

One of the ways Dalit activists coped with the securitization (state surveillance) was by highlighting differences from the Savarnas within the Jati Hindus by proving that they are a different kind of Hindus who were oppressed by hardline Hindutvadis. In fact, not as such out of Pakistani patriotism, but due to the perceived Islamist threat, both the Savarna Sindhis and Dalits give forth statements that express unconditional fidelity to the state. For instance, Ramesh Kumar Vankwani²¹¹, a Savarna politician stated in 2017 urging Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif “to send Pak Army troops to defend Saudi Arabia without any hesitation”. He said that the contribution of the “brave Pak Army could prove to be a game-changer in the current Middle East crisis.”²¹² But such statements do not as come from Savarnas as often as they come out from the mouth of Dalits. Savarna support of Pak Army is often more of a tactical solidarity as their political activism revolves around issues that may be considered antithetical by the state, or the dominant Ashrafia elite and society such as the issues of alleged ‘forced conversions’ and ‘forced Hindu migration’, temple desecration, perceived fears of blasphemy, and the issues related to Hindu personal law, Hindu welfarism, and legitimacy of Hindu panchayats.

Contrary to Savarnas, Dalits were found to be rather pro-state and particularly expressive of their fidelity to Pak-Army. To that end, Scheduled Castes (SC) identity, having an official tag attached to it, served as an officially valid reference to prove their difference from Savarnas and Jati Hindus to convince the state and Army to treat them as

²¹¹ Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, is the (lifetime) patron-in-chief of Pakistan Hindu Council (PHC) and was MNA when I was doing research in 2017.

²¹² Source: Daily, The News (April, 7, 2015) Pakistan Hindu Council calls for sending troops to Saudi Arabia. URL: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/33666-pakistan-hindu-council-calls-for-sending-troops-to-saudi-arabia>. Retrieved on 25th August 2017.

special kind of communities different from (Jati) Hindus. Scheduled Castes identity served as a proof that they are not those ‘Hindus’ that should be feared as enemies, but a group of castes that had been oppressed by Saithiyās or Vaniyas and Brahmin castes under the Hindu caste system. That narrative was in line with the state policy that may cherish the idea that Hindus are internally divided, and inherently, further tended to divide instead to unite. This narrative had currency among the state institutions as well, and of which Dalit activists were positively apprehensive. As proof of that apprehension, Dalit activists proudly told about the reluctance of the Army and intelligence agencies to recruit from Brahmin, Thakur and Vāniyo castes of Jati Hindus. This is considered as a great feat achieved by Dalit activists as, when Pakistan came into existence in 1947, the entry of both the Hindus and Scheduled Castes, in general, had been strictly banned in highly sensitive state institutions such as in the Army and intelligence agencies (Dharani, 2015, p. 204).



Figure 19: BIF Rally on March 3, 2019, held in support of the Pakistan Army.

Source: BIF (2019)

From amongst Dalits, Megwhars in particular, have been more proactive to swear fidelity to the state. The meeting of Scheduled Castes’ delegate in the early 1990s is often quoted as the turning point after which the Pak-Army began recognizing the discriminatory identity differences between the Jati Hindus and Scheduled Castes and began prioritizing SCs in jobs in Army. The delegate included Sono Khangarani, Khatumal Jeewan, Surender Valasai, Dr. Rana C. Rathore and other Meghwar, and Kolhi activists. They demanded to proffer SCs jobs in the Army. It was the first attempt after 1956 when Peter Paul Gomez (from East Pakistan), a Christian leader demanded recruitment of Christians, Buddhists and

Scheduled Castes in the Pakistan Army²¹³. The latest turning point, however, was essentially the achievement of Dalit activists. Dr. Sono Khangarani, convener of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek, and member of IDSN told in a meeting of DST on 23rd of March 2016, how they convinced Pakistan Army to recruit Scheduled castes in Pakistan. He told:

There is a special place in Pindi (alludes to General Head Quarter GHQ or Pakistan Army in Rawalpindi). In 1993, after a month-long effort, we were finally permitted to meet there with a Colonel at its entrance gate. In it, we put before them the five-point demand charter. The first demand was that we have a 6% quota for Scheduled castes across the board, but our people are not yet allowed to enter into Army. Colonel wondered at it and replied that he knew nothing about any such quota. We then asked Colonel, ‘Did you hear any criminal or illegal offense ever committed by Scheduled castes in Pakistan?’ The colonel replied that he never heard that. From there, we were allowed to have a few more meetings with Army officers, and finally in 1994, for the first time, Scheduled castes were considered for the recruitment into Pakistan Rangers. We were asked to tell our people that recruitments are open to them. We asked our people. A few came forward and got recruited; the rest did not show any inclination. In the second phase of our activism, when we took the issue of quota in legal terms in the mid-90s, Scheduled castes were allowed to be recruited into Pakistan Army. We contested our case on the historical-legal basis by showing the existence of the Scheduled caste category as constitutionally and legally existing in different documents including census forms in Pakistan. Today some four to five hundred Kolhi, Bheel and Meghwar are serving in Pakistan Army and rangers.

Similar but unsuccessful initiatives were also taken by Surender Valasai and Sardar Jagjeet Singh (Meghwar) who wrote letters to Army Generals and to Musharraf in 2004-5 to demand Scheduled Castes quota in the Army. These assertions that affirm their fidelity to the state not only fulfilled Dalits’ psychological need to feel safe and secure but also social and economic as they were thereafter recruited in Army and other state institutions with more eagerness than before. The entry of a few Dalits into the Army is also celebrated as the emancipatory gesture by the Dalits. For instance, the example of Major General Danish is often quoted by Meghwars to express their pride in the Meghwar caste, to appreciate Army and to prove that they are the true Pakistani patriots. The loyalty to Pakistan is also expressed by presenting Dalitbahun army men as valiant jawans of the Pak Army. A leading Dalit activist affiliated with the ruling party (PPP) Sindh, and Media Cell Incharge,

²¹³ Mr. Peter Paul Gomez raised the issue of in Constituent Assembly on 22nd March 1956. He demanded that the Buddhists, the Scheduled Castes, the Caste Hindus and also the Christians be recruited in large numbers in the armed forces of Pakistan. Source: Constituent Assembly Debates, Thursday, the 22nd March 1956. URL: http://devlums.com/sites/default/files/debate/1442821174_398.pdf. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.

uploaded a status on social media in 2017 with the picture of young ‘lower caste Hindu (ex-Shudra) wearing the uniform of Pak-Army. He wrote:

Shaheed Lalchand Rabari²¹⁴ embraced martyrdom while fighting against enemies of Pakistan. Pak Minorities including Scheduled Castes are also ready to die for defense of our homeland.

(Surender Valasai, Media Cell Incharge, PPP, 2017)

The status went viral with several likes and comments by the Dalits paying homage to the martyred Rabari, and praising Pakistan Army. The fidelity to Army and Pakistan is also proved by referring to the events of the 1971 war when the Indian Army occupied the parts of the Tharparkar district in Sindh. They narrate stories of how they rescued Muslims from the Indian Army by providing them refuge inside their homes. The bravery and commitment to duty of Jamadar Sujo Mal, particularly his controlling of cross-border smuggling from Sindh into Kutch in India, is also often mentioned by the Meghwar community to prove that Meghwars are not only brave but also dedicated to Pakistan. They also narrated the events whereby they came into contact with Pakistan Army, or Pakistan Army contacted them, and they reciprocated. For instance, Somji Dharani narrates the event from the biography of Moolchand Kudecha, that:

During 1965 Rann of Kutch War when Pakistan Army forcibly employed the Dalit village men to work in Rann of Kutch, Moolchand Kudecha made a deal with the Army, patronized the villagers, ensured that all did their job accordingly, and also ensured that all return back safely back to their homes. Again during the 1971 war, Moolchand Kudecha defended his village against the enemy [Indian Army]. He would serve and arrange the feast for the [Pakistan] Army when it would come to the village. He never gave the Army any reason to complain. And when it left it gave the ‘good certificate’ to him.

(Dharani, 2015, p. 432)

Pakistan Army and other state institutions are also often reminded by sending public messages that none of the Scheduled Castes, except probably Ramchand Kolhi who was also innocent, had been found involved in any such kind of suspicious anti-Pakistani activity. Dalit activists argued that contrary to their fidelity, some ‘upper-caste Hindus’ (Savarnas) have been allegedly captured because of their involvement in such anti-state activities. Malji Mal told that Gulji Mal Damrani (Meghwar) was arrested on the basis of false accusations of espionage instigated by Sodha Lachman Singh but was released after a few days as none of the allegations could be proven against him. Sodha Lachman Singh (Thakur), who assisted the Indian Army to control the Chachro Taluka of Tharparkar and

²¹⁴ Although Rabari is not considered to be a Dalit caste or ‘Scheduled Caste’, yet certain oppressed communities of Hindus, belonging to ‘Shudra’ castes are often believed to be Dalit by Dalit activists. While Rabari consider themselves to be Rajput very much like Kolhi, and Bheel also claim to be Rajput.

eventually migrated in the aftermath of 1971, is depicted by the Dalits as the enemy of Pakistan and Dalits.

The military regimes, on their part for their vested interests, were also tempted to exploit the rift existing between Scheduled Castes and Savarnas. It is quite evident from the written accounts of Dalits as well from the conversions held by me that the military regime of General Zia during the 1980s was quite sympathetic towards Scheduled Castes and knew that Dalits are the victims of caste discrimination that exists among Hindus. But it did not give Dalits a separate identity than the Hindus and instead lumped them together with the Jati Hindus. (Dharani, 2015; Mal, 2000). Alternatively, being cognizant of the fact that Pakistan Army is the de-facto ruler of Pakistan, Dalit leadership and the common Dalit activist was the least critical of the interventions of Army in the local or national politics, and instead many of them rather preferred Army rule instead of purely democratic governments. When I asked Hemraj Meghwar, a school teacher at Mithi, why they support Army rule, he told, 'During Army rule at least we are partially free of the shackles of local feudal lords and Saithiyās'. By and large, Dalit activist's stance over the choice between Army rule and the democratic governments was very ambiguous and divided. This ambiguity and divisiveness, which reflect the macropolitical constraint upon Dalit agency, blunts Dalit's Ambedkarian approach that demands of them to vouchsafe for social democracy.

Hence, sandwiched in between the immediate local and the distant national hegemons, many Dalits prefer to live under the distant oppressor. Instead, some of the individual Dalit activists and the Dalit forums even argue that during Army's rule Dalit individuals get the chance to have some good clerical level jobs above the sanitary worker. Hemandas Chandani, a Mithi based Scheduled caste activist and senior citizen told:

Meghwar, Suthar, '*lower caste*' and Scheduled castes have got jobs from grade 1 to 15 in Mirpurkhas division, purely on merit, whenever recruitments are made on merit (and that happens usually during military rule) in government jobs, also through Sindh Public Service Commission. Whereas, jobs of a sanitation worker, *beldar* (lowest menial jobs) are often on offer to Scheduled castes through MPAs or MNAs quota.

(Hemandas Chandani, Personal Interview, 2017)

This exposition of ideological and social fissure within 'Hindus' also implied that the protection of Scheduled castes in Pakistan and seeking their redressal from caste discrimination at the hands of politically dominant Savarnas, apparently looking, is the legitimate social demand that state and governmental institutions should not hesitate to entertain. Looking from the Ambedkarian lens, this strategic ploy on the part of Dalit

leadership is reminiscent of Ambedkar's attempts to convince the British to recruit Dalits into the British Army. Ambedkar contested his case on historical grounds by proving that Dalit castes are as valiant and trustworthy as any other caste or community (Besham, 1985). Dalits in Pakistan, however, did not brag much about their braveness but relied on their meekness as the oppressed and the harmless but trustworthy class of the marginalized different from (Jati) Hindus. Their persistent visits to Army officers and the token protests against Saithiyā or Vaniya class of Hindus convinced the military to encourage recruitment into the army from amongst Scheduled castes.

Realization of the multifaceted marginal identity that defies both the Brahminic caste-based and religious-based binaries, enables the Dalit activists to assert a more contextually agreeable meaning of their identities that could make their life livable and dignified within Pakistan. This way of identity construction, however, often purposefully evades presenting their demands in a radically Ambedkarian language by hitting at the caste-credentials of Ashrafia class of which Army itself is the leading protagonist. This reluctance of the Dalits to confront casteism and Sayedism of Muslims shows the relative strength and the weakness of both the Dalits and the Ashrafia class in Pakistan. Although this politically and strategically motivated nominal support by the Pak-Army situates Scheduled Castes squarely against local epistemic oppression of the Ashrafia neoliberal Sindhī nationalist narratives, yet it aligns Dalits with the more conservative religious forces steeped in Sayedism, shrine culture, and feudalism.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the use of multiple identities such as Dalit, SC, Darāwar or Dharti Dhani (indigenous Sindhī or 'sons of soil') to know the level of acceptability of each identity marker as it varied from forum to forum and from one section of society to another. While the Ambedkarites prioritize the 'Dalit' and 'Scheduled Castes' over the Darāwar, the Dalit caste groups or caste-based forums prioritize their caste labels followed by Hindu and Darāwar identities. Yet, for others, Hindu-Darāwar-Sindhī makes up the complete set of political markers. Similarly, the pro-state Dalits priorities Pakistani identity over Sindhī and Sufī, but also append Hindu, Sanatan Dharam and Darāwar with it. Hence, one can multiply several combinations depending upon the individual's caste, locality, religious and political orientation.

As these identities were usually expressed in the overlapping narrative(s), so were their organizing strategies to pick up the Dalit issues and highlight them. Different Dalit

forums or organizations use ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ terms selectively, some using ‘Dalit’, others preferring to use ‘Scheduled Castes’ along with a variety of other appended terms such as ‘indigenous’ and the ‘Darāwar’ or ‘Hindu-Dalit’ etc. However, the general identitarian tendency prevalent across the board in most of the Dalit activists is to employ different identity terms interchangeably suffixing one identity after another with the prime purpose to gain self- respect and create political space. To achieve that, Pakistan is imagined by Dalits as controlled by the Pakistan Army. Asserting Scheduled Caste identity as against Hindu identity, was the major successful attempt to throw the political statement of difference from Savarnas, and thereby seek sympathies of Pakistan Army. It was the Meghwar-led attempt. Meghwar, in particular, adopted the policy of appeasing Ashrafia ruling parties and the powerful state institutions, such as the Army. This strategy to appease the political elite of Pakistan and subsist on their gratitude seems closer to the Gandhian approach to make Dalits docile, lowly but functional parts of the larger society. Whereas the strategy to appease Army or the state, that was aimed at bringing about the legal and constitutional changes to ensure the Dalit representation, seems Ambedkarian in essence. This way of identity construction, however, often purposefully skips the bigger hegemon, that is, Ashrafia class of which the Army itself is the leading protagonist. This reluctance of the Dalits to confront casteism and Sayedism of the Muslims and the Dalits shows the relative weakness and the Dalits and the strength of the Ashrafia class in Pakistan.

The claims of Pakistani and Sindhi patriotism are appended with the equally strong disposition to raise the ladder within Hindu caste culture. Hence, it was quite evident from the general tendency among Dalit activists that they assert caste identities as Hindus to (re)claim parity with the Savarnas. Meghwar seemed to take an edge over the rest of Dalit castes in that regard, although they too are underrepresented and rely on ‘dehumanizing tokenism’ (Somwanshi, 2017). Meghwar’s relative success vis-a-vis Kolhi and Bheel, the two other dominant communities, reflects not only the graded inequalities and the exclusion within Dalit communities, the realization of which leads the relatively deprived Dalit castes to make counterclaims and criticize both the Meghwar leaders of PPP and the party. Meghwar rise also shows how a Dalit community criticizes its leadership, celebrates its rise and struggles to survive in Ashrafia-Savarna dominated political party. The lack of Meghwar interest in standing with the Bheel, Kolhi and Meghwar activists spurs these communities to be included in the political mainstream at any price fixed by the Ashrafia-Savarna elite. Consequently, Dalit leadership gets inducted merely as subordinates and without political empowerment.

The reframing of their civilizational greatness and the Dravidian past was meant to inculcate confidence to resist against the Ashrafia-Savarna classes. To that end, Dalit activists were constructing their own archeology of Dalit heroes and heroines so that the sublime difference could be marked against Savarna-Ashraf classes. Most of the Dalit activists wanted the restructuring and the reformation of the political organizations so that caste structure could be restructured on a horizontal plane whereby they could say that they were also equally respectable stakeholders in the social or political equation.

Chapter 6: Political Relevance of ‘Scheduled Castes’ Identity Marker

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 5, the identity markers are chosen or imposed, borrowed or innovatively (re)constructed by the individuals and social groups. The choice or the imposition of these social identities become politically salient when they begin affecting any group’s chances of inclusion or the exclusion from society. ‘Scheduled Castes’ is one such imposed or the chosen identity of the marginalized castes.

Dalit’s identity claims revolve around their claims of demographic strength that are allegedly underestimated by the official statistics. Interestingly, Ashrafia and Savarna political elite, apprehensive of Dalit’s demographic strength in Mirpurkhas division in lower Sindh, cajole them to woo their support during elections. This wooing and cajoling are done, under the specific Ashrafia-Savarna framework that sees them as ‘poor Hindus’. Whatever may be their political stance with regard to identity choice, they are almost on the agreement as regards their distinctively superior and politically significant demography in Mirpurkhas divisions in particular and in lower Sindh in general. They qualify their claims of numbers as political statements to demand greater representation or share in politics and society, which are not accepted wholeheartedly by the Savarna-Ashrafia elite that represents them in the name of the Hindu religion and Sindhi nation.

Given this Ashrafia-Savarna indifference to Dalit's right to representation, in this chapter, I will analyze the Dalit claims of numbers and the contention that they have been systematically excluded from mainstream politics. I discuss why from among several arbitrary social and political categories, the ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity marker is more relevant for the Dalit activists to (de)minoritize.

6.23 Lack of Space for Dalits in Minority Organizations

Minority narrative, in recent years, got the further spur when the Minority Rights Commission was established in Sindh in 2015 (Ghori, 2016). It was stipulated in the Sindh Minorities Rights Commission Bill that it will consist of 11 government-nominated members, head by the chairperson, and that women must comprise at least 33% of the membership. On the 10th August 2017, Sindh Human Rights Commission²¹⁵, which is headed by a Syed (Rizvi) since its formation.

²¹⁵ Source: URL Website: <http://sindhinformation.gos.pk> . Retrieved on 29th of August 2017.

Since the Government was the least caste sensitive to caste-based discrimination, the Jati Hindu dominance in politics, in the human and minority rights forums prevailed. On rare occasions, Dalit and Scheduled Castes do appear in the political vocabulary of ‘minority’ activists, soon to be forgotten. For instance, In the Bill for National Commission for Minority Rights Act, 2015’, Lal Chand Malhi (caste Hindu and PTI, MNA), recommended to constitute minority commission based on the “two of the members shall be from the Christian community, one from the caste Hindu community, one from the Dalit community, one from the Sikh community, one from the Parsi or any other minority and four from the Muslim majority, meeting the selection criteria.”²¹⁶ Although the bill was submitted in 2015, yet it came under discussion by the Standing Committee of National Assembly in May 2017. It disapproved of the bill for the passage of the law. (Wasif, 2017) The inclusion and use of the term ‘Dalit’ in the proposed bill are probably the later addition made after the formation of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek and Dalit activism in 2016. ‘Minority’ as the referential category for communities affected by caste discrimination is also upheld by UN the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsák, in her report in 2016. She believes that although a minority rights approach can provide a valuable platform for the protection of the rights of caste-affected communities, it the category of minority does not transpire the issue of oppressed castes, and “recognizes the complexity of addressing this topic within the minority rights framework, as there” prevails “the view that caste systems are a way to organize society without the domination of majority groups, and that” therefore, ‘lower caste’ “groups may not strictly fall under the category of minority groups”. (UN's Human Rights Council, 2016). Hence, defining non-Muslims as non-Muslims or minorities and caste-affected indigenous communities as Hindus in Pakistan is not only in line with the two-nation theory and the everyday Ashrafia narrative but also in line with the international human rights discourse.

Minority rights defenders, on their part, blame Dalit rights defenders of dividing the minority which is already just a fraction of the national population (3 to 4% only). Certain Dalit activists working from within the ‘minority’ platform defend minority narrative as inclusive of Dalit rights. Pushpa Kumari, the contestant for the Chairperson, Dalit Sujaag Tehreek, also holds a position as an executive member board of minority rights association ‘Paigham-i-Aqliat’, and coordinator Hyderabad district of Pakistan

²¹⁶ Source: National Assembly of Pakistan, online archives. URL: <http://www.na.gov.pk/en/acts-tenure.php>, retrieved on January 17, 2018.

Minorities Alliance. Ramesh Jaipal (SCRM)²¹⁷ and Bhaya Ram Anjum (DST, president Punjab, and a former ticketholder of the Pakistan People's Party) also toe the same line. Bhaya Ram told a newspaper reporter that "There is discrimination in the Constitution which does not treat minorities equally," he said arguing that a person from the minority group cannot become prime minister or president. "Are we not loyal to Pakistan and why do they doubt our loyalty," (Mukhtar, 2014)

Social and political organizations that are concerned with minority issues, such as SHPC²¹⁸, Christian missionaries (Joshua Project, 2013; WYCLIFFE Global Alliance, 2013; Bethany World Prayer Centre, 2004-5; Presentation Sisters Union, 2008), Muslim, Hindu, and Ahmadia missionaries, however, greatly vary their structure and differ from each other in operation. Secular Human rights watchdogs, leftist and nationalist activists, peasant organizations too, mostly address Dalit issues from the religious minority perspective. Particularly the middle class pro-Hindu Dalit class follows that strategy and often comes into ideological conflict with Ambedkarite activists. Most of the government funds and that of NGOs for marginalized and vulnerable or oppressed communities are used in the name of 'minority'.

Nevertheless, due to Dalit activism, particularly in the recent past, Dalit leadership within the ruling Parties did attempt to channel those funds for the welfare of Dalit communities. For instance, the SMBB scholarships amounting to 45 million rupees, announced by minority affairs department Sindh, were announced for all the minority students of Sindh. The checks were distributed by Dr. Khatumal Jeewan, advisor to Chief Minister on minority affairs²¹⁹ on 31st May 2017. Dr. Khatumal told a reporter that out

²¹⁷ SCRM was active in Southern Punjab, particularly Rahim Yar Khan Division, up till 2015, but lately its activities have decreased. Ramesh Jaipal, its founder, and son of Bhaiya Ram Anjum, DST President Punjab, however, keeps advocating the rights of Scheduled castes and minorities. He is currently affiliated with Hare Rama Foundation (HRF) that advocates for the rights of minorities. Despite very meager resources he organized some protests and a large Jalsa (public gathering) in 2014 and invited all leading Scheduled caste activists from Pakistan. See online, "Issues of Pakistani Scheduled Caste Hindu Minority by Ramesh Jaipal", URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoxC_ExKBTg. See also, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQ1NsOdqXS0>; Also : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Von7D7uoUF0>.

²¹⁸ Sindh Hari Porihiat Council (SPHC) is a voluntary peasant association.

²¹⁹ "Minority Affairs - Government of Sindh was established in the year 1995, with religions Affairs, Auqaf, Zakat and Ushr Department. In year 2010, Minority Affairs Department was separated from Religions Affairs and become a complete separate department under tide 'Minority Affairs'. The Department facilitates the formulation of overall policy, planning, coordination, evaluation and review of the regulatory framework. It provides financial Assistant, scholarship, medical treatment, marriage dowry for

2400 total scholarship, 400 are for Karachi division, 400 for upper Sindh, and 1600 for Mirpurkhas and Hyderabad divisions. Dalits being the majority in the (religious) minority in Mirpurkhas and Hyderabad will receive most of the scholarships. Dr. Sono Khangharani, convener DST, who was part of the check distribution team, “I think the majority, about 70 percent as I got the impression, from Scheduled castes will receive those checks.” That check distribution ceremony that was patronized by Dalit leadership (Surender, Dr. Khatumal and Dr. Sono) shows that Dalit are gradually getting hold of the minority affairs and that minority paradigm within the context of Sindh may not affect their Dalit or SC claim as their majority-in-minority status is being gradually recognized by political parties and civil society at large. These types of Dalit-led high-profile government-driven projects, however, are uncommon and the hold of Savarnas on minority affairs departments and of Ashrafia Muslims on the religious affairs departments is as intact as ever.

6.3 Antipathy of Savarnas towards ‘Scheduled Castes’ Marker

Independent of the concern that ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity marker was officially imposed by the political and the administrative leadership during the British rule, the Dalit activists made use of it for the social and the political purposes to mark their difference from the Savarna castes and posit the socio-economic disparity to draw the attention to their issues. This difference of identity, however, was being undermined by the Saithiyā/Vaniya-led Savarna group of anti-Dalits.

On May 9, 2019, Chander Bheel, a Dalit activist informed me that Vaniyas had held a meeting on May 5, simultaneously at Karachi and Islamabad, by inviting persons belonging to different communities on the agenda to ‘save Dharma, serve Dharma’. The majority of the attendants of the meeting were from Savarna castes. Kheal Das Kohistani (MPA), Jai Parkash Ukrani (MNA), Nand Kumar Goklani (MPA), Mangla Sharma (MPA) were amongst the notable Savarna politicians that attended the meeting. He sent me some snaps of the pictures and the details as shared on social media by the Savarna coordinator of the meeting. We noticed that a few persons from Dalit castes were also amongst the 130 odd members (mostly Vaniyas), who attended the meeting. The notable Dalits amongst them were Veerji Kolhi (assistant to CM Sindh) and Sarang Ram, a Meghwar activist. The

deserving, repair and maintenance of religious places of Minorities community in the Province of Sindh. Source: Minority Affairs Department, Government of Sindh.” Source: URL: <http://www.sindh.gov.pk/dpt/MinorityAffairs/index.htm>.

alleged forced conversions of Hindu girls, ending inter-caste discrimination and the ban on the use of ‘Scheduled Castes’ and the ‘Dalit’ terms were the core issues that they deliberated upon. They, however, could not take an immediate decision during that meeting. A month after that on June 5, 2019, while I was writing these lines, Shankar Kumar Talreja, the coordinator of that meeting issued a social media statement that read:

All baradaris representing the Core Coordination Committee decided strictly to ban the use of a word Scheduled Castes for any individual/baradari. If it is used by any individual, group of individuals, forums, [or] panchayats, it will be dealt with strict legal action. All are humbly requested to be very careful to use this word for any individual or baradari.

A few days later, they issued a newsletter ‘Minorities Families’ (June 2019), the headlines read:

‘Let’s get united for the betterment of the community’ (Shankar Lal Talreja).

In the conference along with Sindhi Hindus, women and the Kohli²²⁰ people also participated’.

This statement differentiated between Sindhi Hindus (Savarnas males), the women and the Kolhis (Dalit community). Amidst this denial of Dalitness, such deliberate identity demarcations or the slips of the tongue were often noticed by the Dalit activists and became the subject of condemnation as self-contradictory. These kinds of logical contradictions brought to surface the fact that while the Vaniyas (Savarnas) were willing to consider Dalits as Hindus, they were not willing to impart them equal status. Hence, it can be said that despite the fact that the arbitrariness of categorization allows the marginalized castes to change caste labels and be categorized differently, they end up being classified as the marginalized because of untouchability and discrimination against them persist even after the change of caste tag.

This manipulation of Dalitness by the Savarnas alternatively provided Dalit activists with the justification to assert ‘Dalitness’ even more vociferously. This was the last meeting that was reported by Dalit activists before I wrote these lines. Before that, beginning with June 2016, the opponent groups and forums had held several meetings, programs, conferences, and the protests against each other, the snaps of which were uploaded by me others on Youtube²²¹.

²²⁰ The inversion of a characters ‘H’ and ‘L’ to change the Kolhi to Kohli was probably done by the publishers because Veerji Kolhi, who attended that meeting likes to pronounced as such as it alludes to the Rajpoot Kshatriya caste status, the claim that the Kolhi activists in Sindh make with the tribal pride. Kohli (ڪوھلي or ‘Kəʊhli:’ in Sindhi), a Punjabi Rajput from Khukhrain caste (Gupta & Kapoor, 2009, p. 121) See also 5.2.1, 5.4 and 6.2.

²²¹ There are some online links to the video clips of programs in defense or the denial of Dalit activism and Dalit identity, uploaded by both anti-Dalit and Dalit activists. Some of the clips have been uploaded by me on behalf of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek. See:

The use of Scheduled Castes identity marker was being questioned by anti-Dalits because it was the imposed derogatory label and the leftover of the British imperialism. Whereas the pro-‘Dalit’ activists imagined ‘Scheduled Castes’ as the vital token to bargain in the domain of politics, as there was no other officially recognized identity marker that could draw the best contrast between their socioeconomic vulnerability and politics, and the Savarna domination. While they were using ‘Dalit’ as a political category for the oppressed castes by justifying its use based on its international currency, they were using ‘Scheduled Castes’ marker as the political instrument and justifying its use by referring it as the official category. The dalit exclusion was imagined by Dalit activists as the direct result of the imposition of discriminatory norms by the Brahmins, Thakurs, and Saithiyās (Savarnas) who once labeled them as *achoot* (untouchables). Hence, in the political imaginary of the Dalit activists, the Brahminic and the Ashrafia classes, and, to some extent, also the British colonizers, stood accused of assigning them derogatory labels or turning their indigenous caste identities into toxic identities.

The Dalit activist’s argument makes sense when assessed in the backdrop of the given hegemonic narratives that imagined society through the Hindu-Muslim binaries (see sections 3.4 and 4.2) that glossed over the Scheduled Castes identity marker under the state-sponsored ‘minority’, ‘Hindu’ and ‘non-Muslim’ identity markers. This minoritisation and Hinduization of the Dalits weakened their position in politics to demand the proportionate representation vis-à-vis Savarnas (and Jati Hindus) and the Christian elite within minorities.

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- URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVu8XN2PN4I>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.
- URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxB6f86QTVQ&t=13s>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.
- URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQI6OjA95UA&t=5s>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.
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- URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldDEY6Lg6KM&list=PLMUgIDT0Oe6rHgCs2LYkS2m9elpICCwIC&index=3>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.
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- URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNZuUDS5k8s&t=19s>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.
- URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ps5wJnYvY0U>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.
- URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUAM-qE1eLg>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.

6.4 The Issue of ‘Scheduled Castes’ Quota?

The epistemic grip of the ‘minority’ category was for the first time felt by the Dalit activists when in 1999 the attempt was made by the privileged caste Hindus to revoke the 6% job quota for Scheduled Castes to subsume it under 5 percent minority quota. This meant that jobs and scholarships would be awarded based on ‘non-Muslim’ or minority status only. This act, in a way, also meant that all castes within minorities were equally marginalized and had equal socioeconomic status in relation to dominant Muslims. This dilution of the empirical reality that demanded recognition of caste hierarchies was not liked by Dalit activists. They alleged Shahbaz Bhatti (Christian parliamentarian) that he, with the support of two Savarna parliamentarians, Kishshan Chand Parwani and Rana Chandar, succeeded in getting the bill passed to revoke Scheduled Castes quota. For instance, Radha Bheel, Chairperson Dalit Sujaag Tehreek alleged that the three minority MNAs namely Kishan Chand Parwani (caste Hindu leader), Shahbaz Bhatti (Christian leader) and Rana Chander Singh (caste Hindu) were responsible for revoking Scheduled Castes quota. They influenced not only the Nawaz Sharif government but also subdued Dr. Khatumal Jeewan ex-MNA and a Dalit leader not to retaliate. A minority rights activist when asked also complained similarly:

Jogendar Nath Mandal, Pakistan’s first law minister introduced 11 percent quota for minorities out of which 6% was reserved for Scheduled castes. Ironically in 1998, Rana Chander Singh and Shahabaz Bhatti introduced a bill in assembly for an amendment to settle for a 5% quota for minorities including Scheduled castes. The doors to jobs for the majority of Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, Oad were thus closed. Even that 5% quota is not properly implemented and usually low menial jobs mainly that of sanitary workers are allotted to minorities.”

(A minority rights activist, February 2016)

Since the Dalit activists and their leadership did not agitate much, they were also equally to be blamed. Alleging his Dalit leadership, Bherji Kolhi, a Dalit activist told:

Dalit parliamentary leaders, Khatumal, Krishna Bheel, Giyanchand or any other, have always kept licking the shoes of the ruler like timid dogs that bowed to the most heinous laws passed by the government of Nawaz Sharif. They did not speak for Scheduled Castes when 16th Amendment [that passed the bill to revoke SC quota]²²² was being passed, and even passed the 14th Amendment [related to separate electors]²²³ that turned individual legislators into virtual slaves of party or party head.

²²² When the quota system was introduced in 1973, it was stipulated and expected that within ten years socioeconomic backwardness of SCs could be eliminated. Certain sections, the state could eliminate though quota. Hence, the allotted quota had to be revised based on reports of the socioeconomic surveys after each ten years, which they did not. From the 1993 till 1999, the recruitments continued to be made under quota system despite the fact that its constitutional and legal limit had expired. Because of that in 1999, with the passage of 16th Amendment minority quota (with the scrapping of SC proportion) was reintroduced, and its limit was exceeded from 20 years to 40 years. On 16th Amendment in relation to Scheduled Castes’ quota also read section 6.5?

²²³ On the law related to 14th Amendment and separate electorates read section 7.5.1.

Scheduled Castes quota could not even become part of the debate at any level during those years. At that time the conflict was between urban-based MQM and rural-based Sindhi class and the minorities in general. The contention was not that whether the Scheduled Castes were given separate quota or not, but whether the quota system as a whole should be scrapped or not.

Interestingly, although the Bill for specifying 5 percent minority quota was approved by the National Assembly, it was not notified officially. Before that in 1996 a circular (O.M. No.f.4/15/94-R/II dated 24.9.1996) which is understood by some privileged caste Hindu activists as a legal proof of the withdrawal of the Establishment division's O.M.No.F.56/2/48-Est-(ME) dated 19.10.1948 regarding separate quota for the Scheduled Castes²²⁴. This position, however, is not supported by the case law which upholds the Establishment division's O.M.No.F.56/2/48-Est-(ME) dated 19.10.1948 by an Appellate Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Pakistan in a case 'Federation of Pakistan & another versus Dr, Rubina Chamanlal (CPLA No.6-K of 2006). Giving verdict against the Federation of Pakistan and the Federal Public Service Commission, the Supreme Court argued:

Confronted with serious difficulties in the fact of long standing Government policy contained in ESTACode relating to reservation of vacancies for Scheduled Castes vide serial No51 at page 108 of the ESTACode 1986 Edition also available at page 125 of 2002 Edition learned Standing Counsel has produced a simple copy of O.M. Circular No.f.4/15/94-R/II date 24.9.1996 and contended that through this circular the competent authority had decided to withdraw with immediate effect the Establishment division's O.M.No.F.56/2/48-Est-(ME) date 19.10.1948 regarding quota for the Scheduled Castes, who would, henceforth compete along with other candidates of their own Province.

The verdict further read:

“For our satisfaction we have verified from various editions ESTACode where earlier policy decision has been withdrawn and the O.M. referred to above

²²⁴ See CIVIL ESTABLISHMENT CODE (ESTACODE), PAKISTAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESEARCH CENTER, MANAGEMENT SERVICES WING ESTABLISHMENT DIVISION, ISLAMABAD, pg. 117-118

<https://aurkhh.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/civil-servant-rules-1973-recruitment-promotion-and-seniority.pdf>.

published by the Government in the official Gazette or in the ESTA Code but the same does not appear to have been published even in the latest Edition of 2006.”

Given that fact, the Court upheld that the “Notification of 1948 is still intact in the ESTACode published in various years, including the 2006 Edition at serial No.59 at page 126.” It thus concluded that:

We are firmly of the view that the Circular /Office Memorandum referred to above cannot override the provisions of Articles 2-A, 25, 27 & 38 of the Constitution wherein the safeguards against all types of discrimination and social justice as well as protection of legitimate interest of minorities, backward and deprived classes of the citizen have been assured. The service quota of the scheduled castes reserved vide O.M. dated 19th October 1948, being quite in consonance with the mandate of the Constitution could not justifiably be undone through a subsequent Circular/Office Memorandum issued in 1996 and consequently the petitioner had an inalienable right of selection on the basis of reserved quota. This Court [...] in similar situation have observed that the service quota of certain classes of citizens is in accordance with the provisions of Constitution relating to the Fundamental Rights and these provisions should be liberally interpreted so as to extend benefit to the backward and depressed classes of the citizen.

This political significance of that landmark decision has remained unnoticed, and the Scheduled Castes activists continue to follow the popular rhetoric that their quota has been replaced with 5 percent minority quota.

Since the contention was to increase the yearly specified limit or rather abolish the quota system, it seemed pointless for a negligible Scheduled Castes leadership to put the demand for Scheduled Caste quota. Resultantly, despite their efforts, during Nawaz Sharif’s regime supposedly subsumed SC quota under general minority quota²²⁵. To add insult to injury, about a decade later PPP government scrapped with the passage of 18th Amendment the special seats allocated for Scheduled Castes. Dalit activists attribute the scrapping of these constitutional provisions and the lack of legislation on Scheduled Castes to the impotency of their token representation that they had in legislative assemblies. “There were not sufficient Scheduled Castes’ representatives in the assembly to raise the pitch of voice. Saithiyās have been there, and also the Christian MNAs. They were occupying our space” told Naval Rai Bheel. The representative assemblies dominated by

²²⁵ It should be noted that Shariat Court had already declared quota system un-Islamic and had recommended merit system as it deemed in accordance with Islamic law. Quota system, however, was vehemently opposed by MQM, the urban-based political party and Islamic parties.

the Savarnas and the elite Christian class project minority as a victim of the dominant Muslim class, particularly against MQM (the urban-based) party and the Islamic parties.

On 26 March 2009, a notification was issued for the reservation of a 5% job quota for minorities across the board in the federal government services. ‘Minority’ as the identity of non-Muslims was further institutionalized when on 19th June 2014, the Supreme Court’s 3-member bench gave a verdict about minorities being given a 5% quota in jobs. Moreover, in due course of time, the special task force for minorities and the ‘National Commission for Minorities’ was established to protect their rights of minorities²²⁶.

While minority narrative may have its own merits for the Dalits at the international level, in Pakistan minoritisation has glossed over the specific issues of Dalits. For instance, the allocation jobs based on a 5% minority quota is distributed on the basis of the ‘minority’ quota, but the vacancies end up being filled on the basis of caste location. Sometimes, the newspaper advertisements even specifically mention the castes of Dalits such as Balmiki or the ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘Harijan’ or religion (Christian and Shia) for the posts of Khakrob (sanitation workers)²²⁷. In fact, offering jobs to the Dalits such as that of a sweeper (formerly assigned only to the person of Bhangi caste) continues to be the norm (see the example of Waryam Fakeer, an MPA from PML-F, given in section 4.2.1). The “Annual Statistical Bulletin of Federal Government Employees for 2010-11 states that only 2.6 percent or 11,521 federal jobs – out of a total of 449,964 – were held by non-Muslims. About 70 percent of these jobs fell in the two lowest grades”. No non-Muslims held a job in the highest grade.²²⁸ Yet, if we go into the further details of non-Muslim job recruitment, it will be Dalit castes that end up being allocated for the jobs of the sweeper and the sanitation worker the jobs that are traditionally associated with Chuhra, Bhangi and Balmiki Dalit communities.

Pieter Streefland, writing as early as 1979, writes that that of the Christian Punjabi sweepers (known as Chuhra caste) in Karachi were “reduced to a sweeper or a human scavenger from an agricultural” laborer “because their Hindu landowners had abandoned their farms as well as those who worked for them. This community, therefore, did not have work so they took up their caste professions” (Streefland, 1979). A Dalit Christian working as the sanitation worker told that certain Muslims also work as sanitation workers and the

²²⁶ See the Bill about the National Commission for Minorities, URL

http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1449492702_297.pdf, and retrieved on, March, 18, 2018.

²²⁷ A sample of advertised post by Government of Sindh, Livestock and fisheries Department for an Accelerated Action Plan AAP Government of Sindh 17 May 2017, is given in Annexure I.

²²⁸ See the Annual Statistical Bulletin of Federal Government Employees for 2010-11, URL: <http://establishment.gov.pk>. Retrieved on, March 15, 2018.

sweepers but they do not do perform the task assigned to them and instead either pay the nominal amount from their salaries to the Dalit sanitation worker or to the Municipality head to avoid work that they consider polluting. Jobs of sanitation workers or sweepers are also advertised specifically for ‘Scheduled Castes’ in Sindh although there is no legal or constitutional provision to especially advertising any such lowest scale menial jobs for the Scheduled Castes. See, for instance, the unofficial allotment of jobs in Tharparkar made at the behest of local PPP leaders (Hussain, 2019o).²²⁹

Referring to the Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Article 27 of the Constitution of Pakistan, in 2015, the government of Punjab, however, took notice of discriminatory practices in recruitment for the post of sanitation workers that were specified for non-Muslims (Bajwar, 2015), while the government of Sindh has not so far taken any such measures.

6.5 Migration and the Problem of SC’s Enumeration

The bio-political exercise of population enumeration (Census) enables the state and those in power to imagine, control, direct and view its people and quantify society (Anderson, 1991, pp. 163-85). In the case of Dalits in Pakistan, this bio-political exercise of population enumeration has been under the communal influence of the two-nation theory, which has been predicated on fixed and irreconcilable religious identities. This privileging of religious binaries defy the empirical reality based on multiple identities arising from regional, caste and community affiliations, thereby leading to the exclusion of Scheduled Castes. One of the obvious impacts of it was the decimation and subsuming of the ‘Scheduled Caste’ category through enumerative exercises (as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6). Official estimates about the approximate Scheduled Castes population in Pakistan are less than reliable. Hence, although ‘Scheduled Castes’ as a numerical category exists in Pakistan, the detailed enumeration of any particular caste group is not tabulated by the census surveyors. Therefore, the analysis and the estimates of any single caste, arbitrarily, can be based on the general count of the Scheduled Castes and Jati Hindus.

The population of Scheduled Castes in 1941 in Sindh was 4.5% (191,634) (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). This count was significantly higher in terms of proportion as compared to 0.98 % (3, 00,308) 50 years later during the 1998 census (Population Census Organisation, 2014; Population Welfare Department, 2014). Similarly,

²²⁹ For the details of job allotment see Hussain (2019o), “Jobs allotted by PPP Government to people of Tharparkar in 2015”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/p4c4m3r4sx.2

in terms of proportion, the population of Scheduled Castes in Karachi, Nawabshah and the districts of upper Sindh in 1941, numbering 60,027, was far higher as compared to their numbers (15, 957) in 1998. This indicates the 26.5 percent decrease, the reasons for which cannot be wholly derived based on the migration during Partition²³⁰.

This contemporary discrepancy also does not fit in with the historical and oral evidence that attests to the fact that Dalits did not migrate as much as did the Savaran Sindhis during Partition or even during later years. According to Balasubrahmanyam (2011):

Of all the migrants from Sindh, 156,677 came to Gujarat. 8 There were two distinct groups: most of them were Sindhi-speaking Hindus; a small minority was Gujarati-speaking Dalits. Though firm statistics are not available, Jeevanlal Jairamdas, a senior member of the Congress Party and head of the Harijan Sewak Sangh 9 in Sindh, estimated that there were about 200,000 Dalits in Sindh at the time of Partition and that about 5 percent of them came to India.

(Balasubrahmanyam, 2011, p.463).

In Tharparkar and Umerkot, the population of Scheduled Castes in 1941 was 94,064, and in 1998 it was 207, 215, that is, the two times increase over 50 years' time span. In 1961, the Scheduled Castes population of Tharparkar (Mirpurkhas included) was 204, 248, more than twice the population of Jati Hindus which was then 81,840.²³¹ Contrary to that during the same period, the overall population of the province has had the 9 times increase reaching 30,439, 893 from 4,535,008. This is where, I contend, lies the politics of numbers that beg to explain the drastic reduction of the Scheduled Castes percentage and the comparable increase in the Jati Hindu population. This reduction in SC count, in the absence of any politically motivated or the climatic demographic shift, clearly shows that the omission of the Scheduled Castes category in 1981 by the state proved fatal for the Dalits by the time next census of 1998 was held.

²³⁰ While making a fair assessment, the fact should be considered that 'after Partition, the main eastward movement of people from Sindh took place between late 1947 and early 1948. [...] By May 1948 there was a decline in numbers and later that year, the special trains were stopped. 12 A trickle of migration continued until the early 1970s' (Balasubrahmanyam, 2011, p.464).

²³¹ Tharparkar at that time consisted of areas that now lie in Mirpurkhas division.

It is interesting (as elaborated in the previous section) to note that in censuses preceding

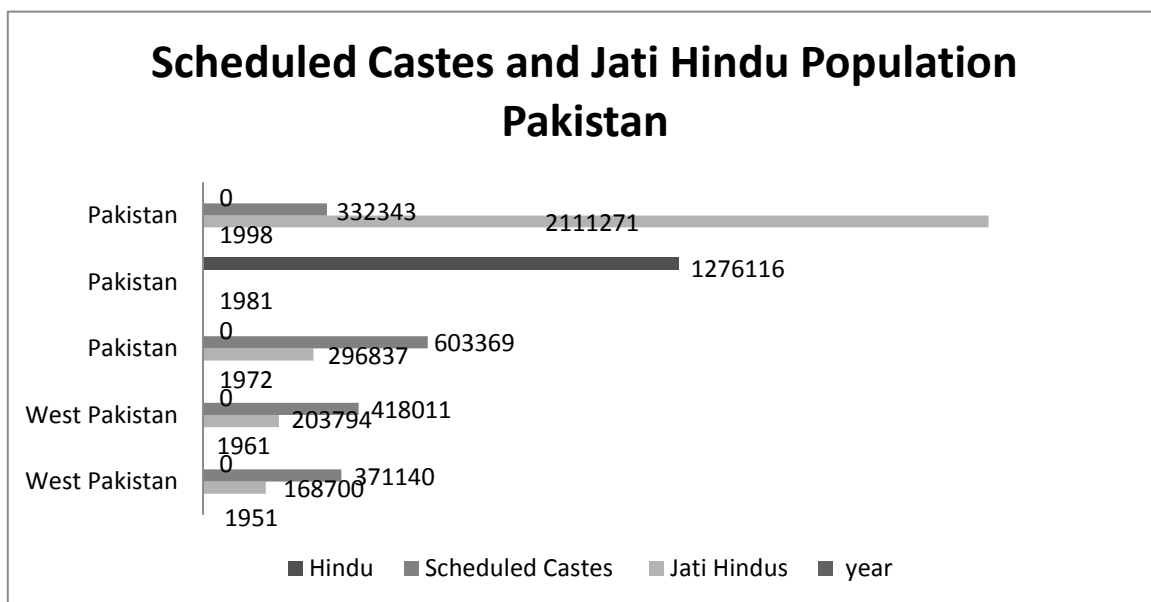


Figure 20: Scheduled Castes and Jati Hindu Population. Census Reports 1981,

Source: Bureau of Census, Government of Pakistan (2018)

Because of this decimation of the SC category, the Scheduled Castes' population in 1998 plummeted 7 times down the population of Jati Hindus. Compared to it, before 1998 SC population was two-timed higher than the Jati Hindu population (See; Graph above).

The demographic equation between Jati Hindus and Scheduled Caste did change due to the migration between 1971-1981 as both the Jati Hindus and Scheduled Castes who attempted to migrate from the parts of Tharparkar that were captured by India during 1971 war and sent back to Pakistan. The local Dalits told that almost all villagers migrated to Kutch during the first wave. It resulted in the 39.42 percent increase in Scheduled Castes population between 1971-1981 and 56.76 percent increase in scheduled tribes' population (Ibrahim, 2005). Yet, some of the families, about 20 to 30 percent returned to Tharparkar particularly after the insistence of Rana Chander Singh who feared to lose a 'Hindu' political constituency in Tharparkar.

Some families, about 20 to 30 percent returned to Tharparkar particularly after the insistence of Rana Chander Singh who feared to lose a 'Hindu' political constituency Tharparkar. Dalit castes living in the rest of Sindh did not migrate from other regions of Sindh and Punjab that were not captured by the Indian Army. Despite that migration, the population census that was conducted after the war did not show much difference in the proportion of the Scheduled Caste and Jati Hindu population. Katchi Kolhis, Meghwars, and Bheels who migrated from Katch to lower Sindh live in Sindh today. This also proves that the majority of the Dalits did not migrate to India either before or after the war of

1971²³². Unlike Dalit castes, Savarnas (mostly Vaniya, Deewan or Lohanas) migrated to Rajasthan and Gujarat in large numbers during partition as well as during later years particularly in the aftermath of wars in 1965 and 1971. Their relatives who had migrated there between 1947-55 had already established themselves in the urban centers of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Delhi and other regions of North India.

Hence, although it is hard to calculate the accurate figures, it is inferable based on the migration patterns that during the Partition and till 1971 war ended, the Scheduled Castes did not migrate to India as much as the Jati Hindus (mostly Savarnas). SCs were, by and large, indifferent to communal politics. Even after 1971, although many Scheduled Castes from Tharparkar migrated to Kutch, some of them returned. The same is, however, not true of Jati Hindus, particularly Lohanas who continue to migrate to India from across Sindh and Punjab. Compared to Jati Hindus, Scheduled Caste migration has been very minimal.²³³

Population census 1998 estimates SC up to 332,343\ 0.25%, while it puts Jati Hindu (upper caste) population around 2,111,271 9 or 1.60% of the total population of Pakistan (Population Census Organisation, 2014; Population Welfare Department, 2014; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017)²³⁴. Assuming that the official statistics about Scheduled Castes as recorded in 1998 are extremely erroneous and biased, if we estimate existing Scheduled Castes population basing it on the percentage increase in censuses preceding 1981, the population of Scheduled Castes in 2018 could be around 2.5 million whereas Jati Hindu population could be around 1.5 million. Hindus (including Scheduled Castes) were 1,221,961 and made up 6.4 percent of the population of (West Pakistan) (Population Census Organisation, 1984, p. 9), whereas in 1998 they have shown to make up only 1 percent of the population of Pakistan. To make more reliable estimates for accurate analysis of the Scheduled Castes population in 1998, I have relied upon differential growth rates of both Scheduled Castes and Jati Hindu population before the 1981 census. Scheduled

²³² Source: Conversational interviews in March 2016 with the elders of Katchi and Wagariya Megwar and Kolhi families settled in Tando Ghulam Ali and Tando Allahyar, and with local Kolhi and Meghwar of Adigam, Nangarparkar.

²³³ Kolhi families settled in Tando Ghulam Ali and Tando Allahyar, and with local Kolhi and Meghwar of Adigam, Nangarparkar.

²³⁴ See Table V in Appendix. Population Distribution by Religion, Census 1998.

See Also, Table VI in Appendix. District Wise Break up of Scheduled Castes Population in Major Districts

See also Table I in Appendix. Scheduled Castes and Non-Muslim (Christian, Hindu Jati & Scheduled Castes) Population Distribution by Districts: 1998.

Castes population has been twice the size of the Jati Hindu population in the Census report of 1951, 1961 and 1972. In 1998 the trend was diametrically reversed. Scheduled Castes (2443614\1.85%) population was merely 1\10th (13.6 %) of the Jati Hindu (2111271\1.60%) population in 1998. If we compare the Census reports of 1951, 1961 and 1972, Scheduled Castes and Jati Hindu population increased by 31 and 32 percent respectively in 1972.

It shows that although some of the Scheduled Castes and caste Hindus migrated to India during war strife, the number of migrants could not be higher than a few hundred or thousand, as the population percentage of both Dalits and Caste Hindus increased in 1972 instead of decreasing. Instead, it could be guessed that several Dalit families may have instead migrated inside Sindh. After the late 1970s when the border was sealed by both the countries, the Scheduled Castes' population may have thereafter increased with almost equal proportion with about 22 percent increase in each succeeding decade.

Table 14: Scheduled Castes' Population Estimates
(ESTIMATES BASED ON 1951, 1961 & 1972 CENSUS REPORTS)

YEAR	<i>Jati Hindus</i>	Growth rate	Scheduled Castes	Growth rate
1951 Census figures	168700	---	371140	---
1961 Census figures	203794	2%	418011	1.2%
1972 Census figures	296837	4.5%	603369	4.4 %
1998 (estimated)	814538	6.7%	1629076	6.5%
2008²³⁵ (estimated)	1010027	2.4%	2020054	2.4%
2018 (estimated)	1252433	2.4%	2504866	2.4%

Hence, contrary to these official figures, based on the estimated 50%- or two-times higher share of SC (calculated based on pre-1981 census reports), the actual population of SC in 1998 should be around 1629076, and Jati Hindu population should be around 814538. The sudden plummeting of Scheduled Castes, after the category of SC, was reinserted in census form in 1998, shows how state maneuvering can orient the social identity of any community. Therefore, to say that Scheduled Castes were Hindus but wrongly classified as Scheduled Castes and that in 1998 they regained their original Hindu identity through their conscious effort, it does not hold valid.

Hence, based on the demographic patterns and the decimation of the SC category by the state, it can be inferred that the reduction shown in official documents does not

²³⁵ Between 1998-2017 the average population growth rate of Pakistan stood at 2.40%. Source: [Provisional Summary Results of 6th Population and Housing Census – 2017](#)". Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. URL: <http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/> . Retrieved 2018-08-28.

correlate with the demographic shifts brought about by the state formation, border-making and the migration patterns. This state-defined and state-classified biopolitics seem to have a greater impact on the identity formation of Scheduled Castes as ‘Hindus’ during the decades that followed. Hindu’ was thus made the political and social category and ‘Jati Hindu’ turned into the political patriarch for the Dalit majority. This bolstered the confidence of the Savarnas to consolidate their political power and their grip over ‘minority’ politics. This ‘biopolitical’ tilt is reflective of the hegemony of political Islam and Sufism that imagine Scheduled Castes primarily as Hindu community (discussed in chapter 4), and this is where lies the politics of numbers that beg to explain the drastic reduction of Scheduled Castes ratio and the comparable increase in Jati Hindu population.

Independent of state maneuvers (although state’s role has been vital), the fundamental social-psychological reason behind marking oneself as ‘Jati Hindu’ was the social stigma of untouchability attributed to their castes by Savarna-Ashrafia castes. One of the main mediums to get rid of the stigma of untouchability was to migrate to a distant place so that the caste name could be anonymized or changed. A Meghwar from Thar told:

Several years ago, I went to my relatives to Thatta. During the night some friends from other castes and communities came to meet me. They asked me who I am. I told them that I am Meghwar. They were surprised to learn that. They again asked if I am relative to their friend. I said yes, we are relatives and of the same caste. I did not know that my relatives had begun calling themselves Deewan (caste Hindu). They all laughed aloud, and my relatives were thus exposed.

During the fieldwork, when I asked some of the travelers on the bus, they initially hid their caste or told that they were Deewan, but when I dug their past a bit deeper it became obvious that they were Dalits. The expressions of shame and guilt were visible on their faces when they apprehended that I had guessed their caste. Census-data collectors did not bring into consideration this ritual of inversion of the Dalits and were also found to be ill-informed and ill-trained and ill-advised about the Scheduled Castes’ population, much less to differentiate between Scheduled Castes (Dalit) and Jati Hindu (further on it in chapter 6).

Dalits themselves, being borderline citizens, often do not know if they have been classified officially as Scheduled Castes or Hindus, thus most of them identify themselves as Hindus in official reports. Many of them lack proper or permanent housing, belong to various religious creeds holding overlapping syncretic beliefs, and many of them do not even have national identity cards. Many of the Dalit communities remain on the move as nomads and seasonal horticultural and pastoral migrants or as wage laborers, least-known suburbs of towns or away from settled villages thus more often than not missing from

census-counting (Shah Z, 2007; Kolhi B. M., 2014; Ercelawn et al, 2001). Hence, despite the harijanization and communalization of the Dalit population, there are reasons to believe that the Population Census of 1998 betrays the actual demographic status of Scheduled Castes and grossly under-documents or misrecognize their population.

6.6 Undercounting of Scheduled Castes in Census Reports

The hegemonic interplay of governmentality and biopolitics, perpetuated by census counts of Scheduled Castes, brought about the drastic decrease in population numbers of SCs on the one hand, and a concomitant increase in the number count of Jati Hindus (see Figure 21). Figure 21 does not show the data on the population census of 1981, as the Scheduled Caste and Jati Hindu categories were completely removed from the census form and replaced by the 'Hindu' category (see also sections 6.2 on the reclassification of Scheduled). The removal of the Scheduled Caste category in the 1981 census report during General Zia's regime was the crucial biopolitical exercise that led to the undercounting of Scheduled Castes in 1998, which was the next census when Scheduled Caste category was reinstated, apparently for no political reasons as the Scheduled Caste leadership during that period did not make any such demand. When I asked a senior Dalit MPA about the reasons for the removal and reinstatement, he told me, 'I don't know, but it may be the government thought that both Jati Hindus and Scheduled Castes are better counted as Hindus only'. Many senior Dalit activists even did not know that the Scheduled Caste category had been removed from the census form in 1981 through administrative fiat.

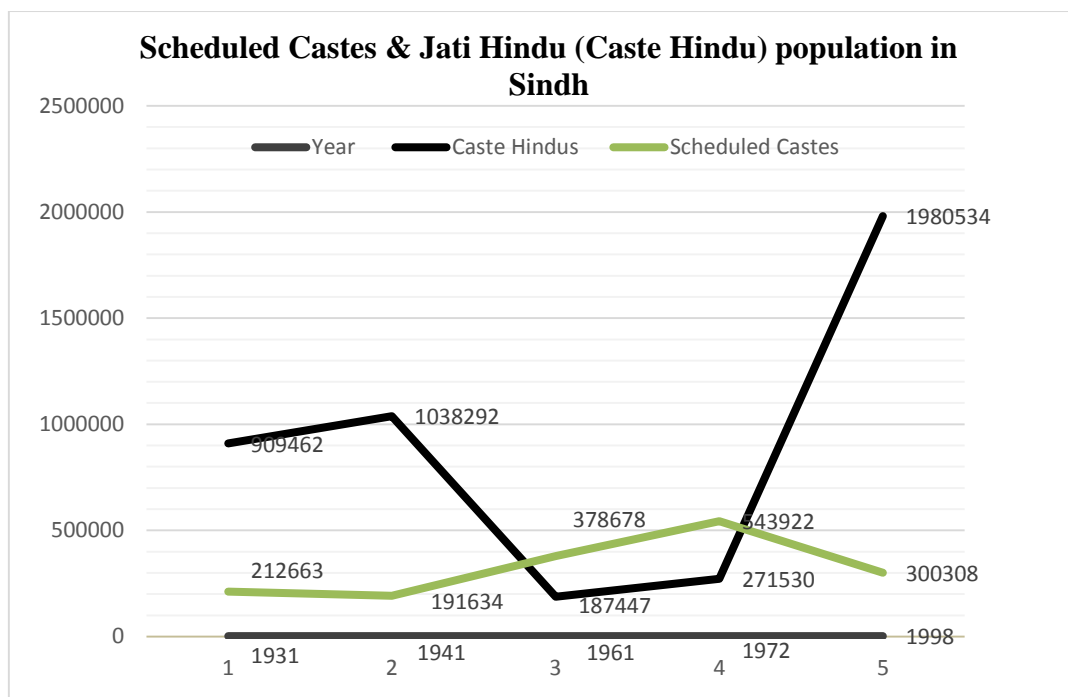


Figure 21: Scheduled Castes' population in Sindh: Census Reports.

Source: Bureau of Census, Government of Pakistan (2018), and Census of India, 1931 and 1941. Vol. I: India. The ignorance of Dalit activists about the removal of the Scheduled Castes category during the Zia regime, and their lack of understanding of the justifiable share of representation under the separate electorate system, shows that the Scheduled Caste leadership had been sufficiently Hinduised over this period of time, and that unwarranted state-driven attempts to classify population based on religion may also have affected the Dalit perception of their major identity markers. Premised on the performative Islamic principle that 'there is no caste in Islam', it was deemed appropriate to remove the category of caste from census forms. It resulted in the further consolidation of the Scheduled Castes around the 'Hindu' identity marker. Its impact, in the form of gross under-counting of Scheduled Castes, was obvious after the restoration of the Scheduled Caste category during the 1998 census as the majority of Scheduled Castes were persuaded by the enumerators to mark 'Hindu' instead of Scheduled Caste (see Figure 21).

Figure 22: Census Form (A) (in Urdu). Scheduled Castes in the Column for Religion has marked with grey color.

Source: Govt of Pakistan (2017)

Since the ‘Hindu’ category had more social grounding and emotional appeal than the ‘Scheduled Caste’, which was more of a technical category devised specifically for the purpose of enumeration, reservation, quota and representation (paradoxically classified as religion and put under the same column with ‘Jati Hindu’), most of the Scheduled Castes preferred to mark ‘Jati Hindu’ instead ‘Scheduled Castes’ in both the 1998 and 2017 censuses (see Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). In fact, during the population Census 2017, the census form does not show the Jati Hindu category (implied for the privileged group of Hindus). The same holds of the constitutional articles that juxtapose Hindu, a religious category against Scheduled Castes instead of Jati Hindu, a caste category. Hence, it creates an existential and identity-based confusion among Dalits as regards their religious identity as Hindu (or non-Hindu) and their socioeconomic status (Scheduled Castes).

Led by the social grounding of ‘Hindu’ and its fitting juxtaposition vis-à-vis Muslims, the census enumerators (mostly Muslims) were also led to interpret ‘Jati Hindu’ as ‘Hindu’ and suggest Scheduled Castes to mark Hindu instead of Scheduled Castes. In certain cases, the enumerators even forced Scheduled Castes to mark ‘Hindu’ instead of Scheduled Caste. For instance, one of the Dalit activists from the Nawabshah district told that during the latest 6th population census, he wanted his family and community to get counted as Scheduled Castes. He said:

When the team arrived accompanied by the rangers, I asked them to mark me in the Scheduled Caste category. They asked me to prove to them that I was not Hindu and Scheduled Caste. But they left me marked as Hindu without my consent. I complained to the

local census commissioner. They were then called in and then they realized that they were wrong. Then they re-entered my name and my family as Scheduled Castes.

Several such incidents were reported by Dalit activists through personal networking and on social media where they complained that the census team was not cooperating with them. Dalits themselves, being borderline citizens, often do not know if they have been classified officially as Scheduled Castes or Hindus, thus most of them identify themselves as Hindus in official reports. Many of them lack proper or permanent housing, belong to various religious creeds holding overlapping syncretic beliefs and do not even have national identity cards. Many of the Dalit communities remain on the move as nomads and seasonal horticultural and pastoral migrants or as wage laborers in the least known suburbs of towns or away from settled villages, thus often missing from census-counting. (Shah, 2007; Kolhi, 2014; Ercelawn & Nauman, 2001)

Based on this extraordinary (dis)location of Dalit communities and multivocality of their identities, the confused classification of Scheduled Castes, their desire to hide their caste identities, the tendency to Harijanize and Ashrafize, it can be argued that the Dalit population can be grossly underestimated in population census reports. This apparent discrepancy between the actual Dalit population visible to Dalits and the locals, and official figures, creates the room for Dalit activists come up with their population estimates. This minoritisation/hinduisation coupled with Ashrafization eventually led to the nullification of Scheduled Castes' job quota in federal departments, and the substitution or removal of legislative assembly seat quota of SCs from the constitution through 18th amendment in 2010.

6.7 Counter Claims of Demographic and Electoral Strength by Dalit Activists

In Pakistan, since Scheduled Castes are not enumerated as a separate category (except in decennial population censuses) from Hindus in the census, their electoral strength cannot be accurately calculated. Similarly, in terms of the vote count, the exact number of Scheduled Castes voters is hard to predict as the voter lists do not necessarily mention caste names with each voter heading. In such a scenario, one could only have indirect but plausible inferences based on the non-Muslim vote count.

The last population census held in 1998, estimates that 332,343, or 0.25% of the population of Pakistan are Scheduled Castes with more than 75 percent living in Mirpurkhas division in Sindh (see Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). As per official reports, the total non-Muslim voters in Pakistan are 2,997,841, out of which the Hindu

Population Census 1998	2111271 (1.60% of total in Pakistan)	Population\Percentage in Pakistan 332343 (0.25%)	Population\Percentage in Sindh 300,308 (1 %)
Human Rights Activists (IDSN, PILER, PDSN) (2017)	2 million	3 to 7 million ²³⁷ (0.14% to 3.36%)	2 to 6 million (4.17 % to 14.61 %)
SCFP	----		30 million

Certain independent research and advocacy-based national and international reports estimate that Dalit-Hindus (Scheduled Castes) make up about 80 per cent of the collective Hindu population. Human rights activists and IDSN, however, estimate Dalit (SC) population in Pakistan around 3 million (International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2013; Meghwal M. , 2013).

Dalit-Hindu activists claim that their population will far exceed any other single minority in Pakistan if all of the 40 tribal groups of Dalits were properly enumerated in census. (People Groups, 2014; Paul, Simons, & Fennig, 2013; Patel, 2010; Kolhi B. M., 2014; Shah Z. , Dec 2007; Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network, 2013). A survey report by Shah (2008) writes that their team consulted with Scheduled Castes representatives, including five former legislators in 2007, and asked about reliability of official statistics. It reported that they “simply reject the official statistics about the population of *upper* and *lower caste* stating that it is vice versa. The population of Scheduled Castes is two millions” (Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (Zulfiqar Shah), 2008, S. 11) According to Surendar Valasai, one of the leading Dalit activist affiliated with PPP:

The Scheduled Castes or Dalits form between 70 to 80 per cent of the total population registered under the Constitutional nomenclature of “Hindus & Scheduled Castes”, yet their representation in political or elected forums is negligible. Look at the Provincial Assembly of Sindh for example: Out of nine reserved seats for the minority, eight belong to so-called Jati Hindus who form between 20 to 30 percent of total Hindu & Scheduled Castes population.”

(Surendar Valasai, Founder-President, Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan
July 1, 2007, Workshop at Central Secretariat, Pakistan People’s Party,
Karachi)²³⁸

²³⁷ “In 2011 it is estimated that there are 7 million Dalits in Pakistan, 3.5 million of which live in the flood prone Sindh province and 70% of Pakistan’s Dalits work as agricultural laborers.” Presentation by Purbhu Lal Satyani plsatyani@gmail.com , Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN). Presented by one of the Dalit activists for International Commission for Dalit Rights in the high-level policy conference at the US State Department on July 22, 2015.

²³⁸ See dataset for details: Hussain (2019zaa), “Documents shared by Surendar Valasai, Dalit activist and PPP leader”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/8nhr59d76d.2

Some other Dalit activists claim that SC makes up 60% of the religious minorities of Pakistan, about 1/5th of the population of Sindh. (Kolhi B. M., 2014; Kolhi C. K., 2014). Dalit activists, particularly radical Ambedkarites make very bold claims depending on the term ‘Dalit’ term as defined by them. An Ambedkarite affiliated with SCFP defined Dalit as the trans-religious historical category that may include Christian, Sikh and even Muslim Dalits that make up around 30 million in Pakistan. According to Ganpat Rai Bheel, Dalits make up 33 (or 30 percent²³⁹) percent of the population of Sindh (Bheel G. R., 2014, pp. 3-4) that makes up about 15 million. On face value, such a huge claim seems harder to pass the test of any estimation methodology.

In SCFP’s manifesto, Ganpat Rai projects Scheduled Caste population up to about 30 million. It is a huge population that makes up around 15 percent of the total population of Pakistan. Such a huge claim requires further elaboration as regards the analytic or methodological base, its source and the definition or redefinition by SCFP of what constitutes Scheduled Castes. Scheduled Castes are defined by Ganpat Rai Bheel as constituting ‘Dalit, Adivasi and Darāwar’ communities. These terms are usually used interchangeably by Dalit activists to refer to Dalits in general. Pakistan Hindu Council, the anti-Dalit community-based organization of the business caste Savarnas (Lohano caste particularly) also makes similar claims about the overall Hindu population of Pakistan. PHC puts the Hindu population around 8 million (4%) in Pakistan, that is, 17% of the population of Sindh (Pakistan Hindu Council, 2016). PHC de-emphasizes the distinction made between Jati Hindus and Scheduled Castes and, therefore, counts Scheduled Castes as Hindus.

Dalit activists greatly vary with each other in terms of claims, some claiming that their population could be around 6 to 14 million (maximum 6.8%) in Pakistan, and 3 to 7 million (maximum 14.6%) in Sindh (see Table 16). Pakistan Dalit Forum, BIF and SKI group of Ranshal Das are some of the prominent Dalit groups making even bolder political claims putting the Dalit population in Sindh around 12.5 million. Their claims seem highly exaggerated but hold greater political appeal for Dalits masses based on perceived undercounting in previous censuses and exclusion. Dalit activists make frequent use of such rhetoric in their community meetings, in newsletters, digests and social media blogs.

²³⁹ In SCFPs manifesto, Ganpat estimates that Scheduled Castes make up about 30 percent of the population of Sindh, and therefore, entitled 30 percent share in economy and politics of the province.

When I questioned their exaggerated claim, they blamed me for deliberately presenting Dalits in the minority so that hegemony of the Sindhi Ashrafia should continue.

Table 16: Dalit Population in Pakistan
(Median Estimates based on Dalit activist's opinion²⁴⁰)

No.	Dalit communities	Estimated Population	Typical known castes
1	Scheduled Castes	4,000,000	Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar etc.
2	Dalit Christians	4,000,000	Chuhra, Bhangi, Balimiki, Katchi Kolhi, etc
3	Nomadic tribes	200,000	Gurgula, Kabootra, Jandawra, etc.
4	Sanskritised SCs and Shudra castes after 1947	1,000,000	Suthar, Sonar, Lohar, etc.
5	Ashrafised/Islamized Dalits after 1947	1,000,000	Chuhra Shaikh, Jogi, Rajpar, Khaskheli etc.
6	Ahmedi, Buddhist and other religions	5,000	Kolhi Bheel etc.
7	Dalit Muslims (Islamized before 1947)	4,000,000	Marchi, Mallah, Kori, Mochi, Langah etc
8	Total population in Pakistan & percentage		14,205,000 (6.8%)
9	Estimated total population in Sindh and percentage		7,000,000 (14.6%)

Dalit activists' estimates can be validated by looking at the 'minority' vote count by NADRA²⁴¹, and the survey estimates about the population of different regions and religions that furnish clues to the estimated number of voters of Dalit castes living in any particular district. For instance, the Hindu population of Pakistan is estimated by Pew Research Centre to reach 5.6 million in the coming 34 years, which is by 2050 (Pew Research Centre, 2015, p. 8). Actual numbers, however, may go as high as 8 million, with Dalits making up 7 million of the Hindu population, keeping in perspective that in 1947, nearly 0.8 million (8 lacks) Jati Hindus, almost the whole Sindhi Hindu middle class deserted Sindh and migrated to India (Malkani K. R., 1984; Thakur, 1959) .

Since the 'Scheduled Castes' category was rarely used in official statistics except in census and job notification relating to age relaxation or job quota²⁴², the accurate number of Scheduled Castes voters was hard to determine. Therefore, the better indicator to assess the strength of Scheduled Castes, however, could be indirectly estimated from the percentage and the number of minority and Hindu votes, and to check the voter lists of Dalit concentrated constituencies. Voter lists did not mention castes all the voters, nonetheless, caste can be guessed, and some reliable estimates can be made. Since the counting requires a lot of manual work as lists were not available in digitized form, no one had attempted to count Dalits through voter lists. Yet the cursory glance into such lists of

²⁴⁰ These are the rough median estimates by me based on the different claims by different stakeholders as presented in various tables in this chapter.

²⁴¹ National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) is the state organization of Pakistan that registers citizens of Pakistan.

²⁴² See also dataset page.1, on 'Approved Application of Reservation for SCs and Age Relaxation', in Hussain (2019zd), "An Ethnographic Study of Dalit Activism in Sindh (Supplementary Thesis Data)", Mendeley Data, v2<http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/ftcwpfhvws.2>

Dalit concentrated constituencies was enough to realize that Scheduled Castes made up the largest caste group of population in Mirpurkhas division.

**Table 17: Scheduled Castes' vote strength in Sindh
(Registered voters in selective districts)**

No.	District	Non-Muslim Vote	Percent of total votes in District	SC vote estimate by SCFP & PDF	SC vote percent (60 % of the non-Muslims)
1	Karachi (South)	302,265	13%	-----	181359
2	Tharparkar	219,342	46%	210000	131605
3	Mirpurkhas	192,357	33%	360000	117214
4	Umerkot	189,501	49%		113700
5	Sanghar	150,234	19%	180000	90140
6	Badin	123,845	19%	300000	74307
7	Matiari	81,589	13%		48953
8	Tando Allahyar	74,954	26%		44972
9	Hyderabad	62,243	7%		37345
10	Ghotki	41,031	7%	----	24618
11	Tando Muhammad Khan	39,847	17%	----	23908
	Total	1,477,208	22.6%	----	888,121

The analysis of the voter names as listed by the government in their documents shows that in eleven districts of Sindh, non-Muslims make up 22.6 percent of the population. Although, the names are not tagged with Scheduled Castes identity marker, it is obvious to any analyst or the observer that most of the caste names that appear with frequency, belong to Scheduled Castes. Based on this indirect evidence, Dalit activists claim that Scheduled Castes have, not only the largest non-Muslim vote bank but also the largest decisive vote bank that no other caste group has in those districts. Premised on this logic of calculation, and with the help of Dalit activists, the estimates by me put Scheduled votes around 66.66 percent (925740) of the total Hindu votes (1390000±) in Sindh. Total non-Muslim voters in Pakistan are 2,997,841, out of which Hindu votes are 1,498,275 (with 1.39 million of them in Sindh only) with a substantial presence in 13 districts of Sindh and two of Punjab where their vote counts as a decisive factor (Khan I. A, 2017).

According to a NADRA's 2012 report, Sindh had eight districts with the highest percentage of non-Muslim voters in the country. Scheduled Castes in Sindh make up 60 percent of the minorities and 66 percent of the Hindu population have the largest share of votes in those districts. In eleven districts of Sindh, non-Muslims make up 22.6 percent of the population and Scheduled Castes with the largest non-Muslim vote make up 13.56 percent. It is the largest decisive vote bank that no other tribal-caste group has in those districts (see Tables 16 and 17).

Although Karachi city is more likely to have the largest Scheduled Castes population, with Karachi (South) having around 7 to 8 percent of the non-Muslim population, it is dispersed and least organized politically as compared to other districts of Sindh. Umerkot and Tharparkar districts have 49 per cent and 46 percent non-Muslim voters respectively (see Table 17) if one counts Dalit Christians and other non-Scheduled Castes Dalits, the actual Dalit vote bank can be 80 percent of minority vote, that is, about 2.3 million. This is the political claim that Dalit activists also make although Dalit Christians or the Christian community in general do not make any such caste-based differentiation. Dalit activists seemed to be apprehensive of the fact that Christians did not indulge in caste politics, and therefore, tended to assume that majority of minority among Christians was Dalit and attempted to take them on board accordingly. Scheduled Castes Rights Movement Pakistan (SCRM) Chairman Ramesh Jaipal said, as reported in local newspaper, *The Express Tribune*:

In 98 constituencies of the National Assembly, minorities have over 10,000 voters in each constituency and in 191 constituencies of provincial assemblies, they have 5,000 voters in each constituency — the “decisive voters” — as a candidate normally wins with a margin of 5,000 or 10,000 votes. [...] that there should be demarcation of constituencies for minorities so that they could elect their representatives, [and] that the position of a minority MNA should be devolved to the provincial level and that of the MPA to the division level [so that] ‘all the minorities will get a fair chance to elect their representatives’.

(Mukhtar, 2014)

What could be the actual number of Scheduled Castes and the Dalits also depends on how the term Dalit itself is defined and interpreted. Although term Dalit is commonly used to refer to Scheduled Castes, its meaning and the scope is discursively understood in the given social context (Guru, 2004, p. 264). The caste-based classification of oppressed classes as presented and projected by Dalit and Adivasi activists is not recognized by the majority of the population so classified. Nonetheless, such a classification is of great political significance for the oppressed classes. As it seems, theirs is the political statement against the undercounted official numbers of Scheduled Castes and uncounted tribal people and nomadic population of Pakistan. The median estimates as calculated by me, based on the opinion of 165 Dalit activists, the total population of Dalits in Pakistan is around 14,205,000 (6.8%), and in Sindh 7,000,000 (14.6%).

Arguing that Dalits make up a significant majority within the minority, one of the Dalit activists demanded more shared for Scheduled Castes. He contended:

I am fully against existing quota arrangements for minorities in which Scheduled Castes quota has been subsumed. It does not bring into account the population of each minority class and therefore benefits only to the Saithiyā class and the elite among the Christians.

More than that it is not based on the actual population of Scheduled Castes which is 9 times higher than Jati Hindus and equal in proportion to the total minority population. The large percentage of Hindus including Scheduled Castes nomadic tribes goes uncounted and undocumented in Pakistan. I believe that if the proper census is conducted Dalits will make up around 7 percent of the population of Pakistan. And in Sindh, they will make up around 17 percent (85 lacks approx.) of the population.



Figure 23: The officially unregistered Jandawra community living in makeshift huts in the suburbs of Hyderabad city.

Source: Author (2016)

These apprehensions are not new, and each succeeding government has been told about the problem of indifference towards the social and national status of marginalized castes and tribes. For instance, Dr. Thanwar Das, during the Zulfiqar Bhutto's regime raised that issue in one of the speeches that he delivered in Rani Bagh, Hyderabad. He alluded to the exclusion of 'Sami' caste and its undefined nationality in Pakistan. Kanbhoo Fakir, the head of Sami caste was also invited to the program by Dr. Thanwar Das Meghwar. Zulfiqar Bhutto immediately took notice of the issue and the persons of Sami tribe were later issued national identity cards. (Dharani, 2015, p. 134). A Dalit activist, Mangha Ram (of Oad caste) told that he had got registered several Jandawara families of Hyderabad and helped them benefit from the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) of the government of Pakistan. Hence, the Dalit reluctance to get counted as Scheduled Castes, their tendency to hide their castes to evade untouchability, the lapses of census enumerators, renders Dalit identity marking and counting rather arbitrary.

I think these claims and contestations with regard to SC population itself defines the problem of biopolitics, and the bases of undercounting by the state, as well as the

grounds for which the Dalits base their numbers on. The political contestation of the Ashrafia and the Dalit class at local government level exposes the faultiness of census reports and demonstrate the demographic and electoral strength of Scheduled Castes, which can easily be gauged from the general ethnographic observation of the local population or the electoral pattern in local government elections. For instance, in the 2015 elections²⁴³ over 600 candidates from minority communities ran on general seats²⁴⁴, with the highest voter turnout in constituencies where Dalits are concentrated in the districts of Tharparkar (70%) and Umerkot (63%). As per election results, a total of 1,050 Muslim and non-Muslim candidates contested the polls in Tharparkar for the 432 seats. Roughly, half of these contestants belonged to Scheduled Castes.

Table 18: Dalits and Hindus in Local Government Election 2015

District	The minority population in Districts (%)	Non-Muslim Voters (Mostly Dalits)	Non-Muslims (Mostly Dalit) winners	General Seats	Non-Muslim Winners (%)
Tharparkar	46%	219,342	209	720	29%
Umerkot	49%	189,501	119	504	23.6%
Tando Allahyar	26%	74,954	25	300	8.3 %
Total	40.3%	483,796	353	1,524	23.16%

Source: Based on data on non-Muslim votes documented by NADRA

According to unofficial results gathered through local Dalit activists over 150 SC contestants won the polls in their respective constituencies in Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas divisions. Several hundred Kolhi, Bheel, Oad, Baghri, and Meghwar contested in local government elections, launched campaigns, visited villages and held meetings with caste-based baradaris. They gathered and mobilized common people who knew little about the local government election process. But when the Election Day neared, they were either forced by using direct threat or by creating pressure over their kinship group. Many of them were cajoled by Ashrafia to seek minority reserved seats offered by major political parties.

²⁴³ See ECP Notification N.F. (1) 2015-LGC P (Vol-II), 22 October 2015. Elections in Sanghar district were deferred to 23 January 2016. 115 (See, Election Commission of Pakistan, URL: http://ecp.gov.pk/Misc/Glossary_Final.pdf . Retrieved on January 8, 2018).

²⁴⁴ The Sikh community boycotted the elections, objecting to the removal of directly elected reserved seats and the lack of reserved seats for Sikhs and Parsis. ‘Sikhs Declare Boycott of Local Government Elections in Sindh’. (See Dawn, 23 September 2015. URL: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1208688>. Retrieved on January 8, 2018).

The combined result of three Dalit dominated districts, namely Tharpakar²⁴⁵, Umerkot, and Tando Allahyar²⁴⁶ reflect this culture of coercion and compulsion. The results show that 23 percent of Scheduled Caste got elected, either directly or indirectly, whereas their share of representation in terms of demographic strength is claimed by Dalit activists to be around 40 percent (see Table 18).

The local government election not only demonstrated the demographic strength but also the pre-existing caste hierarchies. It showed that the Dalits mainly managed to get elected on lower cadre positions as compared to the Savarnas and other Ashrafia candidates. (Dharani, 2015; Mal, 2000). It has been noticed by Dalit activists that the Ashrafia and Jati Hindu classes negatively react when some Scheduled Castes get elected to the positions that they truly deserve. For instance, alluding to the reaction of the Ashrafia class to the Meghwar or the Dalit success in local government elections, Nandlal Soojani, a Dalit activist said:

In 2000, in local government elections out of 64 seats for nazims, 16 nazims [elected administrators] were elected from Scheduled Castes. Out of the four sub-divisions, except Diplo, Scheduled Castes came to be elected as naib nazims. Such a dramatic change could not go unnoticed by the Ashrafia class and the local power brokers. Resultantly, it backfired in 2005 elections in which Scheduled Castes representation was reduced to a half to the previous one. The seats for the nazims are now filled in by the powerful Muslim caste groups. This is the challenge that we face at the local level. Compared to 16 nazims, there remain 4 now. Going by the demographics, I believe that in district councils, as well as in 33 union councils, Scheduled Castes can be elected as nazims.

Several Dalit activists shared the similar apprehensions that the Ashrafia and Savarna class backfires. For instance, Dr. Nandlal said:

Mahesh Malani (Brahmin politician) told in a meeting that Dalits are not willing to contest elections. Therefore, the tickets are given to Thakurs, and eventually, tickets were given to them and 8 of them became chairmen at the level of union council. This is, however, half the truth. Both the Jati Hindus and Ashrafia class employ pressure tactics. It is because of these reasons, we want to work a bit underground, at the social level. Because we perceive that if we would talk about the rights of Meghwar and Kolhi, the powerful Mir (Baloch) and Pir (mostly Sayed), as well as Saithiyā class (Jati Hindus) will oppose, and at worst conspire against us.

This fear of Ashrafia and Savarna backfiring, that may manifest in the form of religious persecution and the use of Hindu-Muslim card keeps Dalit activists in a permanently

²⁴⁵ On the minorities vote bank strength in elections See. [Minorities' votes may decide fate of 96 constituencies](https://www.dawn.com/news/796356) (Dawn: March, 19, 2013) URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/796356>., Retrieved on January, 8, 2018.

²⁴⁶ In Tando Allahyar no Dalit or non-Muslim could get elected. They could only manage to have 25 seats reserved for non-Muslims. This then follows across the districts in Sindh. Hindus and Dalits grabbing reserved seats except at certain places in Ghotki and Jamhoro District where considerable number of *upper caste* Hindus live.

reluctant position to ignore the Sayedism of Ashrafia. Dalit apprehensions apart, the ‘minority’ vote count and the evidence of participation in the local government elections, are presented by Dalit activists to inspire confidence in their communities and to make the population claims that they constitute the majority within the minority.

Notwithstanding this optimism, ‘Scheduled Castes’ in particular and Dalitbahujans, in general, make up the significant population in certain districts of Sindh and Punjab and have a vote bank plays the decisive role in several constituencies, they are grossly underrepresented at both local, provincial and national level. The personal observation in the field and the actual electorates in the seven Dalit concentrated districts of Sindh testified to the fact that despite their demonstrated electoral strength, Scheduled Castes remained excluded from politics.

6.8 Relevance of Scheduled Castes Ordinance

Although Schedule Castes Ordinance, 1957 is the defunct legal document, it holds great political importance for the Dalit activists. To differentiate between Caste (Jati) Hindus and Scheduled Castes, the Schedule of castes was issued through the Scheduled Castes (Declaration) Ordinance, No. XVI, 1957²⁴⁷ that listed 40 castes²⁴⁸. The Ordinance could not become an ‘Act of Law’ through the parliament within the given timeframe²⁴⁹. Since it was not updated and incorporated even during later constitutional amendments or Acts, its constitutional and legal validity remains suspect. Independent of the official legitimacy of the Ordinance, it serves as the political instrument for the Dalit activists to present as the proof of their oppressed existence and its recognition by the state. They usually refer to the Ordinance (although it could not become the law) and to the Article 204 of the 1956 constitution (although it does not directly apply after the constitution of

²⁴⁷ See Annexure IV. A: Scheduled Castes Ordinance, 1957. It should also be kept on record that Supreme Court had expressed certain concerns about the ambiguity of Scheduled Castes category, (see PLD 1993 Supreme Court 439). In this connection an ordinance no. 16 of 1957 which was of course promulgated declaring certain castes of non-Muslims mentioned in schedule to that ordinance as scheduled caste. But this classification was only for the purpose of article 204 and 205 of 1956 constitution. But even this ordinance was not converted into an act and was allowed to lapse at the expiration of the period provided by article 89 of the constitution.

²⁴⁸ See the copy of Scheduled Castes Ordinance in the Annexure IV.

²⁴⁹ The Ordinance reads that since the “National Assembly is not in session and the Speaker, exercising the sanctions of the President under Article 36 of the Constitution, is satisfied that circumstances exist which render it necessary to take immediate action for the purpose”. It was, therefore, deemed legally and constitutionally fitting to extend the ordinance to the whole of West Pakistan and the federal capital (Karachi). It was notified at the end that it shall come into force at once.

1973), that defined Scheduled castes and classified them “within the meaning of the Fifth Schedule to the Government of India Act, 1935”. The constitution of Pakistan, 1973 after several amendments as it reads now, classified ‘Scheduled Castes’ as ‘non-Muslims’ in its article 260 (3-b). With the constitutional legitimacy given to ‘Scheduled Castes’, the Dalit activists, support their identity claims referring to classification in Scheduled Castes Ordinance 1957, in the Government of India, Act 1935, and Scheduled Castes enumeration in Census of India 1941. For instance, Surender Valasai, in his speech in a workshop organized by PPP at its Central Secretariat, argued that:

One understands that the idea of this Ordinance and phrase ‘purpose of the Constitution’ were ingrained in the words of Quaid-e-Azam. In this background, a six-percent job quota was reserved for the persons of Scheduled Castes in the Government of Pakistan departments, though it was less than 1 percent if estimated on national level percentage.

Hence, whenever any anti-Dalit questioned their claims, along with copy of the Scheduled Castes Ordinance of 1957, Dalit activists present the Scheduled Caste certificates (issued by local government), the proofs of the governmental provision for Scheduled caste scholarships, the advertisements of the age relaxation for Scheduled Castes in federal jobs, mention of Scheduled Castes in census documents and survey forms, served the political purpose a great deal and provided technical proofs to contest socioeconomic and caste-specific claims. They had to collect and reproduce such documents on their own to prove that they have legal status in Pakistan, and to prove their caste status. Hence, for Dalit activists, it logically followed that whatever castes were categorized as Scheduled Castes in Scheduled Castes Ordinance of 1957, and as per Government of India, 1935, and enumerated as Scheduled Castes (Hindus) in Census of India 1941 and Census of Pakistan 1951 should be deemed as Scheduled Castes.

Looking from the legal dimension, the Ordinance “had been issued partly to facilitate the implementation of an Establishment Division order of October 1948, which specified that a quota of six percent would be reserved for Scheduled Castes in government services, and they would be given a three-year relaxation of age for the same jobs”. The Schedule was also meant to serve the purpose of the reservation of seats in services for members of the Scheduled Castes but merely allowed them relaxation in the upper age limit only. Later Central Government went further and not only made the relaxation of age limit but also reserved a special quota of seats of 6 percent for the Scheduled Castes. It thereby became legal to give the said benefit to Scheduled Castes as specified in the Schedule. Hence, provided any candidate from Scheduled Castes so notified in the Schedule produced

the certificate issued by the district magistrate, could become the legitimate claimant not only to the relaxation of age limit but also to the grant of a post reserved for the Scheduled Castes²⁵⁰.

Scheduled Castes Ordinance was kept in force by the provisions of the 1962 Constitution (vide Article 225 (1)) and continued to be the vital document for Dalit activists to refer to define and claim the status of Scheduled Castes in Pakistan. Yet in the constitution of 1962 the phrase "Scheduled Castes" had been replaced with the phrase "underprivileged Castes". Although the article 8 of the constitution provided for the promotion of interests of "backward classes", and the "underprivileged Castes", yet this change of nomenclature did not make clear whether the 'underprivileged Castes' category also included 'Scheduled Castes' or not. This confusion occurred despite the fact that the provincial government of West Pakistan was lawfully bound to identify the underprivileged classes and enter them in a schedule of the 'underprivileged Classes'. Article 7(5) read:

Steps should be taken to bring on terms of equality with other persons the members of underprivileged castes, races, tribes and groups and, to this end, the under-privileged castes, races, tribes, and groups within a Province should be identified by the Government of the Province and entered in a schedule of underprivileged classes.

Interestingly, the constitution of 1962, however, provided for the abolition of untouchability as the goal as well (Braibanti, 1965). Although Scheduled Castes Ordinance 1957 mentioned that only non-Muslims could be Scheduled Castes, it did not clarify if Scheduled Castes could belong to any of the religions except Islam. When it was formulated the preamble of the ordinance read, "expedient to declare certain castes of non-Muslims to be Scheduled Castes for the purposes of the Constitution", and accordingly certain castes of non-Muslims were declared to be Scheduled Castes. Hence, it did not mention or even hinted that Scheduled Castes were Hindus by religion.

To further clarify the distinction between Scheduled Castes and other marginalized castes, West Pakistan Government had issued a notification on 2nd May 1968²⁵¹ to classify "Underprivileged Classes". It became evident that none of the castes, tribes, and races included in the Scheduled Castes (Declaration) Ordinance, 1957, are included in the category of 'under-privileged classes. Paradoxically, the 2nd May 1968 notification shows that even privileged Muslim castes like Legharis, Pathan and Mazaris, and even Sayed

²⁵⁰ Source: P L D 1972 Lahore 336, Before Nasim Hassan Shah, Abdul Hamid Khan, Petitioner versus (1) Government of Pakistan, and (2) Central Public Service Commission, Karachi, Respondents, Writ Petition No. 1859/5 of 1969, decided on 14th December 1971.

²⁵¹ See Gazette of West Pakistan, dated 24 5 1968, vide Notification No. 58 H (GAI) TA.

castes were included in it. Further, in 1972, Lahore High Court gave the judgment that Muslims cannot be members of Scheduled Castes and therefore, cannot avail age relaxation²⁵².

Hence, while in India Scheduled Castes could be from any of the indigenous religious groups that included Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism (all defined as part of Hindu culture)²⁵³, in Pakistan Scheduled Castes were classified in the constitution very ambiguously as the religious group (non-Muslims) in itself, and as the Hindu caste group in other legal and official documents. In this manner, although the constitution of Pakistan, legal frameworks and the administrative documents did recognize Scheduled Castes as a category of people, the general narrative that ultimately got shaped defined Scheduled Castes in terms of religious category, as non-Muslims and particularly as Hindus different from Jati Hindus. This precluded the chance that Scheduled Castes could be Buddhists and the Sikhs as they are in India, if not the Muslims or the Christians. Hence, Scheduled castes, as listed in the Ordinance of 1957, however, did not tally with the existing Dalit castes and tribes that have considerably changed their nomenclature. The social reality of local faiths defies the categorization of Scheduled Castes as a sub-category of Hindu religion as many have changed their religion and some of them particularly ultra-subaltern Dalit caste groups still practice their faith in a manner that does not correspond to Brahminic religious practices. Many Scheduled Castes have considerably changed their caste nomenclatures and do not match with the official classification.

Still, others are not even castes or were not castes but indigenous tribes particularly the nomadic tribes many of whom have now settled down in one place, yet still many are living semi-nomadic life. Many such tribes in India are listed as Scheduled Tribes, whereas in Pakistan their constitutional and legal status is not yet clearly defined. Some of these castes are officially recognized as Scheduled Castes both in Pakistan and India, while others are recognized either as OBCs or Scheduled Tribes in India (see Tabel 8 in Appendix).

²⁵² In 1972, a judgment of the Lahore High Court decreed that Muslims could not be considered as Scheduled Castes for any purpose. See Pakistan Law Digest, Lah 336 for details.

²⁵³ About 22.2% of the Hindus, 19% Percent of the Sikhs and 89.5% of the Buddhists are Scheduled Castes in India. In Tamil Nadu, Scheduled Castes are known as Adi-Dravida. Yet in term of numbers majority of the Scheduled Castes still practice Hinduism as their primary religion. Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. See <http://socialjustice.nic.in/UserView/index?mid=76750>.

Table 19: Commonly used opposing/parallel social labels in Pakistan by Dalits and Ashrafia-Savarnass

Scheduled Castes	Jati Hindus
Scheduled Caste Hindus	Caste Hindus
Nichili or Neechi Zat	Oonchi Zat
Lower Caste	Upper caste
Pasmanda Hindu	Saithiyā Class
Dalit Class, Dalit Hindus, Dalit Christians	Saithiyā-Brahmin Class
Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, Gurgural, Kabootra,	Sodha Thakur, Vāṇiyo
Darāwar, Dharti Dhareen, indigenous people, indigenous Sindhi	Arya, Sindhi Hindu

Source: Author (2018)

Some Muslim indigenous communities supposedly ex-untouchables are also considered as oppressed and Dalits, such as Mangarhar, Langah (formerly Langho), or drumbeaters), Meerbahar, Machi, etc. Yet some of them were not found in any official classification or census documents.

Independent of the arbitrariness of the classification of the varied groups of castes and tribes, the ambiguous definition and the classification precluded the chance of differentiating between Savarna castes and the neo-Kshatriyas (ex-Shudras) within Jati Hindus. The majority of people, with whom one interacted in relation to Dalit rights, did not differentiate much between Jati Hindus and Scheduled Castes, Savarnas, Neo-Kshatriyas, and collectively call them Hindus. But when any issue pertaining to caste discrimination or socioeconomic inequality is invoked, the differentiation is made using several identity-based tags. All these social identities, however, are officially validated by the categories of ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Jati Hindus’ as no other social label has so far sought any formal approval from the state. Confusion over categorical identities also diverted the attention from the fact that there can be certain indigenous tribes among Muslims of Pakistan having a socio-economic and ethnic affinity with the Scheduled Castes.

Hence the ambiguous, rather ill-defined, the status of Scheduled Castes not only reduced Dalit predicament to a religious category but also became the reason to reduce their numbers in the census and social surveys as ‘Hindu’ made more sense to the Dalits

than the ‘Scheduled Castes. This ultimately affected their political strength vis-à-vis other non-Muslims and the Savarnas within Jati Hindus and weakened their claims of representation as to the significant number of ex-Shudra or the neo-Kshatriyas were classified together with Savarna castes within the meaning of (Jati) Hindus, or other religions, not as OBCs as the case is in India. Hence, it can be said that although the Ordinance holds immense political value for the Dalits, the classification of castes being limited to a few communities, does not permit the holistic problematization of caste-based discrimination beyond the Hindu fold. Resultantly, many marginalized pasmanda Muslims such as Bhangi, Chuhra Shaikh, Jogi, Shaikh Bheel, Mangarhar, Meerbahar, Machi, Sheedi (Qambrani, etc.) and Khaskheli, cannot be marked or counted as an oppressed or socioeconomically disadvantageous class in need of affirmative action.

6.9 Dalits Redefining ‘Scheduled Castes’

Dalit activists are apprehensive of the fact that Scheduled Castes Ordinance is still useful as a political ploy, has become redundant, and that religious (Hindu) tag cannot be simply wished away by asserting SC identity as a sub-category of Hindu marker. Therefore, Dalit activists attempt either to decouple the ‘Scheduled castes’ category from ‘Hindu’ and ‘minority’ tags or maintain equally salient categorical or identity differences. They want that the category of ‘Scheduled Castes’ must be redefined and reclassified through a constitutional amendment and legal measures that must explicitly define ‘Scheduled Castes’ as a socioeconomic category, not a religious group. To achieve that, Dalit activists give forth different suggestions. To build public opinion Sajan Meghwar, for instance, argued:

‘Hindu’ as a form of religion, if ever it is religion, should be classified separately from ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Jati Hindu’ categories. Both the ‘Jati Hindus’ and the Hindus within Scheduled Castes must be taken into confidence before defining and naming ‘Hindu’, if ever it is, as a form of religion.

Dalit activists contend that, although the majority of Scheduled Castes identify themselves as Hindus, yet their religious practices, lifestyles, code of ethics, the level of religiosity fundamentally differs from Jati Hindus and Saithiyā class (Savarnas). They demand that the special instructions must be issued to governmental institutions and departments to ensure that in any future survey or census Scheduled castes communities shall be counted and listed as ‘Scheduled castes’, and not as ‘Jati Hindus’ or ‘Hindus’. They demand that ‘Scheduled Castes’ by definition must also include several other indigenous communities, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes face similar kind of discrimination as Scheduled Castes listed as per Scheduled Castes Ordinance of 1957. Similarly, they argue that any

caste/tribe/community previously listed in Scheduled Castes Ordinance, 1957, but, after a socioeconomic survey conducted for that purpose, is deemed to have overcome marginalization and deprivation level, should be delisted accordingly.

Hence, Dalit activists discourage to use ‘minority’ to refer to Scheduled Castes, as they claim to be in majority (20-50 %) in certain districts of Sindh and Punjab, and also in the majority among the so-called ‘Hindu’ community.

6.10 Drive for Marking SC in Census

It has been argued by Lieberman and Parnab Singh (2017) while presenting religious conflicts in India that the enumeration of ethnic, racial, and/or religious categories on national household censuses, increases the likelihood of conflict. They propose a theory of intergroup relations, in the context of census surveys, and “find a robust association between the enumeration of ethnic cleavages on the census and various forms of competition and conflict, including violent ethnic civil war” (Lieberman & Singh, 2017). Although Dalit activism hardly got violent, the intense or heated verbal or discursive and peaceful street contestation reflected Dalit drive for marking Scheduled Castes so that they could demand a share in resources, the quota and the representation in legislative assemblies in proportion to their actual population which they believed was about 80 percent of the Hindu population.

Marking SC in census forms mattered to get the demographic strength officially acknowledged and re-demand representation in assemblies and the SC quota that was granted to them in October 1948. Census holds utmost importance in Pakistan as distribution of resources, provincial and Scheduled Caste quota into federal and provincial departments through National Finance Commission and seats in the National Assembly are allocated to each Province based on the population.²⁵⁴ Surrender Valasai, Dalit leader and

²⁵⁴ “The seats in the National Assembly are allocated to each Province/FATA and Federal Territory on the basis of the population in accordance with the last preceding census officially published under Article-51(3) of the Constitution. Further, distribution of funds between the Federation and the Provinces are made through National Finance Commission. Article-160(2) speaks about the formation of the National Finance Commission which also uses census figures. The quota for recruitment to Federal posts is also worked out on the basis of population ratios as given by the census. Establishment Division’s O.M. No. 8/9/72, TRV, dated 31st August 1973, refers in this regard. First 5 censuses were undertaken with the legal cover of [Census Ordinance, 1959](#) amended from time to time. The 6th Population and Housing Census will be conducted under the legal cover of General Statistics (Re-organization) Act, 2011.” See Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan, website: <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/population-census> . Retrieved on September 7, 2017.

an advisor to ruling party PPP's chairmen and (currently Media cell in-charge (PPP²⁵⁵) Bilawal House), in personal interview lamented the Pakistan government's neglect of Dalit issues such as job quotas, scholarships for Scheduled castes students, representation, caste discrimination and marginalization (Valasai, 2015: Personal Interview). To address that issue of representation by proving that they are the majority in minority, Dalit activists began mobilizing for marking 'Scheduled Castes' category as soon as they heard the news published in local newspaper 'Kawish' that the 6th Population Census was going to be held in March 2016, that was to be held after the gap of 18 years. When All Sindh Kolhi Association heard about me researching Scheduled Castes, they invited me into their program that they had organized to create awareness about the importance of Scheduled Castes, held at Mirpurkhas on March 3, 2016. The program was managed in collaboration with some human rights activists and other members of DST were also invited. The program was attended by some 115 odd members mostly belonging to Parkari Kolhi community.

My image that they formed was that I knew a lot about the nature of the issue and can educate them as well as guide them as I was researching that issue. At that time, I knew very little except that 'Scheduled Castes' is an official term mentioned in Scheduled Castes Ordinance, 1957, the copy (see Annexure-IV) of which I had got just from another Dalit activist just a few months back and shared on a social media page. At that time, the Census survey form (answer sheet) had not been released. Therefore, no one knew whether they had the option to mark Scheduled Castes or Hindu, or both. Hence, the motto, as we Dalit activists discussed before the meeting, was to convince the laymen Dalits to mark 'Scheduled Castes' as their religion, and that marking SC did not mean to adopt a new religion, but to enlist oneself for the social and economic benefits. It was very difficult for me to do as I was imagined belonging to the non-Dalit Muslim community, a potential suspect of converting them to other religions. Moreover, at that time I did not know much about the current awareness status of the Parkari Kolhis of Mirpurkhas city. Therefore,

255 . PPP (Pakistan People's Party) is the ruling feudal-capitalist party of Pakistan. Three Dalit leaders have managed to occupy some respectable positions in PPP. Currently Khatu Mal Meghwar is Special Assistant to CM: Minorities Affairs Member: Standing Committee on Forest, Wildlife and Environment. Surendar Valasai is Media Cell In-charge (PPP), Bilawal House, Karachi, and Engineer Giyan Chand is senator in the Parliament of Pakistan. Although PPP has given token representation to Dalit leadership, mainly from Meghwar community, its general stance about Dalits in Pakistan is confused by the equal space given to Sethias through moneybag politics, allotment of tickets to feudal-capitalist elite.

more than a teaching, it was to serve as the lived learning experience for me and determine my future exploration to understand the conversion and diversion between Scheduled Castes, Hindu, Sindhi and Dalit identity markers.

Before my turn arrived, I had an opportunity to engage a few Parkari Kolhis in conversation while sipping tea offered by them. Ramesh Kolhi, 25 asked me ‘Saen, people say, that if we mark Scheduled Castes is not our religion, but I say, we are Scheduled Castes Hindus’. I answered assuring him, ‘Exactly Ramesh, when the census report is prepared, there are mentioned two types of Hindus, namely, Jati Hindus and Scheduled Castes Hindus’. So, both are Hindus. You need not worry. Your religion will not be changed. Jhaman Kolhi supported my argument and quipped with the resolve that:

We shall demand our rights even by becoming Bhangi. Because all humans are equals. Their greatness lies in honest earnings. Therefore, Bhangi, Bheel, Kolhi, all Scheduled Castes, and laborers are equally respectable and deserve their due rights. Let us be Scheduled Castes and they [Jati Hindus] be Hindus. We shall outnumber them in the census.

Jhaman Kolhi (DST member)



Figure 24: Dalit Activists from Kolhi Community creating awareness about marking Scheduled Castes in the 6th Population Census, Pakistan.

Source: Author (2016).

During my turn to speak, I further clarified and explained the political importance of marking Scheduled Castes. After a few weeks, the population census, however, was postponed and rescheduled for March 15, 2017, and was duly conducted. Although, it slowed down the campaign, yet it extended its length and allowed Dalit activists to further

plan, and a few of us continued to mobilize Dalits. The short conversation (given below) between a Dalit activist and the local Bheel father and his son, shows the level of the effort Dalit activists had to take to convince the Hinduised Dalits to take the counterintuitive decision to mark the sterile category of scheduled Castes:

(Sindhi transcription)

Rano Bheel (village head): What are these scheduled Castes and Dalit thing?

Kanji Bheel (Dalit activist): (Uncle, it is the same that you had marked during the 1998 census.)

Rano Bheel: Oh yes, I remember, at that time too, some friends from the community had approached to mark Scheduled [Caste].)

Shiva Bheel (21, son of Rano Bheel interrupted): But bro, why we should mark Scheduled Castes? We are Hindus and will mark Hindu.)

Rano Bheel: My son, we are indeed Hindus, but the government has marked us under Schedule. If we mark the Schedule (caste) then we can have our rights. Lat time too we had marked Scheduled Caste.)

Shiva Bheel: No father, we will get the Hindu marked. We should not change our religion)

Kanji Bheel (explains): Ada Shiva! In column Hindu is given only for Vaniya, Thakur and Mahara to mark, ...for the rest of us have got to mark on Scheduled Castes. Only then we can have jobs, scholarships and can become MNA and MPA.

Rano Bheel (in a disappointing tone): Brother! That is aright... but brother 20 years back we had got marked on Scheduled Castes, but so for could not have got any benefit.

Rano Bheel: *Eeho shedool kast warri aen dilat billat wari chha hay?*

Kanji Bheel: *Kaka eeho jeko 1998 warri adam shumari mein likhyo huwaya?*

Rano Bheel: *hao beli, yaad aayo. Tadahin b k dost aaya huwa ta shedool likhraiyo*

Shiva Bheel: *Par ada, parrn cho Shedule kast khe tick karyon? Parrn hindu aahiyon, hindu ee likhraenda seen.*

Rano Bheel: *aba ahiyon ta hindu, par Sarkar parrn khe schedule kare likhyo aahey. Schedule likharn saan hakk milanda. Agle daffe b asaan scheduled kaste khe ee likhyo ho.*

Shiva Bheel: *na baba, parn hindu aahiyon hindu ee likhraenda seen. Mazhab na mataenda seen.*

Kanji Bheel: *Ada Shiva! Hindu lae khano sirif Vaniyan, thakuran aen mahrajan lae aehy...baki asaan sabhin khe scheduled caste khe tick mark karaeron aahey. Tadahin nokriyon, scholarshipoon aen MNA, MPA theenda seen.*

Rano Bheel: *ada eeho ta theek aahey...par ada weeh saal b eeho scheduled ee likhrayo seen, par faido ta take jo b na thiyo.*

The conviction of the son seemed to affect the elderly as well. Seeing the father silent, the Dalit activist Kanji Bheel tried to convince the Shiva. I also interrupted to explain the political relevance of marking Scheduled Castes. While the elderly Rano Bheel seemed to get convinced the younger Shiva was not. After the 20-minute indecisive debate, we left the small hut of Rano Bheel to ride the bike to another neighboring village of Kolhi community in the suburbs of Matli town.

. The defense of ‘Scheduled Castes’ as a category became problematic for the Dalit activists due to several reasons. Categorical mistake or confusion led each concerned group to contest ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Hindu’ on the following grounds.

1. Scheduled Castes as the census category was not clearly defined, and instead, it was lumped up subsumed under the column for the religion that also included ‘Hindu’

the major faith practiced by Dalits as well. Census form²⁵⁶ clearly showed that Scheduled Castes had been inserted into a column of religion, and Hindu (not Jati Hindu) was written as another religion, to which the majority of SC were identifying themselves with. If they marked Hindu, they would not be counted as Scheduled castes, and if they mark Scheduled castes, they will not be counted as Hindus. Left with the option to mark any one of them, most the Dalits tended to mark ‘Hindu’ instead of ‘Scheduled Cates’

2. This insertion of ‘Scheduled Castes under the column for religion without specifically differentiating between Scheduled Castes Hindus and Jati Hindus created suspicions and nausea among Dalits that probably their Hindu religion is being replaced by the new ‘religious’ or ‘non-religious’ category of ‘Scheduled Castes’. This categorical problem then became the major bone of contention between the Dalits and the anti-Dalits. Dalits activists were, on their part, taking pains to explain ‘Scheduled Castes’ as a socioeconomic caste group-based category of the oppressed by referring to various official documents, whereas anti-Dalits by expressing hatred against ‘Scheduled Castes’ and imagining it as the conspiracy against their religion.

Those who were opposing the ‘Scheduled Castes’ tag, were arguing based on ‘equality’ and ‘merit’ principles; that although all Sindhis are equal, Dalits can contest and compete with any other caste-based community on equal footing based on their demographic strength. Therefore, they argued, we ‘oppressed castes’ neither needed to attach the ‘stigma’ of ‘lower caste’ or ‘Scheduled Castes’ tag. During the debate on Census on social media, the anti-Dalit activist from the Meghwar community argued:

Three doctors from Kolhi community also qualified written and interview of the post medical officer through SPSC. No Dalit quota...!!

(Anonymous, personal blog on Facebook, June 2017)

He then shared a list of some 41 recently selected Meghwar Medical officers (some of them selected on minority quota), attempting to prove that Hindus do not need to be differentiated based on caste:

Still, you think that there is a huge need for so-called Dalit or SC rights?! These doctors who belong to the Meghwar community are selected on a pure merit basis, not on so-called SC quota. This is the big slap on those faces who are advocating *khairaati* (charity-led) movement.

(Anonymous, personal blog on Facebook, June 2017)

²⁵⁶ Census forms can be found online on Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan’s webpage here: <http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/content/census-forms> . Also see Figure 22 about Population Census 2017 (Form A).

Hinduised Dalits were not alone in their campaign against ‘Scheduled Castes’. It was enthusiastically supported by some groups of Savarnas. Pakistan Hindu council’s president, Chelaram Kewlani stated on the 29th February 2016²⁵⁷ that all “Hindus” must mark their religion as ‘Hindu’ and in the column for mother tongue they must mark ‘Sindhi’. That was the typical Jati Hindu’s statement that defended its Jati Hindu interests. Sindhi was the mother tongue of Jati Hindus, the common bond that ties them with Sindhi Sāmmāt Muslim castes. Certain Adivasi activists among Dalits were, however, opposed to marking Sindhi as their mother tongue was not Sindhi. Generally, Dalit activists were also agreed that Sindhi should be marked as the mother tongue but in the column, for the religion, they would mark ‘Scheduled Castes’.

The leading Brahmin political figure Mahesh Malani, then President of PPP ruling party for Tharparkar districts also stated on 11th February 2017, in a conference organized to create awareness about the 6th population. He argued that since Scheduled castes as a social category did not exist as any religion, those who fell under Scheduled Castes could be termed as Hindus. Therefore, in the column for religion, they should tick mark ‘Hindu’ instead of ‘Scheduled Castes’. These ‘upper caste’ anti-Dalit statements were promptly taken to the task by Dalit activists. Dalit leadership within PPP came up with counter-statements urging Dalits to mark ‘Scheduled castes’ in the census form. On the other side, various Dalit forums began approaching people and communities and made intensive use of social media to create awareness about marking ‘Scheduled Castes’ in the census. It followed with several statements by different Dalit and Ashrafia-Savarna politicians favoring Dalit position on marking SC. Census authorities also clarified and justified the marking of SC. A Scheduled Castes activist journalist approached the census authorities and made a video clip to put it on social media and made the newspaper news on it. It was then shared and discussed or contested by Dalit and anti-Dalit activists both on social media and at grassroots in the field.

Anti-Scheduled caste groups termed inclusion of Scheduled castes in the column of religion as the establishment’s conspiracy, and labeled Dalit activists as agents of the state, and sometimes as anti-Sindhi nationalists and quite paradoxically as agents of Brahmanism. Their argument was that they are Hindus, their CNIC forms documented their religion as ‘Hindu’, so they will mark Hindu in census, and that SC is the obsolete Bharati

²⁵⁷ See Daily Ibrat, Monday, 29th February 2016.

Brand or *thappa* (Indian label) and must be done away with, that all Hindus are oppressed and equal citizens, that Dalit agenda is divisive of Sindhi nation and Hindu minority. Whereas, pro-SC activists maintained that, SC was the politically achieved constitutional privilege for the marginalized indigenous ‘caste groups’ and that it was still valid and, therefore, must not be abandoned. They argue that in census form term ‘Hindu’ was used not in a religious sense, but to mean ‘Jati Hindus’ (privileged Hindu castes). They argued that although the Census form puts ‘Hindu’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ into the column for religion by giving each a different code number, basically it is caste background that would be enumerated, while the religion of ‘Scheduled Castes’ should assume to be Hindus in that case. One of the Dalit activists argued that for the confirmation of religion of person NADRA record which is based on CNIC documentation, and primary school leaving certificates²⁵⁸ should be used as references.

Dalit activists gave politically correct statements acknowledging the apparent contradiction of categories and assuming to be politically correct, launched a campaign to mark SC, instead of Hindus because ‘Hindu’ in census form did not represent all Hindus but only ‘Jati Hindus’²⁵⁹. They also appealed the opponents, on technical grounds, to support them to mark SC in the census. They made efforts to convince the pro-Hindu opponents that census form has not been properly prepared, that SC category should be allotted a different column by the time the next census is held once SC proved its numerical strength at the March 2017 census. Census officials were contacted and asked to amend the census form, but they refused to do so as it was very late and all preparations including print copies of the form were already sent to census commissioners. However, they promised to investigate that issue in the future. Meanwhile, that technical or rather deliberately ignored loophole in the constitution and in the official way of categorization, as the Dalit activists maintained, led to the controversy manifesting the form of heated debate in print media, social media and local meetings of the Dalit communities. One of the Dalit activists came up with the solution:

The solution to the confusion and the conflict over census categories, that had both technical and ideological aspects, could be to insert a separate column for Scheduled castes instead of putting it in the column for religion. It did not happen, and it could not happen this time. Neither Dalits activists nor their opponents were influential and alert enough to

²⁵⁸ School leaving certificates clearly mention both caste (*qaum*) and religion together in the column given for ‘nation’/ caste’ (Qaum and Zaat). Also see a copy of school leaving certificate in the Annexure II.

²⁵⁹ See official website of Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan, and report of 1998 census downloadable from: <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/area-population-aadministrative-units>.

see through that issue in time. Asking for revision in the census form, when the census was overhead, and forms were already printed, seems impractical venture under the circumstance. The probable revisions in the form that could at least resolve the technical or clerical issue could be resolved. Whereas the contestation over the actual use of the term ‘Scheduled castes’ requires a social and political debate at all levels and several months to reach the consensus.

(A Dalit activist from Mirpurkhas, telephonic interview 24th August 2017)

Dalit Sujaag Tehreek has, however, had a clear stance, that is, to mark SC this time, and replace it with any other suitable term in the coming years. It maintained that all indigenous communities irrespective of their religions should be socioeconomically surveyed in any future next population census (expected to be held in 2027) to assess their level of education, unemployment, poverty, caste discrimination, and different quotas must be specified accordingly. Term or social label ‘Scheduled Castes’ should be replaced with any other suitable social label, the 'indigenous' or any other local term chosen by Dalit or Adivasi communities. The probable census form and census report could then include multiple columns to ensure the representation of all indigenous groups irrespective of their religion.

6.10 Outcome of the Census Campaign

The success of the Scheduled Caste campaign can be assessed based on Census 2017 official results. In census 2017, Scheduled Castes registered a remarkable increase in demographic count vis-à-vis Jati Hindus, as shown in Table 20 and 21.

Table 20:Growth Rate (Religion) Pakistan and Sindh, 1998-2017. Source Bureau of Census, 2021

Growth rate (religion) 1998-2017			
No	Religion	Pakistan	Sindh
1	Muslims	38%	35.7%
2	Non-Muslims	33%	42.8%
3	Scheduled Castes	61%	63.9%
4	(Jati)Hindus	42%	40.8%
4	Christians	20.9%	27.8%
5	Qadiani/Ahmedis	-45.8%	-101%
6	Others	-117%	-77%

The 2017 population census demystifies the narrative of Hindu genocide and persecution as it reflects a huge politically motivated religious switching within non-Muslims. The reasons for the switching lie more in the Dalit consciousness to mark themselves as a separate religious-cum-socioeconomic group than the (privileged caste) Hindus. Conversion to Islam do not feature as the major factor of the decline of rise of any religion,

except perhaps in the case of Ahmedi faith. Over the span of two decades, the growth of non-Muslims (33%) has been 5 percent less than the growth rate of Muslim population which is 38 percent. Interestingly, the growth of Hindus (42%) and Scheduled Castes (63%) exhibit a considerable advance over the rate of growth of the Muslim population. In fact, Scheduled Castes grew faster than any other community with the highest percentage, that is, 63 in Sindh and 61 in Pakistan. Compared to the 61% growth rate of Scheduled Castes (Jati) Hindus grew by 42%. The increase in the Scheduled Caste population cannot simply be attributed to the natural biological growth, the fertility or the mortality rates etc. Its increase largely owes to political awareness of being a marginalized segment of the population.

Table 21: Population Comparison by Religion 1998-2017

COMPARISON BY RELIGION, 1998-2017, PAKISTAN POPULATION CENSUS												
ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT (DISTRICT)	RELIGION											
	1998	2017	1998	2017	1998	2017	1998	2017	1998	2017	1998	2017
	MUSLIM	MUSLIM	CHRISTIAN	CHRISTIAN	HINDU (JATI)	Hindu (JATI)	QADIANI (AHMADI)	QADIANI (AHMADI)	SCHEDULED CASTES	SCHEDULED CASTES	OTHERS	OTHERS
PAKISTAN	124,269,928	200,362,718	2,090,596	2,642,048	2,110,225	3,595,256 42% GR	279,671	191,737	331,468	849,614 61% GR	94,060	43,253
SINDH PROVINCE	27,796,814	43,234,107	294,885	408,301	1,980,534	3,345,424	43,524	21,661	300,308	831,562	23,828	13,455

The campaign during the population census to mark Scheduled Castes seems to have had success in targeted districts, particularly in Matiari (87.4%), Hyderabad (87.24%), Mirpurkhas (79.4 %), Sanghar (79.3%), Badin (67.8%), Ghotki (67.5%), and Tharparkar (67%). These rates are higher than the Jati Hindu growth rate in every district of Sindh, except Tando Muhammad Khan, where anti-Dalit and pro-Hindu movement have had some success. The district of Tando-Allahyar, Thatta, Dadu and Jacobabad, where significant Hindu population of Dalits inhabits shows little increase, in population ratio, and hence seem untouched by the Scheduled Caste campaign during the Population Census 2017.

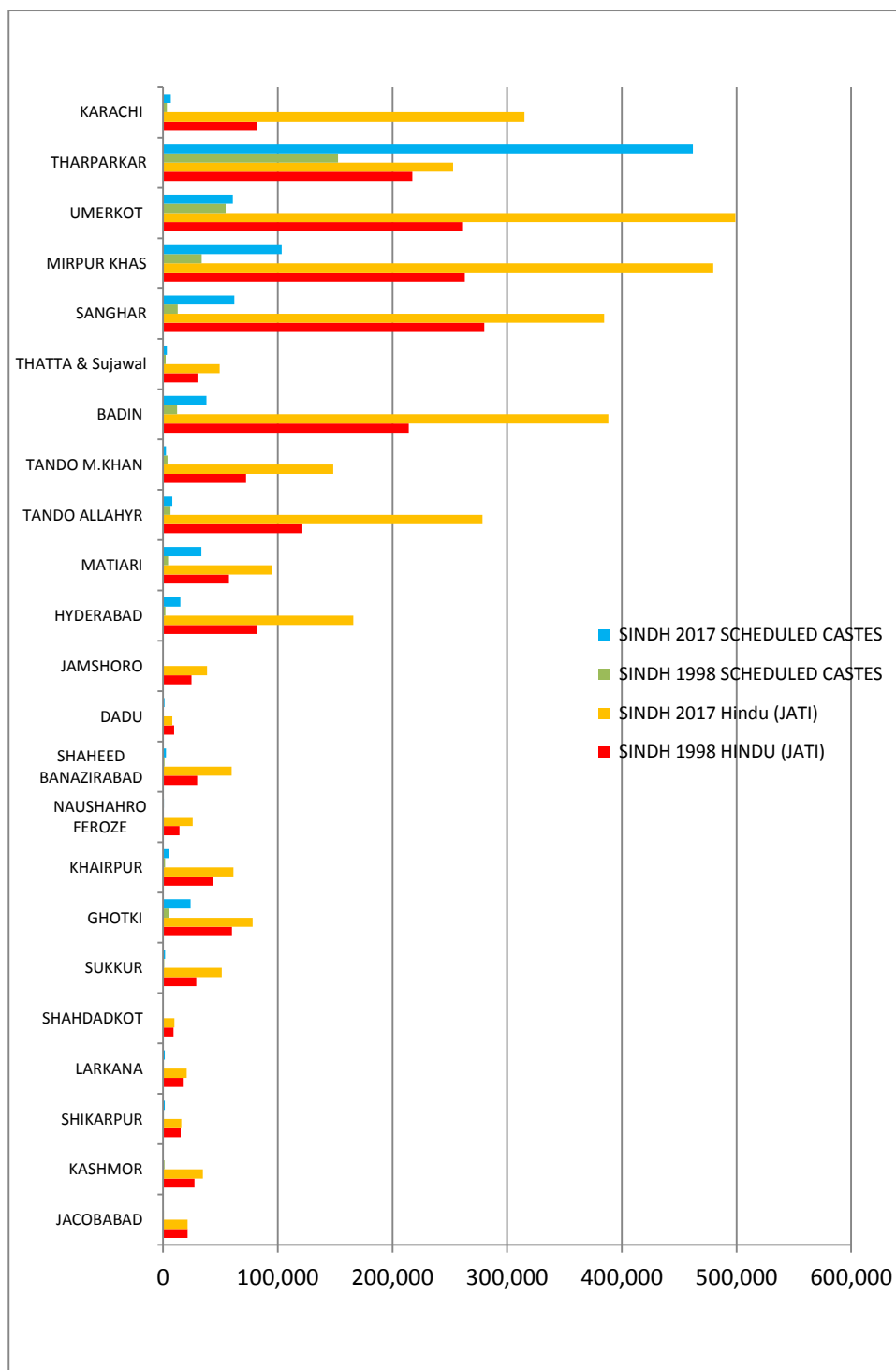


Figure 25: District-wise population 2017

In Umerkot, Significant increase in the Hindu population vis-à-vis Scheduled Castes and Muslims can be seen. It can be attributed to the movement launched by anti-Scheduled Caste in Umerkot district by Hinduised groups to counter the Scheduled Castes movement. Notwithstanding that the growth rate of Scheduled Castes this time is much higher than (Jati) Hindus.

More importantly, for the first time, Scheduled Castes emerge as the second largest segment of the population after Muslims in at least one district (Tharparkar) of Sindh. Politically, legally and officially, this statistical change means a lot for the Scheduled Castes. They can now make political, legal and official claims to due representation independent of the involvement of (Jati) Hindu population. In Tharparkar Scheduled Castes (4.6 lacks) outnumber Hindus (2.5 lacks) by very large margin (1.7 lacks). In 1998 Census, Scheduled Castes were counted as about 1.5 lacks, whereas Jati Hindus were about 2.1 lacks, a 0.6 lacks differential.

Interestingly, the ratio of non-Muslim population in Sindh shows 1 percent increase, which can be attributed to the fact that this time thousands of Scheduled Caste families, and the denotified or undefined caste groups that had previously missed during 1998 census, got themselves marked in 2017 census. It defies the minority rights activists' claims that large number of non-Muslims, perhaps excluding Ahmedis/ Qadianis, are migrating out of the country owing to security concerns. It also attests to the fact that despite Islamisation of the non-Muslims, particularly of Scheduled Castes, the non-Muslim population has sustained its numbers. The lack of decline in Hindu population can also be attributed to the parallel influence of the trans-border and the transnational Hinduisation, and the internal confrontation along caste lines, as observed in the case of Scheduled Caste movement in Tharparkar, and the anti-Scheduled Castes movement by the Hinduised Dalits in Umerkot district.

6.11 Conclusion

From the discussion and analysis, it becomes obvious that the constitutional, administrative and political changes affect the way the identity of the marginalized communities is constructed, and that in turn determines how they are enumerated and classified by the state that in turn affects their chances of exclusion from or inclusion into the mainstream. The way Scheduled Castes were enumerated in the census and other governmental documents is the typical example of the state's indifference to the issue of the recognition of the 'marginalized' sections of society. It reflected the pretense of Ashrafia and Savarna political elite within the state institutions not to recognize Dalits as Scheduled Castes.

Savarnas that represent Scheduled Castes in assemblies seemed indifferent to the erroneous population statistics that show underestimated Scheduled Castes' numbers. The chances of inclusion of Scheduled Castes in Pakistan were diminished by lumping it with the religious category of 'non-Muslims' on the one hand, and with 'Jati Hindu' or 'Hindu'

on the other. Driven by the state maneuvers, and religious and cultural appeal of 'Hindu' identity a majority of Scheduled Castes opted to be identified with 'Hindu'. Identification with Hinduness instead of Scheduled Castes was also in consonance with their tendency to hide their caste identities because of the stigma of untouchability. Hence, due to the hegemonic influence of 'minority narrative', that compelled them ritually invert their identities, even the Scheduled Castes' leadership failed to register its concern over the enumeration of Scheduled Castes.

Nonetheless, Scheduled Castes in particular, and the Dalitbahujans in general, are striving to correct the state's erroneous representation with the claims about the demographic strength of the Dalits. This politicization of numbers is at the core of the whole debate that revolved around the advantage as well as the disadvantage of the categorical ambiguity, and the reason why 'Scheduled Castes' is still the relevant marker to demand proportionate representation, constitutional and legal provisions related to affirmative action to uplift the Scheduled Castes in Pakistan. They perceive that the recognition of their proportionate strength will increase their bargaining power and raise the pitch of their voice to demand the making of laws against caste atrocities, hate speech, sexual harassment, religious persecution and socioeconomic exploitation that specifically emanates from caste-based discrimination.

The comparative analysis of Dalit identity contestation made it abundantly clear that the officially designated categories are arbitrary labels, and in the social domain do not fix or reify the meaning or identity of any caste. Because of that the same caste group or the tribe could be classified differently in different states under different categorical labels. Dalits were Hinduised by the colonial powers and later by the postcolonial state of Pakistan that further marginalized them by terming them a minority. Resultantly, the 'Hindu minority' emerged as the most defining identity that subsumed, rather invalidated the officially designated caste identity, that is, 'Scheduled Castes'

Looking from the Dalitbahujan perspective, it can be argued that British policies to divide Indian society into communal lines, and the subsequent harijanization of Dalits (as discussed in section 3.4), facilitated the imposition of 'minority' as a kind of religious category that continues to gloss over the tribal-caste fault lines and caste oligarchies. Communalism fanned by the British consolidated hegemonic religious and nationalist narratives that further introduced the 'majority-minority' categories that defined Dalits as a religious (Hindu) minority. It resulted in the epistemic and symbolic violence upon the Dalit majority. Hence, the Dalit identity as the oppressed group of castes was further

shrouded under by the neo-communalization that was recast after the Partition through the official use of ‘non-Muslim’, ‘Hindu’ and ‘minority’ identities, in Pakistan,

The ‘Scheduled Caste’ identity that was employed by Dalits to demand representation was, thus, further blurred, particularly, after the cessation of East Pakistan in 1971, and the ensuing communalization by General Zia during the 1980s. This created an identity crisis among the Dalit castes to redefine and reconstruct their identities to proclaim difference from Hindus (Savarnas) and assert specific caste identities, or the generic identities, such as ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Adivasi’ etc. The discussion further revealed that while in India Scheduled Castes were distributed into different indigenous religious groups in Pakistan Scheduled Castes were classified in the constitution very ambiguously as the religious group (non-Muslims) in itself, and the as the Hindu caste group in other legal and official documents. Hence, in Pakistan, Scheduled Castes increasingly came to be classified in the constitution very ambiguously as the religious group (non-Muslims) in itself, and as the Hindu caste group in other legal and official documents. This ambiguous rather ill-defined status of Scheduled Castes not only reduced them to the religious category but also became the primary reason for the underestimated Scheduled Caste population. It also diverted the attention from the fact that there can be certain indigenous tribes among Muslims of Pakistan having a socio-economic and ethnic affinity with the Scheduled Castes. Nonetheless, Dalit activists have continued to assert the difference and make political claims. With the constitutional legitimacy given to ‘Scheduled Castes, the Dalit activists, support their identity claims referring to classification in Scheduled Castes Ordinance 1957, in the Government of India, 1935, and Scheduled Castes enumeration in Census of India 1941. Dalit activists (re) define Scheduled Caste identity as the politically necessary instrument of inclusion instead of exclusion, that needs to be brought back into the nationalist and class-based framework.

The analysis reveals that despite the arbitrariness of categorization, epistemic untouchability and discrimination against Dalit castes persists and that the succeeding governments have taken no special measures to (re)categorize based on historical oppression and the marginality to classify the poor ex-Shudra castes and the Scheduled Castes together under the single category, as Ambedkarites propose, to mark the difference and Savarna castes and isolate them. This defied the Ambedkarian demand to understand and use the collective or the plural caste identities, including ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes to draw the marked contrast between the Dalit (Bahujan) and the Ashrafia-Savarna classes.

Chapter 7: Mobilizing for Representation

7.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, amidst the Ashrafia-Savarna political elite and the state's biopolitics of numbers, Dalit activists find themselves quagmired in the identity crisis and the dilemma whether to mobilize Dalits on the basis of their 'Hindu identity' or 'Scheduled Castes', 'Darāwar' or even 'Dalit' identity. Whatever may be their political stance with regard to identity choice, they qualify their claims of numbers as political statements to demand greater representation or share in politics and society, which are not accepted wholeheartedly by the Savarna-Ashrafia elite that represents them in the name of Hindu religion and Sindhi nation. Given this Ashrafia-Savarna indifference to Dalit right to representation, in this chapter, I will show under different electoral systems Scheduled Castes (Dalits) were allowed to contest and failed to be represented (or included in the mainstream). I will present a Dalit view of electoral representation and the type of proportionate electorate system they want to introduce in Pakistan.

7.2 Ashrafia-Savarna Domination in Legislative Assemblies

'Bio-political' exercise by the state shapes the self-image of different groups and sections and groups of society that are classified, enumerated and administratively divided based by assigning them particular identity markers (see Foucault, 1978 [2001]; Legg, 2005; Vajpeyi, 2009; Findlay, 2003). In process, such state-driven regulation of political economy and society becomes one of the ways "people learn to recognize themselves as members of a nation-state" (Ansari S., 2016, p. 823) and reform their social identities thereby creating state-regulated reproduced forms of social inclusion and exclusion (Gupta A. , 2012, p. 262; Ansari S. , 2016, p. 822). Ashrafia-Savarna's domination in politics and Dalit exclusion is one such state-regulated practice having the sanction of hegemonic Ashrafia classes in Pakistan. The state through her laws and legal codes, (de)classifies and enumerates social groups as per the desires of Ashrafia and Savarna political elite. Resultantly, in the documentation, enumeration, classification for representation, and in political discourse neither Sayedism nor casteism are officially and publicly considered as the major political and categorical factors that reproduce discriminatory and oppressive as well as hegemonic structures of caste.

The partition of the subcontinent in 1947 was the historic juncture that brought about the demographic shift in Sindh, such as the exodus of about 0.8 million urban-based business class of Savarna who migrated from Sindh to India. The migrant Savarna were

replaced by the immigrant Urdu-speaking Ashrafia elite (Malkani, 1984; Kothari, 2007; Cheesman, 1997). However, it took some time for the Ashrafia Urdu-speaking elite to establish itself in politics, until it developed a kind of ethnic consciousness in 1972, partly mobilized by the migrant Nawab elite of Hyderabad in reaction to the Sindhi nationalism. The provincial assembly elections held in 1972 brought the Urdu-speaking Ashrafia elite into legislative assemblies. It was the time when the Sayed-Ashrafia elite had sufficiently consolidated itself and redefined their identity in opposition to Sindhi ethnolinguistic identity (see Table.20).

Table 22:Members of Sindh Assembly from Karachi

(From 5th Sindh Legislative Assembly 1972 till 2013-2018)

SAM	RC	B\P	S	SS	US	SJH	UP	Other mixed castes	Total Urdu-speaking Ashrafia elite
322	163	24	22	2	75	21	2	17	95
Percentage of 163		15%	13%	1%	46%	13%	1%	10%	58.2%

Acronyms:

SAM: Sindh Assembly Members.

RC: Members of Sindh Assembly Recognizable by their caste names.

B\P: Baloch and Pathan members of Sindh Assembly.

S: Sindhi Sammāt, the Ashrafia Muslim members, mostly the converts from 'Savarnas'.

SS: Sindhi-speaking Sayeds.

US: Urdu-speaking Sayed-Ashrafia class.

SJH: Sindhi-Speaking Jati Hindus.

UP: Urdu-speaking pasmanda.

Source: Data Compiled out the official data from the official website of Sindh. URL: <http://www.pas.gov.pk/index.php/assembly/past/en>. Retrieved on December 5, 2018.

Caste analysis of Sindh Assembly members from Karachi, the major city with the largest Urdu-speaking population, shows that Urdu-speaking pasmanda Muslims have been grossly underrepresented and that Urdu-speaking Ashrafia elite continues to be over-represented. Only 2 pasmanda members, as compared to 75 Sayed-Ashrafia from Urdu-speaking castes could get elected to the Assembly. Urdu Ashrafia (noble caste) migrant class also had Sayeds at the top that replaced urban-based Savarnas, who either were forced out of Karachi or left to their own volition to join Hindu India. This caste-class disparity in terms of representation has gone unnoticed so far primarily due to the normative assumption that if ever caste has been the problem, it has been in rural, not urban Sindh.

The Savarnas within Jati Hindus, however, remained the major stakeholders in power till February 4, 1948, till majority of them migrated to India, as evident from their 50-member strong presence in the Sindh Assembly when the new members took the oath of allegiance to the newly founded State of Pakistan (see Table 21). Compared to Savarnas within Jati Hindus, Scheduled Castes that lived in Sindh before partition and who were

thought of as Hindus were supposed to leave Sindh (Pakistan) for India. But they did not migrate in as many numbers as did Savarnas within Jati Hindus (Malkani 1984; Ansari 1992; Ibrahim 2005; Kothari, 2007; Sayed, 2013). The interviews conducted with the Dalit activists confirmed that the reasons for their lack of migration lie in their marginal socio-political status, lack of concern for macropolitical changes, and their indigenous ways of life such as pastoral migration across the open borders.

Table 23: Caste-class structure of Sindh Assembly 1947-55

No.	Sindh Assembly (Years)	Sammāt	Baloch\Pathan	Sayed	Jati Hindus (mostly Savarna)	Scheduled Castes	Others
1	1947-1948	36	34	24	50	0	----
2	1953-1955	31	29	32	9	1	10

Source: Data compiled from the official record from the website of the Sindh Assembly. URL:<http://www.pas.gov.pk>. Retrieved on December 4, 2018.

The caste classification of the 4th Sindh Assembly (1953 - 1955) shows that the numerical domination of Savarnas (Jati Hindus) gave way to the Sayed-Sammāt-Baloch domination. The 4th Sindh Assembly had a total of 112 members, of which 32 were Sayeds, Pirs, and Shahs, 31 were from Sammāt and Muslim business castes, 29 were Baloch and Khan, 10 were Hindu members with 9 were from Savarna Jati Hindus (3 Sodha Thakur, 6 Lohana). Only one Scheduled Caste, Gulji Ratanji Meghwar, could get elected to the Assembly. Although the Meghwar community vote him in huge numbers, yet he was primarily encouraged and patronized by the local Baloch feudal politician, Khair Muhammad Burgri, who wanted to weaken Sodha Thakur²⁶⁰ (Jati Hindu) hold on Tharparkar (Dharani, 2015). This employment of Dalit candidates by the Baloch feudal is one of the major factors that brought the geopolitical shift strengthening Baloch and Sammāt castes in Dalit belt. This consolidated the Sayed hegemony at the provincial level, reducing the Savarna strength in the Sindh Assembly from 50 seats in 1947-48 to a mere 9 in 1953-55. It brought the

²⁶⁰ Sodha Thakur feudal caste continued to have a political leverage in Tharparkar and Umerkot districts mainly because of Sammat hegemony, the group of Hindu and Muslim castes that saw for them more opportunities in Pakistan after the departure of Lohana/Sethia class of Hindus. It was primarily with that understanding that Rana Arjun Singh (of Umerkot, Sindh) contested the 1946 elections on All India Muslim League ticket, resisting all pressures by the Congress to join it. It was with Sammat-Ashrafia understanding that Sodha Rajput feudal lords continued to be elected to legislative assemblies of Pakistan.

concomitant rise in the share of Sayeds from 24 to 32, while the share of Scheduled Castes and pasmanda Muslims neither increased nor decreased. Instead, the reciprocal exchange of populations, both at the state level and at the level of society, led to the reclassification of Scheduled Castes as ‘non-Muslims’ to a distinct but Hindu-religious ‘minority’, and at a local level in Sindh, consolidated their identity as a Sindhi ethnic group.

Table 24: Caste Structure of Sindh Assembly (1937- 2013-17)

Sr. No	Frequency in SLA/SA*						
	<i>Sammāt Sindhi</i>	Baloch, Brohi, Pathan	Ashrafia Syed &	Jati Hindu (Savarna)	Scheduled Castes	Total Members	Total Member of Assembly
Total	421	310	318	117	10	1190	1604

*Acronyms

1. SA: Sindh Assembly

2. SLA: Sindh Legislative Assembly

Source: Sindh Assembly Archives.

The data is based on the caste names as mentioned in the list of members provided by Sindh Assembly online archives. The senior local political activists were also contacted along with tracing online biographies of several members to know the caste background of the members.

Gradually, as the Pakistani nationalist narrative penetrated in semi-urban centers and towns in Sindh, the Scheduled Caste activists began asserting their identities as patriotic Pakistani Hindus, and the victims of Hindu Verna system (Dharani, 2015). In both ways, the trajectory of identity presentation was in line with the Hindu-Muslim binaries that suited the state of Pakistan. Hence, as it is evident, the partition of the sub-continent was just a change of masters for the Dalits and the oppressed peasant classes. The Sayed and Shah replaced the Brahmin-Lohana class, and, after a decade, Sodha Thakurs (Savarna Jati Hindus) in the Thar region were overwhelmed by both Sammāt (Arbab/Nohrio) and Khosa (Baloch) castes.

The biopolitical construction of Scheduled Castes as a ‘minority’ favored Savarnas within Jati Hindus to sustain their 3/4th share of the non-Muslim/minority reserved seats in legislative assemblies (see Table 22 for the distribution of political constituencies and legislative assembly seats held by different caste groups). The exclusionary impact of such minoritisation, for instance, can also be seen during the local government elections held on July 25, 2018, in which forty-eight individual Dalits contested the election as the

representatives of the oppressed castes but failed to convince voters²⁶¹, and got only a few hundred to a few thousand votes each. Apart from the Hindu minority victim card, Savarnas, as alleged by Dalit activists, also make use of economic capital as a bribe to grab seats in legislative assemblies.



Figure 26: Election Jalsa of Lajpat Bheel, ex-president of BIF, who secured 12367 votes as an independent candidate.

Source: BIF (2018)

The concerns of Dalits are not wholly unfounded, as the politics of the Saithiyā class (Hindu Businessmen) is notoriously referred to in Sindhi civil society as *'briefcasan ji siyosat'* (politics of money bags). From the above discussion, it is obvious that the biopolitics of enumeration, classification, and representation of religious and caste groups greatly shaped the contestation and claims regarding the population numbers and related proportion of representation in politics and society.

²⁶¹Compared to many Sindhi nationalist parties, Dalit contestants secured more votes than many Sindhi nationalist contestants in General Elections 2018. For instance, from certain constituencies, Qadir Magsi of STP, a Sindhi nationalist leader secured only 1000 votes, whereas Lajpat Bheel secured 12367 votes. Source: Election Commission of Pakistan.

7.3 Scheduled Castes' Turn Out in Local Government Elections

Pakistan inherited the colonial local government system that initially appointed local administrators, and later elected Municipal and District Boards under 'local self-government system' (Khan, 2006). As discussed earlier, right from its inception, Pakistan was tribal-casteist society politically dominated by tribal-caste chiefs-cum-big landlords, and the subsequent local government systems so introduced adapted or adjusted to the pre-existing tribal-caste system. Despite all the electoral and democratic reforms introduced by different governments in Pakistan, the castes and tribes that had already been dominant in politics, and the tribal-caste families that inherited political legacy by virtue of being tribal-caste chiefs, continued to dominate politics at the local level. From 1947 to 1958 Pakistan continued with the British system of local self-government that did not offer any concrete proposal for Dalit representation. From 1958-1969 during Ayub Martial law regime the system of Basic Democracy (BD) was introduced. Several Scheduled Castes got elected as chairman and councilors from Tharparkar in BD elections but their proportion and the level of administrative or political position remained the lowest as compared to Savarna winners (Dharani, 2015; Mal, 2000). Similarly, during succeeding Martial Law regimes of General Zia and Musharaff, Dalits got some space to participate in local government election process and win a few seats in Tallukas and UCs in Tharparkar purely on the dint of their caste-based vote bank (Dharani, 2015; Mal, 2000), but they failed to sustain the gains achieved during different periods.

The occasional rise and the frequent decline in political share were attributed by Dalit activists to the counter-consciousness among the Ashrafia elite that Dalits were rising grabbing their inherited share. Ashrafia class apprehensive of Dalit rise wanted to keep the Dalits excluded. Since both the local government systems that introduced in different regimes were the forms of 'controlled democracy' regulated with the help of local Ashrafia-Savarna elites, only tribal-caste lords or the local Ashrafia *waderos* (landlords) could be elected on the top.

Before I began my fieldwork, the Local Government Elections, 2015 held on 24th August²⁶² had finished successfully with several Dalit contestants winning. Some of the Dalit activists, particularly Meghwars, were quite jubilant that some of their caste-fellows had won more seats than expected. The Scheduled Castes' turn out in that election,

²⁶² Source: Election Commission of Pakistan Notifications for Mirpurkhas No. No.F.9(21)/2015-LGE-(S), No.F.9(9)/2015-LGE-(S), Tando Allahyar No.F.9(10)/2015-LGE-(S), Badin. No. F.9(14)/2015-LGE(S).

demonstrated both the strength of their population and the hierarchy of political exclusion. In 2015 elections²⁶³ the late removal of directly elected reserved seats for non-Muslims was criticized by minority rights groups²⁶⁴. Nonetheless, over 600 candidates from minority communities ran on general seats. Remarkably, districts with higher proportions of the Dalit population, such as Tharparkar and Umerkot, witnessed a significant number of non-Muslims contesting on general seats. Similarly, voter turn-out in Sindh was the highest (70%) in Tharparkar followed by Umerkot (63%) the Dalit concentrated districts, which can be taken as the indicator of the political consciousness of SCs. Yet, there were other reasons too. Dalit activist opined that the reason for the higher than expected turn out also lied in the increasing interest of the mainstream parliamentary parties in Dalit vote bank, and the targeted campaign in Dalit concentrated districts of Sindh. Several Dalits contested, some on party tickets, others independently openly challenging the ‘upper caste’ candidates of major political parties or the ones of their caste pitted against them by parties. Hence, the majority of the would-be Dalit contestants were tamed by the parties and offered reserved seats allocated for non-Muslims.

Notwithstanding that, some candidates from Scheduled Castes contested in elections forming UC level and district level panels in lower Sindh. Their slogans were based on identity assertions and proclamations that they are indigenous Sindhi and the Dravidians. Traditionally dominant tribal-caste families having control over major political parties employed the usual baradari networking to mobilize the masses. Further, they developed trans-party alliances to win over each other. For instance, Larkana Awāmī Ittehad, comprised of former PPP members and the Pakistan People’s Party-Workers, the 10- party anti-PPP Tameer-i-Ittehad Hyderabad. This election not only helped recognize the demographic strength of the Hindu-Dalit population in these districts but also the recognition of it by the national level politicians that a very significant non-Muslim Dalit marginalized community lives in Southern Sindh that cannot be anymore ignored. The highest voter turn-out was the result of giving maximum chances to the Dalit population to vote their Dalit leaders.

²⁶³ Originally scheduled on 3rd December, the third phase polling date was moved to 5th December due to a religious holiday. See ECP Notification N.F. (1) 2015-LGC P (Vol-II), 22 October 2015. Elections in Sanghar district were deferred to 23 January 2016. 115. See, Election Commission of Pakistan, URL: http://ecp.gov.pk/Misc/Glossary_Final.pdf . Retrieved on January 8, 2018.

²⁶⁴ The Sikh community boycotted the elections, objecting to the removal of directly elected reserved seats and the lack of reserved seats for Sikhs and Parsis. See, e.g., “Sikhs Declare Boycott of Local Government Elections in Sindh,” Dawn, 23 September 2015. See URL: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1208688>., Retrieved on January 8, 2018.

All political parties prioritized to give tickets to ‘lower castes’ from among Jati Hindus or to the Dalit (SC) candidates. For many Dalit activists, it was like a dream come true, since many of the contesting candidates had probably not even dreamt of contesting for elections, not in the near future at least. A total of 1,050 candidates contested the polls in Tharparkar for the 432 seats in Union councils, town committees, and the district council. Half of these contestants were members of Dalit communities, according to the unofficial results as collected from Dalit activists, over 150 Scheduled Castes contestants won the polls in their respective constituencies in Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas divisions. Several hundred Kolhi, Bheel, Oad, Baghri and Meghwar contested in local government elections, launched campaigns, visited villages, gathered and mobilized common people who knew little about the local government election process. That was truly a people-empowering exercise. Mircho Meghwar defeated the PPP’s Muhammad Khan, an influential landlord of Diplo taluka. Another such case is that of Achar Meghwar, a Scheduled Castes Hindu of Umerkot district who is a cobbler. He defeated a PTI candidate, Raees Abdul Sattar Khoso, a local landlord. Parkar Sujag Panel of Veerji Kolhi won independently from UC Behrano as the 80 percent of its Dalits voters from Kolhi, Meghwar and Kumbhar castes joined hands to defeat PPP’s candidate Khoso, the ‘upper caste’ lord, whose baradari vote is not more 40 percent.

Table 25: Dalits and Hindus in local government (District Council) winning on general seats in Tharparkar, Umerkot and Tando Allahyar

District	Total minority population percent in District	Non-Muslim Voters (Mostly Dalits)	Non-Muslims (Mostly Dalit) winners	Total Members including Total Reserved Seats excluding non-Muslims(including peasant/worker, women and youth)	Percentage (win)
Tharparkar	46% ²⁶⁵	219,342	209	720	29%
Umerkot	49%	189,501	119	504	23.6%
Tando Allahyar²⁶⁶	26%	74,954	25	300	8.3 %
Total	40.3%	483,796	353	1,524	23.16%

Ramchand Bheel from U.C Talhi also got elected as an independent candidate from village Chackar Talhi, district Umerkot, primarily on the dint of his Bheel and Kolhi vote

²⁶⁵ See. [Minorities’ votes may decide fate of 96 constituencies](https://www.dawn.com/news/796356) (Dawn: March, 19, 2013) URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/796356>., Retrieved on January 8, 2018.

²⁶⁶ In Tando Allahyar no Dalit or non-Muslim could get elected. They could only manage to have 25 seats reserved for non-Muslims. This then follows across the districts in Sindh. Hindus and Dalits grabbing reserved seats except at certain places in Ghotki and Jamshoro District where considerable number of Jati Hindus live.

strength although some local Pasmada muslim castes also supported. PPP could not convince any candidate there to contest against Ramchand Bheel's panel. PPP even got the date extended through court orders to find the suitable candidate but failed (See Table III-A and III-B in Appendix).

Statistic on the election of District councilor and UC Chairman in Tharparkar shows that Dalits have been grossly under-represented and score as low (17 and 23 percent respectively) as half of their electoral strength, that is, 46 percent. Whereas, overall representation (29%) is also far lower than their numbers²⁶⁷. And if we added to it the results of Umerkot where only one Dalit could be elected to District council position, and none as UC Chairman, the percentage drops to 11.7% of the total votes in both districts²⁶⁸. The combined result of three Dalit dominated districts, Tharparkar, Umerkot, and Tando Allahyar shows 23 percent representation whereas their total vote strength in these districts is 40 percent. This shows the Dalits as grossly underrepresented in all districts despite their considerable majority in certain districts in Sindh. Apart from reserved seats for non-Muslims, some 11 Dalit women also got elected/nominated on reserved seats for women from Tharparkar and Umerkot.

In Umerkot, out of the total 7 seats, only two Dalits Sooraj Meghwar was elected for Town committee Samaro and Lono Mal for town committee Pithoro²⁶⁹. From Tharparkar, Mr.Karni Singh Sodha for Vice Chairman District Council, Mr. Manoj Kumar for Chairman Municipal Committee Mithi, Mr. Doongro Mal, Vice Chairman, Mr.Pardeep Kumar (, Chairman, Chelhar) and Karamchand , Vice Chairman, Mr.Kamlesh, chairman for Town Committee, Islamkot (all three Savarnas), and Mr. Mohan Lal Meghwar (brother of Senator Giyanchand) for Town Committee Diplo. Whereas Jalo Kolhi got elected as Vice-chairman for Town Committee Nangarparkar. Hence, out of 14 seats, 8 were grabbed by non-Muslims mostly by Savarnas²⁷⁰. Similarly in District Mirpurkhas where Non-Muslims mostly Dalits constitute 33% of the total population with 12,357 votes and other districts of lower Sindh where Dalits constitute more than 20 percent of the population, none of the candidates was returned against the following category of

²⁶⁷ See Table II in Appendix.

²⁶⁸ See Table III-A and III-B, IV and V in Appendix.

²⁶⁹ Source: Election Commission of Pakistan's Notification No. No.F.9(22)/2015-LGE-(S), issued on 29th August 2016.

Also see Table IV in Appendix. Dalits and Hindus in local government Umerkot District.

²⁷⁰ See Election Commission of Pakistan's Notification No. No.F.9(23)/2015-LGE-(S), dated: 29th August 2016.

(Chairman/Vice Chairman & Mayor/Deputy Mayor) in the local Council that is, in Town Committee. This shows the discriminatory pattern in the distribution of seats in both the district council and the Town Committee seats with the Ashrafia dominating followed by the Savarnas. Dalits, once again, remained grossly underrepresented despite being in the numerical majority. This latest political exclusion of the Dalits, I believe, has much to do with the period of General Zia's rule.

7.4 The Choice of Joint or Separate Electorates?

Regarding the nature of electorates, B.R. Ambedkar had said that "Joint electorate or separate electorate is a matter of machinery for achieving a given purpose. It is not a matter of principle" (Ambedkar B. R., 1979, p. 374). Dalits in Sindh held different opinions as regards which electoral system could best ensure their representation. To know which type of electoral system is understood to ensure maximum Dalit representation, I sought an opinion of some 165 Dalit activists through online social media survey as well as by asking them directly during interviews and telephonic conversations. To update them from my side, insofar as I knew about the latest innovations, I told Dalit activists that a kind of proportionate electoral system had been lately introduced in several countries of the world including Nepal (Hangen, 2007) and Germany (Stratmann & Baur, 2002).

In my role as an activist affiliated with DST, I tried to convince them these latest electoral systems go a long way to ensure equitable representation of marginalized communities and minorities in those countries, majority of them agreed that it is good and be introduced here and that it is a better option than any of the electoral systems so far tried in Pakistan. Except for those Dalit activists who had visited Nepal or those who had been affiliated with Asia Dalit Rights Forum and IDSN, very few knew about the proportionate electoral system. To seek their very generic opinion just to make comparison possible, I explained to them, both in writing as well as orally, a very general outline of the proportionate electoral system as it operates in Nepal and Germany. Not all agreed with me though.

One of the leading Dalit activists in a meeting of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek suggested to have separate electorate for Scheduled Castes within Hindu minority, or reserved seats in proportion to their population within Hindu minority or within Non-Muslims. Another suggested reserved seats for Scheduled Castes and semi-nomadic or settled tribes, and Adivasi tribes not listed in Scheduled Castes, in proportion to their population irrespective of their religion. All of the activists of DST, however, agree that the proportionate

electorate system be introduced in districts where Dalits make up more than 15 percent of the population and that within Scheduled Castes seats be reserved for women and extremely backward castes and tribes, that is, Baghri, Gurgula, Kabootra, Jandawra, Sheedi, Shaikh Bheel, etc. To understand, how Dalit activists reached that understanding, I would briefly present here the historical profile of how electoral system has worked for the Dalits at times benefiting and at other times becoming the reason for their exclusion.

Since the neo-communal approach dominated the politics of Pakistan, it framed electoral policies on religious lines. The issue of separate or joint electorates was to be decided not based on ethnic-caste-based grouping but on the basis of religious differences with Muslims and non-Muslims, or Muslims and Hindus as major social identity signifiers. This issue of the separate or joint electorate and reserved seats for minorities for the first time after Partition emerged in (West) Pakistan during President Ayub Khan's regime in 1962. Zulfikar Bhutto continued with Ayub Khan's electoral equation. Under Fourth Amendment in the constitution in November 1975, some seats were reserved for non-Muslims in both the provincial and national assemblies "on the basis of proportional representation with a single transferable vote", making the National Assembly their electoral college (Smith D. E., 2015, p. 27; Zia, 2010, p. 158). In September 1978 General Ziaul-Haq amended 'Representation of the People's Act', to introduce separate electorates or proportional representation (PR) for the non-Muslims including 'Scheduled Castes and Hindus' (Ayoob, 2014). The principle of separate electorates for the Muslims and the non-Muslims, however, was first introduced in the electoral system of Pakistan on September 24, 1978. Four Seats in National Assembly were mentioned as reserved for Scheduled (and Hindus) as per Article, 51 (2) A, and in provincial assemblies of Sindh (4), Baluchistan (1) and KPK ((1) for Scheduled Castes and Hindus, the provision that non-Muslims acquired through President's Order No. 14 of 1985 (Kamran & Purewal, 2016, S. 185-186). The whole of Pakistan served as a single constituency for the National Assembly seats reserved for each community. Each province was made a single constituency for reserved seats in the respective provincial assembly. The general elections of 1985, 1988, 1990, 1993 and 1997 were all held under this system that gave the pro-religious political parties an undue advantage (Ayoob, 2014).

The separate electorates, however, met practically none of the Scheduled Castes' demands. General Zia, in religious zeal, to construct the perfect polarity between the believers and the non-believers, allowed subsuming Scheduled Castes under Hindu lumping them both together and allotting them a joint electorate with each other yet

separate electorate from the other religious communities and the Muslims. Although General Zia did not give Scheduled Castes a separate electorate it did specify the proportion of seats for Scheduled and Jati Hindus. Hence although it was separate electorates from the Muslim majority and a joint electorate with Hindus there was some identity-based demarcation that had to be proportionately met. The Scheduled Castes leadership that made to the assemblies was, however, jubilant that they could now be able to elect their representatives to the assembly. Hence, when elections were held in 1985, the electoral documentation mentioned community affiliation of five non-Muslims as ‘Hindu\Scheduled Castes’.

Being obsessed with the notion of ‘Muslim Ummah’, General Zia promoted minoritisation and the polarization of the society based on Muslim-non-Muslim binarism. The Dalit leadership of that time let the separate electorates prevail, although a tiny section of the Dalit activists was against it even at that time. Giving the credit to General Zia, a senior Dalit activist Ramchand, told, “The Specification of seats for the Scheduled Castes within the Hindu quota was largely due to Zia’s antipathy towards Jati Hindus and the soft corner for the poor class of Hindus.” Similar sentiments have also been expressed by Paru Mal Kolhi, who had been elected as MNA during Zia’s rule (Mal, 2000). Probably to convince the poor class of Hindus that Islam is the best religion for them, General Zia encouraged Kolhi, Bheel, and Meghwar of Tharparkar to enter into politics.

Apart from Paru Mal Kolhi, Gulji Ratanji Meghwar was made his way to the National Assembly of Pakistan. In a joint electorate, however, it was probably not possible for them to get elected. Paru Mal writes about the Kolhi politics during 1985 elections that, ‘in the history of Kolhi community only two events can be written, one that of 1859 when Rooplo won the battle against the British, and another when in 1985, two Kolhis got elected as members of the provincial and national assembly. On the provincial assembly seat, Teekam Das Makwana got elected, and on national assembly, Paru Mal Parmar got elected. Both the members did their best to provide relief to the people of Tharparkar, particularly, Nangarparkar. They opened up several schools, community centers, health care centers, built water tanks, provided electricity to villages and jobs to teachers, distributed millions of rupees among the orphan and the poor, during the severe drought of 1986 exerted the government and got special grant released for Tharparkar. Kolhi members virtually did whatever they could for their people (Mal, 2000, pp. 54, 55). Their elections are proof of working democracy when members get elected from below and from within the lower classes. Hence, it was during Zia’s regime that a few Scheduled Castes, for the first time

got elected to the local, provincial and federal government, yet their proportion was far lower than the actual population. The euphoria of Scheduled Castes leadership, that they were proffered a chance to contest under separate electorate system, pales down when one ponders over the persistent domination of Savarnas in electoral politics.

Although the introduction of separate electorates by Zia was primarily motivated by his communal motivations to otherise non-Muslims and alienate the left, it did certainly prove productive for the privileged Savarnas within Jati Hindu. Under separate electorate system from 1985 till 1997, only four Scheduled Castes could get elected to Sindh Assembly as compared to 24 Jati Hindus (mostly Savarnas). In National Assembly, only 6 could get elected as compared to 14 Jati Hindus (mostly Savarnas). Hence a few Scheduled Castes members continued to be elected under the separate electoral system (for details see Table VI and VII in Appendix)²⁷¹. Hence, more than benefiting Scheduled Castes, the separate electoral system proved useful for the dominant Jati Hindu political class as it was, in fact, separate electorate from Muslims and other minorities while the joint electorate with the Jati Hindus. It was the equation that, although bolstered the confidence of Scheduled Castes as they were enabled to contest in elections and elect their political representatives, at the same time, lumping them with Hindus not only hardened their Hindu identity and weakened Scheduled Castes or Dalit consciousness but also increased Jati Hindu's political prowess. Hence, virtually it was not a separate electorate for Scheduled Castes, but collectively for both Scheduled Castes and Jati Hindu minority, and because of that ultimately benefited to Savarnas only as they were already dominating the political sphere. Scheduled Castes, being marginalized and politically lacking in awareness (except Meghwars) lacked political tools and financial prowess to mobilize their tribes and castes. Moreover, the relative political privilege, the social and economic capital of Savarnas played a decisive role in terms of who could better manage political campaigning and resultantly who will have the support of tribal-casteist parliamentary parties. Although political parties were banned to contest elections during Zia's rule, they continued to influence the election of contesting members helping Savarnas to get elected and patronizing the Dalit majority as their subordinates.

In 1996, the PPP government attempted to bring about electoral reforms by including the provision of a dual vote to non-Muslim citizens, one for minority seats and

²⁷¹ For details see Table VI and VII in Appendix. Scheduled Castes representation in Sindh Assembly and National Assembly.

the other general (Muslim) seats. Religious parties opposed the Bill and ultimately it was dropped. (Smith D. E., 2015, p. 27; Zia, 2010, p. 158). Resultantly, the separate electorate system as introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq continued till Local Government Ordinance 2001 that reintroduced joint electorates for the national and provincial legislature. Elections were held on non-party basis in 2001 and again in 2005. This system did not, however, differentiate between different groups of non-Muslims or minorities as was done during General Zia-ul-Haq's regime. Instead of explicitly following Hindu-Muslim idiom, this time majority-minority narrative was followed. Four percent seats were reserved for 'minorities' at each level of governance.

Primarily aimed at empowering the weaker sections of society by bringing them into the decision-making sphere of local politics, both the separate and joint electorates were about dividing electorates on the religious lines. Yet as far as the community-based engagement was concerned, the system of separate electorates brought made Dalit communities more conscious of their vote. They did not vote on the basis of religion but the caste or the community and tended to vote for the candidate of their caste in local government and general elections. Because of that perceived empowerment, most of the Scheduled Castes did not want to abolish separate electors. Contrary to that Savarnas campaigned for abolishing separate electorates.

Meanwhile, the party-based reservations further consolidation of Saithiyā (Savarna) hold on Hindu (minority) politics. From as early as the politics of representation began in 1973, political parties have tended to sell out their tickets to Bania or Saithiyā (savarna) castes (Sangi, 2013; Syed G. M., 1993). Each selection/election on reserved seats enabled only the rich upper caste again to bribe the parties to purchase seats at the cost of majority Scheduled Castes. Complaints of the on-ground manipulation of Scheduled Castes' vote and forcible voting were also made by the Dalits. For instance, a Dalit activist told that Dr. Khatumal on the floor of Sindh Assembly agitated against such manipulation of Dalit vote reporting that during elections in Sanghar, Dalit peasants were forced by their 'upper caste' Muslim landlords, their identity cards were confiscated, and they were made bound to be present at their guesthouses (Otaq) early in the morning.

Hence, despite their very huge population and the voting strength, the Scheduled Castes seem to have been deliberately ignored in both the joint and the separate electoral systems. Dalit activists were, however, pressing for the proportionate or the separate electorates with some asking for the separate electorates even from Jati Hindus and the rest of minorities. Yet the majority of Scheduled Castes were simply demanding the restoration

of the ‘*bitey vote waro nizam*’, that is, the separate electorates or the dual voting system²⁷² as before. This was what the Savarna and the Christian elite were also already demanding²⁷³ (Islam, 2012). From the Ambedkarian perspective, any such system based on the separate electorate that did not differentiate between the oppressor and the oppressed or the marginalized castes will not benefit the Dalitbahujans. Dalit activists did not seem to be sufficiently apprehensive of that Ambedkarian stance.

7.5 Legitimacy of Scheduled Castes’ Share of Seats in Legislative Assemblies

The proportionate electoral system as it is working currently in Pakistan was introduced by General Pervez Musharraf in 2002. Under this system, except for Ahmadis, non-Muslims can vote and contest elections on the general seats, but they also have seats reserved for them in the Senate, National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies. For Ahmadis there is a supplementary list in electoral rolls (Zia, 2010, p. 159). All the reserved seats for non-Muslims are filled in through indirect selection of minority candidates by the political parties in proportion to their respective seat strength of each party in the legislature. Minority candidates stand elected according to the order of the list provided by the party. To qualify for a reserved seat, a party must have at least five percent of the general seats.

The debate among ‘minorities’ (including Dalit leaders) was that which of the two systems was better: Dual voting or separate electorate or the joint electorate with reserved seats for non-Muslims (Islam, 2012; Aqeel, 2018)²⁷⁴. In response to a petition filed by Christian activist Julius Salik in 2010 for direct elections through minority vote, Supreme Court in August 2015 declared existing party-driven proportionate electoral system against the three principles laid down in the Objectives Resolution of the Constitution, particularly the article that “the State shall exercise its powers and authority through the chosen representatives of the people”; the third states “that the principles of democracy [...] shall be fully observed”. (Aqeel, 2018). Even if party ticket-based electoral system of dual representation were replaced with non-party based dual voting rights, Dalits were likely to remain the least represented section of society. Since all the major political parties were

²⁷² “Dual Voting Right is an electoral system through which religious minorities can elect their representatives in Parliament, similar to separate electorates, while simultaneously voting for general seat candidates.” (Islam, 2012)

²⁷³ Ramesh Kumar Vankvani had recommended to Electoral Reform Committee to grant dual vote right to minorities. Source: Dawn, June 24, 2015.

²⁷⁴ “Dual Voting Right is an electoral system through which religious minorities can elect their representatives in Parliament, similar to separate electorates, while simultaneously voting for general seat candidates” (Islam, 2012).

structurally hierarchized on caste lines and the political representatives could mainly be chosen based on their caste alliances, the Dalit castes were likely to find their place at the bottom.

The party ticket-based system was rationalized on grounds that non-Muslims cannot win by contesting general seats, offered as the rationale for such a system of reservations. It, however, was not deemed by Dalit activists as beneficial in the case of Dalit concentrated districts where they could win even on general seats by aligning with pasmanda Muslims, with the ex-Shudra castes within Jati Hindus, or any other tribal-caste group. Because of that most of the Dalit activists were against existing reserved seats based on the existing proportionate electoral system and wanted to introduce the alternative proportionate electoral system that could be representative of Scheduled Castes. The Dalit activist's agenda that, each caste group should have seats reserved in proportion to their community and the caste strength was not on being attended by minority rights activists.

The dominant groups within Dalit activists seemed to be carried away by the 'minority politics' and the demand for dual voting rights on religious grounds. They conceded to them despite the fact that they lamented in their private meetings that 'minority-religious' narrative benefited a tiny Savarna elite and the Christian elite. Scheduled Castes did share certain issues with the Savarnas such as the demand for the increase in 'minority' seats of assemblies, for which 1 seat in National Assembly and 3 in Sindh Assembly had also been recommended (Sangi, 2013). They did it with the hope that they will be ultimately offered most of the seats because of their demographic majority.

Under current 'First past the post' (FPP) system, in which seats allotted by winning parties, Scheduled Castes could manage to have 5 seats only. At the time, I was doing fieldwork; there were only a single member from Scheduled Castes in Sindh Assembly and one in the Senate (Upper House of the parliament). There was not a single member in National Assembly from amongst the 10 seats reserved for non-Muslims or on General seats. Out of 40-plus Scheduled Castes communities, it was only Meghwar community that seemed, in some way, to have gained in terms of political representation under the existing electoral system. Whereas the rest of the Scheduled Castes are still lagging far behind in terms of political representation, access to economic resources, and the major reason for which, is considered by the Dalit activists as the domination of the Savarnas in the name of Hindu religion and Hindu culture. This discrepancy in Dalit representation was reflective of the dilemma whereby permanent minorities (Dalits) having decisive vote bank remain permanently excluded from macro politics.

To overcome Savarna domination, Dalit activists demanded direct/proportionate/separate electoral system, instead of the allotment of minority reserved seats through party tickets. They related their political under-representation to the issue of the legal and constitutional reclassification and redefinition of ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity markers and demanded as a religiously neutral classification and definition. Yet, in the parliamentary political domain, and from within the ‘minority’ narrative they question the persistent hegemony of Savarnas. Take an example of the Dalit activist’s concerning over the election and selection of minority members to legislative assemblies during the last two assemblies. From amongst Savarnas, the Deewan family of Thano Bola Khan (also known as Kohistani Deewan) have always been dominant in minority politics of rural Sindh.

If we reflect on the record of the last two Sindh Assemblies (2008 to 2013 and 2013 to 2018), to see which party gave tickets to whom, it would become evident that Savarnas have always capitalized on their caste capital. In 2013 in Sindh Assembly, out of 9 members elected on reserved seats, 7 were Savarnas. Only one Khatumal Jeewan was from Scheduled Castes)²⁷⁵. Deewan Chand Chawla (MQM), Eng. Pesumal (PPP), Giyan Chand Essrani (PPPP), Hargun Das Ahuja (MQM), Lal Chand Ukrani (PPPP), Mahesh Kumar Chawla (PPPP), Nand Kumar (PML-F) were the Savarnas that got elected on reserved seats allotted by MQM, PPPP, and PML-F, the parties dominated and controlled by the Ashrafia class. During 2008 election out of 9 seats reserved for non-Muslims, seven male Jati Hindu members were elected that included Chattan Mal Amrani (PLM-Q) of Thano Bola Khan, Hargun Das Ahuja (MQM) from Larkana, Mr. Lal Chand (PPPP) from Thatta, Mr. Mohan Lal (PPPP) of Thano Bola Khan, Mukesh Kumar, (PPPP) from Karachi, Pitanber Sehwan (PPPP) from Sukkur. Apart from that, Ram Singh Sodho (Jati Hindu) from Tharparkar was elected on PML-F’s ticket Whereas, Partab Singh Bheel (Dalit) from Tharparkar, was also elected on MQM’s ticket but died after a year.

As it is evident, all major political parties offered reserved seats predominantly to Savarnas. Hence, out of the total 21 ‘Hindu’ legislators elected to the previous two assemblies, only 3 belonged to Scheduled Castes. This political equation contradicts the principle of equal representation if viewed from the Ambedkarian perspective. Scheduled Castes are likely to fail to get the seats under the FPP system as they do not make more than 50 percent in any district. Under the most favorable scenario, they can have

²⁷⁵ For details see Table I in Appendix, and the dataset: Hussain (2019), “ An Ethnographic Study of Dalit Activism in Sindh (Supplementary Thesis Data)”, Mendeley Data, v2<http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/ftcwpfhwvs.2>

representation only if they make alliance or bargain with certain factions of Muslim majority or factions of caste Hindu minority.

Table 26: Political Representation Scheduled Castes (2013-2018)
(ESTIMATES BASED ON 1951, 1961, 1972, 1998 CENSUS REPORTS AND ESTIMATED ANNUAL GROWTH RATE FROM 1998 TO 2017²⁷⁶)

	Estimate population percentage in 2018		Reserved seats for Non-Muslims and women				General seats Under FPP system (SC share)		Estimated SC seats Under proportionate Electorate System	
	SC % of the total population	SC % of the minority population	Current SC share (Non-Muslims) 2013-18	Estimated SC Share (Non-Muslims) 2013-18	Women Reserved Seats current SC share 2013-18	Women Reserved Seats estimate SC share	Current	Estimated	Estimated Vote Share ²⁷⁷	Estimated seats
National Assembly	1 %	27% ²⁷⁸	0	2.7	0	0.6	0	2.7	998850	4-7
Sindh Assembly	5.2%	60%	1	5.4	0	1.5	1	9	925740	10-12
Senate	1%	27%	0	1	1	0.17	2	2.17	00	1.17
Total			1	9	0	2.3	3	11.8		15-20

As per official reports, the total non-Muslim voters in Pakistan are 2,997,841, and the total registered Hindu voters in Sindh are 1498275 (Khan, 2017), and the total national Assembly general seats are 270 that makeup 326675 voters per NA electorates. Given these figures, Scheduled Castes' estimated vote share (998,850) entitles them to have 3 to 4 seats in National Assembly. Since in lower Sindh Scheduled Castes to make up a considerable majority\ minority ranging from 50 percent to 15 percent, dual vote right or separate electorate or the proportionate electorate all be welcomed by Dalit activists. Community or caste's vote strength is their asset and they have come realize that fact. Given the fact that proportionate electoral system (as in Nepal and Germany), even with or without separating electorate for Scheduled Castes in Dalit dominated districts, can enable Dalit (activists) to capture at least 3 seats in National Assembly, one seat in Punjab Assembly, and 7 to 8 seats in Sindh Assembly²⁷⁹ (See Table 23).

²⁷⁶ Between 1998-2017 the average population growth rate of Pakistan stood at 2.40%. Source: [Provisional Summary Results of 6th Population and Housing Census – 2017](http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/)". Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. URL: <http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/>, Retrieved 2018-08-28. And URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1307120>. Retrieved on, 2018-08-28.

²⁷⁷ Source: Election Commission of Pakistan.

URL: <https://www.ecp.gov.pk/frnGenericPage.aspx?PageID=3047>.

And URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1307120>. Retrieved on retrieved on, January 18, 2018.

²⁷⁸ Scheduled Castes make up about 27 percent of minority or non-Muslim population in Pakistan. In Sindh they make up about 60 percent of minority and 66.6 percent of the Hindu population.

²⁷⁹ Provincial Assembly of Sindh consists of 168 general seats and the total registered voters in Sindh are 20,644,304. Each electorate consists of 122882 voters.

This elaborate understanding of the electoral strength was developed by a few Dalit activists of DST after the two years of discussion and debate. They began demanding the proportionate electoral system with or without seats reserved for Scheduled Castes in districts where Hindus and Scheduled Castes make more than 15 percent of the total population. They wanted to bring about amendments in the Representation of the People Act of 1976 and the rules of the Election Commission. Certain Scheduled Castes activists, particularly belonging to BIF, demanded that it should be made mandatory for registered political parties to allot tickets to non-Muslims candidates, particularly Scheduled Castes, to contest elections on several seats according to the ratio of their population.

A few, particularly from DST demanded the introduction of the proportionate electoral system, the idea that was largely influenced by the success of the proportionate electoral system in Nepal, and the similar efforts of Dalit activists in India. M.C. Raj, a Dalit activist, and writer from Karnataka argues that “Political nationalism of postmodern India will have to seriously move in the direction of proportionate electoral system that will give the right to the people their legitimate political space in the instruments and mechanisms of national governance (Raj M. , 2010, p. 9) Following similar lines in Sindh, Dalit Sujaag Tehreek’s manifesto demands:

Since reservations and quotas for the marginalized is not an ideal solution, as it was not at all even from the times of its introduction before partition, and was quite a compromised solution offered to Dalit class in the wake of Poona Pact, as against separate electorates as demanded by B.R. Ambedkar, it is therefore demanded, in the light of new and better electoral systems introduced internationally, that Dalit class be politically empowered through proportional electoral system. Till that is achieved, all the marginalized communities and the historically oppressed classes be uplifted through positive discrimination, proportional representation, quotas, and reservations.

(Dalit Manifesto, DST, 2016, pg.25)

A tiny minority, mostly the Dalit activists affiliated with DST and PDSN were also demanding separate electorate, but not based on non-Muslim/minority, but specifically based on Scheduled Castes identity and in proportion to their demographic strength. Hence, their demand was for the separate electorates based on Scheduled Caste reservation of seats. These Dalit activists demand separate electorates, not based on the Hindu minority, but as a majority Scheduled Castes within the minority, that is, they demand 85 percent reservation from within the Hindu pool. This idea of separate electorates for Scheduled Castes was also inspired by the Ambedkar’s demand of separate electorates for Scheduled Castes, that was thwarted by Hindutvadis and particularly by M.K. Gandhi, and Ambedkar was forced to concede to the quota for Scheduled Castes within the Hindu fold (see Jaffrelot, 2010). Regrettably, according to one of the leading Dalit activists of DST,

Pakistan is also following in the same Gandhian footsteps by allotting Scheduled Castes a nominal share and recognition from within Hindu order. These DST and BIF activists, however, were still struggling to convince the majority of the activists to whom the told ‘dual-vote system’ of Zia’s era made more sense.

7.5.1 18th Amendment and the Removal of Scheduled Castes’ Seats

The eighteenth Amendment in 2010 holds greater significance for Scheduled Castes as it scrapped the legislative assembly seats specified for them. Before the 7th Amendment in 1977, the constitution specified a quota-based proportion of seats specifically mentioning Christian, Hindu and Scheduled Castes in clause (3) of Article 106 as adopted in the constitution of 1973²⁸⁰. It was stipulated that in addition to the number of seats referred to in clause (1), “there shall be in the National Assembly ten additional seats reserved as follows for the persons referred to in clause (3) of Article 106.” In terms of allocation in the provinces, it further read:

In addition to the seats in the Provincial Assemblies for the Provinces of Baluchistan, Punjab, The North-West Frontier, and Sind specified in clause (1), there shall be in those Assemblies the number of seats hereinafter specified for non-Muslims.

Hence, article 106 of the Constitution further laid down that the Provincial Assembly of each province shall consist of 7 members for the seats reserved for Non-Muslims from Hindus and the persons belonging to Scheduled Castes. It stipulated that out of the 7 members, 5 would be elected from Sindh, 1 from Punjab and 1 from Baluchistan. With the passage of the 18th Amendment in 2010, the specific allocation of seats was replaced by inserting a one-sentence description in clause 4 of article 5. It read, “In addition to the number of seats referred to in clause (3), there shall be, in the National Assembly, ten seats reserved for non-Muslims.” In four provincial assemblies further 22 seats for the ‘minorities’ were reserved. This division of the seats did not bring into consideration the proportionate share of Scheduled Castes. Instead, the provision of seats for Scheduled Castes was removed by lumping all non-Muslims together without specifying the proportion for each ‘minority’ community. It was assumed that “Where no independent seat is allocated to a minority in a province for being very small in number, the seat allocated jointly to all other non-Muslims in that Province shall be deemed to include that minority”²⁸¹.

²⁸⁰ Source: Election Commission of Pakistan. URL:

<https://www.ecp.gov.pk/ge/General%20Elections%201988%20Vol-I%20Report.pdf>

²⁸¹ See also URL: <https://pakistanconstitutionlaw.com/article-106-constitution-of-provincial-assemblies/> .

See also URL: http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/orders/po14_1985.html

Looking from the Dalitbahujan perspective, these amendments, as framed in a generic minority paradigm, clearly ignored the graded inequalities and the class-based marginalization of Scheduled Castes as compared to Jati Hindus in general and the Savarna castes in particular. The collapse of specified proportions for Sikhs, Scheduled Castes and Christians was not questioned much by the Dalit leadership of that time. Surindar Valasai, Dalit activist, advisor to PPP Chairman on minority issues, and Media Cell In-charge (PPP), Bilawal House Karachi, told that Scheduled Castes had no representation in the parliament at that time He told that ‘Scheduled Castes leadership could not wield sufficient political clout to pressurize the political parties and the Jati Hindu elite within the government of PPP to let the specific proportions remain intact’. He further added, ‘I sent a proposal to the Constitutional Reforms Committee’s Chairman Raza Rabbani, and also spoke to him about the separate seats for Scheduled Castes but could not have a positive response’. He stressed the need to create awareness among the parliamentarians about the recognition of the subaltern status of Scheduled Castes in Pakistan. Hence, despite being concerned regarding political exclusion, Dalit politicians were swayed by the Savarna minority politics. Taking one step backward, the Scheduled Castes leadership affiliated with PPP rather hailed the overall amendment process as the democratic feat achieved by PPP.

7.6 Bringing Dalits on the Ruling party’s Agenda

Few workers in each political party were pro-Dalit, but a few amongst them raised the issues of Dalits framed in an ideology that may harbor with the Ambedkarian stance. More than taking Dalit issues onboard, they toed the party line and subsisted on the public statements in praise of their party and its Ashrafia-Savarna leadership. For instance, Pakistan People’s Party was projected by its Dalit workers and some of the leading Dalit politicians as the only secular Democratic Party that could secure the rights of Dalits in Pakistan. The pro-Dalit stance of PPP sometimes emanated from the political statements of Bilawal Bhutto and the Dalit leadership within PPP, particularly Surender Valasai, Dr.Khatumal Jeewan, and Engineer Giyanchand. They seemed to aptly use PPPs media cell and internally lobbied for both the Dalits and their Meghwar community. In a given Ashrafia political structure, they seemed compelled to attenuate their demands so that they were not taken as a serious threat to the essence of Ashrafia's power. Instead, whatever political leverage they could garner under the Ashrafia patronage within PPP, such as the Surender Valasai’s supposed intimacy to party chairman, was celebrated by the Dalit

activists of PPP as the token of recognition of the Meghwar community in particular, and the Dalit communities in general. Surrender Valasai told, they had held few exclusive meetings with the party chairman to apprise him of Dalit vulnerability and their political and social status. He also told that when Vaniya and Brahmin members projected them simply as Hindus before party leadership, they confronted them and position themselves as Scheduled Castes. This claim is confirmed by the official statements of the party that, in its official statements, often used the terms ‘oppressed minorities’, ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘Dalit’ quite interchangeably to show the internal inequalities within minorities and the marginalized status of the Dalits. For instance, a statement issued on October 1, 2015, by PPP media cell read:

The PPP leaders apprised the Chairman about the Party position and support from the Minorities, especially the Scheduled Castes communities who form the majority among minorities in the province. They thanked the Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari for his patronage to the oppressed communities of minorities and for giving them a greater role in the Local government elections. Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari assured the Dalit leaders of the Party that he would also stand for the rights of minorities and won’t allow any kind of discrimination or injustice to them in political, social or economic spheres.²⁸²

In another statement, Bilwal Bilawal Bhutto is quoted to have strongly condemned the desecration of the Hindu Dalit’s corpse in Pangrio²⁸³. On August 10, 2016, a minority day was celebrated, in which Bilawal said:

PPP has inducted Hindus, Dalits, and Christians in the new Sindh cabinet and nominated 18 candidates from these communities to the winning seats of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of District Council, Municipal Committees and Town Committees. This is unprecedented political empowerment of minorities.²⁸⁴

Bilwal also issued statements to relate Dalit oppression to the existing political structures and bilateral relations between India and Pakistan²⁸⁵. In a statement issued by PPP’s media cell on August 16, 2016, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari reacted to the statement of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi about Baluchistan and Gilgit-Baltistan terming it a “highly provocative, irresponsible and inflammatory for the people of Pakistan”. He said, “Modi should first stand accountable to the international community for unending and perpetual atrocities against Kashmiris, Muslims, and Dalits in Held Kashmir & India” he stated in a

²⁸² See <https://mediacellppp.wordpress.com/2015/10/01/ppp-senator-engineer-gianchand-and-mpa-dr-khatoomal-jeewan-called-on-chairman-pakistan-peoples-party-bilawal-bhutto-zardari/> . Retrieved, on March, 7, 2018

²⁸³ See URL: <https://mediacellppp.wordpress.com/2013/10/09/bilawal-bhutto-strongly-condemns-desecration-of-hindu-dalits-corpse-in-pangrio/> . Retrieved, on March 7, 2018.

²⁸⁴ See URL: <https://mediacellppp.wordpress.com/2016/08/10/nationalminorityday-chairman-ppp-bbhuttozardari-reiterates-commitment-to-protect-minorities/> . Retrieved, on March 7, 2018.

²⁸⁵ See <https://mediacellppp.wordpress.com/2015/11/02/chairman-ppp-issued-directives-to-his-partys-parliamentary-leaders-to-move-resolutions-condemning-threats-by-shiv-sena-terrorists/> .

statement²⁸⁶. These statements did not go unattended by the politically conscious Dalit activists and were further highlighted by them to create the impression that PPP recognized Dalit exclusion as a serious kind of problem. But, the fact was that, despite these occasional identifications of the problem, PPP had not devised any concrete political program or the socio-economic agenda to uplift the Dalits. Dalit activists knew that given the Ashrafia-Savarna constraints, this was not going to happen soon, and therefore, they had simply to carry on within the limits.

As many Dalit activists believed, it was because of the realization of being inherently weak, that the Dalit leaders framed their demands in an entreating and the least intimidating and the subdued manner. This impotency of the Dalit leadership, and the simultaneous dare to somehow raise the Dalit case within the party, and to create awareness within them, can be inferred from Surindar Valasai's writings, statements, and the commentaries. They were tough against Brahmin, Modi, and India, but not equally critical of the Ashrafia feudal castes and classes. For instance, in a workshop 'Dalits of Pakistan: Their Problems & Solutions', held at Central Secretariat of PPP at Karachi, in 2007, Surindar Valasai made a historic speech. For the first time since Jogendar Nath Mandal left, Surindar Valasai presented a political case of Scheduled castes in an essentially Dalit vocabulary²⁸⁷. He said:

Perhaps caste-based discrimination or human inequality can arguably be considered as a few of the key factors that led to the struggle for an independent Pakistan for Muslims and subsequent partition of the sub-continent. It was during the Pakistan movement that on August 15, 1944, founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah stated at a Press conference, "I can tell my friends of the Scheduled Castes that at no time have I overlooked their interests and position and I may claim that in the past I have done all I could to help them, and I shall always stand for their protection and safeguard in any future scheme of constitution for I think that the wrongs and injustices inflicted on them for centuries should not be allowed to continue under any civilized form of government." Though Caste-based discrimination and untouchability went with India in its original form after partition the same lingered on in an adulterated form in certain parts of Pakistan after August 14, 1947. The new nation could not frame its Constitution at an early age where some measures could have been taken to address this issue. A Constitution was written in 1956 which made some specific provisions for the development of Scheduled Castes. However, this Constitution was abrogated a few years later.

²⁸⁶ See online: [URL: https://mediacellppp.wordpress.com/2016/08/17/bilawal-bhutto-blasts-modis-bubbling-on-balochistan/](https://mediacellppp.wordpress.com/2016/08/17/bilawal-bhutto-blasts-modis-bubbling-on-balochistan/).

Also: <https://www.ppp.org.pk/?s=Dalit>.

²⁸⁷ Dr. Khatu Mal Jeewan, Paru Maul Kolhi and other politicians had also presented the case of Dalit in the past, but their articulation was rather ambiguous mixing their own caste interests with 'lower caste' Hindu status.

(Surendar Valasai, Founder-President, Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan
July 1, 2007, Workshop at Central Secretariat, Pakistan People's Party,
Karachi)²⁸⁸

Lamenting the constant neglect of Dalit issues, Valasai ended up his speech with the optimistic note that his leader Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto will take “cognizance of the plight of the Dalits of Pakistan” and that she will mobilize “her party to give the issue a serious thinking”, and that PPP, being the largest political party, was “morally bound to take care of the problems of the so-called untouchables or Dalits, called Scheduled Castes in Pakistan”. He termed it a “good omen for the Scheduled Castes of Pakistan that country’s most popular leader [had] taken notice of their sufferings, continuing since millenniums.” Contrary to Valasai’s anticipation, things did not move further than taking nominal notice. Scheduled caste and Dalit did not enter PPP’s political vocabulary. Surrender Valasai made a similar speech at Lahore in a function to celebrated B.R.Ambedkar’s 116th birthday organized by Sri Gangaram Heritage Foundation, Lahore on, Friday, April 13, 2007. Yet again no substantial step was taken to alleviate Dalit concerns.

Although positive in many ways, the conflation of Dalit activism with the PPP’s politics to toe the party line, to avoid criticizing the feudal-capitalist and the casteist structure on which the party edifice primarily stood, did not corroborate with the Ambedkarian approach that demanded the radical criticism of both the Ashrafia and Savarna classes. Dalit activists within PPP also very rarely turned against the Savarna MNAs and MPAs of their party. This, I think, as many DST activists also believed, exposed their ideological and political weakness as they compromised to defend the oppressor, the feudal-capitalist Ashrafia and the Savarna of their party. They made efforts to put the Dalit issues on party agenda without confronting the authority of the Wadero, Sardar, Pir, and Mir (Ashrafia titles of respect). This was self-contradictory as the Dalit demands cannot be raised effectively without critiquing the Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony, may it be within any party. The same holds true of other Dalit activists that worked at various levels for different political parties, or different civil society forums. This was probably the general dilemma of the oppressed, the marginalized, and the suppressed who had recently risen from their subaltern state but were being compelled and constrained by the hegemonic structures. Hence, on the part of the state, government and the political parties, all the

²⁸⁸ For details see dataset, Hussain (2019zaa), “Documents shared by Surendar Valasai, Dalit activist and PPP leader”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/8nhr59d76d.2

goodwill and anticipation, the response has been quite disappointing. Similarly, civil society and human rights watchdogs also seemed to constantly ignore Dalit issues.

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the stakes of Dalits in the mainstream macro politics at it emerged during and after partition were discussed. How the pre-existing caste-based hierarchies consolidated Savarna-Ashrafia hegemony was given detailed treatment. It was followed by the extrapolation of the (dis)advantages of different electoral systems as they increased or decreased the chances of Dalit representation and thus redefined the pre-existing caste-based hierarchies. It was obvious that that the post-partition enumeration, classification and representation of caste groups, legitimized by the master narratives of political Sufism and Islam, greatly shaped the contestation and claims regarding the population numbers and related proportion of representation of different caste groups.

The discussion reflected the pretense of Ashrafia and Savarna political elite within the state institutions not to recognize Dalits as Scheduled Castes. To that purpose, for them, the existing system of reserved seats for non-Muslims was unproblematic as that system did not recognize Scheduled Castes as the distinct entity. It was because of that political discrepancy, indifference, and the denial, that the Dalit activists were demanding separate or the proportionate electoral system whereby Scheduled Castes could easily elect several of their members. It also reflected the hegemony of Savarnas and the Christian elites that construe the issue of representation and exclusion primarily from minority rights lens and emphasize the overall exclusion of the minorities irrespective of caste or class disparities within minorities. The major concern of minority rights activists and the minority politicians has been to raise the proportion of minority seats in assemblies that are already occupied by the Vaniya/Saithiyā class and the Christian elite, the Pakistani version of Savarnas.

Chapter 8: Networking Forums

8.1 Introduction

Unlike India, in Pakistan, there is no political party that specifically represents Dalits or may have prioritized the Dalit issues. There are, however, several caste-based small and large groups, forums and associations that raise issues affecting Dalit communities. This chapter discusses the formation, functioning and ideological stance of a few of these Dalit forums or groups. Particularly the organizing strategies of Ambedkarites as framed in the message of B.R. Ambedkar to ‘Educate! Agitate! Organize!’ are discussed in relation to acceptance and the rejection of the terms ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘Dalit’, ‘Darāwar’, and ‘Sindhi’. The weakness and the strengths of a few select Dalit forums, namely, Scheduled Caste Association (SCA), Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan (SCFP), Bheel Intellectual Forum (BIF), Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN) and Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (DST) are assessed and analysed. Since I was connected with DST more than with any other forum, its formation and implications for Dalits are discussed in greater detail.

8.2 Organizing Dalits

As discussed in the previous section, the Dalits in Sindh tend to organize as Hindus, Sindhis, and Pakistanis, or they tend to organize around their caste-based and newly invented ethnic identities. These identities are overlapped with each other but gradually get (dis)connected from the other ethnic, religious and regional identities as they redefine the generic and common identities differently than Savarna and Ashraf do. This, I argue is part of their political script to organize their communities. After having lengthy conversations with some notable Dalit activists, I have been able to outline their approach to organize their communities under the following headings:

1. Harijanized approach (organizing as Hindus and Sufis).
2. E.A.O approach.
3. Reformist approach
4. Indigenous rights approach (Organizing as Darāwar).

I have discussed in section 3.4 as regards how the Dalits tended to Harijanize or get Harijanized, and in section 3.5 and 4.2 respectively, how they were being compelled by the Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony to toe their line of doing politics and redefine Sanatan Dharam

and assert Sindhi Sufi identity markers. Therefore, in this section, I will spend more time discussing the other 3 approaches adopted by Dalit activists to organize.

8.2.1 E.A. O Approach

According to Gopal Guru, an Ambedkarite is a person who, taking the lead from the ideology of Ambedkar, consistently stands with the Dalits in their struggle²⁸⁹. The activists of DST, BIF, SCFP and several other forums of Dalits proclaimed to be the followers of Ambedkar. Although they identify themselves with the Ambedkar, their understanding and the level of commitment to it vary greatly.

There are, however, very few that are well informed about the actual message of Ambedkar. Here I will briefly analyze the political stance of Ganpat Rai Bheel and Sono Khangarani, the two leading Ambedkarites and the way they want to assert Dalitness. Both Ganpat Rai and Sono Khangarani believe in the dictum ‘educate, agitate, organize’ (E.A.O), the words of advice by B.R. Ambedkar as regards how to proceed to emancipate Dalits. They interpret as the spontaneous process that will mature in due process of time, and that would not require much effort to jump to the final stage to ‘organize’. However, in terms of modus operandi, both greatly differ from each other, and also even from what they mean by the ‘educate, Agitate, and ‘organize’. In principle, they both oppose organizing the Dalits under circumstances, yet for Sono Khangarani, the stage to organize is about to arrive, whereas for Ganpat Rai the time for it still farther. Ganpat Rai suggests waiting for the most opportune time. This contradicts his practice whereby he persistently attempts to organize Dalits by means of Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum and Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan. In the manifesto of SCFP in 2016, Ganpat writes:

Now, the most important duty of ours is to follow in the footsteps of Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar and Jogendar Nath Mandal’s ideological and political program to organize Scheduled Castes to fulfill our goals. From the platform of the Scheduled Caste Federation of Pakistan, the 30 million Scheduled Castes now begin the movement for their rights.

When I asked another Dalit activist to explain how SCFP (can) organize the Dalits in Pakistan. He told:

In practice, politics and social activism converge and different members affiliated with the different or the same interlinked social forums and political parties use them as nodal points to meet with each other to advance the Dalit cause. In fact, both the notions ‘educate’ and ‘organize go hand in hand. The purpose of being educated and organized is to agitate for social, economic and political freedom.

²⁸⁹ See online: Dalit Is 'Proper Noun', Not An 'Adjective', Says Political Theorist Prof Gopal Guru Published by [NewsClickin](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rciW7_ZGhxU), Published on Jul 19, 2017. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rciW7_ZGhxU (accessed on January, 9, 2019).

Ganpat Rai takes more of a Buddhist Ambedkarian line that proposes EAO as a linear process. Taking lead from B.R. Ambedkar and V.T.Rajshekhar²⁹⁰, Ganpat explains EAO as the process of *Buddham* (Educate), *Dhammam* (Agitate), and *Sangham* (Organize). ‘Agitate’ in the middle is taken as the mental revolution/protest. VT Rajshekar writes at one point that in case, suitable conditions to achieve unity were not there, then the effort must be made to create conditions for such unity to enter into the decisive stage, this he calls the sharpening of caste contradictions, and what Ambedkar calls agitation (Rai, 1997, p. 26).

Although none of the leading Ambedkarites is Buddhist, they celebrate Buddhism and Ambedkar more than they do Hindu Gods, Sanatan Dharam, and Sufism. They are the crypto-Buddhists who are socially Hindus but ideologically and politically support the Buddhism of Ambedkar. Some argue that such a blending of social, political and spiritual by the parallel use of Buddhist terminologies blurs the political edge of Ambedkar ideology. Secretary to Ambedkar King Study Circle, S Karthikeyan writes in one of his online articles about the Buddhist Ambedkarites that strictly pursue EAO line:

This social class has a crucial place in the balance of class forces during the times of crisis and usually, they take a position with the bourgeois rather with the working class. Their explanation of EAO is that one has to be educated on social issues. Not a mere academic education and such education agitate their mind (or a sort of internal revolution!) and these agitated minds organize themselves for a common cause. There is no programmatic explanation about the common cause where most of the times common cause confined with non-political or apolitical non-governmental or non-for-profit interventions
(Karthikeyan, 2018).

This criticism seems valid if applied to the Ambedkarties in Sindh, as they assume that the organization of Dalits is a spontaneous process that will be triggered at a critical juncture in history. This political belief did not allow them to make an effort to outline any concrete political agenda. For Ganpat Rai Bheel²⁹¹, ‘agitate’ meant ‘to agitate’ and ‘organize’ also means to ‘agitate’ but at grand (national) level. For him, grand agitation meant ‘unity’ achieved, that is, ‘organization’ achieved as Ambedkar wanted. He was waiting for it. He seemed stubbornly stuck to the second stage, that is, ‘agitate’, while attempting to organize Dalit on the platform of SCFP. To organize Dalits, SCFP and Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum

²⁹⁰ Ganpat Rai has been in correspondence with V.T. Raj Shekhar and Kancha Ilaiah and also has shared copies of Dalit Adab with them.

²⁹¹ Ganpat Rai is the most prolific Dalit writer. To read some of his articles, books and editorial works, see dataset, Hussain (2019zzv), “Articles and Books of Ganpat Rai Bheel”, Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/n4p7hc64ft.1

also attempted to establish caste-based Dalit panchayats. Ganpat Rai, himself, told that Khursheed Qaimkhni and Faiz Sheedi established Baghri Panchayat to liberate Baghris, a Dalit community, from the clutches of Talpur and Sayeds. Hence, practically he did not seem to oppose organizing Dalits in whatever form one could. He, however, had reservations against donor-driven activism. He opposed paper-based activism that is merely limited to press releases, and the social media-based organizations as he considered them predatory and harmful for the Dalit cause. Following VT Rajshekar, he criticizes separate caste-based associations of Dalits that according to them reflects the mean and the monstrous aspect of the problem of caste (Rai, 1997, p. 26). This ideal approach, however contradicted Ganpat's activism as he internally remained affiliated with BIF and kept influencing one of the factions in it. He also joined DST, probably with the assumption that the time has come to organize Dalit at the grand level. The DST's agenda was in line with what Ganpat and SCFP wanted, that is, to establish 'Dalit' as a political identity and politicize Dalit demand for political representation in proportion to their population. As Ganpat wrote in Dalit Adab, "The initial challenge of Dalits in India is to confront the state upfront, whereas the prime goal of Dalits in Pakistan is to seek share in proportion to population in representative institutions, and to establish 'Dalit' identity" (Bheel G. R., 2014, p. 4). Ganpat could not get along with DST members and eventually left after feeling disappointed by the alleged presence of NGO activists in DST.

8.2.2 Reformist Approach

Dalit reformists emphasize education more than doing politics. There are two types Dalit reformists; those who are conscious of being oppressed and marginalized and mean to educate the Dalits to get a respectable position in the society, and those who, by education mean creating awareness about Dalit issues along with general education, so that informed agitation and the organizational stage could be reached. Those Dalits, who have succeeded in reaching the lower-middle-class status stress upon education for the individual and collective uplift. According to Engineer Kanji Mal Meghwar, the best way to get rid of caste-based discrimination and social inequalities is to struggle, as was done by Martin Luther King. Similarly, Somji Dharani (Meghwar) writes, "the real war has to be fought in the domain of economy, and to that end there is no other weapon as useful as education." (Dharani, 2015, p. 195). Instead of following developmentalist path, Ganpat Rai Bheel, inspired by Ambedkar and Marx, suggests the socialist route. He writes:

We, the Dalit labor class believe in the materialization of the socialist revolution. Rejecting narrow-minded ethnocentrism, we dream of the society free from casteism, racism,

parochialism, religions, and nationalism. Dalit movement is the part of the larger human struggle for the greater union and brotherhood of humans.

(Bheel G. R., Adivasin Jee Rooedaad, 2014, p. 28)

In contrast to Ganpat Rai's socialist Ambedkarism, Sono Khangarani, during a conversational interview in June 2016, suggested the processual approach. He sees Dalit revival as the social process of uniting the 'broken' (people). He said that "I am part of that process. Sometimes I will lead it, sometimes I will trigger it, and sometimes I will push it". By explaining how Dalit activism was shaping up in Pakistan, he argued that Dalits were gradually proceeding from education to agitation and organization. According to him, Dalit activism in Pakistan is gradually unfolding itself into five historically contingent stages or phases that invariably are proposed by him as the political framework for Dalits in Pakistan. These phases that have elapsed or have recently unfolded are:

1. **Revival**

In the 1970s and 1980s during Bhutto's and Zia's regime, caste politics got the new lease of life, and Dalit movements in India also re-emerged. Khangarani told:

Caste-based traditional occupations no longer have a foothold in society, yet the caste/casteism is there. It is not dying out. It has rather got strengthened, particularly during and after the General Zia's rule. Baradari-based caste got the rebirth during Zia's rule. It also brought 'Scheduled Castes' into politics for the first time after the secession of East Pakistan. A few of the Kolhi, Bheel, and Meghwar came into politics thereafter.

During this phase, the turn from the Harijan association to essentially Scheduled Castes based and Dalit cast-based associations began in Pakistan, particularly in Sindh. Separate electorate system brought some Dalit politicians in the mainstream boosting confidence of Dalit communities, particularly, that of Kolhi, Bheel and Meghwar communities. He argued that although the influence of Sodha Thakurs in Thar had greatly subsided over the decades, it had been replaced by Arbabs. Hence the slave-mentality and Dalit dependence on Ashrafia patronage prevailed. This resurgent interest in caste politics was not a positive development in general, nonetheless, it proved beneficial for the Dalit communities as they had been previously completely excluded from the caste politics of Pakistan. Renewed interest and state patronage brought a few Scheduled Castes into politics. Hence, while Scheduled Castes as the category was removed from the census and the joint electorates with the Jati Hindus were given during General Zia's regime, yet General Zia encouraged Dalit leadership at the bottom to participate in local and national level elections. According to Sono Khangarani, it created political awareness among Dalits. The jubilation of Dalits of Thar was short-lived as in succeeding years during the late 1990s and until now Vāṇiyo

(Bania) and Brahmin along with Ashrafia continue to be the major power brokers at local and national levels.

2. Caste-based Consolidation

Consolidating the oppressed around one's caste to gain social and political benefits in the modernizing society was the second phase, according to Sono Khangarani. At least for Meghwars, that phase has been successfully bypassed. Kolhi, Bheel, and Meghwar were regionally as well as on the basis of sub-castes divided and or organized into several small and large panchayats. On certain important occasions, they would hold grand Panchayati gatherings that would be attended by different panchayats from upper Sindh, lower Sindh or Thar and Southern Punjab. One of the earliest records of forming any caste-based Itihad, different from village-based panchayats dates back to 1933-34 when 'Meghwar Sujag Itihad' was formed in Tharparkar (Dharani, 2015, p. 42). During that same period, particularly with the increasing activity of Harijan Sevak Sangh, the trend to reorganize caste-based panchayats into social or semi-political forums increased. It was followed by the formation of several Harijan Panchayats or associations, as well as regional caste-based associations. For instance, Kirshan Lal formed Meghwar organization for Parkari Meghwar and Sugarchand Seju formed "Parkar Meghwar Panchayat" in early 1950's. Another important forum was Sindh Megh Rikh Association that was formed in the late 1960s (Dharani, 2015, p. 36). Most of these early caste associations were very localized and catered to the social solidarity need of the *nukhs* or regional sub-caste groups. Thari Kolhi and Parkari Kolhi associations and panchayats did not have the links with Katchi Kolhi or Kacthi Meghwar panchayats. Meghwar community was in the forefront to bring a shift from an essential panchayat type association to trans-local social forums. They attempted to reach Meghwars that were living in different regions of Pakistan. For instance, in 1985 the Meghwar Educational Association was formed by Premchand, to collect funds from within the community and awarded scholarships to needy students. Premchand himself played an instrumental role in orienting Dalit students to contest in competitive exams and facilitated them financially as well as morally. In the barrage area of Sindh, Katchi Kolhi Panchayat, Maheshwari Jamaat, and several other caste-based panchayats and associations were formed over the years.

During this phase, certain Dalit castes, particularly Kolhi and Meghwar became conscious of their vote bank in the Mirpurkhas division. Dalit of Tharparkar that had begun settling in the barrage area of Sindh in the early 60s, had established its own colonies nearby major towns and cities by pooling community funds to purchase land. Gradually many got

rid of the direct dependence on Ashrafia landlords and Savaran businessmen. Some of them left pastoralism and traditional occupations and a few of them even made their way into judiciary, media, and law and in law-enforcing agencies. While Kolhi community fell back and after Paru Mal Kolhi, none of the Kolhi could make to legislative assemblies, a few leaders among Meghwar emerged, particularly Dr. Khatumal. Dr. Khatumal, himself believer in the power of Ashrafia heroes, ended up organizing Meghwars of Tharparakar and Umerkot around his personality. This promoted a personality cult instead of facilitating the democratic formation of caste associations among Meghwars. During this phase, major Dalit communities of Dalits (Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar), however, did acquire the consciousness of being oppressed. Dalit leaders did 'Scheduled Castes' term for political purposes to unite Dalit castes on a single platform.

3. Initial Mobilization Phase

According to Sono Khangarani, this is the current phase, which is terms as the first stage to register agitation on Ambedkarian lines. It is the initial mobilization to prepare Dalits and the oppressed communities to agitate and organize. The third phase is that of inclusion, which is conscious attempts by the Dalit families and the caste-based groups to mobilize Dalit youth, to enter the army, law and the law-enforcing agencies. Dr. Sono Khangarani told that at social level the effort is being made to motivate the youth to be professionals in their respective fields, and to have a foothold in the service sector. According to him:

Dalits are still lagging in local administrative system. There is no SC in any power position in Mithi. In Mithi's bureaucracy, AC, DC, ASP, Mukhtiarkar, engineers, social welfare, in judiciary, in hospitals all major power posts are occupied by 'upper caste' Muslims followed by Jati Hindus. So, these are the indicators. There is insecurity of caste that prevails. For instance, Mahesh Malani says, "I am willing to recommend Meghwar and Bheel for powerful posts, but 'upper caste' Muslims are not willing work under you". To tell an interesting incident that Sodha Thakur waited for four years till I got resigned from Thardeep because he did not want to work under any Meghwar. We must constantly fight institutional untouchability while we progress and create space for Dalits.

He told that this is the stage in which food untouchability has been condemned by all and sundry. In this phase, therefore, we can begin mobilizing for inter-caste marriages and inter-caste dining to bring Scheduled Castes and other lower castes within Hindus on a single platform. Along with it, we should also begin introducing Ambedkarian ideology and inform our people about the Dalit movements that are shaping up in India or elsewhere in the world. This is the phase, during which Dalit activists need to identify friends and the sympathizers at local, national and international levels and establish the trans-local and transnational networks. This is the initial stage to lobby at the national and international

levels through solidarity networks such as IDSN, ADRF, NCDHR, and other Dalit activist groups across the world.

4. Political assertion

According to Dr. Sono Khangarani:

In previous phases, we attempted to educate and agitate. Now the process to organize has already begun evidenced in the form of pro-Dalit community-based forums such as BIF, Pakistan Meghwar Council and several other caste-based internally democratic social and semi-political associations, etc. This will ultimately lead to a larger umbrella association, and ultimately to the formation of a pro-Dalit political party.

According to Sono Khangarani, the issues of Dalit representation and inclusion will increasingly be raised in the year to come. The literature on Dalits will be more frequently published and the Dalit activists will become well informed about their ideological positions. He said:

It does not require any big struggle to bring Dalits on a single platform. It is the part of the process and will happen anyway. But the problems are created by the state. The state has always created problems sometimes supporting Dalits to unite and at other times to divide or even remain indifferent to Dalit issues. Similarly, political parties have used Dalit vote bank or ignored them at will.

He told me that he had asked Shah Mahmood Qureshi that “You should have visited 11 villages of Meghwar in Chahro. You didn’t. Resultantly you lost in elections”. This was to make him realize that Dalit vote bank is the decisive vote bank. This, according to Sono Khangarani, is the indication that in case Dalit communities are ignored in any political equation, then Dalits will ultimately form the political party. He presented an example of local government elections in 2000, 16 Nazims (representative district officers) were elected from Scheduled Castes. From four Tallukas except for Diplo, Naib (second cadre) Nazims were from Scheduled Castes. This change was noticed by local power brokers. In 2005 elections Scheduled Castes representation was resultantly halved, and now it is almost zero. “This is the challenge of (upper caste) backlash that we face at the local level”. He justified it by further explaining that:

Compared to 16 *Nazims* out of 64, there are not even 4 left now. In Zila council, 33 *Union council* are such that Scheduled castes should be elected as Nazims, but there are not even 4 members. This decline in political share is because of the counter-consciousness among the Ashrafia elite that Dalits are rising. Resultantly they make deliberate efforts to keep the Dalits excluded. An interesting incident happened in 2003. We tried to have an experiment to work on Dalit cause. It created a reaction. A resolution was passed in District Council Mithi alleging that Dr. Sono Khangarni and certain others are trying to divide people by introducing Dalit issues. Hence, to be pragmatic, we must wait for the social awareness to reach at its peak to channelize it into political action. Therefore, we have decided that at international level we will not talk openly about caste. We will talk about economics about

and social welfare. Because when we talk about caste, then Ashrafia and Jati Hindus get more organized than us and suppress us. We, on the other hand, are not organized. But the process to organize is already on. Dalit forums at the local level have been established. Some of us are networked internationally.

The arguments of Sono Khangarani lead to infer that the rise of Meghwars was partly the result of social and political awareness brought about by the modernization, and partly by the consciousness of the demographic strength in lower Sindh that mattered in representation. Ashrafia and Savarna became conscious of that nominal rise in Meghwar and Dalit power and resultantly, attempted to regain their dominance. It shows that despite having gained some agency, Dalits are not able to overcome the Savarna-Ashraf's hegemony. "It was because of that", told Khangarani, "that the Dalits wanted to work a bit underground, at the social level. Because we perceive that if we would talk about Meghwar or Dalit rights, then the Ashrafia elite, as well as Savarnas, will oppose us. We have to have political and economic war."

5. Organizing phase

According to Sono Khangarani, the fifth Phase is to organize, to form a political party following the Ambedkarian agenda. During this phase, Dalit imagination will become sharpened and the consciousness of being historically oppressed will be very high. Internal caste-based bickerings and the confrontations would sufficiently subside allowing the formation of a larger and effective political organization this will be the phase to form a political party essentially on Ambedkarian lines. This phase is yet to be reached. Khangarani told that the time is not ripe to be explicitly political or to form any political party. Therefore, he suggests, meanwhile activism be grounded in the existing political and human rights framework. Given these above approaches to organize, I will discuss in the next sections as regards how Dalit activists strived to organize by establishing forums and associations.

8.3 Contested Roots of Scheduled Castes' Activism in Pakistan

Ganpat Rai claimed that the Dalit movement in Pakistan was the continuation of the Dalit movement that was going on in India under the leadership of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. In July-August 2017, the six-page manifesto of Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan (SCFP), was published and disseminated by Ganpat Rai Bheel, in which the link is established between the existing SCFP and the Bengal branch of Ambedkar's All India Scheduled Caste Federation, that, after partition, became Scheduled Caste Federation of Pakistan.

Without giving forth many historical details to establish links, Ganpat, however, tried to create an impression as if existing SCFP that was established in 2002 and the Dalit activism in Pakistan, may have been the continuation of those movements. According to him the genuine Ambedkarian movement in Pakistan was introduced by Khursheed Qaimkhani. Before his intervention, Gandhian ideology prevailed. The empirical evidence partially supported Ganpat's claims. While the chapters of Scheduled Caste Federation of India were active in Punjab and East Bengal before and after partition, and Ambedkar-influenced Ad-Dharam movement existed in parts of Punjab, in Sindh there was not any such active chapter of it. Dalits in Sindh were then patronized by the All India Congress under the Gandhian ideology and was financed by the local Bania (Jati Hindu) class. Gulji Ratanji is known among local Dalits as the first Gandhian politician from Dalit class who strived for the rights of 'Harijan' from 1947 till late 1980s. (Dharani, 2015, p. 154). The personal narratives of the early Dalit activists confirm that they were being patronized by the Congress and the followers of Gandhi. Rana C.Rathore told:

A group of 10 Meghwar teachers of Noor Muhammad High School and Government D.G College for the first time contemplated establishing Scheduled Caste association. I was the only student to have the privilege to be in their group on that count. Resultantly, Scheduled Caste Educational Committee was established in 1956 and I was appointed its general secretary. We had heard about Ambedkar and his quarrels with Gandhi, but we did not know much about his ideas, nay his struggle. We did not even know whether he was a Dalit and from Mahar or Meghwar caste.



Figure 27: SCFP activists protesting for the Indian Dalits (held in 2002).

Source: SCFP (2016)

Rana C. Rathore was one of the several fortunate Dalit students who would avail scholarship given by Khushiram Harijan Trust²⁹², a welfare organization premised on Gandhian ideology. Kanji Mal Chochan, one of the beneficiaries of the Trust told:

Khushiram Harijan trust was formed in 1946 by Seth Khushi Ram Daryano Mal, a Jati Hindu. Seth Khushi Ram was given money by Gandhi to purchase the land, and the donation of Rs.100,000 to establish the trust for the welfare of 'Harijans'. Seth Khushiram performed that task with the utmost dedication despite extreme opposition from Jati Hindus. Khushiram would explain to them that Harijans are like a part of body as vital as any other. They clean our streets and toilets, they skin animals and dump the dead bodies. To treat them like untouchables is like hating one's own body part'.

This approach to the welfare was in line with the Harijan Sevak Sangh and several other Hindu organizations that wanted to eradicate untouchability but considered the caste system a functional necessity of the society. Khushiram Harijan Trust was managed by a 10-Member high profile pro-Congress Savarnas when it was established in 1946. The Trust is still functional and Rana C. Rathore is one of the few Dalit members on its working committee. The rest are Savarnas. Now it is managed by Hoondraj, the descendent of Khushiram while it has now 5 Dalits (3 Meghwar, 1 Kolhi, 1 Oad) on its working committee. It awards 1.2 million rupees each year under various scholarships to the Dalit students told one of its recipients. Hemandas Chandani, a senior Scheduled Caste activist told, 'Almost every Scheduled Caste student from class 8 till university level, at one point or another during their educational career have sought scholarship from Khushiram Trust when I was a student'. Most of the senior Meghwars that I interviewed told that they have been beneficiaries of the Trust. It shows the level of influence and role in educating Meghwar as well as its influence in the shaping of their ideological towards Gandhian Harijan activism.

Scheduled Caste Educational Committee (SSEC) that was formed by Meghwars soon became dysfunctional due to the lack of the leadership and the lack of the community-generated funding although, for a while, it continued to work with the support of few well-to-do Meghwar(Dharani, 2015, pp. 228-29). SSEC primarily aimed at the social and economic uplift of the Scheduled Castes through the eradication of social evils such as drinking, extravagance during the rites of passage, and through the provision of educational facilities, particularly scholarships. It also helped Dalits in legal matters providing free services of Dalit lawyers. SCA having mostly Meghwar on its working Committee,

²⁹² The trust was formed in 1946 and ten high profile Savarnas affiliated with Congress were appointed as the members of its working committee, that included Jamshed Nasrwanji (Mayor Karachi), Dada Jairamdas Daulatram (former MPA, Sindh Assembly, and Governor Asam and Bihar, Professor, Ghansham Das (Ex-MPA) and others.

benefited more to Meghwar than to any other Dalit community and because of that other communities either did not take interest in it, or Meghwar patrons did not wholeheartedly include other communities. Resultantly, it ceased to be functional and Meghwar activists then established Meghwar Educational Association for the same purpose that did work for a decade or so and was financially assisted Meghwar students, but then it too became defunct.

On very rare occasions did SCA intervened in politics, such as when it presented the case of Scheduled Castes before Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, in a Pakistan Minority Conference held on April 26, 1973 (Dharani, 2015, p. 385). SCA did create a cadre of caste-sensitive political activists that increasingly became aware of the pitfalls of the Gandhian led anti-caste reformism and the value of Ambedkarian struggle. The notable amongst them to whom I interviewed was Comrade Damro Mal who served as the treasurer of SCA, and who later joined Communist Party Pakistan (CPP) and presented the issues of Dalits from the CPPs platform.

Ambedkarian ideas, however, had begun shaping organizational strategies of the Dalits from the early 70s when the first generation of the lower middle class began emerging among Dalits. The statement of Jairam Das Abojha, president of SCFP also did not concord with the claim of Ganpat Rai Bheel. Abojha argued that in a post-1976 era, the anti-colonial struggles and nationalist movements were at peak in Vietnam, Palestine and certain African countries. It was also the era that Phoolan Devi's struggle against Thakurs was on the rise and made its way into Pakistani media. (Abojha, 2016) He writes:

I and a few other Dalit activists were greatly impressed by these movements that eventually brought rising Scheduled Castes movements and issues into our focus. Since I myself was employed in the press, I would update myself about the Dalit movements in India. Discovery of B.R.Ambedkar, as a Dalit ideologue, and the subsequent formation of SCFP was the result of that historical and processual engagement with social and political struggles²⁹³.

Communalization of Dalits that went on for decades, however, has had a relatively permanent impact upon the Dalit identity assertions. During the 80s, partly inspired by the Dalit movements in India, Dalits in Pakistan also were inspired. Pakistan Hindu Scheduled Castes Association was formed by Dr. Thanwar Das Dadvani during that period that would raise the issues of both the Hindus and Scheduled Castes as well as of other minorities (Dharani, 2015, p. 136). A senior Meghwar activist told:

In the early 90s Dalits primarily asserted as individual castes using their caste associations to demand the inclusion of their own caste only. Kolhi, Bheel, and

²⁹³ See also preface in Rai, Sayed Shah Ghazi-u-din\Ganpat by Jairam Das Abojha (2016, p. 6-7).

Meghwar, being the numerical majority were conscious of their vote bank tended to strengthen their caste associations and panchayats, and therefore, dominated the subaltern politics.

These early attempts by the Dalits in Pakistan to organize could not have any deeper impact on the Dalit community or to influence the state or the governments to take Dalit issues on board. Dalit forums and caste-based associations were social than political in their outlook and aimed at educating and reforming their castes. They formed small groups of activists that could hardly manage to organize their respective castes, not mention of standing with other oppressed castes to pressurize the government to have larger political gains.

8.4 SCFP: Its Ideology and Activism

Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan (SCFP) was formed in Sindhi in 1984 by Prem Chand Meghwar (then in charge of Controller of Examinations, SPSC (Dharani, 2015, p. 122). Although it was inspired by the SCF that was formed by B.R. Ambedkar and the Dalit activism and movements that had begun in India during the 1980s, it did not seem to have a direct historical link with it. Instead, it seemed more of a social welfare forum, a small association rather than any leading Dalit political platform. It had few members, supported by a tiny literate lower middle class of Dalits, mainly Meghwar. Hence, it had very little say in any major social or political matter affecting Dalit communities in Sindh or in Pakistan. This initial SCFP faded away after few years, and then after the gap of almost two decades, in 2003, another SCFP, was formed Khursheed Qaim Khani (Rajput), Mama Faiz Sheedi and (Pasmaanda Muslim). Harijanization of Dalits in Pakistan was almost total and there seemed little likelihood of any Ambedkarite being active or attempting to organize Dalits in Sindh or Punjab on Ambedkarian lines during the early post-partition year. It could then be safely concluded that contrary to Ganpat Rai's claims, the SCFP of which he was one of the most active members was inspired by the Bengal Branch of Ambedkar's SCF, but was by no means its formerly detached chapter or the wing. Khursheed Qaimkhani and Faiz Sheedi (pasmanda Muslim) played an equally important role along with Surender Valasai, Kalwanti Raja²⁹⁴ and Ganpat Rai Bheel, and Jairam Das Abojha to raise issues related caste-based discrimination (Abojha, 2016). SCFP occasionally held protests and rallies and published newsletters, the Dalit digests and, on a few occasions, also celebrated Ambedkar Jayanti (anniversary). SCFP wrote several letters to higher authorities to draw their attention to the Dalit issues, particularly the issue of SC

²⁹⁴ Kalawanti Raja, a Meghwar woman from Khairpur, was SCFP's Central Vice President. Later she also became member of Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network and attended some important seminars and conferences on Dalit rights in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Thailand. (Dharani, 2015, pp. 254-255)

quota, representation, and caste discrimination into their attention. SCFP revolved around a few selective issues and had no formal manifesto or agenda till 2017. SCFP's manifesto²⁹⁵ reads that presently none of the political party has any program or space for the Dalits in Pakistan and suggests looking back to Ambedkar and Dalit icons to sketch one's own political program for "30 million"²⁹⁶ Dalits of Pakistan. The major reasons to form SCFP outlined by Ganpat Rai Bheel were:

1. The marginalized status of Scheduled Castes (Dalit, Adivasi, Darāwar) in Pakistan.
2. Violation of the human rights of Scheduled Castes.
3. Obscure and uncertain future of Scheduled Castes.
4. Social alienation and the prevailing sense of deprivation. Social discrimination, extreme level of deprivation, social, cultural, spiritual and historical exploitation and injustice.
5. Denial to recognize the social, cultural and linguistic identity of 30 million strong Dalits.
6. Dangers relating to national, cultural and civilizational identity.
7. Exclusion from the political representation and service sector.
8. Exploitation by the feudal class.
9. Prevalent casteism within Scheduled Castes that keeps them divided.
10. To abet increasing NGO-isation of Dalit narrative.

SCFP established spread its intellectual activism by establishing virtual links with some notable Dalit activists in India. Ganpat Rai Bheel had had a correspondence with V.T. Rajshekhar, the editor of Dalit Voice, and Kancha Ilaiah, the leading Dalitbahujan intellectual of India. Sardar Jagjit Singh, another leading Dalit activist converted to Sikhism, had had correspondence with the anti-caste Sikh activists across Pakistan or elsewhere in the world. Surindar Valasai also had met with V.T.Rajshekhar and certain other Dalit activists of India in Lahore in seminars held by SGRHF.

Valasai also wrote some politically charged articles on the plight of Dalits in Sindh. He serves as a Dalit think-thank along with Ganpat Rai Bhheel, Dr. Sono Khangarani, Muhib

²⁹⁵ To read the manifesto see dataset: Hussain, (2019w), "*Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan: Basic Manifesto, Constitution and Program*", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/xfjhkppykr.2

²⁹⁶ 30 million is a huge population that makes up around 15 percent of the total population of Pakistan. Such a huge claim requires further elaboration as regards on what that claim is made, its source and the definition or redefinition of what constitutes Scheduled Castes.

Bheel and certain others whose names research ethics do not allow me to mention here. In August 2007, Valasai also attempted to invite the attention of Chief Justice of Pakistan to the rampant untouchability being practiced in Pakistan against Dalits and demanded that suo moto action be taken to ban untouchability²⁹⁷. Valasai's statement was not a mere social complaint but a political statement upon legal system to attend to the grave structural inequalities of society. Ganpat Rai Bheel, Khursheed Qaimkhani, Faiz Muhammad Sheedi, Bhoora Lal Kolhi attempted to publish Dalit newsletter in 2001, and eventually with their efforts 'Dalit Adab' quarterly digest was published beginning with 2006 from the SCFP's subsidiary platform that they named as Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum. Dalit Adab digest published some important translated texts of B.R. Ambedkar, resignation of Jogendar Mandal, articles of V.T.Rajshekhar from Dalit Voice, and Kancha Ilaiah's article. Most the articles were translated from Urdu into Sindhi by Ganpat Rai Bheel. It was a major serious effort to introduce the Ambedkarian ideology in Sindh. Dalit Adab was consecutively published for two years and then suddenly stopped due to financial issues and resume back in 2014. A couple of years earlier in 2004, a similar attempt was made by Dolat Thari, the Meghwar of Chelhar Thar, who inspired by the 'Dalit Voice' of V.T.Rajshekhar, began publishing 'Dalit Awaz', a Sindhi monthly newsletter. Dalit Awaz reported the incidents of caste-based discrimination and the issues of Thar and Sindh in particular. Yet the most important aspect of it was the use of the term 'Dalit' as the marker for the oppressed. It was the attempt to popularize the Dalit term and thereby a Dalit narrative. Dolat Thari kept publishing it for some years till 2013 despite the fact that the Dalits and common Sindhis did not buy into his argument. Thari got disappointed and abandoned publishing Dalit literature. When I asked about the reasons, Dalit activists told me that he was harassed by both the Savarna and Ashrafs on several occasions. They also told that several other stories that proved that most of the all Dalit activists had experienced social harassment just because of their anti-caste activism or Dalit assertion.

During these middle years, SCFP lost its tempo and failed to ground its roots among the Dalits. After being preoccupied with the mainstream neoliberal politics of PPP, Surindar Valasai lost interest in SCFP that was then taken over by Jairam Das Abojha and Ganpat Rai Bheel. Ganpat Rai Bheel defined SCFP as rooted in the activism of Khursheed Qaimkhani, the anti-caste activist belonging to Rajput Ashrafia caste. He was a retired Captain, who spent most of his life for the welfare of Dalit communities, particularly Bheel

²⁹⁷ Surindar Valasai, Founder-President, Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan, Kaloi, Tehsil Diplo, Tharparkar, Pakistan, Dated, August 3, 2007

and Jogi. Ganpat Rai Bheel, the leading Dalit activist told that Khursheed Qaimkhani and Faiz Sheedi established Baghri Panchayat to liberate Baghris, a Dalit community, from the clutches of elite Talpur and Sayed castes. Mir Talpurs and Sayeds used to mortgage or keep as deposit gold of both the conflicting Baghri factions and use it as leverage to further manipulate both factions so that they would keep quarreling and thus mortgaged gold would always remain with Syed or Mir. To get rid of that exploitation, they appointed Uncle Poorab Baghri as sarpanch of Baghri baradari. Khursheed Qaimkhani had also established a library at his agricultural farm and let it open for Dalits to visit. He also helped open the school in Jogi village near Tando Allahyar.

Khursheed Qaimkhani was also invited to different countries, particularly to the USA and African countries where he presented the case of Dalits and observed the differences between Dalits in Pakistan and the oppressed, particularly the blacks in other countries. He published four books, 'Sipyau aur Pathar', 'Bhatakti Naslen', 'Sapnon Ka Des' and a posthumous novel, Gypsy on Jogi community. His book Bhatakti Naslen, written in Urdu is the most widely read book that introduced Adivasi and semi-nomadic tribes of Sindh to the civil society of Pakistan. It is based on his ethnographic observations that he has analyzed from the Aryan-Dravidian theory perspective to bring to relief the historical oppression meted out to Dalits or Adivasi tribes. In a speech (published as an article in Dalit Adab in its June-July 2007 edition) on the occasion of 116th Anniversary of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar on 14th of April 2014, Khursheed Qaimkhani has referred to the struggle of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar relating it to the anti-caste struggle of the past particularly Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. It is in that that he used the term 'Dalit' and 'Dalitbahujan' to estimate the demographic strength of Dalits and explain Ambedkarian ideology. (Qaimkhani K. , 2007) Whereas, in most his writings, he has, however, avoided to use the term 'Dalit' and even have sparingly referred to Ambedkar or any other contemporary Dalit ideologue, intellectual or leader. Nonetheless, the ideological, moral and probably also the financial support of Khursheed Qaimkhani, made possible for the Ganpat Rai to translate into Sindhi some important readings of Dalit literature and articulate Dalit issues in Pakistan. This was undeniably the radical ideological departure from any previous attempt by the Dalits in Pakistan. SCFP's agenda contains both highly rational and just demands such as share for Dalit women, separate electorates, as well as relatively high-pitched demands based on quite a high proportion of Dalit population assumed by Ganpat Rai Bheel. SCFP purports to keep its membership open to all citizens

of Pakistan irrespective of caste, color, and creed and provided they follow Ambedkarian ideology and agree to the agenda and conditions stipulated in the manifesto.

To summarize, Dalit activism that employed ‘Scheduled Castes’ as the referential term, along with the ‘Dalit’, ‘Hindu’ and ‘minority’ could not grow because of the identity crises, the lack of decision and confusion over the referential term that could better organize Dalits. Except for Ganpat Rai Bheel, other Dalit activists either died away after few years such as Khursheed Qaimkhani and Faiz Sheed, switched to mainstream neoliberal politics such as Surindar Valasai, became regionalists like Dolat Thari, or NGO-led minority activist like Ramesh Jaipal.

These abortive attempts instead of helping Dalits organize, in certain ways created disappointment, and resultantly SCFP failed to rise from a tiny group of activists to a semi-political or political Dalit forum. Nonetheless, these initiatives have a value of their own for the Dalits. Ambedkarian ideological legacy was, by and large, unknown in Sindh before the Dalit Adab was published. Although Dalit Adab was not received with much openness and its readership remained limited to a few person (probably not more than few hundreds), yet it did pool some introductory data, information and the ideas for the consumption of Sindhi people. Dalit Adab, however, became known to the mainstream in Sindhi civil society only after the establishment of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek in 2016 that used social media as the medium to disseminate and share all kinds of literature on Dalits.

Ganpat Rai Bheel also became the member of DST for a few months and along with me and other DST, activists helped formulate its manifesto only to criticize later on the increasing influence of NGOs over DST and was a neoliberal imprint in discourse and the practice of DST that came into shape over the months. According to him, the stage to organize had not yet arrived and had to emerge spontaneously when the task to educate and agitate would be fully ripe.

8.5 Bheel Intellectual Forum (BIF)

Amid comrades at Sindh university hostel, we were given meals in separate utensils. This is what gave birth to the Bheel Intellectual Forum.

(Jugnu Bheel, an undergraduate student of Sindh University).

Amongst the caste-based forums in Sindh that preferentially used Dalit, Scheduled Castes and Darāwaṛ identity markers to express their difference, BIF was ahead of others. BIF is the most active caste-based forum of Dalits. It was formed in 2010 by Bheel students of Sindh University. In 2016 it had about 500 registered members. In 2016 general body

elections, 330 Bheel cast their vote in which Lajpat Rai Bheel won securing 208 votes. In 2019, BIF's membership was around 5000. This shows that BIF although small, consists of committed members, and is a democratic forum different from any traditional panchayat or baradari. It has demonstrated the ability to organize mass gatherings and protests in several districts across Sindh. Although it is a caste-based forum, it struggles for other oppressed castes as well. In Bheel Magazine, issued by BIF, Bheru Lal Bheel related BIF with Darāwar and the socialist struggle grounding it in Sindh. He writes:

The long-lasting solution of the oppressed people lies in the socialist struggle in which humanity holds supreme and no one is 'upper' or 'lower'. Basing it in Dalit struggles, BIF seeks the redressal of historical oppression, distortion of Dalit history.

(Bheel B. L., 2016, p. 8)

Each year BIF celebrates 14th of August on Mata Mandir. While the PHC council defined Hinduism as a way of life, they define Sanatan Dharam as their original religion. BIF, however, defines Sanatan Dharam as the religion of Darāwar to differentiate it from 'Arya Dharam' which they believe has been imposed upon them by the invading Aryans (Bheel S. , 2016, p. 11).



Figure 28: Researcher with President BIF, discussing the issue of encroachment over the graveyard of the Bheel community

Source: Author (2019)

Hence, while Jati Hindus largely do not believe in Aryan-Dravidian theory, BIF members, like the rest of Dalits assert Dravidianism and relate it to Sanatan Dharma. BIF invites other Dalit communities and civil society members in their programs as well. It is reflective of their openness to dilute caste-boundaries or to establish fraternal ties with other castes.

Nonetheless, it is essentially a caste-based forum that primarily works for the welfare and advocacy of the Bheel community. They regularly hold general body meetings in different districts and Talukas and select new members. BIF also issues Bheel Magazines with regular special editions.

To redefine their religion, they have recently inaugurated a few temples, one for Mata Devi, and others where they plan to keep any Bheel deity to worship, probably for Ekalyava Bheel. They organize different functions such as welcome and welfare programs for Sindh University students, Deewali shows, and celebrate anniversaries of different Dalit leaders. They have also established Amar Ghaman Singh Library and encourage Bheel and Dalit students to develop passion for learning. Bheel, Kolhi and Meghwar associations, particularly in Thar region, work in close alliance with each other to eradicate untouchability and pose as the political other to the dominant Savarna rulers, that is, Sodha Thakurs. BIF activists believe that in the past Bheels have been socially and politically more aware than either Meghwar or Kolhi. They have had Bheel leaders in almost every political party and have been MNAs and MPAs on reserved seats.



Figure 29: BIF's Jalsa at Umerkot held on April 9, 2017

Source: BIF (2017)

Many members of the BIF were also at the same time members of DST and worked in collaboration with each other and other Dalit associations or forums particularly, SCFP, and Sindh Kolhi Itihad.

8.6 Transnational Networking and the Use of Social Media

In his doctoral dissertation Purvi Mehta argues in favor of establishing Dalit transnational solidarity networks as he deems it in consonance with the “Jotirao Phule’s imagining of solidarity with groups oceans away in the mid-nineteenth century” (Mehta, 2013, pp. 3-4). He argues that Ambedkar had foreseen the disconnect in the Dalit struggle at the transnational level in the Indian political and social structures of the sub-continent. (Mehta, 2013, pp. 3-4) The globalization has now opened the vistas for Dalits to give vent to their anger, agitate in the somewhat neutral global space to pressurize the governments and casteist society at homes.

Cognizant of that historical development, Dalit activists in Sindh keep each other updated about the Dalit activism in India, and sometimes write on it in their newsletters or put blogs on social media. A close circle of Dalit friends engages with each other on social media and in late-night bonfire meetings in debates on Dalit politics and activism of Indian Dalits. Rohit Vemula’s institutional murder, Una Gujarat incident, Chalo Una movement in 2016, Dalit activism organized around Dalit scholar Rohit Vemula’s institutional murder, Gujarat against Gaurakhshash, 'Dalit Swabhimani Yatra'²⁹⁸, a Dalit Indian civil service exam topper, Tina, Nagraj Manjoli making of *Sairat*, a Marathi film²⁹⁹, Bezwada Wilson (Safai Karamchari Andolan) winning of Ramon Magsaysay Award, BAMCEF’s³⁰⁰ and Bharat Mukti Morcha’s struggle for Moolnivasi (indigenous Dalits) featured in debates among Dalit activists and served as the source of inspiration.

²⁹⁸ Jignesh Mevani was the foreman to the recent ‘Chalo Una’ Dalit movement in Gujarat which surfaced after public beating of four Dalits in Una, Gujarat. He was leading a march 'Dalit Swabhimani Yatra' where every other Dalit of state is taking pledge and spreading awareness for not doing the any kind of scavenging.

²⁹⁹ Nagraj Manjoli made ‘Sairat’ Dalit Marathi film that made record business last year, in 2016. The film follows the story of Prashant Kale aka Parshya, a low-caste young boy, and Archana Patil aka Archi, a daughter of a rich savarna landlord.

³⁰⁰ The BAMCEF (All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation) is the only social organization which is organizing Bahujan and Moolnivasi. Its leaders are B.D. Borkar, Daya Ram, S.S. Dhammi, Kahnekar, Ms. Manisha Bangar, Prof. P.D. Satyapal, Dr. Sanajy Ingole and many others. It has a Campus of 28 acres at Nagpur. It publishes weekly newspapers in five languages, with twenty-one publications. It also has a website, Bharat Mukti Morcha head by Waman Meshram and BAMCEF work in alliance with each other and manages a satellite cable TV channel.



Figure 30: Snapshot of Facebook group page of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek.

Source: DST (2017)

Dalit organizations have social media pages and groups. Each group shares activities and agendas of Dalit forums, organizations, and associations to generate the debate and create awareness in local and international social media users. As of June 6, 2017, DST, had 14,956 members in its closed group on Facebook. Each group manages its different chat boxes with 200 plus members. DST engaged around 2000 social media activists that were added and removed from the chatbox operated by its members. The role of those social media debates and the Dalit rhetoric generated on it was so potent that it even became part of a general debate in civil society. Radio program debates initiated, and the articles are written on Dalits and Scheduled castes, both by the pro-Dalit and anti-Dalit writers were the direct result of social media activism. The debate on Dalit and DST affected all other Dalit forums and upper caste ways of doing politics such that any program on Hindu rights or minority issues had to necessarily bring into consideration specific issues of Dalits and Scheduled castes as well.



Figure 31: Pre-election picture of DST chairperson Radha Bheel shared on social media by DST activists.

Source: DST (2017)

Social media served as the foremost tool to communicate with the Dalit activists across the world to share views and learn from each other. Social media as a transnational outlet showed the new possibilities to motivate and sustains struggle through moral and financial support, particularly from the Dalit activists in India, the USA, and Nepal. Dalit activists learned about the history and ideology of Dalits through their social media conversations with the Dalit activists elsewhere in the world. For instance, they knew about the Pro-Dalit Political and electoral reforms in Nepal, Dalit Panther's legacy, Dravidian movements of northern India, Bahujan Samaj Party of UP, and Moolnivasi activism of BAMCEF and Bharat Mukti Morcha that, for many of the activists, were the political models worthy to be emulated with some contextual modifications.

Apart from social media, personal communication with the Dalit activists in other countries was also established. For instance, the literature produced by Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum was shared through courier services. A number of times Dalit parliamentarians and Dalit rights activists traveled to Nepal, Bangladesh and to United Nations to present Dalit issues and the issues related to caste-based discrimination. Dalit activists in Pakistan particularly affiliated with Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN), IDSAN, and PILER, the network of NGOs linked with international Dalit rights activists are in the forefront of bringing to the world attention the problem of caste and Dalit oppression in Sindh

International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2013b; Meghwal M., 2013; Census Organization (Pakistan), 1961; Maliha et al, 2004). The role of the members of PDSN and certain voluntary Dalit rights activists has been pivotal in facilitating transnational communication of the activists affiliated with other local forums. Dalit rights activists create pressure through advocacy-based NGOs (IDSN, PDSN, South Asia Dalit Forum, and Local NGOs) that highlight Dalit issues at national and international forums. For instance, Pirbhu Satyani, affiliated with PDSN, monitored the plight of Dalits during 2010-11 floods and showed to the world how Dalits had been discriminated during flood relief activities³⁰¹.

Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN) is a small NGO established in June 2008. It is networked with the International Dalit Solidarity Network (INGO) and works in alliance with other advocacy-based NGOs working for the rights of peasants, laborers, and Dalits in Pakistan. Its desk was established at PILER, and an 11-member steering committee and an advisory committee was formed with Malji Meghwar as its convener and Zulfiqar Shah (Sayed) as its secretary. Except for four Meghwar, the rest of its members were Sayed, Jati Hindu or other 'upper caste' developmentalists.

After a few years, Kalawanti Raja, the only Dalit woman member, dissociated herself from PDSN, whereas the rest of the members continued to strive for Dalit rights from the same platform. After the formation of DST, the core of members of PDSN also became its part. Most of its members are working as paid employees in other NGOs such as PILER and TRDP. Certain other unregistered members are government employees that are socially active at local level to advocate Dalit rights and highlight Dalit atrocities. Yet their major thrust is to advocate Dalit rights at the global and international forums and to make reports to present at UN, SAARC or any other international forums. Dr. Sono Khangarani, Zulfiqar Shah, Pirbhu Satyani, Malji Meghwar's role has been exemplary in this regard. PDSN was formed to give some sort of formal sanction to the voluntary Dalit activism that they had been doing for several years. Formation of PDSN gave organizational identity to their individual activism and afforded formal legitimacy to the international and transnational invitations that they received. It also gave them legitimacy to present Dalit case not as individuals but an organization to become members of other transnational Dalit organizations, particularly IDSN, ADRF and NCDHR. One of the major contributions of the PDSN and PILER members is to publish the report, 'Long

³⁰¹ Presentation by Pirbhu Lal Satyani (plsatyani@gmail.com), Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN). For International Commission for Dalit Rights in the high-level policy conference at the US State Department on July 22, 2015.

Behind Schedule’, to address and highlight caste-based discrimination. It is the most cited report on the issue of caste discrimination in Pakistan. That report was also then published by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies. (Shah, 2007) PDSN members attended some of the important conferences or seminars on Dalit rights held in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Thailand and highlighted Dalit issues.

With the efforts of PDSN and PILER as well as IDSN,³⁰² Pakistan has been observed and reported by Treaty Bodies on caste discrimination six times so far, by CERD in 2016, 2009 and by CRC in 2009, 2003 and 2016 (International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2017), and have reported the wide prevalence of caste-based discrimination and the discrimination based on descent. Despite ample documentary proof, presented during the first review of Pakistan under the CESCR, in June 2017, Pakistani officials denied that caste-based discrimination exists in Pakistan³⁰³. United Nation’s Special Rapporteurs “on contemporary forms of slavery has on various occasions underlined the link between bonded labor and caste. Examples include the 2009 report on debt bondage”, the 2010 report on domestic servitude, and the 2011 report on child slavery in the artisanal mining and quarrying sector. PDSN along with the IDSN, the two leading Dalit networks, also submitted a few reports to UN Committees on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations highlighting the current situation of Dalit women and the plight of Dalit bonded laborers in Pakistan (Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network, 2013; International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2013a).

A significant advance was made in 2017 when on 13th November, a joint statement issued by IDSN, PDSN, International Movement Against All Forms of Racism and Discrimination (IMADR), Minority Rights Groups International, Anti-slavery International and Forum-Asia, urging upon the Pakistan government to “act immediately to protect Dalits against forced disappearances, slavery and discrimination”. The meeting and online videoconference were attended by Radha Bheel (Chairman DST) as well. Pirbhu Satyani, Karamat Ali and several other Dalit rights activists of Pakistan also attended the conference. Before that IDSN and the PDSN had made a submission to the 2017 periodical review (UPR) “detailing key action that must be taken to protect and promote the rights of Dalits in Pakistan.” The joint statement reads:

³⁰² See IDSN countries. URL: <http://idsn.org/countries/>, Retrieved on 6th June 2017.

³⁰³ See online, Pakistani state’s stance in a report submitted to CERD. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/270/79/PDF/G1527079.pdf?OpenElement>.

In June 2017, the Committee of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)³⁰⁴ recommended the Government to 'carry out a study on the situation of the 'Scheduled castes' or Dalits, with the participation of the members of that community and of relevant experts' and 'take effective measures to eradicate stigma and prejudice against members of the 'scheduled castes', including awareness-raising campaigns, and to combat discrimination against them, particularly in the employment and education sectors.

The joint statement urged upon the state “to recommend to the Government of Pakistan to implement concrete, time-bound action to” eradicate caste discrimination “making explicit reference to Dalits and the rights violations they are suffering.” It called “upon the Government to accept the recommendations and to honor their commitments and make sure that the recommendations at the November 2017 UPR are not only accepted but also urgently implemented and systematically followed up.” This NGO-led activism that makes demands for donor-driven projects from international human rights and development agencies (Arif, 2008; Chandio R. A., 2009; Khalil, 2011; Bhandar Sangat, 2012) is discredited by radical Ambedkarites and the Dalit-Marxists as a counter-revolutionary strategy. Radical Ambedkarites argue that NGO-istic approach trivializes the historical oppression and the humiliation that the Dalits have undergone and presents Dalit issues in the neoliberal reformist framework that fails to grasp the deeper structural violence that demands political movement rather than ‘development’. I could not find any evidence of major external funding to the Dalit rights activists in Pakistan. The activism of Dalit rights activists in Pakistan so far has been voluntary. But they expressed their desire to seek funding to educate the people and spread advocacy to get the Dalit issues of Pakistan registered as the UN’s Millennium Development Goals and to ‘develop’ Dalit communities in Pakistan.

8.7 Dalit Sujaag Tehreek

It is an ultimatum to you all that we shall spread out agitation throughout Sindh. These, Jandawara, these Jogi, these Kabootra, these Sami, these Sansi, these *dharti dhareen* (owners of this land) have now risen up. O Sindhi! It pains to call myself Sindhi, I weep in this land of Sindh. I feel ashamed. I feel embarrassed to call myself *dharti dhareen* (owner of this land). It stinks foul now to call myself indigenous Sindhi, the inheritor of five thousand old Darāwar culture of Sindh. Because of my honor, my dignity, my sisters are not safe in this land. This land stinks now because those who humiliated and oppressed my sisters were not others, not aliens, not outsiders, but my own Sindhi, that oppressor is Sindhi *wadero*. My own Sindhi are

³⁰⁴ The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) is the body of [18 independent experts](#) that monitors implementation of the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) by its States parties. The Committee was established under [ECOSOC Resolution 1985/17](#) of 28 May 1985 to carry out the monitoring functions assigned to the [United Nations Economic and Social Council \(ECOSOC\)](#) in Part IV of the Covenant. See online. URL: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CESCR/Pages/CESCRIndex.aspx>

See also: URL:

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/Countries.aspx?CountryCode=PAK&Lang=EN .

raping my sisters. They have broken my trust. The treatment that our women are meted out; you all know very well. It pains me to call myself Sindhi.

(Radha Bheel, DST Chairperson. June 6, 2017)

In her speech, Radha Bheel, Chairperson of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (DST) condemned the rape of Tulsi Meghwar, abduction of Gori Meghwar, and the death of Irfan Masih³⁰⁵, a sanitation worker belonging to Christian Dalit community formerly known as Chuhras. The protest organized outside at press club was attended by a small crowd of activists affiliated with different pro-Dalit forums, members of the civil society and a few political party workers. These local social and political workers often participate in each other's protests as their issues often converge. Radha's speech reflected gender sensitivity and seemed quite appealing to the Sindhi conscience. She made starkly visible the graded inequalities within Dalits and the Dalit women's extreme vulnerability.

Radha Bheel was appointed the Chairperson of DST on the 7th of May 2016 in a program at Hyderabad. Since I was staying at Hyderabad with the purpose to collect data for my research and had previously met with Radha and most of the expected members, I was made one of the organizers of the programs. I made phone calls to the local political activists living in Hyderabad to attend the program. The program was specifically organized to announce the formation of DST, a Dalit activists' forum. It was attended by 28 leading activists that had especially traveled from different parts of lower Sindh to attend. Radha was not elected by voting, but by the unanimous decision by the participants that became the earliest members of the forum. Prior to that on the 16th of April 2016, it was decided in a Dalit conference at Mirpurkhas that a Dalit movement will be launched that will be destined to become a political party before the next general election.

³⁰⁵ See online: Z Ali (June 2, 2017); [Sanitary worker dies in Umerkot after fasting doctors refuse to touch his 'unclean' body](https://tribune.com.pk/story/1425712/sanitary-worker-dies-doctors-refuse-touch-sludge-covered-body/), URL: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1425712/sanitary-worker-dies-doctors-refuse-touch-sludge-covered-body/>. See also, Caste-based discrimination must be criminalized. PDSN, 'Caste-based discrimination must be criminalized' <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/208603-Caste-based-discrimination-must-be-criminalised>.



Figure 32: Radha Bheel (DST Chairperson) addressing after a protest before Press Club Hyderabad on 28, June 2017)

Source: DST (2017)

There is no Dalit party in Pakistan. All the mainstream secular socialist liberal parties or the leftist and the religious ones, have been Ashrafia dominated parties. These are then considered by Dalits as the Ashrafia dominated ruling political parties. There are few pro-Dalit leftist parties like CPP, AT³⁰⁶, QAT, AJP yet these too are considered as Ashrafia parties. Dalit activists share the strong feeling that they systematically kept at the margins of politics, except in rare cases³⁰⁷, and are not allowed to occupy key leadership positions at parties. DST aimed at fulfilling that political need to provide for an essentially political and social platform for the Dalits.

During the span of two years, DST remained a voluntary unregistered and the small formal association of the Dalit activists that could spread its network into 14 districts of Sindh with about 300-500 members that increased and decreased depending upon the political influences. Its monthly meetings and the conferences were attended variously by some 10 to 150 members. District president and the general secretary from each district (28) were entitled to vote whereas 27 members from the core committee together making 55 members formed the electoral body as well as the general body to make important decisions.

³⁰⁶ Awāmī Tehreek, a Marxist-Maoist –Leninist party with Sindhi nationalist predilections sometimes supported and sometimes indirectly opposed DST's anti-caste poetics as foolish, obsolete and unnecessary. But some important Dalit workers of AT kept openly supporting and defending DST and Dalit cause. Dalit activists alleged that Awāmī Tehreek's leader RB Paleejo even formed or had a hand in the formation of a *Sammāt* Tanzeem (Sindhi Association Sammat castes) that was initially formed by Bahawal Khan in 1980s in the aftermath of Baroch-Sammāt caste wars.

³⁰⁷ Recently in 2016, Vasand Thari (Meghwar) has been made general secretary of Awāmī Tehreek, the Leninist Marxist party of Sindh. A few Meghwar, Kolhi and Bheel politicians, however, have managed to fulfil certain peripheral roles and positions in all local parties.

Juneja Itehad by Khaliq Junejo, Zardari recently became Sardar of Zardaris, GM Sayed made Saadat Tanzeem.



Figure 33: DST Meeting held on September 5, 2017

Source: DST (2017)

It was a group of anti-castes and the Dalits that asserted their caste identities and reframed the socio-economic and political issues from the Ambedkarian perspective. It specifically strived:

1. (Re)introduction of Dalit narrative and Ambedkarian ideology
2. Instilling Dalit consciousness
3. Resolving the social and political issues of Scheduled Castes
4. Mainstreaming Dalit women
5. Networking different Dalit castes and forums

DST was established to inculcate political consciousness among the Scheduled Castes and other oppressed sections of society including women and marginalized communities among Muslims such as fisher folks. At ideological level, it was premised on the Ambedkarian mission of the ‘annihilation of caste’, whereby it was assumed that the socioeconomic classes in South Asia are primarily based on groups of castes (classes). Dalit activists often referred Ambedkar to explain the structure of society explain it as based on the ‘division of laborers’, not simply the division of labour. At the political level, DST aimed at creating the vanguard group of activists from within Dalit women followed by the Dalit men and the rest of the oppressed classes. This political primacy given to the

Dalit women was premised on the assumption that the Dalit women were the most oppressed group that could be galvanized to afford the political alternative with broader sociopolitical implications. Hence, DST, like many of Dalit forums or movements, was not merely caste specific but also gender-sensitive, and brought into consideration class dynamics following the notion of graded intersectionality.

DST activists shared a deep realization that Hindu-Muslim nationalism during partition and before it, led to the sharpening of communal divisions, that it served primarily ‘upper caste’ Muslim and ‘upper caste’ Hindu interests. In a shared space of activism in which Scheduled Castes constituted a small community, to initiate their activism with some success, DST had to take with it several ‘upper caste’ and ‘lower caste’ anti-caste activists. Because of that, I happened to become one of its core members, the organizer of programs and taken as the intellectual as well as a financial contributor in a group of some 15 odd activists. The engagement of the de-castified activists was also considered imperative to absorb initial criticism, ward off Dalit fears, and the sense of insecurity. Dalit activists, as their varied ideological approach informed them, were critical of the post-partition Hinduisation in India, Islamization in Pakistan and Sayedism in Sindh, viewed them as part of the same pro-caste and anti-Dalit narratives that concealed anti-Dalitness in the nationalist narratives.

Instead of organizing big rallies or demonstrations on its own, it strived to attract the leadership of the different Dalit castes and communities on DST’s platform, and disseminate its message to people through them. Hence its significance can be best judged from the overall impact of DST’s activism on different Dalit forums and on the Sindhi civil society, particularly in the context of micropolitical discourse on caste and Dalit issues that generated after its formation. Judging from that angle, DST seems to have played an important role in introducing the alternative discourse in Sindhi society, and in setting up the social and political ground for assertive Dalit politics. DST manifesto upheld the Dravidian identity assertions as emancipatory yet gave such ethnic-racial assertions secondary importance over the narrative that criticized the caste-class based inequalities³⁰⁸. With its bottom-up (particular-to-universal) approach, DST manifesto allowed for the

³⁰⁸ See datasets:

Hussain (2019s), “Manifesto and Constitution of Dalit Sujaag Threek, Sindh, Pakistan”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/sr3789fw86.2

Hussain (2019t), “*Manifesto of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (in Sindhi)*”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/xjgkbbd5kg.2

inclusion and the acceptance open for anyone willing to annihilate caste or to become part of a broader struggle to get rid of all kinds of oppression and humiliations.

Dalit Sujaag Tehreek defined term ‘Dalit’ in its extended and wider sense that includes Scheduled Castes, but also Muslim, Sikh, Ahmedi and Christian Dalits (converts from ex-untouchable Chuhra, Balmiki, and Bhangi communities). Mallah, Mangarhar, Sheedi, Bhangi, Chuhra Shaikh, Shaik Bheel are some of the Muslim Dalit communities that are also considered as Dalit. Notwithstanding that the term ‘Dalit’ was often employed to refer to Scheduled Castes, Darāwar communities, and to any other Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh belonging to ex-untouchable castes, or to any community victimized based on the caste. Dalit term was also employed in a very general sense to mean any one person belonging to any caste provided that person stood by the Dalits and upheld Ambedkarian ideology. Although this multiplicity of the meaning and the usage of the term often created confusion, yet, its deliberate use created awareness about the problem of caste and gender disparity in Sindhi society.

8.7. 1 (Re) introducing Dalit Narrative

The invocation of terms ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ were the banes in Sindh and faced stern opposition from the hinduised Dalits, Jati Hindus, Sindhi nationalists and, to some extent, by the radical Islamists as well. Despite that Dalit activists pushed these terminologies at the local level and in electoral tug-of-war with the dominant caste groups that took off in the wake of DST’s formation. Instead of leading to annihilate the caste, DST’s presence boosted up the morale of the dominant castes, particularly, Kolhi, Bheel, Meghwar, Baghri and Oad communities to reinvigorate their caste-based forums. Being aware of their political significance and demographic strength in lower Sindh, they redefined their agenda with the democratic goals to elect their core body having the dare to question, ridicule and challenge the Jati Hindu patronage and started politicizing the demands with more frequency than before.

The debate revolving around the identity labels did not exist in Sindh before the formation of DST. Before DST, people of Sindh, even majority Dalits did not know much about the Dalit term, not to mention of Ambedkarian ideology. Pakistan Dalit Forum and PDSN (NGO), that worked quietly and highlighted Scheduled Castes’ issues at the international forums. But at the local level, discourse on caste was as if almost non-existent in civil society. DST-driven activism re-introduced and popularized the terms ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ and familiarized the civil society with them. The initial target was to

popularize and familiarize both the terms ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ within Dalits and Sindhi civil society which was not receptive to then, and rather was against their use, particularly the hardline Sindhi nationalists and the upwardly mobile lower middle-class Meghwar, Kolhi and Bheel youth.



Figure 34: B.R. Ambedkar's Anniversary organized by DST and held in Mithi on April 14, 2018.
Source: DST (2018)

DST brought Dalit issues into the public domain to raise the debate on social media and in print media. It invoked the civil society and the political parties to reformulate their opinion about the problem of caste and the status of Dalits.

Media, however, remained, partial to Dalit activism. A Dalit activist opined that:

Sindhi print media was supposed to highlight their activities in newspapers with impartiality, rather on a priority basis. But, being loaded in an ethno-nationalist conspiracy theory mindset, they gave more space to the anti-Dalit lobby and attempted to suppress Dalit voice.

He quoted several examples. For instance, the Scheduled caste seminar organized at Shadi Large, Badin on 13th March 2017, by BIF to create awareness among Dalits was deliberately misreported by daily Sindh Express. The seminar's banner read, 'Yes, I am Scheduled Caste' and the participants stressed the importance of marking Scheduled castes in the census form. But the newspaper reported quoting president BIF "Hindu community should mark Hindu in census". The next day a notification by BIF for the clarification was issued and sent to the newspaper editor complaining of deliberate misreporting and of

damaging the cause of Scheduled Castes. Yet, instead of confessing their misappropriation and misreporting, and acting against anyone responsible for it, the next day they just republished the same with some minor corrections. Sindh Kolhi Itihad also complained that death anniversary of Rooplo' grandson organized by them was not published by any Sindhi print media. This bias of Sindhi newspapers, a Sindhi radio channel, particularly, the Voice of Sindh, was very much obvious by their anti-Dalit social media commentaries, print media articles, and radio programs.



Figure 35: DST's Jalsa for General Elections 2018.

Source: DST (2018)

The cry by Dalit activists that they are being ignored could also be noticed in virtual spaces on social media. Social media activism was also indicative of the fact that the Dalit activists, particularly, after the formation of DST, had acquired a fresh agency to assert.

Politics of representation, politics of shaming the oppressor, exposing the existing untouchability, and the construction of anti-caste narrative constituted the sociopolitical project of Dalit activists in Sindh. DST supported all these indigenous attempts at social engineering while trying to bring them on a single social and political platform. After DST-led activism, certain Dalit activists that were not Dalit by caste, and were already active as human rights, women's rights and Dalit rights activists came to be identified more as Dalit activists as they could now argue with more conviction about Dalit rights. It made their

presence necessary in meetings and programs held by minority activists. For instance, recently, in 2017, Sindh Human Rights Commission, which is headed by a Syed (Rizvi) since its formation, and all privileged castes are its core members, appointed/nominated some 11 human rights activists, and 7 minority rights activists on its committees, out of which (first time) surprisingly five members were pro-Dalit, two members of DST's core committee, including Dr. Sono Khangarani, and two other Dalit activists from advocacy-based NGO background. Hence, although there was only one Dalit and four Savarnas, ten Ashrafia, and one Christian woman on the list, the appointment of 5 pro-Dalit members was a positive sign, that probably could not have been possible if Dalits had not been assertive. A DST activist working with different Human rights and minority organizations told that 'they have kept Dr. Sono Khangarani on the committee panels lest Scheduled castes make fuss.' She told that they have been given space inside minority and human rights corridors due to recent Dalit activism and with much ado. She complained that at each minority forum Savarnas try their best to keep Scheduled caste at distance from decision-makers. Hence, Dalits were found striving to organize and raise the voice for the Dalits at various forums to problematize caste-based discrimination.

8.7.2 Prioritizing Dalit Women

DST was a Dalit-women-led forum. Radha Bheel (chairperson of DST), Kumari Pushpa (President Sindh), were the leading Dalit women activists and the founding members of DST. They were later joined by Tulsi Balani, another brave Dalit woman based at Mithi, Tharparkar. These Dalit women were supported by another prominent and influential political society activist Amar Sindhu (Sindhi Baloch). Several other women also, off and on, came up to express their solidarity with the DST. Giving primacy to woman fold was made the core of DST's agenda and was clearly stipulated in its manifesto and the constitution. DST's manifesto vowed to bring women into leadership positions and let them lead Dalit political struggle. In its manifesto, DST suggested devising a political program for women and Dalit specifically recognizing the miserable plight of women. DST also vowed to establish Dalit Women Wing, a separate unit to specifically deal with issues affecting women, but it could not be made functional.

The efforts of Radha Bheel, Pushpa Kumari and Tulsi Balani, the three leading DST activists, were noticed by the larger society. They were setting up an example to contest the Ashrafia class women's hegemonic position. For instance, Radha Bheel exposed the *waderap* (elitism) of Ashrafia class women on October 7, 2017, when in a program 'Women

want Peace', she thrashed both Shehla Raza and Sheri Rahman on neglecting persecution of Dalit women, Dalit exclusion. Both the so-called leaders of PPP intimidated Radha using feudal language (who the hell are you to speak with us like that!). It was the rare occurrence that any Dalit woman may have confronted Ashrafia women elite at any major forum.



Figure 36: Radha Bheel and Leelan Lohar during an election campaign in 2018 in a village near Mirpurkhas city

Source: DST (2018)

8.7.3 Networking Forums

Dalits in Sindh were contesting their case at various community based, ngoistic and political and civil society forums. They did not have any formidable solidarity alliance at the level of civil society. A small number of Dalit leaders from different political parties, however, were lobbying for Dalits. The DST activists pushed other Dalit forums to be more pro-active. In two years, from March 2016 till June 2018, DST interacted and networked with several Dalit forums and caste-based associations and political parties. The key

members of the Dalit solidarity networks, such as (PDSN), Scheduled Caste Federation of Pakistan (SCFP) and Scheduled Caste Rights Organization (SCRO), Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, (HRCP), Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation, Bheel Intellectual Forum, Darāwar Welfare Organization (Punjab) simultaneously became members of DST. While PDSN was essentially ngoistic forum, the rest of Dalit forums were grounded in local Dalit communities. This networking was aimed at bringing them on a single national level, trans-local and transnational platforms premised on socialist revolutionary and democratic principles of Ambedkar and Karl Marx. While working with and from within all forums, Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (DST) took the political and community-driven route engaging with all existing Dalit forums and attempted to have links with Dalit academicians, scholars, and activists in India and elsewhere.

The member activists of these pro-Dalit forums casually converged when, for instance, the government of Nepal, or any international body such as UN, invited them in their programs or when they collaborated to organize any local event. For instance, in Global parliamentarian's conference on caste-discrimination and the discrimination based on descent, held at Nepal on 25-26 February 2017, DST Chairperson, along with Dalit parliamentarians of Pakistan, and Human rights activists participated in it and presented the case of Dalits³⁰⁹. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Pakistan Institute of Labor Education (PILER) and Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation were the three major advocacy-based human rights organizations that sometimes have attended to the issues of Scheduled Castes as well.

Meetings, conferences, and seminars held by these NGOs were usually attended by lower-middle-class Dalit activists, including DST members. DST attempted to create space inside its body for all types of voluntary community-based Dalits, political workers and those Dalits working for the rights of Scheduled castes and minorities from within different NGOs.³¹⁰ It served, for the time being, as a yardstick to assess the relative unity,

³⁰⁹ "Declaration from the Global Parliamentarians Conference - We, the Parliamentarians from the continents of Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South Americas (Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, European Union, Finland, Germany, India, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka and UK) have come together in Kathmandu on 25-26 February, 2017, at the Global Conference on Discrimination based on Gender and Caste, to express our solidarity in calling upon organs of the State and inter-State bodies in the South Asian Region and globally to end caste based discrimination and untouchability against the communities affected by this systemic And heinous crime and to work for their development and progress within the parameters of equality and justice, equity and inclusion." Source: Pirbhu Satyani (2017).

³¹⁰ Several social forums, NGOs and political parties that drew attention of DST, and their members remained part of Dalit conferences, and activities, and supported DST in various ways. I am mentioning the names of some them here: BIF, SKL, Sindh Facebook Friends, Thar Murk, Communist Party Pakistan, Pakistan Mazdoor Itihad, SCFP, PDSN, Pakistan Dalit Adab Forum, Woman Action forum, Kolhi Sujaag Tehreek, BIF, Awāmī Tehreek, Awāmī Raaj Tehreek,

significance and the achievements of the Dalit communities and groups. The inclusive approach of networking with every possible Dalit forum appeared to have its drawbacks too.



Figure 37: DST activists participating in a long March organized by Sindh Hari Mazdoor Jedojehad.

Source: DST (2017)

The ideological frictions resurfaced within DST between the politically oriented radical Ambedkarites, casteist community forums, and the ngoistic human rights defenders that were simultaneously affiliated with different political and social organizations. This kept DST very fluid and open, formally unregistered and internally disorganized. Over-lapping ideological differences within DST also reflected the overall ideological and political differences of Dalit activists that they with each other before joining DST. The consensus to join and stay with DST largely depended on the consensus on the use of the term ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ along with socially more acceptable terms such as *Adivasi* or *dharti dhareen* (indigenous owner of Sindh).

During the first year after the formation of DST, many left it after a few weeks’ interventions and replaced by the new members, and in this manner, DST kept working with the team of some 25 odd core members. Some of the members reacted intensely and went to join the opposite anti-Dalit faction. Nevertheless, DST remained active as the most effective Dalit platform. I myself as a part of DST, disseminated literature on Ambedkarian

Sindh Sagar Party, Pakistan People’s Party, Jeay Sindh Mahaz, Darāwar Tanzeem, International Workers Youth Movement, Mazdoor Kisan Party, Dehati Mazdoor Tanzeem, All Pakistan Hindu Panchayat (Valmiki). They were not uniform in their support though. In most cases, their responses were casual and came up usually when invoked.

ideology and Dalit movements through social media, emails and face-to-face interactions. In coordination with the Dalit activists of different forums, I also helped prepare and present the list of demands in the form of a letter to the parliamentarians, to urge them to pay heed to the issues of Scheduled Castes in Pakistan³¹¹. The demand draft was also submitted to Fazila Aliani, a member of National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) by DST to consider for the incorporation into a whitepaper that was to be submitted in the National Assembly and Senate in order to play a role in ensuring the rights of the minorities. It was decided in a convention by NCHR that that the whitepaper will be issued based on the recommendations given by the participants of the National Convention to ensure the full implementation of the Supreme Court judgment of June 19, 2014 for providing protection for the religious minorities (Junaidi, 2018) . These and many other similar demands were made by the Dalit activists a number of times on several occasions from the government. This time, the effort was made to take on board the larger number of Dalit activists and circulate the same letter among the general public so that everyone could apprehend the legal nature of Scheduled Castes issues.

Prior to DST, Dalit activists had the literary forums, regional as well as caste-based forums. Except for SCFP, Dalit activists of these forums were not the intellectuals, neither specifically Ambedkarites, nor the Marxists or the capitalists. Their understanding of the caste politics was based on their personal lived experiences that informed that some forums be formed, or a movement be launched to develop community consensus over specifically Dalit and Scheduled caste issues.

DST was formed with that agenda in perspective to educate and organize Dalit activists on a single platform. The sensitization generated by DST on the issues of caste discrimination, untouchability, and the representation greatly influenced the formation of the social and political agendas of different forums of Dalits. For instance, on January 27, 2019, six caste-based forums, including BIF, Hindu Katchi Itehad, Thakur Association, Megh Samaj Sath, Mutahid Meghwar Forum, Kolhi Sujag Tehreek joined hands to form Pakistan Darāwar Itehad with the Scheduled Castes' issues representation put forward as priority agenda. The forum was formed after the intensive debate over its name. Pakistan Iqiliyat Itehad, Pakistan Hindu Itehad, Pakistan Scheduled Castes Itehad were the names suggested and contested by the members present at the decisive meeting held at

³¹¹ See the dataset: Hussain (2019p), "Letter to Parliamentarians: Lalchand Malhi", Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/2855352z4s.2

Mirpurkhas. The formation of such an active and the vibrant local network brought a few formerly ant-Dalit associations on the Dalit or Scheduled Caste agenda, is hailed by the Dalit activists as a major step in the right direction. DST, however, could not meet its idealized goal and could not establish any formal and permanent link or alliance with any particular forum. Dalit forums that sometimes stood together such as during census counting of SC, and at other times stood apart, to target individually the Savarnas, the Ashrafia landlord class, and the religious fanatics.



Figure 38: In an inaugural meeting of Pakistan Darāwaṛ Itehad at Mirpurkhas, January 27, 2019

Nonetheless, DST attracted many Dalit activists that were either affiliated with the other political parties or the Dalit forums and caste-based associations. The lack of success in networking Dalit activists or the Dalit communities, in general, can be attributed to many factors, from the timing of the formation of DST and the internal divisions within Dalits to the Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony and the resultant denial of the problem of caste and Dalitness. DST could not educate and organize Dalits to the degree to pose a challenge to Ashrafia-Savarna structures of oppression. Therefore, the formation of DST and its activism should be understood as the premature engagement with the activists that were not yet ready to sink their casteist and the factional biases.

8.7.4 Failure of DST to Network on Ideological Grounds

The intra-Dalit friction failed to unite Dalits on issues where caste was intersected with the indigenous and the ecological issues. Concerns were raised by the leftists and certain

radical Ambedkarites, even from within DST that it lacks moral capacity to fulfill its Ambedkarian agenda that is framed in an anti-neoliberal language. For instance, DST and BIF were criticized when it failed to take a clear stance against Engro Company when it allegedly built the Gorano reservoir by displacing Meghwar villages by grabbing the community land. While DST activists, in their capacity protested against Gorano issue, DST as a team showed only nominal support for the affected communities of Gorano pond\dam. DST, BIF SCFP and other pro-Dalit forums showed nominal support for the affected families. Gorano reservoir was built by Engro Coal Mining Company for the storage of brackish water pumped out from Tharparkar's coalfield in Islamkot. Some of the villagers and the journalists along with the leftist civil society activists raised serious concerns that the reservoir had been extended to encroach upon Gouchar (Grazing land) and village property that would inundate at least a dozen of villages and hundreds of acres of village wasteland creating human and ecological catastrophe for the locals. Gorano Dam protest had assumed a national level importance in Sindh and was becoming symbolic of indigenous people's resistance. The leftists were linking corporate onslaught to the global imperialistic designs, particularly to the impending CPEC (China-Pak Economic Corridor) project³¹². Some of the Dalit activists occasionally joined the protesters in their four-month-long protest, but they did not hold any rally or program for them. In general, both the pro-Dalit and anti-Dalit factions and forums remained aloof from each other particularly on that issue. The major reason for the lack of cooperation and consensus among Dalits over Gorano issue was that some of them were foreseeing immediate benefits from the projects. They were apprehensive of the certain accesses on the part of Engro and knew that government and the mainstreamed Dalit leadership of PPP are also hand-in-glove with the Engro Company. But they chose, not to involve with that movement primarily because of two reasons.

1. The criticism of the Dalit forums for their anti-caste activism by those who were leading anti-Gorano Dam\pond.
2. Presence in DST and BIF as well as in SCFP certain individual NGO-ised activists that saw an opportunity to progress than digress.
3. Lack of resistance by the Meghwar or Dalit affected by the project.

312 The plan states that the corridor "spans Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and whole Pakistan in spatial range" and will connect South Xinjiang with Pakistan. (15, April, 2017S) '*Exclusive: CPEC master plan revealed*'. See online: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1333101/exclusive-cpec-master-plan-revealed> .

Dalit communities and Dalit leadership, in general, saw Thar coal project as beneficial for them. Neoliberal approach to Dalit issue became evident when, one of the leading Dalit activist Harji Lal's wife was seen driving Chief Minister of Sindh in a dumper during a demo-visit to Thar coal mining site. Both the Bheel and Meghwar communities, along with other marginalized castes of the area, were employed by the company, and the villages affected by Gorano pond were also compensated, not up to their satisfaction though. Dr. Sono Khangarani, the leading Dalit activist from Thar, also remained silent, thereby, tacitly supporting Engro's stance. Apart from the neoliberal tendencies, the ideological antipathy on the issue of caste that existed and had been exposed between the Marxist-nationalists kept both the groups of activists at a distance from each other.

8.7.5 Why DST did not have Ultra-subalterns

DST activists made several attempts to include the maximum number of the representatives from all the Dalitbahujan communities. It did, however, could not achieve that, and the DST remained dominated by the Meghwar, Kolhi and Bheel communities. All the representatives from these communities identified themselves with the Hindu religion despite the fact that they did criticize it as well. DST had a few Jogi and Sami members as well. For a few weeks, a Jandawra member also stayed with DST members and promised to work within his community to create awareness, but eventually abandoned. Some members from Baghri and Oad community also joined and remained active. Sahib Oad, a journalist by profession, became the information secretary and remained quite active for several months and even published investigative stories on the prevailing untouchability against the Dalits. He was swayed by some of his Hindutvadi relatives to abandon DST.

Table 27: DST Members: Caste-Class Profile

No.	Caste group	Caste	May-2016 to September 2016	October 2016 to January 2017
1	Dominant Dalit castes	Kolhi, Bheel Meghwar	144	231
2	Ashrafia class anti-caste activists	Sammāt, Sayed, Baloch, Urdu-speaking Ashrafia	98	111
3	Pasmanda Muslims	Shaikh, Solangi, Sheedi, Mangarhar	35	44
4	Ultra-subalterns	Gurugurla Kabootra Jandawra, Sami, Jogi	5	2
5		Ex-Shudras	3	3
6	Other Non-Muslim Dalits	Qadiani, Ahmadi, Christian Dalits	3	2
7		Baghri, Oad	7	1
8		Anti-caste Savarna activists	0	0

Similarly, Mangha Ram Oad was pressurized by a Sindhi nationalist party, STP. He was its member before he joined DST. Vesakhi Mal Bhagri, a panchayat leader of the Baghri community of Matiari also remained active and even helped organize a program at Larkana. He had primarily joined with the hope to get some funding for his community. Moreover, the Baghri community was ahead of all other communities to get Hinduised as it reflected in its Satsang programs and the increasing devotion to Brahminic gods. Vesakhi left, and his sons joined the anti-Dalit camp. In short, DST could not convince any Jandwara, Kabootra, Gurgula and several other ultra-subaltern semi-nomadic groups to join DST. The biggest reason lied in the ultra-subaltern state of these communities.

During the second meeting at Hyderabad, when we approached a Jandwara and tried to convince him he said, “People like you come to us. Bring cameras, take our snaps, make promises and then never return. Now you have come to take us elsewhere.” He said pointing his hand towards 5 children standing nearby us, “Brother, if we go with you, then who will fetch the *manni tukur* (meal) for these kids”. Eventually, he agreed to come with us when we promised to pay for the one-day meal for his family. He did come to the program in his shattered dress. A newly convert Shaikh from a Shikari Bheel community also had joined. This brought the socioeconomic disparity within the Dalit activists in stark contrast. Meghwar, Kolhi and Hindu Bheel activists seemed well-educated and well-dressed as compared to Shikari Bheel converts and the Jandwaras, who even did not know what the ‘Dalit’ means, or what benefit the political activism can be for their families. Pasmada Muslims and the Christian Dalits and Ahmadi Dalits did not join as they had more solidly formed their political identities around religion to counter both the untouchability and Islam. Hence, right from the beginnings, DST turns out to be the representative forum only of the Hindu Dalits, particularly of the Kolhi, Bheel and Meghwar communities.

8.7.6 Identifying Potential Dalit activists from Ashrafia class

Dalits lack in terms of socioeconomic resources to organize events or gather their communities. Most of their hard-earned capital is wasted on socio-religious programs such as Satsang (devotional singing programs) and the ‘osar’ or ‘baaras’ (feasts of death ceremonies) and marriage-related expenses. This lack of surplus resource that could be expended on political activism was a matter of concern for the DST activists. Political activism has been the prerogative of the ‘upper caste’ feudal capitalist politicians and that of the resourceful leftists and the nationalists. It was also because of that that the pro-Dalit

activists from within Ashrafia castes having financial prowess resorted several times. Sher Solangi (pasmanda Muslim) opined:

In the early stages of Dalit organization, when resources are deficient, relying on such a kind of indirect patronization by Ashrafia, to compensate for resource deficiency when it does not directly affect the Dalit agenda, should be acceptable.

Hence, several times the halls booked or used by DST were provided either by government or by the Ashrafia class pro-Dalit activists, Noor Junejo, Amar Sindhu, Mir Safdar Ali and Dalits of Mahar group of Ghotki. The last meeting of DST held in May 2017, to elect its new body was held at the Otaq (guest house) of Mir Safdar Talpur. Talpurs have been the ruling caste of lower Sindh. Mir Safdar Talpur not only provided a decent space but also hosted a feast and served it with his own hands. DST activists defended such an Ashrafia intervention as a form of indirect patronization that the Dalits had to allow to avoid ghettoization. Still, there were a few activists in each major Dalit community that could arrange the awareness programs on their own by pooling funds together from among the members of the community. For instance, the Baghri community of Larkana invited DST activists and arranged the program on their own with nominal support of DST.

8.7.7 Instilling Dalit Consciousness

In the 6th Population Census held in 2017, many among the Dalit communities made a politically conscious decision to mark ‘Scheduled Caste’ (SC), instead of ‘Hindu’. Their marking of SC this time was a conscious choice developed after the recent sensitization instilled primarily by the activists of DST and spread over into Dalit communities by the BIF, PMC, and several other splinter forums, associations, and organizations. DST-led activism revolved around issue of marking Scheduled Castes, instead of ‘Hindu’, in census forms. It was the test case of how bottom-up activism can generate the ideological debate in civil society on the subaltern communities and the forgotten issues, and through Dalit and anti-Dalit activists brings the issue to the attention of the state and the government as well. It was also an example of how Scheduled Caste communities can be educated about their rights and build up community consciousness and motivate them to do issue-based politics.

The movement to mark the Schedule Castes also proved an outlet for the pent-up anger of Dalits against the dominant castes. Each Dalit activist had the story of social and institutional untouchability practiced against himself or his community that they personally experienced. For instance, the story of Dr. Sono Mal Khangarani (DST and PDSN member)

is self-explanatory as to why, after all, he is the staunch advocate of Dalit rights. Right from early childhood, he was ridiculed and that is not ending even till today although the nature of the ridicule has become more indirect and is worded in a different idiom. Students and the co-villagers would make fun of Dr.Khangarani saying that ‘Look, now the Meghwar will also go to school and study’. Wherever, he did private or government jobs, from the as low profile as becoming a paid washerman at the Khaskheli wash house in Tando Ghulam Ali, to become the CEO³¹³ in TRDP³¹⁴, he was humiliated one way or another, just because of his Dalit background. Many Savarnas particularly Thakurs, Vaniyas and Brahmins, explicitly expressed their reluctance to work in TRDP just because Dr.Khangarani was the CEO of TRDP. An incident reflecting an ‘untouchable’ attitude of the Brahminic-Ashrafia-mindset of the corporate sector was observed against the newly elected Dalit senator Krishna Kolhi, when in a program organized by Engro Thar Coal Mining Company, she was pressed by the volunteers of Engro company to vacate the Sofa and shift to the back seats. Felt insulted, eventually, Krishna left the place and headed outside³¹⁵.

Similar experiences were shared by different Dalit activists who been treated as untouchables, served tea in Soneri cups and the utensils lying separately from major cutlery, and especially kept on hotels for the use of Dalits only. They narrated their stories of struggle of how they achieved the economic success devoid of equal social respect that they deserved. After the formation of DST, these incidents of the Dalit humiliation were shared in DST meetings that were held, in conferences and on social media. The Dalits felt liberated to share such personal experiences by appealing the larger community, by shaming the Savarna-Ashrafia classes, and, in process, mobilizing each other to organize.

8.7.8 Nature of allegations against DST

One of the goals of DST that was to familiarize Dalits and the people of Sindh with the anti-caste narrative and generate the contextually relevant and empirically grounded Ambedkarian narrative. The impact of the debate in civil society over Dalit activism of DST by the serious kind of allegations against it coming from different quarters.

³¹³ Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

³¹⁴ Thardeep Rural Development Program (TRDP).

³¹⁵ Source: Online texting interview with the journalist Mumtaz Nuhrio, who was present at the occasion, and with Sahil Balani, a Dalit journalist who confirmed it.

1. It's a conspiracy against the Hindu community and Hindu religion. Dalit Tehreek is a Brahminic ploy. They are promoting Brahminism by propagating casteism (A Hindu rights activist).
2. All Sindhi are Dalits, all are oppressed. Sindhi is a Dalit nation. Saithiyā Class of Hindus is also Dalit. (Hindu activists)
3. Jati Hindus themselves are oppressed in Sindh and are being victimized by radical Islamists and also by the state. DST is serving the state's interests thus targeting Jati Hindus.
4. It's a conspiracy against minorities. Dalits are anti-Hindu and divide the Hindu nation or Hindu religion or Hindu minority or minorities. (A minority rights activist).
5. Dalitism is eroding the categorical base of Marxism by relabeling Dalit castes as Dalit class.
6. Its donor-sponsored project. DST is NGO. Its anti-political (certain Marxists and Journalists)
7. DST has brought out a non-issue, the dead issue. It's non-antagonistic. The real issue is nationalist oppression.
8. DST's members possess a corrupt record and are project hungry.
9. Dalit Tehreek is playing ethnic and communal politics. Dalits are playing childish games. They are non-entity. Dalit Tehreek has failed. People of Sindh have rejected it. There is no justification left for its existence.
10. Dalit Tehreek is a bunch of opportunists that just want to attract donors to seek funds for their vested interest.
11. Dalit activists just want to have few seats in assemblies, a costly adventure, at the cost of dividing the Sindhi nation.
12. There is no harm or gain to any party or group from the Dalit movement. It's a zero-sum game.

Several conferences and corner meetings were held throughout the province. All major Dalit activities and the atrocities were recast in the Dalit framework and publicized adding a Dalit angle to local politics in Sindh.

8.7.9 Self-criticism of DST

DST's strategy was to network different community-based forums and leftist organizations. Its effort proved to be a success on one front, and the failure on the other.

While DST succeeded in initiating the national-regional debate in civil society circles and among the Dalit communities on the use and political significance of the term ‘Dalit’ and draw attention to the issues of Dalits, it could not bring Dalit forums on a single platform. Most of the forums of the Dalits were organized around their own caste identity and did not show much willingness to transcend it to immerse in any generic forum inclusive of all the oppressed castes. Different splinter groups of Dalits and the individuals joined for a few months and then turned indifferent. Most of the caste-based Dalit forums, instead of sinking their casteism for the larger alliance, continued to assert their caste identities while nominally raised voice against the oppression that other Dalit communities underwent. NGO-based Dalit activists also kept wavering, sometimes taking interest into DST-led activism, and at other times, particularly when DST seemed drifting towards politics, observing distance from it. Some pro-Dalit organizations, such as Hari Porihiat Committee, Mazdoor Kisan Itihad, Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) and the Dalit activists from within PPP continued to extend their moral support to DST.

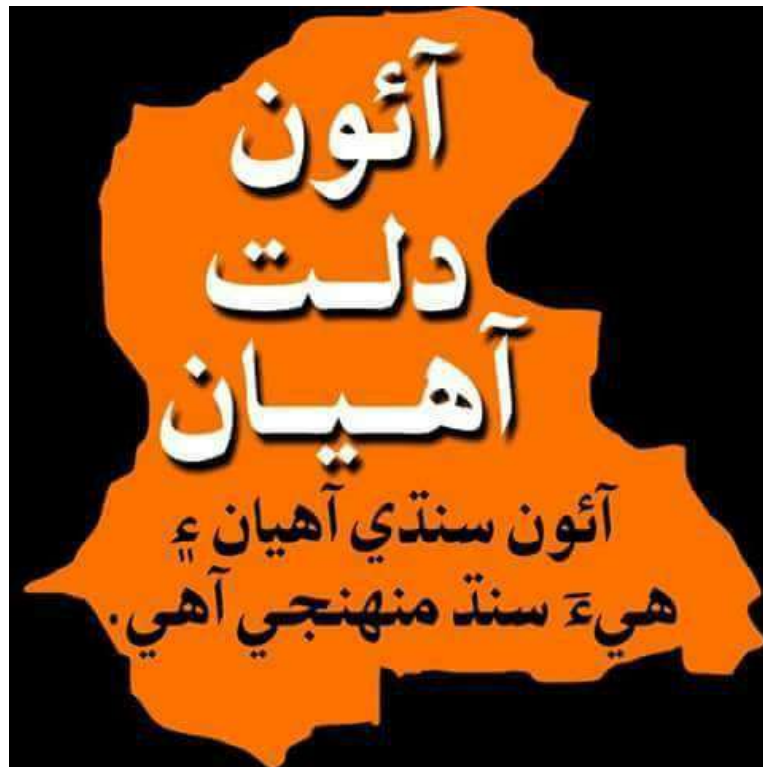


Figure 39 Social Media poster map of Sindh that read, ‘I am Dalit, I am Sindhi and this Sindhi is mine’.

Source: DST (2016)

Particularly highlighting the role of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek, Muhib Bheel, a Dalit activist and intellectual himself, summed up Dalit activism, in this manner:

Presently, Dalit Tehreek, which is working on Dalits, pretends to assume the role of a political party. Therefore, office bearers and members of it can better explain issues pertaining to it. I would just present some of the concerns regarding it based on my observational analysis, that should be taken with the spirit of constructive criticism... [Radha Bheel, which was elected Chairperson of DST] delivered more than what was expected of her. On the political front, only that person can stand steadfastly who may have passed the ideological test and may have gone through political training under any political organization. Radha Bheel, for a brief period of time, remained active in Sindhiyani Tehreek³¹⁶. She led DST with braveness and observed political sagacity in the face of bitter criticism. It was because of the political training that she received during his engagement with Sindhiyani Tehreek. Apart from that, most of the core members affiliated with DST have little exposure to active politics and have remained social workers or affiliated with donor-driven NGOs. And that is the weakest link in that movement which is exploited and targeted by the Brahmin imperialist agents as well. Paradoxically, those who oppose it, the majority of them are also affiliated with one or other sort of NGO, and it has generated a new blame-game related to seeking projects and funding.

Muhib Bheel (2018) *Dalit Tehreek, Kujh Suwal?*

Dr. Sono Khangarani, DST convener somewhat concurs with the concerns and assessment of Muhib Bheel. He argues:

I thought that we let the movement grow for another year which will allow us to develop more systems to create more membership-based in each district and have elections first from district bodies. The district bodies should elect the central body. It sounds too early to get into politics of vote.

(Dr. Sono Khangarani, Personal communication, 2017)

An NGO worker and Dalit rights activist affiliated with PILER expressed his disappointment that 'DST should have worked for getting funded project but unfortunately it has drifted more towards politics'. To the disappointment of Dr. Sono Khangarani, and also to certain other members, membership of DST could not be raised as per expectations, and it also created resentment among a few active members who could not qualify to elect the core committee members. DST had nominated 2 members from each of the districts of Sindh and 2 from the districts of Punjab to form a general body. Their primary task was to disseminate the message of DST, increase membership, look for potential social and political allies, and thus to expand the network of DST in their respective districts, hold similar elections the next time as stipulated in DST's constitution. It was a very ambitious agenda for a voluntary organization that lacked in the requisite social and the economic as well as the political capital. Economically, most of its members were from the lower-middle class. Yet, as far as, the overall role of DST as the symbol of reinvigorated Dalit activism was concerned, DST can still be credited with forming the ground for a larger

³¹⁶ Sindhiyani Tehreek is a women-based wing of Awāmi Tehreek, a Marxist-Maoist-Leninist party based in Sindh.

Dalit assertion, with the introduction of the Dalit narrative and discourse that charged up the rest of active and non-active Dalit activists.

Impact of DST in public and political sphere can also be had through re-advertisement of jobs of Scheduled Castes, newspaper articles written on Dalit debates, statements of the veteran Dalit leaders and the politicians, and social media debate on the Dalit issues. DST mounted Dalit discourse by making conscious, purposeful and persistent use of the term 'Dalit'. By considering every possible invitation as the opportunity, the members of DST transmitted its agenda at the local and international levels. For instance, DST members, along with Dalit parliamentarian of Pakistan, presented their point of view in global parliamentarian's conference on caste-discrimination and the discrimination based on descent, held at Nepal in 2017. Similarly, at the national level, DST raised Dalit issues of the Dalit exclusion thereby attempting to subvert the religious minority paradigm. For instance, a consultative meeting was held by the HRCP with the support of German funding body Friderich Naumann-Stiftung Fur Freiheit (FNF) on 12th of June 2017, that was attended by the newly elected DST President Sindh, Kumari Pushpa, Radha Bheel, Chairperson DST, and Vesakhi Mal Baghri. The anti-Dalit activists, a journalist amongst them and BIF Pakistan's President Bhagchand Bheel was also invited. The agenda of the meeting revolved around the core issues of Scheduled Castes. Their agenda was in line with some basic objectives of DST already outlined in its manifesto a year back, particularly the debate revolving around identity labels. Lahore-based HRCP's member Chaudhry Najamuddin, who chaired the event, saw no harm in the temporary application of Scheduled Caste status pointing out that globally this concept is tried for the marginalized communities. A similar meeting was held on June 14, 2015, in Sindh that was also attended by HRCP's secretary-general, I.A Rahman, a noted human rights activist, and secretary-general HRCP. In those meetings, similar concerns over the terminology were brought under discussion³¹⁷. HRCP had attempted to resolve that conflict over the use or misuse of Hindu and Scheduled castes labels for those affected by caste discrimination. (Dawn, 2015). After that meeting, IA Rehman wrote an article in daily Dawn, in which he suggested the replacement of term Scheduled Caste with Dalit (Rehman, 2017). At the event organized by HRCP, both pro-Dalit and anti-Dalit activists, defined as "Two groups of political and social activists from that community appear at loggerheads regarding which of either path to follow to acquire greater rights and opportunities" (Ali Z. , 2017).

³¹⁷ See '[Call to curb discrimination against scheduled caste](https://www.dawn.com/news/1188196)', Published in Dawn, June 15th, 2015 , URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1188196>

As it seems, although the debate revolving around ‘Dalit’ and ‘Scheduled Castes’ identity labels had always been, yet it was limited to those NGOs working for human rights. DST’s contribution was to make it public and rather political by drawing the attention of the common person and the civil society at large. Since Dalit leadership within PPP, the ruling Ashrafia party had failed to get the Dalit case registered, DST emerged as the inspiration to take the specifically Dalit issues to the legislators, to academicians, scholars, and the activists in Sindh, Pakistan as well as, through transnational media, in India and elsewhere.



Figure 40: Surender Valasai and Dr.Khatumal holding printed pages to express their solidarity with the PPP and Dalit cause.

Source: DST (2017)

The impact of DST on the Dalit politicians and its recognition by the Dalit activists can be gauged the he way the most celebrated Dalit leader Dr. Khatumal Jeewan and Surendar Valasai hold printed pages that read “We are Dalits, we love PPP” in their hands in solidarity with the DST against anti-Dalit onslaught, and by the Dr. Khatumal’s statement congratulating it on electing a new body of members:

Congrats to the newly elected body. Hope new body will work hard and sincerely to achieve the goals which we think, are necessary to eliminate all kinds of discrimination in our society existing in different forms, not only Dalit issues but many others. The majority

prevails in democracy, and democracy is the best revenge which we shall achieve through census results. Sath Salamat!

(Dr. Khatumal, Jeewan. May 28, 2017)

This empathy of the Dalit activists with DST that transcended the political, provincial and regional boundaries was also criticized as counterproductive. For instance, Muhib Bheel argued:

Many persons having sympathies for Dalit movement, that off and on, defended it, are the ones also affiliated with other political parties. Many of them are active members of certain political parties, such as Dr. Khatumal Jeewan, Engineer Giyanchand, Poonjo Mal Bheel, Surender Valasai, Heman Das Advocate, Advocate Bhagwands Bheel, Kanji Rano Bheel, (the writer of this text) Muhib Bheel, Sarwan Bheel Adv, Ranshal Kolhi, Damro Mal, Dayal Das, Nemdas Kolhi and others. These are the persons that are not directly responsible for any of the activity of Dalit Tehreek, but they all eagerly want that the voice of their people must be raised. Sindhi Kolhi Itihad, Bheel Intellectual Form, Baghri Itihad, Gadoliyal Lohar Itihad, Scheduled caste Federation and *Adivasi* Itihad have also been allied to this Dalit Tehreek. Apart from that, FC Rathore, Raj Kumar Khokahr, Ganpat Rai Bheel, Mahesh Bheel, Chetan Bheel, Advocate Chandi Ram Bheel, Bhalji Bheel, Advocate Lajpat Bheel, Jairam Abojhas are some key Dalit activists that also agreed with Dalit Tehreek on certain key points and have been together, particularly, on issue of marking Scheduled caste in census form.

Lala Lajpat Bheel, Mirchand Bheel, and several other Dalit activists have worked within their communities and stood steadfast in support of marking Scheduled castes in the census and have bravely faced the opposition of Brahminic imperialist forces. Dalit Tehreek have not been the sole torchbearer in that whole struggle. Long marches, awareness rallies and protests staged by Bheel Intellectual Forum and Sindh Kolhi Itihad have been the common feature of Dalit activism during the last two years. Dalit Tehreek, however, did an exemplary job on social media, but on ground their activism has been less than satisfactory. In certain rape cases, it did agitate that are on record for which they deserve credit.

(Bheel M. , Darawar Jaag Mein aahin, 2017)

The criticism of DST by Muhib Bheel furnishes an honest political opinion not only about DST but also about the whole Dalit activism in Sindh. He amply situates the central position of DST, while implicitly acknowledging its role as the emerging political organization, and which has succeeded in networking, although arbitrarily, the Dalit activists that were formerly distanced from each other. However, on the ground as the protesting body taking to the streets, DST could not deliver what was expected by many. DST did organize a few rallies and participated in some others organized by other Dalit organizations and the leftist political party (CPP). It raised voice against the rapes, murders and the untouchability meted out Dalits in Sindh. Although Dalit Sujaag Tehreek failed to unite Dalit forums and associations on a single platform, yet it brings them closer to each other, as result of which, they established contacts with each other, and began asserting themselves publicly without fear. Given the diversity of the political activists that DST

aimed to attract, many doubts that it can ever become a political party with the agenda on which everyone may agree. According to Muhib Bheel:

I fear that, in the long run, as it has already happened in India, Brahmin imperialist may hijack Dalit Tehreek, and implant their agents within it. It will, then, generate despondency within the oppressed and will get further alienated from the political movements of the oppressed. No one knows for sure, that NGO-ised members of Dalit Tehreek would remain committed to Dalit cause, and could stand with steadfastness against all odds? They could be trapped by Brahmin imperialist, sell themselves out to them? They could even go against the very cause of Dalits. Because in communist parties of Russia and China too imperialist agents had penetrated inside and had become members of its core committees. Only purely political minds can apprehend these concerns. Because of that, Dalit Tehreek has to advance with great care lest its vigour is taken away by Brahmin bloodsuckers.

(Bheel M. , Dalit Tehreek, Kujh Suwal? (Sindhi), 2018)

Notwithstanding DST's failures at many levels, it can still be credited with some positive changes it induced, such as:

1. The successful drive to mark SC in the 6th population census. Its success can be assessed on the basis of population census comparison. It, however, failed to resolve the fundamental problem of Dalits wrought by the government, that is, confusion of the 'SC' category with 'religion' in the census form.
2. For the first time in history, more than 8 Dalits were nominated on seats reserved MNA and MPA elected from non-Muslims in Pakistan. It seemed likely that this time 4 to 5 of them would make their way to Sindh Assembly and National Assembly. The role of DST as a political catalyst to mobilize Dalit activists across political parties, to demand their due political position within their respective parties, is hard to deny.
3. Generation and the introduction of Dalit discourse in civil society by popularizing 'Dalit' as a term of agitation and resistance against casteism and patriarchy. This exercise instilled Dalit consciousness and inspired confidence among the potential activists to resist caste-based discrimination and related oppression.
4. The creation of Dalit political narrative and devising Dalit agenda through its manifesto thereby suggesting the rest of Dalit associations to politicize.
5. Exposed the pitfalls of pre-existing meta-narratives of political Islam, Sindhi nationalism and the minority paradigm. Problematized the institution of caste and class. The persistent criticism casteism and the ideal type of Brahminic Varna system.

6. Encouraging women to lead the Dalit movement.
7. Formed alliances with CPP, Pakistan Mazdoor Itihad and other leftist political parties. Convinced a section of Marxists that their organizational structure being Ashrafia-led, they are incapable to resolve Dalit issues unless they allow Dalit and Dalit women in particular to lead the struggles of the oppressed.
8. Took into confidence Dalit leadership of the ruling party of Sindh (PPP) and PTI while at the same time boosted the morale of Dalit leaders to negotiate Dalit issues with confidence.
9. Influenced government to allot jobs to SCs and ensure that the maximum number of minority-based scholarships go to SC students
10. Identified pro-Dalit Ashrafia and ex-Shudras within Jati Hindus and aligned many of them with the DST.

8.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, different organizational approaches of Dalit activists, particularly of the Ambedkarites were discussed as they problematized them and around which they tended to organize themselves for the social and political gains. The revolutionary, reformatory and strategic depth of some of the forums with whom I interacted were discussed as examples of the ways Dalits tend to organize. Based on the discussion, it can be inferred that they were trying to subvert the dominant structural hierarchies mainly through the reconstruction and recasting of the caste identities.

The local Dalit forums were small in size and had the membership that varied from 10 persons to about 1000. Most of the individual Dalits held the membership of several forums, associations and political parties at the same time. Dalit forums were active for both social and political purposes. Although they wanted to promote education as the way out of poverty and discrimination, their main thrust was to get political representation, and criticize Saithiyā or Vaniya class of the local Savarnas. Dalit activists did not have any elaborate kind of strategy to organize. Notwithstanding that few amongst them had some formulae to offer. For instance, Ganpat Rai Bheel, suggested to the Ambedkarian dictum 'Educate, Agitate, Organize' (E.A.O). This dictum was interpreted by some very much like the V.T.Rajshekhar explained it as the kind of spontaneous process that would mature in due process of time. Therefore, it did not require much effort to jump to the final stage of 'organize'. The Ambedkarites with the reformist bent of mind argued for educating Dalits

about their past before doing mainstream politics. By education, they meant creating awareness about Dalit issues along with general education, so that informed agitation and the organizational stage could be reached. Unlike reformist Ambedkarites, the neoliberal Dalits wanted to bring about change through social education, schooling, and hard work to meet the criterion of merit. Hence, educating Dalits meant different things for different groups of Dalit activists. Notwithstanding, both the groups seemed conscious of being oppressed and the marginalized and meant to educate the Dalits to reach to the respectable positions of prestige and power in the society. Ambedkarite reformists, particularly, Dr. Sono Khangarani, explained Dalit politics of emancipation as a kind of gradual process that would eventually lead from casteism to Dalitism. By Dalitism, he meant, the unified assertion of all Dalit castes. According to him Dalit activism in Pakistan was gradually unfolding itself into five historically contingent stages or phases. This undergoing process, he argued, should guide the Dalit's social and political agenda in Pakistan.

Having discussed organizational strategies, I gave forth the historical and contemporary background of the Dalit forums, their social and political alignment with different social and political actors, the inherent casteism and the political ramifications. Based on the facts, extrapolated, it can be concluded that although most of the Dalit forums or associations in Sindh were very small, as compared to very large social and political organizations of the Dalitbahujans working in India, they do certainly have a significant political impact on the overall polity of the Mirpurkhas Division in lower Sindh. They did draw the attention of the Savarnas and the political parties, although their core issues always remained unattended and unresolved. Notwithstanding that, they were increasingly getting networked with the Dalit activists in other parts of the world and using international forums to build the pressure on the Savarna-Ashrafia elite in Sindh, Pakistan. The Dalit leadership faced the double challenge to make the state and the civil society realize that caste mattered and that the Dalits were being excluded. They were actively problematizing the caste discrimination so that they could legitimize their demands for representation.

DST, the forum with which I worked for the Dalit rights, served as the networking catalyst for all Dalit forums and associations. DST proved that casteism and Dalit exclusion normalized and glossed under the Sufi nationalist and Hindutvadi narratives. The anti-Dalit reaction against DST, however, seemed to serve the very purpose of Dalit activists, that is, to draw the attention of the Sindhi civil and political society towards the issues of the Dalits, and to popularize the Dalit's Ambedkarian political vocabulary.

One of the major challenges that DST and SCFP undertook was to gather the representatives from all the Dalitbahujan castes but failed. Apart from the Savarna-Ashrafia hegemonic constraints, the reasons for the failure of DST and SCFP lied in the internal graded inequalities in the form of Meghwar dominance followed by Bheels and Kolhis. Several other Dalit communities were found to live the ultra-subaltern existence such as Jandawra, Kabootra, Gurgula, Barha, etc. It was mainly because of that ultra-subalternity, the extreme marginality that DST struggled to enlist any member from those communities. The graded inequalities also existed because certain caste groups, such as Kolhis, Bheels and Meghwars had the demographic advantage over certain other ultra-subaltern castes, such as Gurgula, Kabootra, Kucheria, Sami, Jogi etc. These subaltern castes, I argue, are likely to remain excluded even from the Dalit politics mainly because of the Savarnizing and Ashrafizing tendencies among the Dalit activists that propel the Dalits to look upwards instead of towards those who had lagged.

Despite these internal organization dilemmas, on January 27, 2019, six caste-based forums, including BIF, joined hands to form Pakistan Darāwar Itihad with the issues of ‘Scheduled Castes’ put forward as the priority agenda. The formation of the pro-Dalit forum was hailed by both the DST and SCFP members and other pro-Dalit forums as the positive step in the right direction as it used ‘Scheduled Castes’ as the political token instead of ‘minority’ or ‘Hindu’. Hence, it is yet to see, how, for instance, such inter-caste forums rise from their caste bias to embrace the ultra-subaltern Dalit communities to form a vigorous anti-caste and emancipatory front against the Savarna and Ashrafia classes. Equally interesting will be to see if the pasmanda Muslims, and the Christian Dalits also join with them, which so far seems extremely difficult given the hegemonic influence of political Islam and Sufism, and the ‘Hindu minority’ narratives. It was, however, evident that due to stronger influence of Hindu-Muslim binaries, the Scheduled Castes in Punjab and or Sindh, and the pasmanda Muslims, such as that of Darāwar Tanzeem and the Muslim Shaikh’s in Punjab, may not easily get united on a single platform. That will also be interesting to see whether the significant number of pro caste or the anti-Dalit activists will break their casteist shells to embark upon the radical path to struggle for the oppressed classes from an anti-caste political platform. That is to see if the Dalit activists succeed in creating the inter-caste or trans-caste social and political alliances of the oppressed at the Pakistan level.

Chapter 9: Possibilities of Dalit Representation

9.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter is an attempt to evaluate the possibilities of Dalit emancipation and inclusion as imagined by Dalit activists through Dalit representation in the political domain. I weave the analysis done in different chapters reflective of the political worldview of the Dalit activists that I have condensed into to three major premises: Despite the constraints of Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony that (2) Dalits find some space to strive for self-respect through identity assertions and for representation to achieve sociopolitical parity with Ashrafia-Savarna castes. (3) Although they do not have elaborate kinds of political agenda, nonetheless, they have identified certain issues and problematized them in the form demands from or recommendations to the state, governments and civil society.

Before, elaborating upon Dalit activist's demands, I will attempt to summarize the causative, relational and correlating factors, processes and practices related to Dalit identity assertions to argue for or against the possibilities of Dalit emancipation as imagined by Dalit activists.

9.2 Coping up with Savarna-Ashrafia Hegemony

According to Gopal Guru, liberal democracy [in India] 'exists in the shadow of eternal truth of caste' (Guru, 2011, p. 119). With some caveats, this also true of caste, or rather casteism in Sindh, whereby Ashrafia-Savarna elite dominates both political and socially to the exclusion of Dalits. This hegemonic influence is evident from the cursory look at the historiography of casteism (discussed in Chapter 3 and 4), and the post-Partition history whereby, Scheduled Castes as the group of marginalized communities were ignored and gradually misrecognized, both socially and politically. Promises made to the leaders of the Scheduled Castes by the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah fell flat right from the inception, as laws and the rules of the state were formulated based on two-nation theory that polarized society on the religious lines that neither aimed at nor succeeded in, diluting existing caste-based discriminatory social structure that excluded the Dalits. The realization that casteism did not dissipate as expected, resulted in apologetic and relativizing and sometimes rationalizing post-hoc explanations coming forth mostly from the Ashrafia-Savarna beneficiaries of the system. This dissonance or discrepancy between the ideal position of the Ashrafia-Savarna class and the reality of Dalit exclusion, in a way, reflected in the denial of casteism by the state, political parties, civil society, and the human rights watchdogs.

Religious polity brought the Savarnas in a more favorable position to play the Hindu victim card and to capitalize on their inherited caste capital to hegemonize minority politics (discussed in Chapters 4 and 6). Hence, while the Dalit activists claimed to be the majority within the minority, they could not escape the hegemonic influence of the religious ‘minority’ narrative that compelled them to play second fiddle to Savarna Hindus that dominated minority politics. Hence, it can be argued that the Dalit’s counter-hegemonic ‘hidden script’ (Scott, 1990) that sometimes manifested in the form of caste-based solidarities, was being subverted by the dominant Ashrafia-Savarna discourse that defined otherness fundamentally on the basis of religion (Hindu-under-Muslim).

At the level of governmental level, the constitutional, administrative and political changes affected the way the social identities of the Dalits were constructed and enumerated affecting their chances of being included in the mainstream or continue to be excluded. The problem of casteism was rather complicated by identitarian-communalist categorization of Scheduled Castes as the (Hindu) religious community of the non-Muslims. This lumping of caste category with the religion created further categorical confusion and an identity crisis that I observed during Dalit’s drive for marking Scheduled Castes during the Population Census. It was the typical instance of the state’s indifference and the lack of political will to properly define and enumerate the marginalized castes or the sections of society. This bio-political exercise of population enumeration (Census), inadvertently, enabled the state and the Savarna-Ashrafia elite to control, direct, view and quantify society in terms of religious binaries. ‘Hindu’ and ‘minority’ thus became the state-approved blanket terms that even the staunch Dalit activists sometimes had to adopt when addressing Hindu and minority issues.

Looking retrospectively, the political position of the Scheduled Castes in Sindh was undermined when East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) seceded from West Pakistan (now Pakistan) in 1971 as the Scheduled Castes constituted more than 22 percent of the population of East Pakistan. This demographic strength ensured Dalit’s visibility at the national level. Paradoxically Dalits were rather Savarnized during the Islamic regime of General Zia as it scrapped the ‘Scheduled Castes’ category from the Population Census in 1981, and placed SCs under the joint electorates with the Jati Hindus. This increased the consciousness of being Hindu among Dalits as it was evident from the comparisons based on census reports of 1951, 1961 and 1972, or by comparing NADRA records and voter lists. Meanwhile, the ‘minority narrative’ under the patronage of international ‘minority rights’ activists grew in strength that too fundamentally saw the ‘minority’ as the religious

communities instead of caste-based bradaris. It was primarily because of that religious connotation of the ‘minority-majority’ that caste discrimination rarely, if ever, featured in any social program and political debate initiated from the minority platform.

Dalit activists tasted the bitter fruit of the glossy shroud of ‘minority’ again in 1998 when the 6 per cent quota allocated for the Scheduled Castes was supposedly withdrawn, and the separate electorate system was replaced with reserved seats based on ‘non-Muslim’ identity. Further with the passage of the 18th amendment in 2010, the legislative assembly seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Hindus were also scrapped from the constitution. These moves further put Savarnas and Christian elite in an advantageous position as even the nominal recognition of the class disparity within Hindus was concealed.

This gradual withdrawal of nominal privileges and the recognition of Scheduled Castes’ marginality reflected the marginality of Dalit leaders and the activists in the face of overwhelming Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony. This digressive trajectory of the constitutional and governmental changes was a matter of great concern for the Dalit activists. Dalit activists were imagining these changes by comparing them with the constitutional and the legal changes made in India for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the Other Backward Castes. Hence, they saw that while in India the politics of Ambedkar sufficiently problematized caste, and several laws curbing Scheduled Castes Atrocities and untouchability were passed, and the periodical caste-based surveys were conducted, no such kind of attempt was made by the state in Pakistan. Instead, the ‘empirical’ reality of casteism was shrouded under the idealistic (Islamic and Sufi nationalist) agenda that assumed every Pakistani (and Sindhi) equal irrespective of caste, color, and creed. Particularly, the progressive’s endeavors aimed at erecting national icons and constructing homogenous political narratives in which events and narratives of the Dalit subalterns appeared merely as footnotes primarily to validate the epistemic superiority of the Ashrafia-Savarna intelligentsia.

Both political Islam and Sufism of progressives presented its ethnocentric version of nationalism in a performative idiom to showcase Dalits through ‘positive reference points’ (see Guru, 2016, p. 250) identified as ‘Sufi Sindhi’, through the affirmative events, such as by allowing Dalits to participate in Sufi rituals at the shrines, and by the political Islam through the eminent spheres at the state level, such as by allowing to enter into Pak Army. Although, Political Sufism, in particular, through its performative interpretation of history rendered the category of ‘Sufi’ accessible to Dalit’s performative Darāwar indigeneity to assert, yet emptiness of Sufi identity and the multivocality of Sufism blurred

the critical imagination to differentiate between the oppressor Sufi (Ashrafia-Savarna) and the oppressed Sufi (Dalitbahujan). Political Sufism was thus rendered the least sensitive about the hegemony of Sayeds, Baloch, Sammāt and Vaniya classes of castes. These idealistic assumptions did not allow to think of Dalit assertions as having emancipatory and the transformative potential and contradicted even religious binaries (Hindu-Muslim, Muslim-non-Muslim), that the state legitimized and on which rested the whole political edifice of Pakistan.

Both political Islam and political Sufism reinforced each other and in-process legitimized the ethnocentric Ashrafia and Savarna domination over Dalitbahujans. Sufi identification in Sindh glossed over the caste faultiness that preexisted as traditional and primordial caste narratives. This hybridized (both the derivative and desi) ethnic Sufi identity mainly expressed itself through Sindhi Ashrafia middle class that seemed to be anti-Pir and anti-Mullah, but at the political level failed to pose any serious challenge to the authority of Sayeds, Sardars, and Pirs.

The Sindhi-Hindu nationalist desire to see Sindh as an autonomous and independent nation projected all Hindu castes as the most insecure ‘minority’ of Sindh. Jati Hindus (mostly of the Vaniya class) were taken as the vital political asset, the symbol of secular and syncretic Sindh, the identity that was reframed as against the allegedly state-sponsored ‘Punjabi-Pakistan’³¹⁸. Sindhi nationalist’s main target was the ‘other’ (that is, ‘Pakistani or Punjabi’ ethnic Muslim), another self-same Ashrafia, and the invisible entity establishment or the state. Such an ideological orientation did not allow Sindhi nationalists to acknowledge caste as a politically viable medium. Hence, it can be argued that the post-Partition line of politics did not consider “the logic of the local configuration of power built up around the caste-based hierarchical ideology” (Guru, 2016, p. 240). It was the caste blind political trajectory not much different from what had already been practiced by the Savarna/Hindu and Ashrafia/Muslim nationalists before the Partition. By comparing Ashrafia hegemony in Sindh with the Brahminic hegemony in India, it can be said that while Brahminical hegemony surreptitiously promoted Hindutva ideology, the Ashrafia hegemony in Sindh from within continued to manufacture its own ideological and structural instruments of domination by promoting a specific version of political Sufism

³¹⁸ The Sindhi Baloch Pushtoon Front (SBPF) was formed in London on 31 March 1985, by [Ataullah Mengal](#), [Mumtaz Bhutto](#), [Hafiz Pirzada](#) and [Afzal Bangash](#) to counter what they perceived as a Punjabi establishment’s hegemony of [Pakistan](#). It called for a confederation in Pakistan instead of a federation. (Jaffrelot C. , *The Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience*, 2015, p. 113)

that did not problematize casteism. In fact, both the Sufism and the Vedantic mystic cultural practices were either explicitly supportive of Sayedism (the genealogical superiority Sayed) and the Hindu caste system, were least critical of it.

These cultural and the political narratives that were focused on the external enemy—Punjabi-Pakistanis, Arabs, and Pathan construed as the invaders and the occupiers—favored the internal enemies (Sindhised Arabs and Pathans, etc.), the local hegemons. This rendered the internal casteism normative. Resultantly, casteism was conceived not as existential reality but the way Islamic and Sufi ideologies had wished away the annihilation of caste. As argued by Masood Ahmed Falahi (2009; 2012), the criterion for superiority and status in Islam should have been, not caste, but, what the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad laid down in that regard, which is termed as *taqwa* (piety or God-consciousness), but in practice, and multiple local interpretations of Islam, quite the reverse was done. In similar fashion nationalist-separatist Sufi voices from Sindh that rest their arguments in the popular belief that Sindh is the land of Sufis, the land of natural equality, not only often denied the prevalence of casteism, but also, contrary to their denials, practiced it.

Reflecting historically, it can be argued that the idealized mission of Islam and Sufism that promised society free of caste, color, and creed, had failed to be materialized. Instead, at the empirical level as the form of everyday practice, it had hybridized with the pre-existing caste culture reproducing its own sectarian identities that glossed over the graded tribal-caste based inequalities. This normative state of casteism did not allow qualifying casteism as the subject matter of macro politics and developed the apologetic and the denial-based attitude with the result that casteism rather thrived in electoral politics at the local level.

Such a polity brought Savarnas in a more favorable position rendering irrelevant the internal criticism against their political, economic and social domination. It discouraged the class-based formations of the Dalit communities and pushed them further towards Savarnization. Ashrafia-Savarna domination further grew during later decades as religious missionaries further polarized Dalits on religious lines speeding up their Savarnization and Ashrafization. From the Ambedkarian perspective, this voluntary or forced drive for upward mobility by means of the adoption of Hindu and Muslim identity markers did not seem to dilute the Dalit's stigma of untouchability as they continued to be treated as 'inferiors' and the 'lower castes'. The inefficacy of both Ashrafization and Savarnization lied in the rigidity and resilience of caste, that is, caste endogamy and its historicity, that

is, the normative centrality of the history of caste backgrounds of individuals and social groups.

9.3 Contesting ‘Dalit’ Identities for Representation

Apprehensive as they were of Ashrafia-Savarna domination, Dalit activists nonetheless cherished an optimism of sort. The demographic shifts during and after the partition proved socio-politically beneficial for the Dalitbahujans on the whole. Migration of Jati Hindus, mostly Vaniyas and Sodha Thakurs, to India and the Pasmada and Ashrafia castes from India to rural Sindh or Thar and Urban Sindh, (re)configured the local class structure. This created some space for both the Dalits and pasmanda leaders to have occasional seats in legislative assemblies, and to make demands for representation. This gradually built up Dalit leadership’s confidence to articulate their demands in a manner to draw the attention of state authorities, political parties and civil society to their social and political exclusion. Their political unconscious led them to express the unity of purpose with the state to mark their existential difference from Jati Hindus and to proclaim majority in the minority with the decisive vote bank in certain electoral constituencies.

The ideological and political strategies of the Dalit activists converged and reinforced each other on several points. For instance, they attacked Verna (Hindu caste-class) system, Hindu scriptures, particularly Manusimriti, and extol Dravidian civilizational legacy. Politically they demanded representation in legislative assemblies, social organizations and administrative departments in proportion to their population. This agency and assertion qualify Dalit activists to a type of subalterns who are increasingly acquiring the capacity to speak up, protest and demand social justice.

The realization of the Dalits that they were not being treated as equals even after conversion but as ‘untouchables’ led the Dalits to scramble for the alternative identities within the scope of the given Ashrafia-Savarna hegemony. These hegemonic limitations created the dissonance too. For instance, the simultaneous assertion of the Hindu and Pakistani identities aimed at convincing the Savarna and the Ashrafia elite that they were loyal to their religion, to the Army and the Sayeds, and were, therefore, the true patriots, and therefore, should be deemed as respectable as any other Pakistani and or Sindhi communities. They were willing to adopt any ethnic identity, such as they did to proclaim that they were indigenous Sindhis when the Sindhi nationalists proffered promised emancipation and equal treatment. But none of such attempts seemed to resolve the problem of caste and identity crisis of Dalits.

The need to organize around a particular political identity was further complicated when Scheduled Castes' category was decimated from the census count in 1981, and a 5 percent quota allocated for them was rescinded in 1998. Subsequently, the seats in the legislature allocated for the Scheduled Castes were also revoked in 2010 and subsumed under the non-Muslim category. Meanwhile, the Dalit's identity was further hardened as Hindus, and a non-Muslim minority group. This was not acceptable to the Dalit activists, and they mounted the critique of both the Hindu and minority politics. Resultantly, their activism was condemned as the anti-minority in a state which was understood by progressives as unfriendly towards Hindus in particular and minorities in general.

In later years, particularly after the late 1990s, Dalit activists also began drawing the attention of international human rights forums, and subsequently became members of Dalit solidarity networks. This much-cherished international networking was made even more accessible during the past few years due to the availability of transnational channels (social media and the internet) at the public level. This provided them with the much needed social-virtual milieu to mobilize Dalits to demand political representation.

9.4 Contesting the Denial of Dalitness

Notwithstanding the opposition to Dalit activism by the mainstream civil society, particularly by the Sindhi progressive Ashrafia class, the Dalit activists continued to defend their political stance, and the 'Dalit' and 'Scheduled Castes' identity markers vis-à-vis 'Hindu' and 'minority'. This contestation became visible in Sindhi civil society and within the Dalit communities in the wake of the formation of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek (DST) in early 2016 when I was on half-way through my fieldwork in Sindh. For the Dalit activists, the external imposition of the 'Hindu minority' identity was unacceptable and was understood as the cause of the symbolic epistemic violence. In reaction to it, and in line with the Dalit scholars who supported the use of the term 'Dalit', a section of Dalit activists in Pakistan (Sindh), particularly those affiliated with DST, PDSN and BIF, actively made use of it. For instance, DST, BIF and Pakistan Darāwar Itihad asserted Dalit, Scheduled Castes and Darāwar indigeneity interchangeably or in conjunction with Sindhi and Pakistani identities, to express both identity and alterity in relation to dominant Sindhi, Pakistani, Hindu and minority identity markers.

DST struggled to organize activists around Dalit identity. Although it could not make 'Dalit' a political identity at the provincial and national level, yet it did, for the time being, let the suppressed Dalit voice to come out, express itself and be talked about in civil

society circles. It promoted a culture of writing and speaking about Dalit rights with all the major Dalit activities and the atrocities recast in the Dalit framework and publicized the use of the 'Dalit' term. It seemed to create some social space for the Dalit activists to negotiate intra-Dalit differences, claims, and the contestations. DST created, helped familiarize Dalits and Sindhi with the Ambedkarian ideology, and helped Dalits to generate contextually fitting Dalit narrative(s).

It was the verbal or the discursive contestation in social spaces, in private meetings, within Dalit forums, on social media sites or internet blogs, and print media in newspaper articles and radio programs. Debates did, however, sometimes degenerate into personal attacks and abuses, but remained within the realm of discourse only. In general, resistance to the term 'Dalit' was coming from three different sections of Dalit communities, namely:

- a) Dalit political workers
- b) Upwardly mobile Dalits
- c) Dalit caste forums that tended to organize themselves as Darāwar.

The interesting aspect of the debate within Dalits was to reconcile the indigenous 'Darāwar' identity marker with the Hindu and Sindhi identities. The majority of the Dalits, as well as the Dalit activists, were priding in being indigenous Sindhi Darāwar.

The bone of contention was the use of the term 'Dalit' along with Hindu and Darāwar or in opposition to them. Some of the Dalit activists that partially or conditionally opposed the use of 'Dalit' and 'Scheduled Castes' markers, while others completely rejected or denied it. For a significant number of Dalit activists, the term 'Dalit' continued to be the term of agitation. It was not the identity to feel proud of, but to assert to demand equal rights and the dignified existence by exposing the historical injustice. For them, the use of the term 'Dalit' did not create or reproduce negative Dalitness but instead infused the transformative spirit to struggle for social democracy and moral-ethical reformation to eradicate materially existing negative Dalitness associated with the untouchable treatment of Dalits. It was believed to be the social-psychological given that would not go away merely by not using the term 'Dalit' but by eradicating existing casteism and untouchability. Yet a significant majority of the activists from within Dalit communities opposed the use of the 'Dalit' on grounds that it carried the humiliating connotation. They argued that identifying oneself as a 'Dalit' ghettoized the oppressed castes leading to further alienation making them vulnerable to the proselytizing Hindu, Christian, Ahmedi, Ismaili and Muslim missionaries. They intensely disliked being pointed out as 'humiliated'

people. For them, the assertion of Dalitness was a trap that would perpetuate their alienation and take away agency to progress as equals.

At the empirical level, several causes seemed to have influenced the choice of identity markers, such as identification of Dalits as Hindu by the Muslim majority and the assumption that Hinduism is in fact Sanatan Dharam and vice versa. The intense opposition to the 'Dalit' term even made the pro-Dalit activists reluctant to use 'Dalit', and many of them tended to avoid its use, or use it only peripherally. Pakistan Fisher Folk Forum and other such Pasmanda Muslim communities and their forums also rejected the 'Dalit' idiom on similar grounds, and instead preferred the 'indigenous' identity marker to highlight their regional and community-specific issues. Majority of the pro-Dalit and the anti-Dalit activists were proud to be called a Hindu, a Darāwaṛ, a Sindhi, and indigenous sons of the soil, and even Pakistani, but is reluctant to use 'Dalit'. Because of this empirically given problematic connotation of the 'Dalit' marker, most of the Dalits preferred to align with their specific caste groups or with the 'Hindu' minority and with the 'Darāwaṛ-based' forums. For them, one of the efficient ways to bring about change in the social attitudes of the oppressed and the oppressor, was to employ the elevating and proud 'labels' to convince the rest of Dalits and society that were are progressing, getting educated, and that they were proud Dravidians of the past, and we, therefore, the earliest of the indigenous Sindhis, and therefore, as capable as any Vāṇiyo, Brahmin, Thakur or the Sayed. Hence, for them the best way to abolish the caste system was, not to talk about untouchability of the present or the past, or about the caste discrimination against the Dalits, but to project the civilizational greatness of the Dalits. This logic of the denial shrouded in the idealized notions of equality and the economic progress without confronting casteism is arguably one of the primary reasons that the Dalit struggles fail to grow or broaden as Dalits avoid being identified as oppressed by casteism.

This social-psychological reaction was not new phenomena in Sindh and had been previously documented by Streefland (1979) and Sarah Singha (2015) in Pakistan, and the Dalit scholars in India (see Guru, 2009; Guru, 2011). This denialist narrative defied the Ambedkarian demand to understand and use collective or the plural caste identities, including the 'Dalit' and 'Scheduled Castes in the positive and emancipatory sense, and as

the markers of social protest,³¹⁹ and to draw the marked contrast between the Dalit(Bahujan) and the Ashrafia-savarna classes.

Hence, denying Dalitness and existential reality of casteism was the negative way of making sense of the historically conceived 'Dalit' identity marker that alluded to the Dalitness, that is, the feeling of humiliation that emanated from the social-psychological mindset of the privileged castes that attributed 'untouchability' to Dalit subjects. It was the product of social attitude, the treatment of Dalits as untouchables irrespective of their religion and implied nationality and was fundamentally grounded in the material economic and social conditions shaped by the casteist protagonists.

Looking from the Dalit activists' lens, even the denial and rejection of the term 'Dalit' was promoting their cause at the level of discourse as the people were being compelled to talk about it and discuss it. That seemed to be promoting the very use of the term Dalit as it generated the debate and discourse on the use of terms like 'Dalit', 'casteism' and 'Dalit movements. It was because of it that anti-Dalit reactions were also taken as the form of 'Dalit' assertions. The denial of Dalitness that expressed itself in the phrases like 'we are no more 'Dalit', that 'we are equal now', that 'all humans are equal', and that 'all Sindhi are equal', or that 'there is no concept of caste and race in Islam', all these expressions were understood by Dalit activists as the subconscious reactions that reflected the general state of the denial and the normativity of casteism. Because of that, instead of striving to radically alter the social structures to annihilate caste as radical Ambedkarites suggested, they wanted to re-order tribal-caste structures on a horizontal plane whereby they could say that they are equally respectable stakeholders in any social or political equation.

Hence, although the use of the 'Dalit' identity marker was on the increase, it had not yet acquired that necessary political leverage, the transformative meaning at the social level, as a process towards achieving a sense of cultural identity, the symbol of resistance, and as a medium to get rid of one's inferiority complex (Guru, 20102; Paswan et al, 2003) that, as Gopal Guru explained, could afford the sense of dignity, mutual recognition, and justice³²⁰. The debate among different groups of activists to negotiate the best way out of

³¹⁹ See online: Dalit Is 'Proper Noun', Not An 'Adjective', Says Political Theorist Prof Gopal Guru Published by [NewsClickin](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rciW7_ZGhxU), Published on Jul 19, 2017. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rciW7_ZGhxU (accessed on January, 9, 2019).

³²⁰ See online: Dalit Is 'Proper Noun', Not An 'Adjective', Says Political Theorist Prof Gopal Guru. Published by [NewsClickin](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rciW7_ZGhxU), Published on Jul 19, 2017. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rciW7_ZGhxU (accessed on January, 9, 2019).

categorical violence, however, proved that untouchability was not simply any label, but the product of social material conditions that reproduced and defined its meaning. This disconnection between the ‘words’ and the embodied essence of the words, for instance, can be proved by giving an example of the use of the ‘untouchable’ term in the Western countries for the rich and the elite, in the opposite sense of the meaning, as the ‘untouchables’ because they are so influential, powerful and inaccessible that the less affluent and the poor cannot touch them (Williams, 2006, p. 155).³²¹ Hence, arguing from the Dalit activists’ lens, it is most probably not the label in itself as such that produced Dalitness but the material conditions that were categorized as such.

For the Dalit activists, the use of the plural class categories of the oppressed castes was deemed politically necessary and sociologically useful to make the point that Dalitness was not the Dalit’s own choice, but the oppressive condition imposed upon them by the Savarna-Ashrafia castes. It was the inherited sense of generations and the decades of the humiliation of the Dalitbahujans by the Ashrafia and the Savarna classes that cause Dalitness and sustains it. Therefore, it can be concluded that as long as the degradation of the Dalits is the normative given, Dalitness is likely to exist. Hence, unless untouchability, Dalit exclusion, and caste-discrimination are eradicated, Dalitness will continue to be reproduced no matter how humane and in a fancy wording one may (re)construct, atone Dalit condition.

9.5 Drive for Caste-parity and Self-respect

Notwithstanding the Ashrafia-Savarna influences, the Dalit activists were not deterred to assert their existence as equals, although their assertions were mainly identity-based, occasional or episodic and were not justly reciprocated by the Savarna-Ashraf classes. Although Dalit identities either self-chosen or imposed by the oppressor had acquired some acceptability primarily after the ritual sanction by the Ashrafia and Brahmin classes, yet the Dalit activist were not simply passive recipients of identity labels and the systemic exclusion

³²¹The terms ‘untouchable’ is also used in Hollywood movies in a positive sense to mean so professional, brave and honest that could not be corrupted. “Seemingly impossible to bribe, he and his men became known as *The Untouchables*. The nickname was later adopted as the title of the 1987 [Hollywood](#) movie in which Kevin Costner portrayed Ness as the brave hero who took down Al [Capone](#).”

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2576061/Womaniser-Drunk-The-Untouchable-cop-battled-Al-Capone-no-Hollywood-hero.html#ixzz4jWi7hoO9>.

Dalit activists came up with their own competing claims of numbers to demand representation and share in politics. Apprehensive of their political exclusion as well as their electoral strength in several districts of Sindh, they, for instance, evaluated and assessed different electoral systems and started demanding changes in the existing joint electoral system and replace it with a separate or the proportionate electoral system. They contested the meaning and the use of both the imposed and self-chosen identities, and redefined or reconstructed them anew, as they did by contesting, and defending the (self)imposition of the ‘Dalit’, ‘Scheduled Castes’, Sindhi, Sufi, Darāwar and ‘Hindu identities. Although their claims and the contestations of Dalit activists, however, seemed to have penetrated only a section of Sindhi civil society, they continued to assert in various ways to demand representation and construct their histories and identities to gain self-respect.

One internally anomalous aspect of identity crises among Dalits as it reflected in their practice of caste discrimination and untouchability against each other. This internal graded inequality greatly weakened their political say as they could not unite on a single platform to pose any greater challenge to the dominant Savarna and Ashrafia domination. Instead, being under the influence of Ashrafia values, they strived for caste-parity primarily on individual bases. Looking from the Dalitbahujan perspective, this alternative counter-casteism of the Dalits in certain ways seemed to trap them into an unending identity politics, in which the Ashrafia and Savarnas classes were more likely to maintain their hegemony over the Dalitbahujan. This vicious circle of perpetual subordination, then, alternatively, also provided the Savarnas with the justification to deny their domination over the Dalits. Oppressive caste structures, in which the Dalits were trapped, constrained them (in the form of the ridicule by the Ashrafia and Savarna lobby) to assert caste-based identities, which the Dalit activist argued, was a form of alternative agitation, and the way out to break free of the caste hierarchies. They believed that it could go a long way to undo the fixity of identities and achieve the new democratic consensus.

Dalit activists were striving to realize self-respect and caste-parity by inverting caste identities and histories and recasting them in an elated historical perspective. Inversion was enacted by hiding castes, or by the adoption of the different (upper) caste identities. It was also done by anonymizing, or relativizing caste identities. The Dalit activists, particularly the Ambedkarites and Darāwar activists, however, do it by way of asserting Dalitness and the oppressed status, and by confronting or questioning the oppressor. Contrary to that, the oppressive caste structure, in which Dalits were (and are)

enmeshed, constrained them to assert caste identities. The individual Dalit, invariably, asserted his/her caste pride more than any other and prioritized her caste more than any other Dalit caste. The drive for caste-parity and the deep-seated suppressed desire to achieve self-respect and dignity were the two sides of the same phenomenon that, for instance, even reflected in the half-hearted speeches and political statements of Dalit leadership.

The Dalits did not seem to gain the self-respect, which was contingent upon the equal treatment by the privileged castes and classes. They, however, enjoyed the self-esteem in digging out, recognizing and erecting emancipatory symbols of their own. These symbolic gains, however, were not without liabilities such as the tendency to Savarnize and ashrafize that undermined the Ambedkarian demand of the annihilation of caste (Guru, 2011a & 2011b; Kumar, 2016a, 2016b & 2005), and the drive for making space within Ashrafia-Brahminic caste-class order. This did not seem to work to the advantage of the Dalitbahujans, and, paradoxically, attested the superiority of Savarna-Ashrafs and the inferiority of the Dalit(Bahujan).

Given such casteist constraints, for instance, DST, Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan and members of PDSN, and BIF adopted the political strategy to confront caste oppression through caste assertion to achieve caste parity. The challenge for Dalit activists, particularly for the Ambedkarites, was to deconstruct Hindu-Sanatan Dharam and Sindhi identity constructs, to reconcile Dalitness and Ambedkarian agenda of the annihilation of caste with that of indigenous Dravidian pride in each Dalit caste. Apprehensive of the fact that they could not simply wish to annihilate caste under circumstances, they allowed for the caste assertions, particularly those that inculcated feelings of pride instead of shame. To achieve parity with other castes, Ambedkarites, allowed for the assertion of caste-based identities, such as in the case of Meghwar, Kolhi, Bheel communities, and the generic identities such as Darāwar, which was the most acceptable social identity for Dalits. They supplemented their difference with the semi-historical legend that Sindh is the seat of one of the most ancient Dravidian civilizations provided the raw material for the construction of Kshatriya Rajput narrative that linked them to the local popular narrative. It allowed for the casting off untouchability as the extraneous social evil, the later appropriation of caste-free Hinduism which they called Sanatan Dharma, the ancient and original pre-Vedic faith. Similarly, 'assertion by Dalits in the name of 'Darāwar' allowed for the projection of Ravana and Eklayaya as Dalit heroes, and Holika and Shibri Bheelin as essentially Dalit heroines as against Hindu deities such as Ram and Sita. This was to question the dominant

Brahminic narrative and to convince the dominant Sammāt and Baloch (believed to be Aryans as opposed to Dravidians) majority that Dalits have their own distinctively dignified origins in history, and therefore they are no less dignified than any other Sindhi.

Darāwaṛ or Dravidian identity fulfills both the historical and psychological needs of the Dalits. This assertion of indigeneity or Darāwaṛ identity, although helping them out of the psychological feel of humiliation, seemed to take away the spirit to unite with the rest of the oppressed (women and the poorer sections among ‘lower castes’) on class lines. It, therefore, required the Dalit activists to transcend identity politics at a certain point in time in the future. Yet, till the social and political milieu ripens for the desired change, Dalit activists are likely to continue to indulge in assertive politics based on ethnic and caste identities, by supporting the oppressed castes groups of Dalits as the initial condition and a step towards larger and more inclusive struggle led by caste underclass, Dalits, Bahujans and the rest of oppressed classes. I view these assertions as a form of emancipatory maneuvers (Kumar V. , 2006; Rawat, 2017), that are democratically unifying in essence instead of divisive and the casteist (Round Table India, 2017). In the final analysis, it can be, therefore, be concluded that although the Dalit desire to achieve caste-parity overrides the Ambedkarian goal to annihilate caste, yet the Dalitbahujan identity assertions, with their trans-national and trans-religious dimensions, are emancipatory and promise to transcend identity politics.

The processes of Ashrafization and Savarnization and the application of ‘hidden scripts’ (Scott, 1990) by the Dalit activists, confirmed the anthropological theses that culture cannot be taken as a reified entity, but as a “political process of contestation” among different groups to redefine their social contexts. (Wright, 1998). It is always “constantly “in the making” (Sökefeld, 1999), and is the dynamic field of contestation, in which differently positioned individuals and groups (tribes, ethnicities, castes) try to dominate each other or tend to marginalize the opponent (Meijl, 2008; Jenkins, 2010; Jenkins, 2004; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; Leach, 1976; Leach, 1971 [1960]) and reimagine their cultural history (Fox, 2011).

A few sociological propositions about the social structure and hierarchies can also be justifiably inferred about the nature of casteism and identity assertions. The findings confer that unlike what the early Marxist studies on caste in Punjab (Alavi, 1972; Alvi,

1973; Ahmed, 1977)³²² and nationalist accounts of Sindh (as discussed in chapter 3 and 4) may suggest, both casteism as a form of racial or ethnic discrimination persists in Sindh. The study validates the belief of locals in both the book view of caste (Verna System, religiously sanctioned Sayedism) and field view of caste (the actual practice of casteism). However, the nature of casteism asserted by Dalits and Ashrafia-Savarna protagonists varied in terms of their subtle impact on the social structure. While Ashrafia-Savarna casteism is hegemonic and hides under Hindu or Muslim religious cover, the Dalit caste assertions are emancipatory as they strive for caste-parity by asserting syncretic Sufi or Sanatan Dharam as an identity marker. The same is true of Dalit's Darāwaṛ (Dravidian) identity assertion, as Indian sociologist T.K Oommen had argued that while, 'Aryan Hinduism is hegemonic, and Dravidian Hinduism is emancipatory'. This study thus corresponds with the Oommen's supposition that the religious sanction makes the eradication of caste more difficult than race. Yet more importantly, as Thomas' Theorem suggests, it's the perception of the people about caste that matters. According to Thomas & Thomas (1928), 'if [humans] define a situation as real, they are real in their consequences'. Hence, since Dalits perceive their condition as oppressed and struggle for their rights, and Ashrafia class imagines themselves as superior, and projects this imagination through to maintain their hegemony, both the perception of Dalits and the imagination of Ashrafia protagonist are real not only for them. However, the hegemonic disparity between them both makes them discriminatingly different from each other, which turns into social issues if perceived from the Dalit's perspective and requires to be (re)solved through political and policy intervention in the democratic society.

9.6 Summary of Key Findings

The key findings can be explained with reference to the key questions that were explained in the introductory chapter. The querries pertained to the interplay of different identity markers that shaped the inter-caste politics, informed about the framing and projection of issues of Dalits, and the ideologies and narratives that constrained and or liberated Dalits. There are two aspects of answers to the above queries that can be briefly explained as:

- a) Ethnographic findings

³²² Marxist thesis on caste in Pakistan has been quite mechanical largely driven by their ideological desires. For instance, Saghir Ahmed (1977), a Marxist anthropologist who did his fieldwork in a Punjabi village in Sahiwal, departs from the above in that he classifies castes into two broad classes, i.e., cultivator castes, and the non-cultivator castes. While linking occupational castes to socioeconomic status, he assigns position to any caste or family in the overall social hierarchy in village.

- b) Discursive constraints/findings

9.6.1 Ethnographic findings

- a) Group identities remain liminal, and are invoked arbitrarily depending on the nature of the issue. A significant majority of Dalits is not in consensus with each other on which identity marker be preferably mobilized against caste discrimination, and for Dalit representation and self-respect.
- b) The question of whether Dalit politics is possible or not in Sindh can be answered in the affirmative. The possibility of counterhegemonic Dalit assertions was not completely foreclosed. Dalit activists could experiment with identity (re)construction in ways that could enable them to gain the desired self-respect. It was evident from the existence of some viable Dalit forums, and their proactive role.
- c) Whether the identity assertions infuse in Dalits a much-needed optimism giving them a sense of direction did not seem too promising owing to tokenism, graded caste inequality, ahrafisation, savarnisation, privileged caste Hindu's hegemony, and subalternity, the perennial factors that incapacitate Dalits to form a formidable united front.
- d) Can activism, in concrete terms, benefit Dalits in achieving representation? This question too can be partly answered in the affirmative. The successful campaign during Census 2017 that showed the remarkable increase in demographic count of Scheduled Castes vis-à-vis Jati Hindus is likely to pay dividends both politically and socio-economically.

9.6.2 Discursive findings

It was found that Dalit identity assertion was being ideologically constrained and delimited by the arbitrary nature of identities, and the epistemic barriers. Arbitrariness of identity markers was regulated by the Hindu-Muslim religious binaries, and the performative narrative of political Sufism. Instead of eradicating caste-based discrimination, political Sufism glossed over caste-frictions under the performative and the rhetorical Sufi-Muslim binaries whereby Sufi is seen as accommodative of Hindus, but a Muslim is not. Similarly, the Ashrafia denial of casteism set the epistemic barrier not to problematize caste thereby discouraging to entertain Dalit issue. The denial of caste thrived on performative assumption that there is no concept of caste discrimination among Muslims. These normatively hegemonic assumptions and

denials choked Dalit agency to question and challenge caste-based discrimination and to formulate their political demands.

9.7 Policy Recommendations

As discussed in the previous sections, caste is not considered as too problematic in Pakistan, and because of that, no special laws were enacted to criminalize caste-based discrimination. Despite all goodwill and anticipation, the response from the political parties, the government and the state of Pakistan have been quite disappointing. Similarly, civil society and the human rights watchdogs also have been largely indifferent to issues of the Dalits. Dalit activists want to engage the state, government and civil society to understand their political predicament. They, for instance, attempted to draw attention towards:

- a) Jati Hindu (Savarna) domination and resultant under-representation of Dalits in legislative assemblies.
- b) Allotment of minority reserved seats through party tickets instead of direct/proportionate/separate electoral system.

Related to both these problems is the issue of legal and constitutional reclassification and the redefinition of Scheduled Castes as a community of socioeconomically marginalized castes and tribes, instead of religion. They were asking for constitutional and legal provisions related to affirmative action to uplift Scheduled Castes in Pakistan. In line with the basic principles delineated in the Constitution of Pakistan, they asked for special measures to eradicate the differences, inequalities, and discriminations that exist based on caste, color, and creed.

The preamble of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic reads, “Wherein adequate provision shall be made to safeguard the legitimate interests of minorities and backward and depressed classes.” Here ‘depressed classes’ is understood as the reference to Scheduled Castes (defined in Article 260-3b as non-Muslims), and other marginalized communities. Similarly, articles 22, 26, 27 and 38 of the Constitution required that laws be made to stop discrimination in terms of equitable access to political institutions, food, and health facilities, jobs and education without any discrimination based on caste, color, and creed. Based on these constitutional provisions, Dalit activists demand affirmative action for the uplift of Scheduled Castes that requires further constitutional amendments in Article 51 (2A), and Clause (3) of Article 106 as adopted in 1973, and as previously amended through P.O. No. 14 of 1985 that formerly specified the proportion of seats for Scheduled

Castes, Jati Hindus and other minorities in the national and provincial assemblies respectively.

The Dalit activists contend that due to the non-representation of Scheduled Castes in legislative assemblies, and the indoctrination of minority narrative, rights of the SCs are being constantly usurped by the dominant Savarnas and the political elite within Christians. The 18th Amendment scrapped whatever nominal reservation existed for Scheduled Castes (Hindus). Dalit activists want these articles to be amended to allocate reserved seats for Scheduled Castes in proportion to the actual population, instead of what the official statistics informs³²³.

Further, they demanded a 3 percent quota for Scheduled Castes at the national level, and 6% in Sindh province, 2 percent in Punjab, and 1 percent in KPK and Baluchistan respectively. The quota was demanded not merely based on the proportion of Scheduled Castes population, which may not be more than 3 percent in Pakistan, but also based on marginalization based on multiple vulnerabilities. They demanded that seats reserved for women in the parliament and the provincial assemblies must specifically allocate seats for the SC women in proportion to their population and the relative marginalization.

The Dalit activists regretted that Scheduled Castes population had been shown to constitute merely 1\10th (13.6 %) of the Jati Hindu population in 1998, which they believed, was a gross underestimation³²⁴. The reasons for such erroneous estimates, as discussed in Chapter 6, were many. One of the major reasons identified by the Dalit activists was the classification of Scheduled Castes as a religion parallel to the Hindu religion. They argued that religion is an emotional matter. Scheduled Castes preferred to mark Hindu instead of Scheduled Castes during the population census or any other kind of documentation for similar purposes.

Dalit activists argued that given the approximate demographic ratio and Dalit marginalization, and provided separate or proportional electoral system is introduced, the political representation of Scheduled Castes in assemblies and political party cadre should be apportioned based on the criterion of the demographic strength and the level of marginalization of Scheduled Castes in any such electorate. Following that logic, the share of Scheduled Castes should be more than their population, and, at best, double their

³²³ Scheduled Castes were not enumerated properly during the previous Censuses due to various technical and sociological reasons that need to be taken into consideration for further amendments in the constitution.

³²⁴ Since the report on Population Census 2017 has not been issued by the government, the inferences about Scheduled Caste population have to be compared on the basis of previous census held in 1998.

estimated population in any constituency. Hence, based on demographic strength and the level of marginalization, Dalit activists asked for affirmative action demanding that:

- a) The proportion of seats, jobs or representation across the board at all status ranks or positions and in every forum, association or assembly particularly in 11 districts of Pakistan.
- b) Instead of putting Scheduled Castes workers at the lowest rung in each committee or forum, Scheduled Castes be given leading party positions or roles in each district by the PPP, the ruling party of Sindh.

9.7.1 Alleviating Socio-economic Deprivation

To socioeconomically uplift the Dalit communities, the state must ensure the following:

- i. Provision of a special social welfare program for Scheduled Caste communities, scholarships for students and job quota in proportion to the population of Scheduled Caste and keeping in consideration their relatively deprived and marginalized status. The Government of Pakistan should ensure justifiable representation of Scheduled Castes in the national institutions and departments like PIAC, banks, DFIs, Pakistan Steel, Thar Coal, etc., and 6% jobs in federal, provincial and district governments.
- ii. Special microfinance schemes should be introduced by both the government and the private sector. In rural Sindh, SRSO³²⁵, Baanhn Beli³²⁶ and Thardeep Microfinance Foundation³²⁷ are some of the NGOs that are partly catering to this aspect of the issue by providing small loans (0.5 to 1 million rupees) to the needy. Yet, their programs of financial aid are not specifically devised to target marginal Dalit communities. The state must ensure that caste is factored in all governmental and private sector welfare programs as the key indicator.
- iii. To government must train and educate Dalit communities for better preparedness, response and recovery mechanisms to mitigate the impacts of natural and/or manmade disasters. Similarly, they should be sensitive to the relative vulnerability of Dalits living in hazardous environments when devising training programs on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), or on issues related to public health, such as protection from epidemics and pandemics.

³²⁵ See <https://www.srso.org.pk/index.html>

³²⁶ See <https://baanhnbeli.org.pk/2021/06/01/poverty-alleviation/>.

³²⁷ See <https://www.tmf.org.pk/>.

- iv. Affirmative education: Several NGOs, including Baanhn Beli, PCDP³²⁸ and semi-governmental organizations such as SEF³²⁹ are running schools in areas inhabited by Dalits. They should evolve by-laws and rules to ensure that no Dalit is discriminated against based on caste location. Moreover, they must ensure that Dalit students are given preferential treatment in terms of scholarships, stipends and distribution of teaching material.

As caste discrimination exists in Pakistan, with the Scheduled Castes as the worst victims, the Government of Pakistan should take all necessary measures to eradicate it. This, according to Dr. Sono Khangarani, “will enhance the international standing of Pakistan as caste discrimination and discrimination based on descent is declared by the United Nations as a form of racial discrimination”. Dalit activists also demanded that international representatives at the UN and other international forums such as SAARC must be appointed from within Scheduled Castes to ensure proper representation. The Dalit activists suggest that the policymakers and legislators as well as political parties in Pakistan need to recognize the intersectional and transnational nature of the socioeconomic problems. They demand that the policymakers, politicians and think tanks in Pakistan should diversify and broaden their analytic angle to bring Dalit studies into the national and local scope.

Given this Dalit predicament in Pakistan, I recommend that the Constitution of Pakistan and the related laws or legal codes must be amended and implemented so that the concerns of the Dalits could be addressed. One of the biggest steps that should be taken is to secularize the Constitution so that the religious binaries could be eliminated and the caste-based social hierarchies could be made visible for necessary action. This demand of the Dalit activists, however, does not seem will get fulfilled in the near future.

The international universal norms of human dignity dictate that Pakistan must take all necessary measures to eradicate caste-based discrimination and address the spread of Brahmanism and Sayeddism. To that end, the issues of Scheduled Castes related to political representation, reclassification, recognition and redefinition of their official or social identity markers need to be tackled. According to Robin Fox, the recognition and redefinition of personal and group identities are the passionate desire and basic ‘tribal need’ of humans for absolute equality in terms of equal recognition (Fox, 2011, p. 342). It is

³²⁸ PCDP stands for Parkari Community Development Program, a local NGO funded by a Christian missionary for the uplift of Parkari Kolhi Community, and the Kolhi converts to Christianity.

³²⁹ SEF stands for Sindh Education Foundation. Radha Bheel, Chairperson of Dalit Sujag Tehreek also runs three SEF schools in Mirpurkhas district.

reflective of the humans' deep desire to carry past in the present and to continue to live the past in the present with due recognition and dignity (Fox, 2011, p. 342). This deep desire for recognition lies at the core of Dalit activists' logic of emancipation (see Guru, 2011; Guru, 2009; Ilaiah, 2010; Kumar V., 2006; Kumar V., 2014).

The onus to recognize, identify and act according to the desires of the oppressed classes lies upon those in power, in politics. To begin with, the government must sponsor a socioeconomic survey to assess vulnerability and the level of marginalization of Scheduled Castes, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, and also, if possible, of fishermen, sanitation workers, those living in urban slums and ghettos, and those working on brick-kiln factories or the potential victims of bonded labor in agriculture sector. In all social surveys related to suicide rates, sexual harassment, and hate abuse, caste-based discrimination must necessarily be inserted as one of the socio-economic indicators. To get along with the world at large, Pakistan should also reform its electoral system as per global trends to introduce proportionate electoral system (on an experimental basis at least) in districts where Scheduled Castes are concentrated so that they could get rid of living as permanent minorities. The identification and ramification of Dalit issues in Pakistan can also provide strong diplomatic leverage to the Dalitbahujans in India to argue their caste comparatively by presenting the example of Pakistan. It can also promote the transnational brotherhood of the oppressed classes and friendly relations with India.

Summing up the analysis in the profound statement of Gopal Guru, Ambedkarian scholar, it can be argued that like India, Pakistan too inherits the liberal democracy that "exists in the shadow of the eternal truth of caste". (Guru, 2011, p. 119). Particularly in the context of Sindh, it is the culture of caste oligarchies in which the Dalitbahujans have been forced to live under the permanent hegemony of Savarna-Ashrafia classes and suffer from the worst kind of caste-based discrimination.

9.8. Future Research Directions

This study has primarily explored and analysed the identity-based contestation and assertion of Dalits as they demand political representation and reclaim self-respect and dignity. Though it has touched upon the class dimension of the issue as well, the socioeconomic issues and the ecological challenges that these communities face require several similar studies. For instance, issues like debt-bondage affecting Dalits, alarming suicide rate prevalent among Dalits in general and the Kolhi community in particular, and issues related to faith conversions, which were beyond the scope of this single study, need to be investigated separately. Religious conversion among Dalits is not a new phenomenon and have been previously studied by scholars in India. There are only a

couple of research articles and a video documentary on conversion in Sindh done by Jurgen Schaflechner (2016:2017) and an M.Phil. thesis by Muhammad Wajid (2016) available so far (see Schaflechner, 2016:2017). This study however, has not covered several key aspects of the issue that need to be further explored and documented. Similarly, Muslim Dalits, or the neo-converts to Islam and Christianity, the phenomenon of family and mass conversion and its aftermath also needs to be covered by scholars someday. Dalits inhabit the ecologically precarious low-lying desert prone to drought, floods and sea intrusion apart from several diseases and epidemics such as measles, coronavirus, malnutrition, stunting, hepatitis and AIDS. The scholars should study separately the caste-specific impact of each public health related ecological and climatic challenge. Equally important is to study certain positive developments such as the rise of Meghwar community in the field of education compared to the educational stagnation of Kolhi, Bheel and other communities. One of the limitations of this study is that it has largely covered the partially vocal and politically active segments or caste groups of the Dalits, namely Kolhi, Bheel, and Meghwar. Consequently, the ultra-subaltern status of some small Dalit communities such as Jandawra, Kabotra, Gurgula and Kokri could not be sufficiently problematized. It, therefore, requires special and urgent attention of the researchers-cum-activists so that they could be mainstreamed without hurting their sense of self-respect and dignity.

9.9 Conclusion

In Sindh, caste is the basic social identity marker and is coterminous with other ethnic identities such as race, nation, and religion. Castes are like both real and imaginary piles of bricks that cut across each other both horizontally and vertically. Its social complexity, however, does not blur the critical anthropological gaze to see the embedded caste hierarchies, the narratives that legitimize them and the counterhegemonic assertions that aim at subverting them.

These assertions were organized around ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘Dalit’ and ‘Darāwar’ identity markers that they juxtaposed against Hindu identity or synchronized them with the dominant Sindhi and Pakistani identity markers of the Savarna-Ashrafia classes. This identitarian hegemony of Ashrafia-Savarna classes over the Dalits, by and large, was the product of pre-existing historical hegemonic relations that continue to be (re)produced in contemporary Sindh. However, this (re)production of hegemony was not infallible and was resisted by Dalit activists primarily through counter-identitarian caste assertions. This identitarian and counter-identitarian assertions were the testimony that in Sindh caste persisted as the basic social identity marker with caste capital being considered as the vital ascribed asset. It was reproducing the feelings of superiority among Ashrafia-Savarna castes and inferiority among the Dalit individuals and caste groups. This renders caste-

based classes empirically tenable based on their social standing in relation to the perceptions about each caste and the groups of castes. Since rich Ashrafia prefers to marry with the relatively rich or poor Ashrafia, not with the pasmanda Muslim or the Dalit, the economic, symbolic and social capital circulates within particular caste-based and sectarian or religious groups. Such an arrangement also makes the Ambedkarian notion of ‘division of laborers’ (division of class based on caste groupings) understandable. The affluence of the few amongst Dalits and pasmandas does not make them capitalists as the capital is determined not merely by economic wealth but also by the symbolic capital of caste and the social capital, i.e., the privilege to have access to resources.

This social-psychological aura was both the cause and effect of pre-existing caste hierarchies and discrimination legitimized by Ashrafia-Savarna narratives of political Sufism, Islam and Sanatan Dharam aka Hinduism. The pre-existing tribal-caste structures were thus redefined to set in motion the interpellated system of graded intersectionality with Scheduled Castes and (or) Dalitbahujan majority pushed to the bottom of social, economic and the political hierarchy. These narratives allowed Dalits only to better their lot either through Ashrafization or Savarnization, which instead of making them caste-equals merely redefined them as ‘lower caste’ subordinates, i.e. inauthentic Savarnas or Ashrafs. Ashrafization and Savarnization, in effect, promoted casteist opportunism to climb the caste ladder, and thus the system of caste-based graded inequalities. Confronted with that hegemonic challenge, the Dalit activists often found themselves in disarray and could not even resolve the conflict over the choice of political identities.

To sum up Dalit assertions, it can be argued that Dalit activists could not significantly problematize caste discrimination also because; they felt humiliated to mount counter-hegemonic resistance from their own ‘ex-untouchable’ or Dalit location. They were finding themselves in an identitarian crises also because they were being swayed by the dominant religious binaries that masked caste and class frictions. Resultantly, religious binaries could not be diluted, graded inequalities within Dalits persisted, caste oligarchies continued to flourish, and political capital failed to equally re-distribute among caste groups. Casteism was, thus, harmonized across classes, religions, cults or sects. This Ashrafia-Savarna regulated political order inadvertently rendered caste question politically irrelevant, weakening the Dalits’ claim to representation and their drive for self-respect.

Looking from the Ambedkarian perspective, this can be termed as the Savarna trap to hamper Dalit agency to collectively strive for authentic social equality and political representation, and thus to keep Dalits under their perpetual subordination. Hence, it can

be concluded that the strategy to improve the lot of Dalits through Savarnization and Ashrafization cannot help to overcome the structural barriers or to reduce the structural caste-based discrimination and untouchability in a significant way. Rather, it can attest to the superiority of Savarna-Ashrafs and the inferiority of Dalit(bahujans). It merely redefines the hegemonic social and the political field of contestation to sustain caste hierarchies and deny self-respect to the Dalits.

Notwithstanding the hegemonic narratives that denied them self-respect, Dalits did enjoy self-esteem in digging out, erecting, recognizing and redefining identity markers on certain occasions that did generate counter-hegemonic emancipatory discourse at the margins of Sindhi civil society. This counter-caste consciousness spurred the Dalit agency to strive for the subversion of hegemonic narratives and reconstruct emancipatory identities to (re)claim self-respect. This meant that a marginal epistemic space was created by the Dalit activists. They shared that space with like-minded anti-caste activists hailing from Ashrafia-Savarna location.

A sort of optimism prevailed among Dalit activists that Dalit assertions will pay political and social dividends. They believed that by recasting caste-based, ethnic, religious, regional and national identities, and by forming egalitarian Dalit forums, they could convince the Ashrafia-Savarna political conscience to reciprocate with self-respect that will eventually make them equal in status to Savarna and Ashrafia classes. Such optimism, for instance, was evident from their conviction that their politically viable demographic majority status would be eventually recognized by the state, and consequently, they would be given their due space in local social and political spheres.

They believed that their reimagined proud identities that symbolized caste pride would eventually exorcise the ghost of 'inferiority' and stir Dalit consciousness. They were striving to re-order caste structure on a horizontal plane whereby they could say that they were also equally respectable stakeholders in any social or political equation. Through their identity assertions, either as 'Dalit', 'Darāwar' or 'indigenous Sindhi', they wanted to reclaim their past that they thought was far more glorious than their recent past and the present status. To that end, they were relocating their lost heroes, and redefining past battles and myths.

This trajectory of Dalit politics, however, makes it abundantly clear that the Dalit activists did not, and probably could not, struggle for bringing about fundamental radical structural change to annihilate caste, the radical demand of a few local Ambedkarites. Apprehensive of the infeasibility of such a radical change in given conditions, the leading

local Ambedkarites suggested gradual progression. Hence the Dalits' drive for caste-parity cannot be wholly downplayed as anti-Ambedkarian in essence as it reflected the deep desire of the Dalits for equal recognition and can be justifiably explained as transitional assertions on the way to annihilate caste. This transitional imperative in inter-caste space also demands of the anti-caste activists from within Ashrafia and Savarna castes to mount radical criticism of their caste privileges as the first necessary step to stand by Dalit activists for Dalit inclusion. This intersubjective engagement by means of de-castification is necessary to invoke the state and the government to recognize and subsequently eliminate the discriminations embedded in religious and secular notions enshrined in the Constitution, official codes, and legal system.

To conclude, I should emphasize self-reflexive approach to do ethnography among the subalterns as vital to generate the critique of hegemonic structures and agents in any given society. In this research, my Ashrafia caste location proved to be the major limiting factor in intersubjective space that I shared with Dalit activists. Based on my experience as an ethnographer-cum-activist, I should suggest to the prospective ethnographer to take the caution of Gopal Guru and Sunder Sarukkai (2012) with seriousness, and be ethically careful not to appropriate or hegemonize the discursive space of Dalits to undermine critical particularity at the cost of critical universality (see Guru & Sarukkai, 2012; Sarukkai, 2012, pp.152-53).³³⁰ The prospective ethnographer should constantly remain apprehensive of the epistemological pitfalls that can bias his or her knowledge claims about the authentic 'Dalit' experience that holds key to understand the 'Dalit' lifeworld. Avoiding such potentially ethnocentric tendencies can open up the window into the Dalit's lifeworld and also enable the researcher to contribute as an emancipating change agent both in the academic and social spheres. Since not much research has been done on Dalit activism in Pakistan, this research can furnish several researchable propositions to be validated by the qualitative or quantitative social survey or yet another ethnography done either by a Dalit or non-Dalit scholar.

³³⁰ '[A]n ethical stance towards theorizing can programmatically be defined as a stance that acknowledges a 'critical universality' of theories from other cultures and societies but which, at the same time, draws upon a culture's own historical and intellectual capital.' (Sarukkai, Ethics of Theorising, 2012, pp. 152-53)

Datasets (Papers, Documents, Audio-visuals) Available Online

Publications based on this Dissertation

1. **‘Dalits are in India, not in Pakistan’: Exploring the Discursive Bases of the Denial of Dalitness under the Ashrafia Hegemony.** *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909619863455>.
2. **Understanding Hegemony of Caste in Political Islam and Sufism in Sindh, Pakistan.** *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 54(5), 716–745. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909619839430>.
3. **Politics of Metaphors: Traces of Casteism, Fatalism and Patriarchy in Shah Abdul Latif.** <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2021.1923154>.
4. **Ethno-Nationality of Caste in Pakistan: Privileged Caste Morality in Sindhi Progressive Literature and Politics.** *Critical Sociology* doi:[10.1177/0896920520964541](https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520964541).
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Some of the Datasets based on Pictures, Documents, Blogs, Transcripts of Chats and Conversations Available Online

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6. Hussain, Ghulam (2019f), “*Conversation about the local reaction against early Pre-DST Dalit activism*”, Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/gf2mchs854.1
7. Hussain, Ghulam (2019g), “*Conversation with a Buddhist Meghwar activist at Umerkot 2--02-2016*”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/sc379jwxyz.2
8. Hussain, Ghulam (2019h), “*Conversation on Rooplo Kolhi, Sayedism and Ambedkarism at Mithi*”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/5fmfzbxycy.2
9. Hussain, Ghulam (2019i), “*Conversations with anti-caste activist: Umerkot, and with Veerji Kolhi’s father at Parkar*”, Mendeley Data, V2, doi: 10.17632/y2tz277vnd.2
10. Hussain, Ghulam (2019j), “*Dalit Activism in Sindh Field notes*”, Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/ycfkfhtnhp.1
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Audio Recordings of Some Conversations

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Video Clips (Dataset) Recorded or Shared by Dalit activist

37. Hussain, Ghulam (2019), "Short video clips recorded by the researcher or shared by Dalit activists", Mendeley Data, V1, doi: 10.17632/dhpxsnbwx.1

You Tube links to some field videos

[There are some online links to the video clips of programs in defense or the denial of Dalit activism and Dalit identity, uploaded by both anti-Dalit and pro-Dalit activists. Some of the clips have been uploaded by me on behalf of Dalit Sujaag Tehreek]

38. Chetan Bheel (BIF Dalit activist) Scheduled castes Rally at Mithi, Sindh, Published by Sufi Hussain on Mar 27, 2017. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVu8XN2PN4I>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.
39. Radha Bheel, Chairperson (Dalit Sujaag Tehreek) @ Pano Aqil, Sindh 2016, Published by Sufi Hussain on Mar 27, 2017. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxB6f86QTvQ&t=13s>. Retrieved on March 18, 2018.
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Glossary

<i>Achoot (Achūt)</i>	Untouchable
<i>Adivasi</i>	Indigenous
<i>Ambedkartie</i>	Anyone who believes that the ideas of and political practices of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar to resolve the problem of caste discrimination.
<i>Ashrafia</i>	The group of castes that claim to have descended from the Arab, Turk and Mughal or Middle Eastern ethnic communities or tribes.
<i>Ashrafization</i>	The tendency among the 'lower caste' Muslims and ex-converts from Hinduism to Islam, to change their caste names and values.
<i>Asloka Sindhis</i>	Indigenous Sindhis
<i>Assertion</i>	A statement or an act that makes the other person or entity believe that something being said requires attention; something asserted as an insistent and positive affirmation to maintain or defend (as of a right or attribute). Hence, assertiveness should be understood as the quality of being self-assured and confident without being aggressive and unnecessarily domineering.
<i>Bahujan</i>	The Hindi term that literally means 'majority people'
<i>Baradari</i>	Informal or formal traditional caste-based kinship group.
<i>Brahmanism</i>	The belief that certain castes and classes are inherently sanctified and, therefore, are superior.
<i>Caste capital</i>	The symbolic wealth accumulated based on the given social status of a particular caste.
<i>Caste Hindu</i>	<i>Jati Hindu</i> or 'upper caste' Hindu
<i>Councilor</i>	The member of the local government at <i>Union council</i> level, Taullka or district level.
<i>Dalit</i>	'Dalit', etymologically is the combination of 'Dal', a Hebrew root and the Sanskrit suffix literally meaning 'broken into pieces', or 'crushed underfoot' thus meaning 'oppressed' or 'broken' people.
<i>Dalit Activism</i>	Social and political assertions by the historically oppressed castes and communities of South Asia.
<i>Dalit Christians</i>	Christians that converted from Hinduism and belonged to so-called 'ex-untouchable' castes.
<i>Dalit Hindu</i>	Any caste or the group of castes or the individual who are either Scheduled Castes.
<i>Dalit Muslim</i>	Any Muslim such as ' <i>musalli</i> ' (used derogatorily), 'shaikh', Sheedi, Solangi, Mangarhar, who is either is treated like an 'untouchable'.
<i>Dalitbahujan</i>	Literally means 'Majority oppressed people'. It is used to refer to the all oppressed castes, that make up the majority, including Scheduled Castes.
<i>Dalitness</i>	The condition of being oppressed, suppressed and humiliated. The state of mind or the social existence developed and produced among Dalits by the discriminatory treatment meted out to them by the Savarna and Ashrafia castes.
<i>Darāwar</i>	The Sindhi and Urdu variant of 'Dravidian', the racial- <i>Ethnic identity</i> of the Dalit class.
<i>Dargāh</i>	<i>Shrine</i> of the <i>Sufi</i> Saint

<i>Decastification</i>	The distribution of social, symbolic, political, economic capital emanating from one's Ashrafia-Savarna caste among the groups and individuals of caste socially considered as 'lower', 'inferior', or 'untouchable', to the point that the 'untouchable' may feel being duly reciprocated.
<i>Dharti Dhareen</i>	In Sindhi, literally means 'sons of the soil' or 'lord of the land'.
<i>Feudalism/Landlordism/Waderap</i>	Possession of the hundreds and thousands of acres of landed property by a few tribal and caste lords. Feudalism also means the elitist social attitude usually towards those who do not possess landed property.
<i>Harijanization</i>	The process of assimilation into Hindu culture initiated as a form of Hindu revivalist movements.
<i>Islamisation</i>	The process of assimilation into Islamic culture or adopt Islamic values as a norm.
<i>Jirga/Jirgo</i>	Jirgo or Jirga is the newly adopted term by the Sindhi people that has been borrowed from Baloch and Pashtoon culture and used interchangeably with ' <i>Faislo</i> ' to refer to the decision-making body headed by <i>Sardar</i> or the jury of tribal or sub-tribal and caste chiefs or by the village headmen.
<i>Kshatriya/Khatri</i>	In the Hindu caste system or <i>Verna</i> system, the Kshatriya is the group of castes or second class in order of hierarchy after Brahmins and preceded by Vasihya or merchant class. Together all three castes are known as Savarna castes of the twice-born, according to the Hindu belief system in the incarnation.
<i>Lower Caste</i>	Any caste group or the tribal-caste community considered by the society as 'lower' or inferior to certain other caste or the group of castes.
<i>Minority</i>	The term minority in Pakistan should be understood not in only terms of numbers but also in terms of religious identity. All non-Muslims are considered as a minority because of their population which is far less (1.86% Hindus, 1.6% Christians, and other 0.6%) than the Muslims (96%). It is not simply. In Pakistan both the Savarnas and the Dalit Hindus were imagined and classified as a 'Hindu minority', the identity marker that is contested by the Scheduled Castes who assert for their recognition as the 'majority-in-minority', based on their numerical strength that far outweighs Jati Hindu numbers.
<i>Minoritisation</i>	The reduction or the subsumption of religious groups including Scheduled Castes (who claim to be majority-in-minority) under the blanket social categories such as 'non-Muslim' and 'minority'.
<i>Moolnivasi</i>	Literally means 'indigenous inhabitants'. It is used by the BAMSEF and Bharat Mukti Morcha and certain other Dalitbahujan organizations.
<i>Nazim</i>	The local administrator in Pakistan elected to office by the people under the local government system.
<i>Non-Muslim</i>	The official term for religious minorities in Pakistan.
<i>Pasmanda</i>	The term coined by Ali Anwar in 1985. It is a word of the Persian origin, literally meaning "those who have fallen behind", broken or the oppressed and refers to backward caste Muslims.

<i>Pir</i>	The religious-spiritual guide. Pir'' is the title often given to the spiritual leader or the Sufi (mystic) leader.
<i>Pir-parasti</i>	Pir-Parasti' literally means 'worship of Pir'.
<i>Province</i>	The administrative unit comprised of several districts and often representing a particular ethnolinguistic group.
<i>Qabeelo</i>	Tribe
<i>Qaum</i>	Literally means 'nation'. It is the term that is invariably used to refer to caste, tribe and also to the ethnolinguistic group, to the nation-state and also to a religious community.
<i>Sammāt</i>	The dominant 'upper caste' Sindhi ethnic castes of indigenous Sindhis, considered as racially Aryan (ANI (Ancestral North Indian) origin as against Dravidian/Darāwar Dalits.
<i>Sanatan Dharam</i>	Literally the "eternal way" is widely believed to be the religion or the way of saints, yogis, rishis or mystics. Usually, the mystical dimensions of the Hindu faith are referred to as Sanatan Dharam. Usually, Sanatan Dharam and Hinduism are used interchangeably by the Savarnas.
<i>Sangh Parivar</i>	The <i>Sangh Parivar</i> refers to the family of Hindu nationalist organizations which have been started by members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or drew inspiration from its ideology.
<i>Sankiritisation</i>	The tendency among Dalits, either injected or voluntary, to adopt 'upper caste' Hindu values and beliefs and practices after a few generations.
<i>Sardar</i>	Tribal-caste chief
<i>Savarna</i>	Savarna' as the category used by the Dalit activists to refer to the socially hierarchized classes of the supposedly Hindu castes, that include Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya classes.'
<i>Savarnization</i>	<i>Savarnization</i> is the tendency in Scheduled Castes and the neo-Kshatriyas or the ex-Shudras to adopt Savarna caste values and customs.
<i>Sayed</i>	The descendant of the Ahal-i-bayt, the progeny of Imam Ali-ibn-i-Talib and Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad.
<i>Sayedism</i>	The belief that <i>Sayed</i> castes, which is the descendant of the Panj-tan or Ahal-i-bayt, are sanctified by God, and therefore, superior in social status than any other caste. The system of caste hierarchies produced among Muslims because of belief in the superiority of <i>Sayed</i> followed by other <i>Ashrafia</i> castes.
<i>Scheduled Castes (SC)</i>	Official category of the group of backward or historically oppressed castes in need of affirmative action.
<i>Scheduled Tribes (ST)</i>	Group of backward or historically oppressed tribes in need of economic uplift through reservations, quotas, and political representation.
<i>Self-esteem</i>	The pride that one feels in the self-success or the success of one's caste, baradaris or community fellow.
<i>Self-respect</i>	The pride and respect for the self that one feels one's success is duly acknowledged by other individuals, bradaris, caste or community.

<i>Saithiyā class</i>	‘ <i>Saithiyā</i> ’ literally means the ‘wealthy merchant or businessmen. <i>Saithiyā</i> Class is the socioeconomic class of wealthy Savarna merchants and businessmen.
<i>Shrine culture</i>	The culture of a society that cherishes the belief in the divine providence of the tombs and the graves of saints, Pir, or the Sayeds.
<i>Shudar</i>	According to the Hindu <i>Verna</i> system, the lowest of the four caste groups believed to have been begotten of the feet of the primordial deity Prusha Shukta. Shudar is believed to be the class of menial workers or the laborers, or those engaged in the lowest of the occupations.
<i>Sodha</i>	The title of Thakur or Rajput rulers of Thar
<i>Sufi (Sūfi)</i>	A highly idealized projection of an individual having the mystical powers, and the one who believes in tolerance, peace, equality and interfaith harmony.
<i>Ethnocentric Sufism</i>	The belief that certain individuals and ethnic groups or even regions are ideally spiritual and therefore, inherently peaceful, and tolerant to different faiths.
<i>Taraqqi-Passsand</i>	Progressive
<i>Thari</i>	An inhabitant of Thar Desert region of Sindh
<i>Tribe</i>	The endogamous social group that relatively lives in isolation from mainstream society.
<i>Union council</i>	The local administrative unit comprised of several <i>Deh</i> (sub-units of villages).
<i>Vāṇiyo</i>	‘ <i>Vāṇiyo</i> ’ literally means ‘merchant’. It is used to refer to wealthy Savarnas within Jati Hindus in Sindh.
<i>Vedas</i>	The ancient Hindu religious scriptures.
<i>Verna System</i>	The Varna system in Dharma-sastras divides society into four hierarchical classes or varnas (Brahmins, <i>Kshatriyas</i> , Vaishyas, and Shudras). Those who fall out of this system because of their grievous sins are ostracized as outcastes (untouchables) and considered outside the varna system.
<i>Waderap</i>	The haughty and arrogant social attitude that is maintained by the village head or the chief landlord or the tribal-caste chief to dominate and terrify the common people.
<i>Wadero</i>	Village head or the chief landlord or the tribal-caste chief usually holding surrounding lands of the village and recognized by villagers as the village head.
<i>Zat/Zaat</i>	Caste

Appendix

Table I

Scheduled Castes and Non-Muslim (Christian, Hindu Jati & Scheduled Castes) Population Distribution by Districts:1998³¹

District	Christian	Hindu Jati	Scheduled Castes
Tharparkar	0.04	23.78	16.69
Umerkot	0.23	39.33	6.23
Mirpurkhas	0.50	29.03	3.71
Badin	0.25	18.85	1.08
Sanghar	0.49	19.28	0.87
Hyderabad	0.51	11.51	0.56
Ghotki	0.14	6.17	0.51
Thatta	0.18	2.70	0.19
Jacobabad	0.06	3.42	0.14
Khairpur	0.09	2.82	0.11
Nawabshah	0.33	2.77	0.11
Sukkur	0.51	3.18	0.10
Shikarpur	0.09	1.73	0.07
Larkana	0.06	1.36	0.06
Karachi Central	2.78	0.28	0.05
Karachi East	2.28	0.49	0.05
Karachi South	4.26	2.66	0.03
Malir	2.08	1.10	0.03
Naushehro Feroze	0.04	1.30	0.03
Dadu	0.37	2.03	0.02
Karachi West	1.46	0.35	0.01

Source: Bureau of Census, Government of Pakistan.

Table II

Dalits and Hindus in local government (District Council) winning on general seats

District Tharparkar

No.	Winner	Caste	Union Council (U.C)
District Councilor			
	Tejo	Meghwar	Chelhar
1	Mircho	Meghwar	Kaloi
2	Chetan	Bheel	Dharendro
3	Kanwar Karni Singh Sodha	Savarna Hindu	Pithapur
4	Kewal	Kolhi	Adhigam
5	Lajpat Rai	Bheel	Virawah
6	Shiv Lal		Tigusar
7	Dayal Das		Islamkot (rural)
8	Lachman Singh	Thakur (Savarna)	Nangarparkar (rural)
U.C. Chairman			
9	Jaswant Singh	Thakur (Savarna)	Mithrio Bhatti
10	Lachman Singh	Thakur (Savarna)	Bhakuo
11	Khet Singh	Meghwar	Chelhar

³¹ Note: This table does not contain the population distribution of Ahmedis and 'others'. For the purpose of analysis, however, it suffices here to mention that Ahmedis make up 0.14 percent, and 'Others' make up 0.08 percent of the population of Sindh. Most of the Ahmedis and 'others' belonging to semi-nomadic tribal caste groups living in Mirpurkhas and Hyderabad division, however, belong to Dalit communities. Source: Population Distribution by Religion and Rural/Urban Areas: 1981 & 1998, Hand book of Population Census Data (2002), Sindh, Census Publication No.168, Population Census Organization, Statistics Division, Government of Pakistan.

12	Chetan	Bheel	Bapuhar
13	Manjhi	Meghwar	Sonal Beh
14	<i>Sardaro</i>	Meghwar	Chachro (Rural)
15	Pancho	Kolhi	Nangarparkar
16	Shankar ji	Thakur	Pitha Pur
17	Veerji	Kolhi	Behrano
18	Jhawar Lal	Meghwar	Adhigam
19	Mangal Singh	Thakur	Pillu
20	Partab Singh	Bheel	Dabho
21	Rattan	Bheel	Buhareri
Vice Chairman			
22	Manjo	Kolhi	Mohrano
23	Pirbhdas	Thakur (Savarna)	Poskaro
24	Ganesh	Meghwar	Mihrio Bhatti
25	Hamtho	Bheel	Bhakuo
26	Goban Ram		Vejhaiar
27	Chelo Mal		Chelhar
28	Venjhraaj		Manjthi
29	Pirkash		Bapuhar
30	Mohan	Bheel	Sonal Beh
31	Rajo	Bheel	Khario Ghulam Shah
32	Khamiso Sagram	Bheel	Giryanchho
33	Giyanchand		Saranhiar
33	Sunil Premi	Meghwar	Rajoro
34	Mukesh		Nangarparkar
35	Rato		Pithapur
36	Tago	Kolhi	Behrano
37	Jawahar Lal	Meghwar	Adhigam

Table III -A

Dalits and Hindus in local government (District Council) winning on general seats in District Tharparkar						
District	Status	Total minority population percent in District	Total Non-Muslim Voters	SC and Jati Hindu members (winners)	Total Members including Muslims	Percentage win
Tharparkar	District Councilor	46%	219,342	10	64 ³³² (56)	17.85 %
	U.C Chairman			13	56	23.2 %
	U.C Vice Chairman			16	56	28.57 %
	Councilors			64	224	28.57%
	Reserved seats for Non-Muslims			64	64	100%
	Reserved Seats for women			10	64	15.6%
	Reserved seats for peasants, Youth and workers			45	192	23.4%
Sub-Total		46% ³³³		209	720	29 %

³³² Polling was withheld on 8 UCs for district Councilor and Chairman, and on two polling for general Councilors as per the officially declared list of successful candidates resourced to compile data. Source: Election Commission of Pakistan, Notification No. F.9 23)/2015-LGE-(S). URL: https://www.pakvoter.org/sites/default/files/files/Local_Govt_Elections/Ig_elections_sindh_2015/Tharparkar.pdf. Retrieved on: January 18, 2018

³³³ See. [Minorities' votes may decide fate of 96 constituencies](#) (Dawn: March, 19, 2013) URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/796356> . Retrieved on January 18, 2018

Table III-B

Dalits and Hindus in local government (District Council) winning on general seats in Umerkot						
District	Status	Total minority population percent in District	Total Non-Muslim votes	Non-Muslim (Mostly Scheduled Castes) winners	Total Members including Muslims (mostly Ashrafia)	Percentage (win)
Umerkot	District Councilor			1	42	2.3 %
	U.C Chairman	49 %	189,501	0	42	00%
	U.C Vice Chairman			12	42	28.57%
	Councilors			24	168	14.28%
	Reserved Seats for Non-Muslims			42	42	100%
	Reserved Seats (peasant, worker, women and youth)			40	168	23.8%
Subtotal		49%		119	504	23.6%

Table IV

PPP leadership in District Tharparkar (2017-2018)				
No.	Caste group	Position	Leader	caste
Scheduled Castes				
1	Scheduled Castes	President (Tharparkar)	Engineer Giyanchand (Senator)	Meghwar
2	Scheduled Castes	General Secretary (Islamkot)	Advocate Mohan	Bheel
3	Scheduled Castes	General Secretary (Nangarparkar)	Lajpat Rai	Bheel
4	Scheduled Castes	Information Secretary (Nangarparkar)	Vasdev	Meghwar
5	Scheduled Castes	Information Secretary (Mithi)	Amar Odani	Meghwar
Jati Hindu				
6	Jati Hindu (ex-Shudra)	Information secretary (Tharparkar)	Nand Lal	Malhi
7	Brahmin	President (Mithi)	Manjo Kumar	Malani
8	Jati Hindu	President (Chachro)	Mukhi Bhero lal	Maheshwari
9	Jati Hindu	Information Secretary (Diplo)	Ashok	Chuhan
Muslim castes				
10	Pasmanda Muslim	General Secretary (Mithi)	Ashraf	Dars
11	Pasmanda Muslim	President (Islamkot)	Adam	Hingoro
12	Pasmanda Muslim	Information Secretary (Islamkot)	Waryam	Lunjo
13	Pasmanda Muslim	General Secretary (Diplo)	Muhammad	Bajir
14	Pasmanda Muslim	Information Secretary (Chachro)	Ali Nawaz	Bajir
15	Ashrafia	General Secretary (Tharparkar)	Dost Muhammad (MPA)	Rahimoon
16	Ashrafia	President (Diplo)	Muhammad Essa	Rahimoon
17	Ashrafia	President (Nangarparkar)	Muhammad Rahim	Khoso
18	Ashrafia	General Secretary (Chachro)	Muhammad Ayub	Sangrasi
19	Ashrafia	President (Dahili)	Muhammad Salim	Rahimoon
20	Ashrafia	General Secretary (Dahili)	Muhammad Bachal	Samejo
21	Ashrafia	Information secretary (Dahili)	Akbar Ali	Nuhrio
22	Ashrafia	President (Kaloi)	Muhammad Umar	Lund
23	Ashrafia	General Secretary (Kaloi)	Arbab Akbar	Lund
24	Ashrafia	Information Secretary (Kaloi)	Umar Sagar	Lashari

Source. Bilawal House (PPP), URL: <https://mediacellppp.wordpress.com>. Retrieved on January 8, 2018.

Table V

PPP leadership in Division Mirpurkhas (2017-2018) Mirpurkhas and Umerkot Districts				
No.	Caste group	Position	Leader	caste
1	Ashrafia	President (Division Mirpurkhas)	Pir Aftab Shah	Jilani\ <i>Sayed</i>
2	Savarna	General Secretary (Division Mirpurkhas)	Dr. Mahesh Kumar	Malani (Brahmin)
3	Ashrafia	Information Secretary (Division Mirpurkhas)	Khair-un-Nisar	Mughal
4	Baloch (Ashrafia)	President Mir (District Mirpurkhas)	Mir Munawar Ali	Talpur
5	Baloch (Ashrafia)	General Secretary (District Mirpurkhas)	Mir Hassan	Dhonkai
6	Business Caste (converted Ashrafia)	Information Secretary (District Mirpurkhas)	Abdul Salam	Memon
7	Ashrafia	President (District Umerkot)	Syed Ali Mardan	Shah/Sayed
8	Ashrafia	General Secretary	Faqeer Muhammed Nawaz Sufi	-----
9	Pasmanda Muslim	Information Secretary	Burhan Din	Kumbhar

Source: Bilawal House (PPP), URL: <https://mediacellppp.wordpress.com/2017/03/05/ppp-office-bearers-announced-for-mirpurkhas-division-districts/>.

Table VI

Scheduled Castes representation in Sindh Assembly and National Assembly (1985-1997)											
Elected members to Five Provincial Assembly Sindh Seats Reserved for Hindus and Scheduled Castes under separate electorate system											
Year	1997			1993			1990		1988		1985
Total Contestant	85			67			91		96		Non party based
Total SC & Hindu votes	2,42,568			7,09,520			641,455		645,155		-----
Winners	Party	Votes	Winners	Party	votes	Winners	votes	Winners	Votes	Winners	
1	Bherulal	11,907	Engineer Gianchand	IND	19319	Lachman Das	28,856	Khatu mal Jeewan	---	Assar Das	
2	Giyanoomal		10223		Lachman Das	12,116	Humer Sigh	24,988	Jagdes h	12,167	Tikam
3	Mehroomal Jagwani	11,263	Mehrao Mal Jagwani	PH-SCP	15,402	Mahroo Mal	18,151	Deeva n Kumar	18056	Ram Singh	
4	Hari Ram	14,123	Hari Ram Kishori Lal		32,916	Hari Ram Kishorilal	13,908	Mehru Mal	10,710	Rattan Kumar	
5	Hamair Singh	19,689	Hamir Singh	PH-SCP	14,495	Servanand	11,863	Hari Ram Kishori lal	8612	Mangha Ram	
SC	1		1			0		1		1	
Hindu	4		4			5		4		4	
Total Scheduled Castes								4			
Total Hindus								21			

Table VII

Elected members to four National Assembly Seats Reserved for Hindus and Scheduled Castes under separate electorate system										
Year	1997		1993		1990		1988		1985	
Total Contestants	28		25		40		40		Non-party based	
Total SC & Hindu votes	805877		7,68588		696561		694330			
	Winners	Votes	Winners	Votes	Winners	Party	Votes	Winners	Votes	Winners
1	Khatumal	31,049	Khatumal	26,162	Khatumal	IND	33,667	Assar Das	15,824	Bhagwandas Chawla
2	Rana Chandar Singh	27,459	Rana Chandar Singh	26,968	Rana Chander Singh	PHP	33,847	Bhagwandas	14,234	Parumal Kolhi
3	Krishan Bheel	31,049	Kishachad Parwani	29,866	Bhagwan Dass	IND	24,130	Rana Chandar Singh	55,673	Seth Chiman Das
4	Kishan Chand Parwani	33,717	Moti Ram	25,904	Kishanchand Parwani	IND	24,130	Kishanchand Parwani	27,296	Mr.Gulji
SC	2		1			1		0		2
Hindu	2		3			3		4		2
Total Scheduled Castes								6		
Total Hindus								14		

Table VIII

Scheduled Castes and other indigenous tribes in Pakistan, Rajasthan and Gujarat		Other backward tribes and castes listed/not listed ³³⁴ .			SC, ST, OBC and Denotified tribes in Gujarat and Rajasthan ³³⁵	
Sindh		Punjab	Scheduled Castes (Rajasthan and Gujarat)	Schedule d Tribes	OBCs and Denotified Tribes	
Castes/Tribes observed during field work	Mentioned by R.U Thakur (Shudra castes & minor castes)					
Barha, Bajrya, Bhat, Malhi, Sami, Rawra, Rabari, Gur-ra, Galaria, Khatri Rangrez, Kansara, Nai, Dabgar, Bajir, Dabgar, Jogi, Gurgla, Kokri, Kabootra, Mangarha, Merbahar, Mallah, Machi, Chuhra, Shaikh, Sheedi, Qambrani, Markani, Khaskheli, Langah, Jat, Hingoro, Mochi, Lohar, Penjara, Kori, Lohar, Khatti, Gogi, Karia, Jatia, Ghaghra, Rawra, Jatia, Marecha, Bawariya, Mochi, Bhang, Gujarati, Gawariya, Machla, Kucheria, Kokri, Ahir, Lori, Chammar, Changar, Bhatu, Kenghar, Gurajmar, Chootiya, Madari, Pakhai, Dulhar, Dhoor-dhoya	[Shudra Castes] Bhansal, Darzi, Bhoobi, Nai, Kumbhar, Lohar, Sonar, Suthar, Kori, Teli, Kahar, Kunbi, Kurmi, Pinjara, Bnasai, Od, Kucharia, Mali, Vagri, Wanhan, Bhandi, Shikari, Mang, Madig, Menghwal, Dedh, Maha, and Kunbi, Chammar, Mochi, Sochi, Kolhi, Bheel, Beragi, Jogi, Kala, Aboriginal, Dhondia, Dhulia, Bhunhar, Mangi, Kasai, Bazigar, Parwari, Valimiki. [Minor Castes] Sanyasi, Gusa, Gur Gurpota, Jagiasi, Jagik, Masand, Nanga, Udasi, Fakir, Nath, Brahmachari, Telargi, Jagiri, Jagnam, Suthria, Sheikh, Mirasi, Lingaya, Agri, Bajirs, Gend, Jatia, Sanelia, Oswal, Narspin Viga, Ansari, Chavar	Jhabels, Kihals, Mores, Kutanas ³³⁶ , Joiya, Khokhar, Choochan, Gojar, Sarsar, Sandal, Parhiyar, Lootay, Madhar, Teejey, Pabey, Korotana, Sahutra, Cheniyal, Saroey, Hanjra, Sipra, Borat, Bhatti, Dhagge, Kalyane, Pundit, Lodhay, Valanex, Sandhu, Gharo, Pereer, Khojey	Adi Dharmi, Bagri, Balmiki, Bawaria, Bazigar, Bhand, Bhang, Chandal, Chura, Dabgar, Dhed, Dom, Halalkhor, Pabey, Kanjar, Koli, Kooch Band, Korar, Kori, Chamar, Kuchband, Lalbegi, Machigar, Madari, Mang, Megh, Menghvar, Mochi, Mochigar, Nat, Nut, Raidas, Ramdasia, Rohidas, Sansi, Sapera, Valmiki, Vargi	Bheel Koli	Bagri, Bawaria, Baldias, Banjara, Baori, Bavri or Baori, Bhat, Chandlia, Charan, Chuvalia, Koli, Dafer (Hindu & Muslim), Darzi, Dhakad, Dhangar, Dhobi (Muslim), Gadhi, Gadias, Lohars, Gadi-Luharia, Ghanchi (Muslim), Halepota, Hingora (Muslim), Hingora/Hingorja (DNT in Gujarat), Jat (Muslim), Jogi, Kanjar, Khatki or Kasai (Converts from Scheduled Castes only), Koli, Labana, Langa, Mangniyar, Langha, Lohar, Madari, Mallah, Mali, Sapera (Non Hindu Caste), Pinjara (all Muslim), Mirasi (all Muslims), Mochi (Non Hindu Caste), Multanis, Nai, Naik, Nat, Nath, Nut, Od, Rabari, Sansi, Sapera, Sarangiwala Bhopas, Siddi (where they are not Scheduled Tribes), Silawat (other than Sompura and Murtikaar) Charan, Sindhi, Musalman, Sonari, Sorathia Rabari, Suthar, Talpada Koli (where they are not Scheduled Tribes), Tari & Ansari (All Muslims), Tarkhan, Theba (DNT, Gujarat), Waghari, Wagharia	

Table IX

Scheduled castes in Pakistan Scheduled Castes in Pakistan

Listed in Scheduled Castes Ordinance, 1957

³³⁴ Most of these tribes and castes belonging to different religions have been identified by Dalit activists as marginalized and backward.

³³⁵ Source: Social Justice and Empowerment Department, Government of Rajasthan. URL: <http://sje.rajasthan.gov.in/oldpms/List%20of%20Castes/st.htm>, Retrieved, on January, 12, 2018.

³³⁵ See Census of India, URL: http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_gujarat.pdf, Retrieved, on January, 12, 2018.

³³⁵ See Social Justice and Empowerment Department, Government of Rajasthan. URL: <http://www.bcmbcmw.tn.gov.in/obc/faq/gujarat.pdf>, Retrieved, on January, 12, 2018

³³⁵ See Social Justice and Empowerment Department, Government of Rajasthan. URL: <http://sje.rajasthan.gov.in/oldpms/List%20of%20Castes/obc.htm>, Retrieved, on January, 12, 2018

³³⁵ See Social Justice and Empowerment Department, Government of Rajasthan. URL: <http://sje.rajasthan.gov.in/oldpms/List%20of%20Castes/dtnt.htm>, Retrieved, on January, 12, 2018.

Also: Draft list of denotified tries, nomadic tribes and semi-nomadic tribes in India, <http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/Draft%20List%20of%20Denotified%20Tribes%20for%20Mail.pdf>, Retrieved, on January, 12, 2018.

³³⁶ The population census mentions tribes in the category of „others“, See Population Census Organization, Statistics Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, June 2000.

	Listed in both Punjab 1936³³⁷ and 1957	Listed in both Sindh in 1957, and 1936	Listed only in Scheduled Castes Ordinance, 1957
Ad Dharmi, Bangali, Barar, Bawaria, Bazigar, Bhangi, Banjara, Bheel, Chamar, Chanal, Charan, Chuhra or Balmiki, Dagi and Koli, Dhanak, Dhed, Dumna, Gagra, Gandhila, Halal- Khor, Jatia, Kalal, Khatik, Kolhi, Kori, Kutchria, Marija, or Marecha, Megh, Mengwar, Nat, Od, Pasi, Perna, Ramdasi, Sansi, Sapela, Sarera, Shikari, Sirkiband, Sochi, Wagri.	Ad Dharmi, Bangali, Barar, Burar, Berar, Bawaria, Bazigar, Bhangi, Bhanjara, Chamar, Chanal, Chuhra or Balmiki, Dagi, Koli, Dhanak, Dumna, Gandhila, Khatik, Kori, Marija, or Marecha, Megh, Nat, Od, Pasi, Perna, Ramdasi, Ravidasi, Sansi, Sapela, Sarera, Sirkiband.	Dhed, Bhangi, Chuhra, Chamar, Koli, Menghwar or, Meghval, Sochi.	Bheel, Dhed, Gagra, Halal-Khor, Jatia, Kalal, Kolhi, Kuchria, Shikari, Wagri.

³³⁷ Scheduled Castes Order, 1936, see online, URL:
<http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/GOI-SC-ORDER-1936.pdf>, retrieved on January 18,
2018.

Table X
Caste Elite of Sindh: District-wise Break-up

Sr. No	District	Total ruling castes	Frequency in Legislative Assemblies (1937 to 2016)				
			Ashrafiya class			Savarna class	Dalit class
			Families	<i>Sammāt</i>	Baloch /Pathan /Turk	Syed/ Arab	Sodho /Thakur /Lohano /Brahmin
1	Badin	13	16	23	11		
2	Dadu	15	22	15	32	6	
3	Ghotki	8	14	8	1	1	
4	Hyderabad	37	30	27	47	12	0
5	Jacobabad (upper Sindh Frontier)	14	4	52		4	0
6	Jamshoro	6	2	2	3	3 ³³⁸	0
15	Kambar Shahdadkot	6	6	6	0	0	0
25	Karachi (all districts)	43	Urdu-speaking Rajputs / Sindhi Sammāt	Baloch/ Pashtoon	Sindhi and Urdu-Speaking Syed	Jati Hindus since 1937	0
			38	24	77	24	
8	Kashmore	5		8	0	0	0
9	Khairpur	14	24	7	23	0	0
10	Larkana	21	65	13	2	7	
11	Matiari	3		2	6	0	0
12	Mirpurkhas	5	2	7	11	5	
13	Naushahro Firoze	6	9	11	13	0	0
16	Sanghar	18	38	12	5	1	0
14	Shaheed Benazirabad	20	26	30	31	6	0
17	Shikarpur	14	21	15	1	1	0
24	Sujawal	3		0		0	0
18	Sukkur	25	39	18	20	14	0
19	Tando Allahyar	3		2	3	0	0
20	Tando Muhammad Khan	2	2	1		0	0
21	Tharparkar	13	32	14	13	28	8
22	Thatta	11	31	8	20	4	0
23	Umerkot	3	1	5	7	2	0
	Total	308	421	310	326	118	8

³³⁸ Daya Ram directly elected on general seat on ticket of PPPP from Jamshoro PS-72 (Old Dadu II)

Table XI

Sr. No	District	Ashrafia Caste elite of Sindh ³³⁹	Total ruling castes/ Families
1	Badin	Halepoto, Mirza, Rahu, Jilani , Rashidi(Syed/Pir), Shah , Siddiqui (Syed),Talpur, Nizamani, Mandhro, Leghari, Soomro, Chang, Odhejo, Chandio	13
2	Dadu	Mahesar, Jatoi, Panhwar, Syed/Pir/Shah, Jamali, Jilani, Junejo, Shoro, Channa, Shanani, Leghari, Malik, Qazi, Lund, Butt (Punjabi)	15
3	Ghotki	Pitafi, Mahar,Shar, Bozdar, Jam, Dahar, Leghari, Dharejo	8
4	Hyderabad	Jam,Soomro, Memon,Jamot, Bachani, Bhurgri, Sirhandi, Qureshi , Mashadi, Bukhari,(Syed) Makhdoom (Qureshi/Syed) ,Talpur, Nizamani, Khilji., (Shah), Jillani , Zaidi,(Rizvi, Sayed (Urdu), Shaikh, Khanzada Walhari, Rajput, Nawabzada, Bhatti),Shah, Nawab Khan (Urdu), Shaikh, Qazi ³⁴⁰ , Arain(Punjabi), Brohi, Lakho, Bachani, Mangrio, Soomro, Dars, Jumani, Palari (Baloch), Magsi	37
5	Jacobabad (upper Sindh Fronteir)	Sarki, Panhwar, Mazari, Jatoi, Bijarani, Khoso, Buledi, Jamali, Sundrani, Usto Odho, Domki, Jakhrani, Shahliyani	14
6	Jamshoro	Syed/Shah, Shoro, Malik, Jokhio, Leghari, Khoso	6
15	Kambar Shahdaktot	Magsi, Chandio, Isran, Hakro, Khoso, Jatoi	6
25	Karachi (all districts)	Jamot, Gabol, Leghari,Baloch, Schawani, Junejo,Chandio, , Kazi, Allana, Soomro,Jokhio, Pirzada, Baluch,Hoti , Khattak, Ghauri ,Durrani, Jadoon,Marwat, Hingoro Jafferi (Syed), Kazmi, Zaidi, Qadri, Farooqui, Bukhari,Hashmi , Bakri, Siddiqui Qureshi, Rizvi, Sabzwari,(Urdu-Syed) Mirza-Baig, Lakhani [Gazdar (Rajasthani) , Burhni, Patel, Bhopali, Lakhani, Madani, Arshi, Hazari, Ansari, Haqqani.] ³⁴¹ Ghanchi (Urdu-lower caste) Chaudhry , Awan(Punjabi upper caste)	43
8	Kashmore	Khoso, Bijarani, Domki, Sundrani, Jatoi	5
9	Khairpur	Wassan, Pir Pagara (Rashidi, Jilani,Syed/Shah), Kharal, Banbhan, Larik, Mari, Shar, Talpur, Phulpoto, Unar, Shaikh, Wassan, Heesbani	14
10	Larkana	Kuhro, Bhutto, Siyal, Abro, , Soomro, Abbasi, Unar, Isran, Chandio, Qazi, Memon Kehar, Tunio, Bughio, Hakro,Magsi, Katpar, Junejo, Jalbani, Kuhro, Shah	21
11	Matari	Makhdoom (Shah/Syed), Talpur, Qureshi	3
12	Mirpurkhas	Talpur, Bhurgri,Memon, Qaimkhani, Siddiqui/Shah/Pir(Sayed)	5
13	Naushahro Firoze	Jatoi, Shah/Syed, Abbasi, Rajpar, Dahraj, Khero, Bhurt	6
16	Sanghar	Dero, Rajar, Syed/Shah, Pir Pagara Rashidi (Shah/Syed) , Thaheem, Marri, Junejo, Jam, Narejo, Rind, Sanjrani, Hingoro, Wassan, Chandio, Brohi, Mangrio, Rana (Punjabi) , Khaskheli ³⁴²	18

³³⁹ As epithets (Rana, Pir, Syed, and Shah) symbolize caste status and one can infer from epithet the caste lineage, these have been mentioned here as such. Hindu castes have not been mentioned in this column. Syed/Shah/Pir has counted as one caste groups. Farooqui, Qureshis, Siddiqui, Makhdoom etc., all such so called Syed castes have been counted separately in this column.

³⁴⁰ Qazi is not a caste, but an epithet. Most of Qazis (descendants of the doctors of Islamic law) are either Memon or Shaikh, or *Sammatt* Sindhis ethnically, and therefore, have been counted as *Sammatt* Sindhis. Jam and Arbab are also epithets used by *Sammatt* tribes, and therefore have been counted among *Sammatt* Sindhi Muslim group.

“There were a number of categories of persons who enjoyed the privilege of directly appropriating the surplus of the peasants. Most of these were the recipients of the madad-i-ma'sh (subsistence) revenue grants which were made to persons of four categories: (i) literary people, (ii) persons of judicial profession, such as qazi, mufti, sadar and muhtasib, (iii) persons of religious castes,; such as sadat, mashaikh and Sayeds, and (iv) descendents of original Mughals who had be-come recluse or who otherwise had no ability to earn their living” (Ahmed F., 1984, p. A152)

³⁴¹ Urdu-speaking Ashrafia and Ashrafia epithets Mirza-Baig, Nawab etc., and Syed surnames Kazmi, Qureshi, Farooqui, Siddiques counted as Syed here as Ashrafia castes.

³⁴² Khaskheli is believed to be lower caste Sindhis, descendants Afro-Sindhi servants of Mir Talpurs during Talpur rule of Sindh. Khaskheli and Mangrio Fakeer get elected through Pir Pagara's party PML-F, by virtue of being their dedicated discipleship to the Pir Pagara, the Syed by caste and spiritual head.

14	Shaheed Benazirabad	Zardari, Dahri, Jam, Qazi, Arain ³⁴³ (Punabi), Jalbani, Shah/Syed, (Pirzado)Unar, Junejo, Dhraj, Dahri,Brohi, Jatoi, Rind, Jamali, Jalbani,, Chandio, Bhurt, Rajpar, Tamachi	20
17	Shikarpur	Durrani,Pathan (Agha), Bhayo, Jatoi, Mahar, Sarki,Jatoi, Shah, Shaikh, Kumario (Abro), Soomro, Junejo. Mirani, Jokhio	14
24	Sujawal	Sheerazi (Syed),Malkani, Paleejo	3
18	Sukkur	Dharejo, Mahar , Miran ³⁴⁴ i (upper-lower caste) Bozdar, Bandhani, Lund, Shar, Bhutto,Shah/Syed, Rashidi , Qadri, Musavi (Urdu),Rajput (Urdu) Pirzada,Dahar,Durrani ,Chahar, Pitafi, Shaikh, Dharejo,Farooqui(Syed) Patthan, Soomro, Mangi, Bozdar Baloch,	25
19	Tando Allahyar	Pitafi, Shah/Syed, Rizvi	3
20	Tando Muhammad Khan	Bukhari (Shah), Soomro	2
21	Tharparkar	Nohrio (Arbab), Qureshi, Makhdoom Jillani/Pir/Syed/Shah,Rahimon Memon, Talpur, Bhurgri , Wassan, Palli, Balalani, Khoso, Malani	13
22	Thatta	Sheerazi (syed) Shah ,Khoja Leghari, Malkani, Paleejo, Chandio, Memon,Jalbani, Soomro, Gaho, Jam	11
23	Umerkot	Shah/Pir, Bhurgri, Talpur	3
	Total		308

³⁴³ Arain is a Punjabi Rajput caste. There have been only three assembly members out of that caste. Therefore, here have been counted among *Sammatt* Sindhi group, which is also considered to be ethnically Rajput, and only linguistically different.

³⁴⁴ Mirani is considered as the alternative caste name of those lower caste fishermen groups (Mallah, Machi, and Meerbahar) who rise up the economic ladder. Aftab Shaban Mirani has been only one such notable politician among Miranis. He is a politician from [Shikarpur](#), [Sindh](#), [Pakistan](#). The former defense minister has been a representative for the NA-202 constituency. Their family has established kinship bonds with non-Mirani upper caste urban family. Mr.Mirani, his daughter, Seema Khurram (wife of Khurram Gulzar (P.S.P) D.I.G of Karachi, one of the Senior most Police Officer of Sindh) and also Danial Ahmed, grandson of Mr.Mirani, and son of Mr.Khurram Gulzar.

Annexures

Annexure I: Sample of Posts Advertised

A sample of advertised posts by Government of Sindh, Livestock and fisheries Department for an Accelerated Action Plan AAP Govt Of Sindh 17 May 2017,

Retrieved from: <https://www.ilmkidunya.com/jobs/jobs-in-accelerated-action-plan-aap-govt-of-sindh-17-may-2017-117546.aspx> . Dated May 18th, 2017.

		GOVERNMENT OF SINDH OFFICE OF THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR, ACCELERATED ACTION PLAN (AAP) FOR REDUCTION OF STUNTING MALNUTRITION IN SINDH (FISHERIES SECTOR) Email: aapfisheriessindh@gmail.com Phone 022-9240207			
SITUATION VACANT					
<p>Applications are invited from the bona fide residents of Sindh Province for purely contract appointment against following vacant posts under the World Bank Assisted program namely Accelerated Action Plan (AAP) for Reduction of Stunting and Malnutrition in Sindh (Fisheries Sector) in Fisheries Wing of Livestock and Fisheries Department, Government of Sindh.</p>					
S. #	Name of Post	Number of Posts	Qualification and Experience	Age	Fixed Salary Per Month
PROJECT MANAGEMENT UNIT (PMU AT KARACHI)					
1	Procurement Specialist	01	At least MBA degree in logistics, supply chain management or business administration from a recognised University. A minimum of 5-8 years of relevant experience including broad expertise in the management of public procurement in the public or private sector. Age can be relaxed based on experience and qualification.	35-40	100,000 PKR
9	Driver	18	Middle pass, possession of valid LTV/HTV Driving License. Must be able to maintain Log Book. At least five years experience as a driver.	30-40	25,000 PKR
10	Sweeper	02	Must be literate. From Scheduled Caste	23-30	20,000 PKR
11	Naib Qasid	04	Must be literate and well-mannered.	23-30	20,000 PKR

Annexure II: School Leaving Certificate

اسکول دیوان چورس ایفکیت

رقبت برائے اسکول اسکول - لکھی محلہ ملکائی
 قلمبر 166 - چورس ایفکیت - دیوان چورس ایفکیت

نام و شناختی نمبر	نام و شناختی نمبر
پیدائشی تاریخ	پیدائشی تاریخ
اسکول برائے داخلہ کی تاریخ	اسکول برائے داخلہ کی تاریخ
اسکول برائے داخلہ کی تاریخ	اسکول برائے داخلہ کی تاریخ
اسکول برائے داخلہ کی تاریخ	اسکول برائے داخلہ کی تاریخ
اسکول برائے داخلہ کی تاریخ	اسکول برائے داخلہ کی تاریخ
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سنہ پیدائش: 04-04-1989
 پیدائشی مقام: اوٹھہ شہر اوٹھہ لڑی
 سنہ داخلہ: 22-05-1998
 مقام داخلہ: EPMS
 پیدائشی مقام: اوٹھہ شہر اوٹھہ لڑی
 سنہ داخلہ: 31-08-2000
 مقام داخلہ: ایفکیت چورس ایفکیت
 پیدائشی مقام: اوٹھہ شہر اوٹھہ لڑی
 سنہ داخلہ: 31-08-2000
 مقام داخلہ: ایفکیت چورس ایفکیت

سنہ پیدائش: 04-04-1989
 پیدائشی مقام: اوٹھہ شہر اوٹھہ لڑی
 سنہ داخلہ: 22-05-1998
 مقام داخلہ: EPMS
 پیدائشی مقام: اوٹھہ شہر اوٹھہ لڑی
 سنہ داخلہ: 31-08-2000
 مقام داخلہ: ایفکیت چورس ایفکیت

سربراہ اسکول کی طرف سے درج ذیل اسکول چورس ایفکیت میں مقیم ہے۔
 2415185
HEAD MASTER
 مسجد ایفکیت
 چورس ایفکیت

محلہ چورس ایفکیت، یارس کتات گھر ملکائی شریف ضلعو بدایوں

Annexure III: Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal Application


GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN
PAKISTAN BAIT-UL-MAL
(Let the Affluent Share with the Needy)
 Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare & Special Education

Ref No: EBM/FP/03/44/323 Date: 16/12/03

The District Nazim / Commissioner,
 District Food Support Steering Committee,
 District Tharparkar.


Subject: INCREASE IN FSP QUOTA OF MINORITIES - DALITS, DISTRICT THARPARKAR.

It is imperative to mention that Mr. Sadhmal Alias Surendar Vilasai, R/o district Tharparkar, presently working as reporter in Daily Financial Post, Karachi vide his letter dated 05-11-2003 has pointed out various difficulties being faced by Dalits, who are part of Hindu. He has requested to increase FSP quota for Dalits according to their percentage in the population of Tharparkar (15%) instead of fixing it as 3% of total beneficiaries of the district.

District Incharge, FSP Tharparkar has confirmed that share of non-Muslims in the population of district Tharparkar is 0.69% as compared to their share in FSP quota of that district i.e. 27.96%.

It may be recalled that Federal Food Support Steering Committee (FFSSC) has decided in its first meeting held on 09-02-2000 that "relaxation of beneficiaries at district level will be made on population basis of minorities through lists, as this is the first safety net programme in which minorities have been included since they did not qualify for Ghazari Allowance from Zakat Administration (copy enclosed).

In view thereof, it is therefore requested that District Food Support Steering Committee (DFSSC) Tharparkar may undertake necessary steps to provide financial assistance to Dalits/Hindus on the basis of their population, under intimation to this office.


 (ZAHALKAT MAHMOOD)
 DIRECTOR (PWT/HC/TS)
 TEL: 981-928972

CC -

- The Director, Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal, Provincial Office, Sindh, Karachi (w.r.to his E-mail pbsindh@baitulmal.gov.pk dated 05-12-2003 addressed to Head Office).
- Mr. Sadhmal Alias Surendar Vilasai, Reporter, Daily Financial Post, 106-C, Main Khyaban-e-Istehadi, Phase-II (Extension), Defence Housing Authority, Karachi (w.r. to his letter dated 05-11-2003)

E-mail: ebm@baitulmal.gov.pk
 Street No. 9, Sector H-8/4, D.H.A. Colony-e-Jahar, Islamabad (Ph: 9257754 Fax 9258371)

Annexure IV: Scheduled Caste Ordinance, 1957



EXTRAORDINARY
PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY
KARACHI, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1957

GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN
MINISTRY OF LAW
ORDINANCE No. XVI OF 1957
Karachi, the 12th November, 1957

ORDINANCE

to declare certain castes of non-Muslims to be Scheduled Castes for the purposes of the Constitution.

WHEREAS it is expedient to declare certain castes of non-Muslims to be Scheduled Castes for the purposes of the Constitution and to specify the castes to which such a declaration extends;

AND WHEREAS the National Assembly is not in session and the Speaker, exercising the powers of the President under Article 50 of the Constitution, is satisfied that circumstances exist which render it necessary to take immediate action for the purpose;

Now, therefore, in pursuance of Article 50 of the Constitution and in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 50 of the Constitution, and of all other powers enabling him in that behalf, the Speaker, exercising the powers of the President, makes and promulgates the following Ordinance:—

1. Short title, extent and commencement.—(1) This Ordinance may be called the Scheduled Castes (Declaration) Ordinance, 1957.

(2) It extends to the whole of West Pakistan and the Federal Capital.

(3) It shall come into force at once.

Enacted at Karachi on the 12th day of November 1957.

2430 THE GAZETTE OF PAKISTAN EXTRA, NOV. 12, 1957
2. Declaration of Scheduled Castes.—The castes of non-Muslims mentioned in the Schedule to this Ordinance are declared to be Scheduled Castes for the purposes of the Constitution within the meaning of Article 204 thereof.

SCHEDULE

(See section 2)	
1. All Dhanni	29. Mui
2. Bangali	30. Ormu
3. Barir	31. Gajra
4. Bawaria	32. Gumbhis
5. Buzigar	33. Halakhor
6. Hingri	34. Jaha
7. Dhanjari	35. Kachal
8. Hali	36. Khatib
9. Chaur	37. Kohli
10. Chimal	38. Kori
11. Chisori	39. Kuchik
12. Chitara, or Bhanjki	40. Mariga, or Maridia
13. Dagi and Kori	41. Meho
14. Dhank	42. Mirgahpur

ABDUL WAHAB KHAN,
Speaker, exercising the powers
of the President under Article 50
of the Constitution.

EDWARD SUTTON,
Secretary.

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Annexure V: Interview Guide

Interview Guide and Score Form

(For conversational interviews)

Level of Casteism among political workers of 10 major political parties of rural Sindh

Name of the respondent: _____ Social/Political affiliation: _____
 Caste: _____ Date: _____
 Gender: _____ Place of Interview: _____
 Age: _____ Nature of queries/ questions: *Open Ended Questions*

Sample Questions/Queries

I	Query	Purpose	Score of casteism				
			1 (Least Casteist)	2	3	4	5 (Extremely Casteist)
1	<p>a) <i>کون سا کاسٹہ بہتر ہے؟</i></p> <p>b) Your caste is superior to this or that caste?</p> <p>c) Which caste or the groups of castes do you believe are superior and inferior?</p> <p>d) Dalits/Sayeds are inferior/superior due to their genealogy/birth?</p> <p>e) Why do you believe Sayeds are superior or the Dalits are inferior?</p>	<p>a) To know whether the political affiliations affect the social beliefs and practices.</p> <p>b) The level of attachment to one's caste, and casteism</p> <p>c) Sayedism</p> <p>d) Belief that Dalits are responsible for their own exclusion</p> <p>e) Belief that society as a whole is responsible for their exclusion</p> <p>f) Belief that Ashrafia and Jati Hindu class is responsible for Dalit exclusion</p>					
2	To which political party you belong to?	To know extent/level political affiliation					
3	What your party wants to achieve?	Official political ideology as understood by the worker					
4	Do you think casteism and tribalism is as big a problem as class, gender and national autonomy? How casteism can be eradicated?	To know the extent of importance given to caste by the worker					
5	To which sect/religion you belong to?	To know the level of religiosity					
6	Who is your Murshid/Pir?	To know the level and nature of affiliation with any hereditary Pir/Sayed/Sufi					
7	Who is your political hero?	To assess the attachment to any Ashrafia/Non-Ashrafia personality/ personality cultism					

