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# The Political Economy of the Jat Agitation for Other Backward Class Status

CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT, KALAIYARASAN A

The changing caste realities in Haryana and their links with economic processes became visible in the protests of the Jats for Other Backward Class status. The concerns of the Jats are embedded in twin processes initiated in 1991: the “Market” and the “Mandal.” Led by economic liberalisation, the job market demands certain attributes and levels of education and social skills to profit from its growth process. The implementation of the Mandal Commission’s report has facilitated the relative mobility of lower castes such as OBCs and Dalits through reservations in government jobs and education. The Jats have responded to this crisis by changing the discourse from one of domination to one that highlights their deprivation to bolster their demands for OBC status.

The protests by Jats for Other Backward Class (OBC) status in Haryana have opened up a debate on the relationship between economic processes and changing caste realities in India (Jaffrelot and Kalaiyaran 2017; Palshikar 2016). The mobilisation of the Jats and their concerns have to be understood in the context of twin processes initiated in 1991—the “Market” (economic liberalisation) and “Mandal” (the implementation of reservations for OBCs following the Mandal Commission). Together, these two processes have changed the economic and political reality of Haryana and are a significant cause for the current crisis among the Jats.

Market signifies two broad economic processes. Led by economic liberalisation, the market offers higher returns to those who have a better education and have acquired skills. The current economic growth in Haryana, led by the service sector, demands certain attributes and levels of education and social skills (Kumar and Subramanian 2012; Sood 2016). The castes positioned above the Jats have benefited from some education and skills acquisition, and have been able to profit from this growth process. Since networks play a major role in accessing these economic sectors, caste networks also constitute a significant advantage (Munshi 2016). Those who do not fall within this caste network get excluded. With a few exceptions, the vast majority within castes such as the Jats are excluded from this process.

The second vital outcome of the market is the severing of the structural link between the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, where agriculture has lost its relevance as a driver of economic growth. The sector’s contribution to India’s gross domestic product (GDP) has decreased from about 31% in 1990–91 to just 14.1% in 2014–15. Both, the service sector and industry have overtaken agriculture. Traditionally, the latter was seen as providing a surplus for industrial accumulation and markets for industrial commodities. However, such inter-sectoral linkages have weakened over time. Studies suggest that the agrarian question of capital has been largely bypassed in India (Lerche 2013). The sector at best provides a livelihood for a large mass of surplus labour while relaxing food constraints in capital accumulation processes in India. As the agricultural sector declined, caste groups such as the Jats, who have traditionally been associated with agriculture, also lost their economic power.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, Mandal has fostered the relative upward social mobility of OBCs through reservations in government jobs and education.<sup>2</sup> For these groups, like for Dalits in the past, education

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has become a route to greater emancipation. Urbanisation has also contributed to this process, making the lower castes less dependent on Jats for employment (Chowdhry 2009). Along with this relative mobility, the lower castes have also acquired a greater capacity to negotiate with officials and politicians, something Harris (2012) has termed the emergence of *naya netas*. These “new leaders” are now able to negotiate with the state to gain benefits and services for their groups. In other words, the economic and political mobility of the lower castes is challenging conventional caste equations and generating anxieties among Jats.

This paper argues that the dual processes of Market and Mandal have partly dislodged Jats from their earlier economic and political position. Jats perceive those who are above them as advancing at a faster rate, and those who are below them as also advancing, albeit marginally, while the Jats’ own position has remained stagnant, or has slightly deteriorated. The community remains largely agrarian and is composed of small and marginal farmers, and some farm labourers. These twin processes have disturbed the old social equilibrium. In response, the Jats have changed the discourse from one of domination—a claim to a glorious past and Kshatriya status—to one of deprivation, and have attempted to lay claim to OBC status in order to get access to education and jobs (Datta 1999b). This paper maps this process of dislocation of Jats and their response to this crisis. In other words, it attempts to situate the Jats’ crisis in the changing reality of the larger political economy.

This paper first offers a historical narrative of how Jats performed in Haryana before the Mandal and Market came into being. This is followed by an exploration of the changing economic reality in the state, looking at economic growth and employment generation, and offering insights into what this changing economic reality means for different caste groups in the state by mapping their relative income status and sources of income. Next, the effect of Mandal on the different communities and their educational status is examined. Finally, the differentiation within these caste groups and the subsequent implications are elaborated.

### Jats before Market and Mandal

Jats are spread over several states in India. They are numerically concentrated in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and western Uttar Pradesh. Their socio-economic condition varies across states. In terms of religion, they are divided into Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. They are considered to be one among the more prosperous agricultural castes of North India (Singh 2011). While there are some common cultural traits and a shared socio-economic status among the Jats spread across these regions, we will confine our analysis largely to Haryana.

Jats gained their prosperity through two routes (Jaffrelot 2000). The first was through land reform which, although incomplete, enabled many among the Jats to become landowners. The second was through the green revolution. Jats who had a certain amount of land and investment capacity profited from the green revolution package, which consisted of high-yielding seeds, chemical fertilisers, and the development

of irrigation. They became more prosperous, generating greater expectations within their community (Jaffrelot 2002).

The rural life of a peasant was romanticised and celebrated. Jat leaders such as Charan Singh, a former Prime Minister of India, deliberately nurtured and romanticised this agrarian lifestyle.<sup>3</sup> Singh argued that

the peasant is an incorrigible individualist; for his avocation, season in and season out, can be carried on with a pair of bullocks in the solitude of Nature without the necessity of having to give orders to, or, take orders from anybody. (1959: 104)

The (Jat) peasant was seen as the master of his own destiny. This philosophy led Jats to believe that the village is “a harmonious whole” and in the claim that it “was always a stronger moral unit than a factory. The sense of the community was a vital thing among the peasantry, providing a natural foundation for collaboration or co-operative action” (Singh 1959: 270). This is the philosophy based on which they built their organisation, the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU).

The BKU, largely led by Jats, consistently articulated this vision in political terms to keep alive the moral foundation of the village community (Gupta 1997). It claimed to maintain an apolitical character, but it often pushed the peasant question to centre stage in political life through its hartals (strike action). Charan Singh articulated many of the BKU’s demands in the political sphere. For instance, when he was the senior deputy prime minister in charge of finance in the Morarji Desai government in 1979, his budget—which articulated the exact demands of the BKU—was seen as the “kulak budget” (wealthy farmers’ budget). It mainly addressed the issues of

reduction of several indirect taxes on mechanical tillers, diesel for electric water pumps, and chemical fertilisers ... it lowered interest rates for rural loans; increased subsidy of minor irrigation; and earmarked funds for rural electrification and grain-storage facilities. (Jaffrelot 2000: 94)

Though the BKU and Charan Singh claimed to promote the interests of farmers, Jats were the biggest beneficiaries. The concerns of others, particularly those of the landless poor and lower castes, were ignored.

As Balagopal (1987) argues, the approach of the BKU, like that of the “Shetkari Sanghatana” (Farmers’ Organisation) in Maharashtra, has ignored the deep social cleavage and contradictions among classes, particularly between agricultural labourers and landowners in rural India. These movements are good illustrations of agrarian populism as analysed by Dhanagare (2015). The concerns of the rural poor and the landless conflict with those of the better off and rich peasants whose concerns the BKU articulated. It is well worth noting here that Balagopal (1987: 2177) describes these richer and landed peasants as the “provincial propertied class,” while M N Srinivas (2003: 455) refers to them as “dominant castes.”

Though the BKU claimed that it represented all farmers, Jats were the main constituents. Indeed, caste functioned as the common link uniting disparaged classes within the peasantry. Although it could mobilise large numbers of peasants based on the slogans “village versus city” and “monopoly capital versus farmers,” the concerns of the landless and lower

castes were barely represented in these movements. As Jaffrelot (2000) notes, Charan Singh, who championed the cause of farmers, was of the opinion that “if wages have at all to be paid, in view of the fact that a large supply of idle labour is almost always available, the wages paid need only be subsistence wages” (1959: 168). Although he never openly articulated the caste position, subsuming it under “peasant movement,” the All-India Jat Mahasabha was on his side and supported all his claims, as both their interests coincided. Both articulated the concerns of the same caste groups who owned some land and could sell their surplus crops. This only reinforced “the Jats’ hegemony over the lower castes” (Jaffrelot 2000).<sup>4</sup>

### The Market and Jats

As mentioned earlier, Jats built their prosperity through the green revolution and their dominance through the political mobilisation of the BKU. Their philosophy and lifestyles are rooted in the idea of a village community. The Market, led by economic liberalisation, posed challenges to their prosperity and affected their economic status. This section maps the dislocation of Jats in the economic growth process.

**Dynamics of economic growth:** Haryana has witnessed a consistently high economic growth rate. This can be attributed to the economic reforms initiated by the Government of India in the early 1990s. Haryana, in particular, has heavily subsidised the corporate sector through various tax exemptions (Kennedy 2014).

Table 1 provides the sectorwise growth rate and the contribution of each sector to aggregate growth in the state for the last three decades. The overall GDP growth of the state for this period was more than 6.8% per annum, which was slightly higher than the average all-India rate. In the last decade, the state saw a growth rate of 9% per annum, which was higher than India’s overall average of 8%. The state, thus, managed to maintain its status as one of the richer states in India.

If the data is disaggregated, we find that in Haryana, the service sector had the highest growth rate during the period. It averaged 9.2% between 1980 and 2010, while the all-India growth rate averaged 7.7% per annum. For both Haryana and India, industry was the top-performing sector in the 1980s,

while the service sector rose to prominence in the 1990s. Further disaggregation of service-sector data shows that there were variations in the growth rates of the subsectors. The banking and insurance sub-sector saw the highest growth rate among the service sub-sectors, followed by transport and communication, in both Haryana and India over the last three decades.

Banking and insurance grew at 12.3% per annum in Haryana between 1980 and 2010, while the corresponding growth rate for India was 11.6% per annum. The transport and communication sector grew at 10.4% per annum in Haryana and 9.1% per annum in India in the same period. Notably, the real estate sector grew at 14.7% per annum in Haryana during the decade 2000–10, exhibiting the highest growth of any sector or sub-sector for that decade in Haryana or across India.

The manufacturing sector grew at a faster rate in Haryana compared to the all-India growth rate, in the last three decades. However, the rate of growth reduced from 10% per annum in the 1980s to 7.7% per annum in the 2000s. The corresponding figures for India were 7.3% and 8.8% per annum, respectively.

Agriculture too performed better in Haryana in comparison to the all-India rate. The sector grew at 3.3% per annum in the state in the last three decades, while India’s rate of growth was 2.9% per annum. In terms of changes over time, the growth rate of the agriculture sector was higher in Haryana than the all-India average in the 1980s, but it declined in the 1990s. The last decade saw a slight revival of the sector in the state. However, Haryana appears to have gradually de-prioritised the agricultural sector, which is very visible when one looks at the structure of growth and the contribution of different sectors to the aggregate growth.

The service sector was the key driver of growth in the last three decades for both Haryana and India. The contribution of the service sector to overall growth between 1980 and 2010 was about 57% for Haryana and 62% for India. In the last decade (2000–10), the service sector alone contributed about 61% of the overall economic growth of Haryana, while the sector’s contribution to the all-India rate was about 66%. The contribution of agriculture to overall growth declined for both Haryana and India. The agricultural sector’s contribution to

**Table 1: Gross State Domestic Product Growth Rate by Basic Economic Activities**

Sector	Haryana				India			
	1980–90	1990–2000	2000–10	1980–2010	1980–90	1990–2000	2000–10	1980–2010
Agriculture	3.9 (28.1)	1.9 (14.5)	3.3 (8.9)	3.3 (13.5)	2.9 (22.5)	3.2 (13.4)	3.0 (6.8)	2.9 (10.6)
Industry	8.5 (33.3)	5.4 (30.9)	9.5 (29.9)	7.8 (29.9)	6.9 (30.3)	6.6 (24.7)	8.7 (27.3)	6.7 (27.5)
Manufacturing	10.0 (25.4)	5.8 (23.2)	7.3 (15.1)	7.7 (18.0)	7.3 (18.8)	7.2 (14.9)	8.8 (16.5)	6.9 (16.6)
Services	8 (38.6)	7.5 (54.6)	11.8 (61.4)	9.2 (56.6)	6.7 (47.2)	8 (61.9)	9.5 (65.8)	7.7 (61.9)
Transport, storage and communication	8 (5.7)	7.9 (9.2)	14.4 (14.0)	10.4 (11.8)	7.4 (7.5)	8.2 (9.7)	13.4 (17.0)	9.1 (13.9)
Trade, hotels and restaurants	8.7 (13.3)	7.9 (18.9)	11.3 (20.4)	9.5 (19.4)	6 (12.9)	8.6 (18.0)	9.2 (17.4)	7.6 (16.8)
Banking and insurance	12.8 (3.1)	12.7 (7.1)	12.7 (6.0)	12.3 (5.5)	12.9 (5.9)	12.1 (10.0)	12.5 (10.5)	11.6 (9.3)
Real estate and business services	4.5 (5.1)	4.1 (5.1)	14.7 (14.0)	8.1 (11.2)	3.6 (5.8)	4.5 (6.3)	8.7 (18.3)	5.3 (7.6)
Public administration	9.0 (4.0)	6.2 (4.1)	6.0 (1.8)	6.7 (2.4)	8.0 (8.4)	6.3 (7.8)	6.0 (5.4)	6.0 (6.2)
Other services	5.7 (6.5)	5.5 (7.7)	7.5 (5.2)	6.0 (5.6)	5.3 (6.7)	7.5 (10.1)	6.9 (7.3)	6.9 (8.1)
GSDP	6.2 (100)	4.8 (100)	9 (100)	6.8 (100)	5.4 (100)	6.2 (100)	8 (100)	6.1 (100)

GSDP at 1999–2000 constant prices. Figures in parentheses show contribution to GSDP growth. Source: Estimated from National Accounts Statistics, Central Statistics Office.

Haryana's aggregate growth was about 28% in the 1980s, which reduced to 13.5% in the 2000s. The corresponding figures for India were 22.5% and 10.6%, respectively.

The contribution of industry to overall growth in Haryana was about 33% in the 1980s, and it reduced to 30% in the 2000s. The corresponding figures for India were about 30% and 27.5%, respectively. The contribution of the service sector to overall growth in the state was about 39% in the 1980s, and it increased to 56.6% in the 2000s. The corresponding figures for India were 47% and 65.8%, respectively. Among the subsectors within the service sector, trade and hotels contributed about 19% to overall economic growth in Haryana during the last three decades. The corresponding figure for India was about 17%.

In sum, the structure of the economy—and the key driver of structural change and growth—has moved from the agricultural sector to the service sector for both Haryana and all India. For Jats, who have been historically associated with land and agriculture, this shift has profound significance.

**Employment growth by sectors:** Haryana witnessed structural changes in employment in the last two decades. The growth in employment was relatively higher in the state compared to the all-India rate. From 1993–94 to 2011–12, the aggregate employment growth in Haryana was 1.7% per annum, as compared to 1.3% per annum for India (Table 2). There were significant variations within sub-periods as compared to the overall trend. The state saw a faster rate of employment growth between 1993–94 and 2004–05 than between 2004–05 and 2011–12. The aggregate employment growth rate in the first of these two periods was 3.1% per annum, while the growth rate in the second period was -0.4%—a marginally negative growth rate. If we disaggregate by ownership, we see that the increased employment was in the private sector, with no employment generation in the public sector in the last two decades.<sup>5</sup>

Among sub-sectors, construction witnessed consistent growth in employment in the last two decades in Haryana. Between 1993–94 and 2011–12, construction and manufacturing have experienced 6.4% and 3.9% annual growth respectively, while employment in agriculture has grown by only 0.2% per annum, and the service sector has seen 2% growth in employment per annum. In comparison, with the exception of agriculture, all other sectors saw positive growth in employment in India as a whole. Manufacturing too saw a 2.4% employment growth per annum across India.

To summarise, agriculture saw negative employment growth.<sup>6</sup> The labour force left agriculture and was largely absorbed into

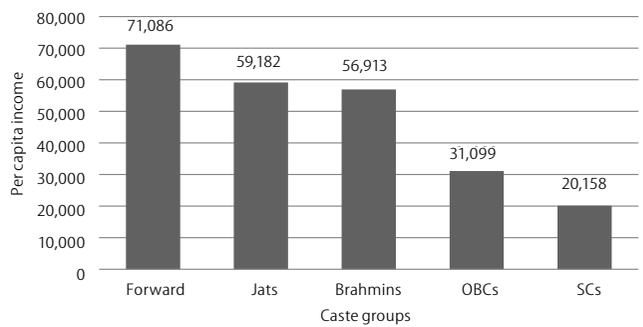
**Table 2: Employment Growth by Sectors**

Sector	1993–94 to 2004–05		2004–05 to 2011–12		1993–94 to 2011–12	
	Haryana	India	Haryana	India	Haryana	India
Agriculture	2.3	1.0	-3.0	-2.1	0.2	-0.2
Manufacturing	6.4	3.0	0.1	1.5	3.9	2.4
Construction	6.2	5.8	6.7	9.4	6.4	7.2
Service	2.6	3.0	1.2	2.5	2.0	2.8
All	3.1	1.9	-0.4	0.5	1.7	1.3

Source: Calculated by the authors using National Sample Survey Employment and Unemployment (EUS) surveys unit record data for the 50th (1993–94), 61st (2004–05), and 68th (2011–12) rounds.

**Figure 1: Annual per Capita Mean Income**

(₹)



Source: Calculated by the authors using the IHDS-II (2011–12).

the construction and service sectors. The caste-wise distribution of the labour force that left agriculture illustrates the changing economic reality of Haryana. The caste groups who remain tied to agriculture have lost their economic status. Who are these caste groups? We will return to this question later in the paper.

**Relative positions of castes by income:** Table 3 provides the basic statistics of the households in Haryana surveyed by the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) (NCAER 2018).<sup>7</sup> The survey covers about 1,806 households and 9,568 individuals in Haryana. The caste-wise population distribution may not reflect the actual composition of caste groups in the state, as the sample was done at a national level. The caste categories have been reconstructed based on the needs of this paper.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 3: Basic Statistics**

Caste Group	Sample Persons	Sample Households	Annual per Capita Mean Income in ₹ <sup>9</sup>	Gini
Brahmin	908	174	56,913	0.56
Forward*	1,386	272	71,086	0.64
Jats	1,155	210	59,182	0.54
OBCs	3,411	620	31,099	0.50
SCs	2,641	517	20,158	0.39
All Haryana	9,568	1,806	39,606	0.57

\*"Forward" excludes Brahmins and Jats.

Source: Calculated by the authors using the IHDS-II (2011–12).

The average annual per capita income of Haryana was ₹39,606 for the study period, and inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient was 0.57. The difference in the average annual per capita incomes of caste groups reflects the caste hierarchy in the state. For instance (Figure 1), the annual per capita mean income for a Brahmin was ₹56,913, while it was ₹20,158 for Scheduled Castes (scs). The average annual per capita income for Forward Castes was the highest in the state at ₹71,086, followed by Jats at ₹59,182; the corresponding figure for OBCs was ₹31,099. As with per capita income, inequality too was highest within the Forward Castes: the Gini coefficient of the Forward Castes was 0.64 while it was lowest among scs at 0.39. The corresponding figures for Brahmins and Jats were 0.56 and 0.54, respectively. Thus, Forward Castes, Brahmins, and Jats have both, a higher mean income and higher inequality as compared to OBCs and scs.

**Main sources of income:** Table 4 shows the main source of household income across caste groups in Haryana for 2011–12: cultivation was the main source of income for about 24% of households in the state, followed by casual labour at 32%, and salaried employment at 22%. About 11% of households operated petty shops; and about 3% were involved in organised business. This last group had the highest per capita mean income at ₹1,86,452, while those engaged in casual labour had the lowest mean income at ₹18,597. The per capita mean income of the salaried class (₹58,989) was higher than that of cultivators (₹40,867). The corresponding figure for petty shopowners was ₹42,530. The difference in mean incomes across occupations explains the difference in mean incomes across caste groups, as the main occupations vary according to caste.

**Table 4: Main Source of Household Income across Caste Groups**

Occupations	Brahmin	Forward	Jats	OBCs	SCs	ALL Haryana	Per Capita Mean Income	Gini
Cultivation	15.3 (82,482)	22.4 (48,409)	67.0 (43,701)	26.5 (31,281)	6.3 (25,876)	24.1	40,867	0.51
Casual labour	15.1 (22,789)	12.8 (16,708)	4.9 (20,172)	29.3 (19,528)	62.2 (17,831)	31.6	18,597	0.34
Petty shop	8.4 (1,16,180)	21.5 (51,870)	5.7 (53,611)	12.6 (28,585)	5.2 (21,882)	10.9	42,530	0.56
Organised business	3.6 (43,835)	11.2 (2,76,263)	3.1 (3,31,132)	2.7 (42,030)	0.2 (12,876)	3.2	1,86,452	0.72
Salaried	45.8 (67,673)	25.3 (86,591)	11.4 (64,321)	20.8 (56,271)	19.1 (33,997)	22.1	58,989	0.46
Pension/rent, etc	9.5 (43,941)	2.2 (33,673)	2.3 (1,18,096)	4.2 (39,061)	3.7 (19,483)	4.0	39,355	0.42
Others	2.4 (33,843)	4.6 (20,902)	5.6 (36,186)	4.7 (21,075)	3.1 (15,699)	4.1	22,886	0.44
All	100 (56,912)	100 (73,637)	100 (59,873)	100 (31,329)	100 (20,428)	100.0	39,606	0.57

Source: Calculated by the authors using the IHDS-II (2011–12).

The main source of income for about 46% of households among Brahmins was salaries, followed by cultivation at 15%, casual labour at 15%, and organised business at 3%. For the Forward Castes, households derived their main sources of income from different occupations: about 25% were salaried, 22% operated small shops, and 22% were engaged in cultivation. Among the Forward Castes, about 11% were engaged in organised business, indicating that a higher percentage of this caste is engaged in the organised sector compared to any other caste group in the state. For the Jats, the most common source of income during the study period was cultivation, which had the highest percentage as compared to any other group in the state. Among the Forward Castes, 67% of households were dependent on cultivation and just 11% were salaried. The share of salaried households among the Jats was the lowest among all caste groups in the state.

The scs and oBcs were shown to have a higher proportion of salaried households—about 21% and 19%, respectively. However, one needs to be cautious of variations within the salaried class. While the average income of a salaried worker was higher than that of those engaged in other occupations, the average income of salaried scs (₹33,997) was lesser than that of Brahmins (₹67,673) and Jats (₹64,321). The state average income of salaried workers was ₹58,989.

For the oBcs, the main sources of income were evenly distributed across occupations except for business: cultivators made up about 27% of households, casual labourers 29%, salaried workers 21%, and petty shopowners about 13%. For the scs, the main sources of income were casual labour followed by salaried work. Notably, Jats were still tied to the land, with the majority of households dependent on cultivation as their main source of income. The average income from cultivation was lower than that of salaried work, organised business, and even that of petty shops.

The second notable aspect is that the Jats' share in salaried work was lower than that of oBcs and scs. This is due to educational mobility and the affirmative action in government jobs enjoyed by scs and oBcs. As a result, they have seen relative improvement and a larger share have found salaried jobs. Recent

reports suggest that an increasing share of scs are entering jobs and small business, and this has caused unsettling feelings among the Jats (Ghildiyal 2015). As argued earlier, Jats are still tied to cultivation, while the others, including Dalits, have diversified their economic activities.

**Distribution of land:** Table 5 provides details on the distribution of households practising cultivation by size of landholdings in Haryana. The average size of landholdings in cultivation in the state came down from 3.1 hectares in 1983 to 0.8 hectares in 2011–12. More than 90% of cultivators have less than one hectare of land.

The pattern of distribution changed drastically between 1983 and 2011–12. For instance, the percentage of large-size holdings (10 and above hectares) was about 10% in 1983, but it reduced to just 0.3% in 2011–12. A similar decrease occurred among medium-sized holdings (four to 10 hectares) which, in 1983, constituted about 14% of landholdings, but by 2011–12, whose share had reduced to 4%. In this same period of time, the share of landholdings of less than one hectare increased from about 57% to 73%. This shift in the distribution of landholdings significantly affected Jats in Haryana, 67% of whom still depend on cultivation as their main source of income, and among whom a large percentage now hold less than one hectare of land. It can then be argued that the Jats, being the largest agrarian community and internally very differentiated, would in all likelihood fall into the categories having less than one hectare

**Table 5: Distribution of Rural Households by Size of Landholding**

NSS Year	Size of Landholding (in hectares)					All	Average Size Holding
	Landless (<1)	Marginal (1 to 2)	Small (2 to 4)	Medium (4 to 10)	Large (10 and Above)		
1983	56.5	6.3	13.2	14.3	9.7	100.0	3.1
1987–88	56.1	12.1	14.1	13.6	4.1	100.0	2.0
1993–94	64.7	11.8	13.8	7.7	2.1	100.0	1.3
1999–2000	65.7	11.6	12.2	9.3	1.2	100.0	1.3
2004–05	75.4	9.7	9.7	4.7	0.6	100.0	0.8
2009–10	71.5	12.2	10.8	4.7	0.9	100.0	0.9
2011–12	73.4	9.8	12.4	4.0	0.3	100.0	0.8

Source: Calculated by the authors using NSSO employment round unit record data for the respective years.

or small landholdings. Therefore, they feel vulnerable and insecure about their future today.

This section has shown that the market, led by economic liberalisation, has indeed produced growth in Haryana, which has been led primarily by the service sector, while agriculture has lost its relevance as the driver of growth in the state. The agricultural labourers who were dependent on Jats have moved to the cities and have secured some education and salaried employment. Caste groups such as Brahmins and Forward Castes have been able to exploit the opportunities opened up by the economic liberalisation process and have diversified their economic activities, whereas the Jats have not. The Jats continue to be engaged in cultivation, which offers a lesser income compared to other occupations today. The average size of landholdings has also reduced. If the market has dislocated Jats from their earlier economic position, the Mandal has challenged them in the political sphere.

**The Mandal and Jats**

The Jats’ status and identity are now in question. Economic prosperity and social control over labour offered them a sense of superiority, as did the claim of Kshatriya status. The claim has its history: it was pushed through the Arya Samaj in colonial times, and it was denied by both Forward Castes and colonial authorities (Datta 1999a). If the market broke Jats’ economic status, the Mandal broke their political status. The sense of superiority gave way to a sense of loss. The claim of Kshatriya status has now made way to claims of OBC status if not Shudra status. The language of deprivation has replaced the language of domination.

The Jats have had an ambiguous relationship with the Mandal. They initially opposed their inclusion in the OBC category as it hurt their caste pride. The involvement of Devi Lal, a Jat leader who was the then deputy prime minister in the V P Singh government in 1990, illustrates this ambivalence. Lal was appointed chairman of a committee tasked with implementing the Mandal Commission recommendations, but he was reluctant to carry out this task as Jats had not been included in the OBC category. When the decision was finally taken to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations, Devi Lal resigned from the government (Jaffrelot 2000). This signalled a division within middle-caste groups in North India. Jaffrelot (2000) characterises this division as one between kisan (farmer) politics and “quota” (reservation) politics. Jats opted for kisan politics while the rest aligned themselves with quota politics.

Those who aligned themselves with quotas have experienced an increase in political power and economic mobility. Yogendra Yadav describes this as a “second democratic upsurge” (2000: 120). He also argues that the OBC category has acquired a vibrant and political subjectivity. Others counter the claim that this new political power and mobility is confined only to interest groups, who seek to claim a larger share of the state’s power and resources (Jaffrelot 2000). Notwithstanding these contested claims, the Mandal along with the Market have indeed opened up alternative jobs for the lower castes.

Based on her fieldwork in the state, Prem Chowdhry (2009) argues that reservations, education, and skills acquisition have facilitated Dalits’ mobility, enabling them to find jobs other than their traditional roles. Caste distinctions are also blurring, which can otherwise be observed in segregated dwelling spaces. This “homogenisation in lifestyle and appearance” generates anxiety among the dominant castes, and particularly unsettles Jats. Jagpal Singh (1997) notes that urbanisation offers a sense of anonymity and freedom to Dalits. The Dalits living in Delhi, Chandigarh, Gurgaon, or the cities located along the highway from Delhi to Chandigarh feel free and are less dependent on dominant landowners for jobs. On the other hand, Dalit mobility is less in interior districts like Rohtak, Jind, Sirsa, Hisar and Bhiwani, where they are more reliant on landowners.

Jats’ claims of educational backwardness have to be seen in this context. Table 6 provides details regarding educational attainment across caste groups in Haryana. It also provides data on educational attainment at quintile five (top quintile) for different caste groups, in order to map the caste differences among the top income groups (the “cream” of each caste group). In Haryana as a whole, 33% of the population was found to be illiterate. The population share of illiterate people varied by caste: in 2011–12, the lowest percentage of illiterate people was seen within the Brahmin community, at about 24%, followed by the Forward Castes at 25%, the Jats at 30%, and OBCs at 35%. The highest percentage of illiterate persons (about 39%) was found in the SC community.

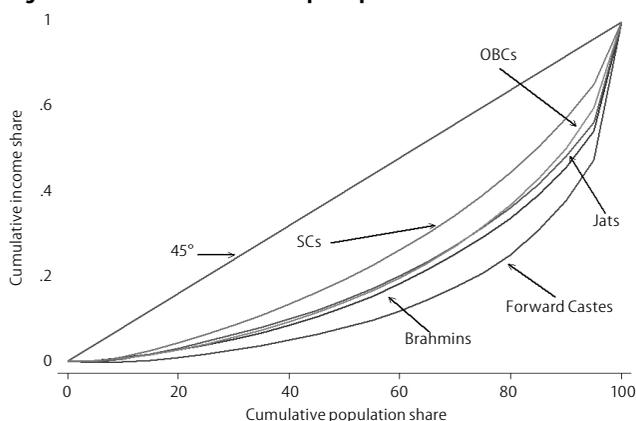
**Table 6: Education by Income Quintiles and Caste**

Caste Group	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary and Higher Secondary	Graduate and Above	All
All Haryana					
Brahmin	24.2	30.1	30.3	15.4	100
Forward	25.3	34.0	26.5	14.2	100
Jats	30.2	36.8	27.2	5.8	100
OBC	34.5	40.2	20.0	5.4	100
SC	38.7	43.8	15.3	2.1	100
All Haryana	32.9	38.8	21.5	6.8	100
Quintile five (top)					
Brahmin	22.2	22.0	29.8	26.0	100
Forward	16.7	30.0	28.7	24.6	100
Jats	27.2	35.3	28.3	9.3	100
OBC	19.2	34.6	35.2	11.0	100
SC	28.8	28.5	32.0	10.6	100
All Haryana	21.6	31.2	31.1	16.2	100

Source: Calculated by the authors using the IHDS-II (2011–12).

A larger share of Brahmins had achieved higher education in 2011–12, a trend similar to income levels. The survey showed that about 15% of Brahmins are graduates, compared to about 2% among SCs. The corresponding figures for Jats and OBCs were about 6% and 5%, respectively. The figure for the Forward Castes was very close to that of the Brahmins, at about 14%. Jats claim that lack of access to higher education has been their main problem. Their academic performance was close to that of OBCs, much lower than that of Brahmins and Forward Castes, and above that of SCs.

**Unequal cream:** The disaggregate figures by quintile present a sharp disparity in educational attainment even among the elite of caste groups. According to our analysis, the percentage

**Figure 2: Relative Lorenz Curves for per Capita Income**

Source: Calculated by the authors using the IHDS-II (2011–12).

of graduates and above among Brahmins was about 26% in the top income quintile. The corresponding figure for Forward Castes was about 25%, while it was just 9% for Jats, and 11% for both OBCs and SCs. However, it is important to note here that the overall position of Jats in terms of education was better than that of OBCs and SCs. What has unsettled them is the relative mobility of the cream among OBCs and SCs.

In this quintile, Jats' educational attainment was lowest among the cream of any caste group in Haryana. As argued earlier, Jats' mean income was the second highest in the state while their educational attainment, particularly in higher education, was the lowest in the state, indicating a clear disconnect between educational attainment and income mobility. For a similar income level, the educational attainment among OBCs and SCs was slightly above that of the Jats. This finding validates Prem Chowdhry's (2009) argument that the marginal mobility of SCs in education has unsettled Jats, and that their claim of educational backwardness is not unfounded.

### Differentiation within Jats

As stated earlier, Jats are unable to move out of cultivation. The average size of landholdings in cultivation has decreased over the last three decades. The vast majority of Jat farmers are now in the category of marginal landholders who are poorly

educated and have a low income. There is, thus, a sharp differentiation within the Jats whose mean income, as stated above, is second only to that of Forward Castes.

**Lorenz curves:** Figure 2 shows the Lorenz curves of each caste group, illustrating the inequality in per capita income. Sharp inequalities exist within all caste groups, with inequality being much greater within the Forward Castes, Brahmins, and Jats than among SCs and OBCs. The Lorenz curve for SCs is very close to the 45-degree line, while the curve for the Forward Castes falls far from the centre line. The curves for the other caste groups fall between these two extremes, with the Lorenz curve for the Jats falling slightly above that of OBCs but below that of Brahmins. This configuration confirms the argument that there is a sharp class-based differential within caste groups. This is more extreme among Forward Castes, Brahmins, and Jats than within SC and OBC communities.

Table 7 shows income distribution by quintiles<sup>10</sup> across caste groups in Haryana, illustrating that inequality is much sharper within caste groups than between, and strengthening the earlier argument that there is a class differential within caste groups. As stated above, the IHDS data for 2011–12 shows that this class divide is much deeper among Brahmins, Forward Castes, and Jats than among OBCs and SCs. For instance, quintile five (the top quintile) earned about 64% of the total income of Brahmins, while the bottom quintile accounted for only about 3% of the group's total income. The disparity was most evident among the Forward Castes, where the top quintile accounted for about 75% of their total income and the bottom quintile only 1%.

The inequality within Jats was second only to that of Forward Castes, with the top quintile controlling about 63% of the total income and the bottom quintile controlling just 4%. The top quintile within OBC communities accounted for 59% of its total income, while the bottom quintile contributed only about 3%. SCs had the lowest intra-caste (within caste) disparity among all the caste groups in the state, with the top quintile accounting for 49% of the total income and the bottom quintile for about 5%. The Forward Castes had the highest intra-caste disparity followed by Jats and Brahmins. The SCs had the

**Table 7: Income Distribution by Quintiles across Caste Groups**

Income Quintiles	Brahmin				Forward				Jats			
	Pop Share	Income Share	Mean Income	Gini	Pop Share	Income Share	Mean Income	Gini	Pop Share	Income Share	Mean Income	Gini
Q1	19.8	2.7	7,831	0.32	12.0	1.0	6,195	0.29	21.5	4.0	11,191	0.27
Q2	19.1	6.4	19,047	0.07	18.9	3.7	14,254	0.09	16.9	6.4	22,465	0.05
Q3	21.6	12.4	32,604	0.09	19.1	6.3	24,255	0.09	20.2	11.4	33,907	0.08
Q4	16.9	15.0	50,652	0.07	22.9	14.4	46,348	0.11	17.9	15.8	52,629	0.07
Q5	22.6	63.5	1,59,855	0.41	27.2	74.6	2,02,398	0.49	23.4	62.5	1,59,430	0.42
All	100.0	100.0	56,913	0.56	100.0	100.0	71,086	0.64	100.0	100.0	59,182	0.54
Income Quintiles	OBCs				SCs				All Haryana			
	Pop Share	Mean Income	Mean Income	Gini	Pop Share	Income Share	Mean Income	Gini	Pop Share	Income Share	Mean Income	Gini
Q1	17.0	2.8	5,175	0.22	19.8	5.9	6,063	0.25	17.5	2.6	6,053	0.26
Q2	18.0	6.7	11,707	0.07	18.8	10.0	10,881	0.06	18.5	5.9	12,716	0.08
Q3	21.2	12.2	18,100	0.07	19.3	14.4	15,245	0.05	19.2	9.4	19,674	0.07
Q4	20.2	19.2	29,814	0.09	18.8	20.6	22,464	0.07	21.0	16.9	32,322	0.1
Q5	23.6	59.0	78,211	0.31	23.3	49.1	43,053	0.21	23.8	65.2	1,09,871	0.43
All	100.0	100.0	31,099	0.50	100.0	100.0	20,158	0.39	100.0	100.0	39,606	0.57

Source: Calculated by the authors using the IHDS-II (2011–12).

lowest intra-caste disparity, with OBCs in the second-lowest position. As stated earlier, this trend closely parallels that of the Gini coefficient.

**Inequality decomposition:** Table 8 shows the extent of inter/intra-group inequality among caste groups in Haryana. It also breaks intra-group inequality into subgroups. Inequality, as measured by the Theil Index, is highest among the Forward Castes in Haryana. Inequality decomposition analysis for the state shows that the between-group component<sup>11</sup> contributes about 15% to the total income inequality in the state. The intra-group component continues to dominate in shaping the overall inequality in Haryana, constituting about 85% of the total inequality in the state.<sup>12</sup> OBCs and SCs are marginalised as compared to the other groups, as indicated by their negative sign with regard to their contribution to the between group component.

The Forward Castes, Jats, and OBCs contributed more than 80% of the total intra-inequality in the state. This only shows that there is a sharp inequality in income within these groups. This may be due to either class disparities and the formation of a creamy layer within a caste, or to the grouping of disparate or unequal sub-castes in the same group.

As stated earlier, agriculture has lost its relevance as a driver of economic growth. Those who have acquired education and skills have been able to enter the service sector and industry, while Jats are still tied to cultivation. The average size of landholdings has also come down. Smaller landholdings, low income, and low education have generated a sense of deprivation among many within the Jat community.

## Conclusions

The Market, led by the initiation of economic liberalisation in 1991, has partly disenfranchised Jats from their earlier robust economic power and stable social status. Unlike other dominant castes, Jats could not diversify their economic activities. In other words, they could not invest the surplus generated by

agriculture in industries, nor could be absorbed in industries as skilled labourers. Besides their own cultural inability, or refusal, to move out of agriculture, they also have not acquired the required skills and access to business networks that would allow them to overcome the strong barriers to entry built up by traditional business communities. Even upwardly mobile Jats

have only been able to become either renters in real estate or have entered agro-related businesses such as trading in grains and vegetables. They could not diversify into business activities or exploit opportunities opened up by economic liberalisation. The real estate booms which benefited considerable sections within the Jat community have also led many members of that community to believe that while they had gained short-term wealth, they have still have lost out to others who are benefiting in

the long run from economic liberalisation.

If Market has disturbed the economic equilibrium, Mandal has significantly changed the political and social equilibrium, particularly in rural Haryana. The lower castes, including Dalits and OBCs, have seen relative mobility, particularly in jobs and education. In addition, Jats have seen the sharpest internal differentiation along class lines, as evidenced by the aforementioned Gini coefficients. Jats who are at the bottom perform very poorly in both jobs and education as compared to the average performance of these caste groups. While studies tend to dismiss Jats' demands for reservations by considering their socio-economic conditions vis-à-vis OBCs and Dalits as an average, they need to be disaggregated from this purely socio-economic point of view given their large population size. If some have benefited from the double-digit growth rate of the 2000s, others—mostly those who have stayed behind in the village—have not gained much, and therefore have become anxious about the rise of OBCs and Dalits. As a result, their discourse has gone from one of domination to one of deprivation. They identify themselves as deprived now, which is partly perceived and partly real.

**Table 8: Inequality Decomposition by Caste Groups**

Caste Groups	Intra	Inter	Theil*
Brahmins	0.10	0.05	0.700
Forward castes	0.26	0.16	0.997
Jats	0.12	0.07	0.665
OBCs	0.13	-0.07	0.468
SCs	0.04	-0.10	0.261
Intra+inter inequality	0.644	0.11	0.754
	85%	15%	100%

\* Theil Index provided by inequality decomposition is non-normalised.  
Source: Calculated by the authors using the IHDS-II (2011–12).

## NOTES

- 1 The Jats have not been able to diversify into business activities or exploit the opportunities opened up by economic liberalisation, unlike other agrarian communities—such as the Kammas and Reddys in Andhra Pradesh and the Gounders in Tamil Nadu—who have managed to diversify their economic activities by investing the economic surplus generated from agriculture in industries and educational institutions (Damodaran 2008).
- 2 Although the Mandal offers reservations only to OBCs, it has had a wider significance for caste politics in North India, including that of Dalits. Thus, the Mandal is not only an act but also a wider process whereby caste has acquired a central place in politics. For further reference, see Jaffrelot (2003).
- 3 Jats' use of the categories "rural," "zamindar," and "agriculturist" goes back to pre-independence times. Chhotu Ram, the single most important leader in the unionist politics of the

1930s, articulated Jats' concerns and negotiated with the British colonial powers. He fought equally hard against the "urban educated class" led by the "Bania Congress" in the interests of the Hindu zamindars of Punjab. He also used the agrarian measures brought in by the British—the Punjab Alienation of Land Act of 1900 and 1907—to consolidate Jats' dominance in the region. For further details see Chowdhry (1984).

- 4 There are similar caste groups who share the concerns and anxieties of Jats, including the Patels in Gujarat, Marathas in Maharashtra, and Kapus in Andhra Pradesh. The Marathas and Patels, like the Jats, have recently become more prominent through their agitation for OBC status. These groups also experienced economic prosperity in the past, albeit by different routes. The Jats took the route of the Green Revolution in North India, while the White Revolution and the setting up of other related small businesses was the way out for

Patels. Sugar cane-led cooperatives have been the route to prosperity for Marathas. It must be noted that all these communities were tied to land, which is the source of control of labour and social and political power in rural India. For further details, see Damodaran (2008) and Anderson et al (2016).

- 5 The number of public sector jobs has come down over time. The recent Statistical Abstract of Haryana (2016) shows that the number of jobs in both the state and central public sectors have come down from 4,25,432 in 1995–96 to 3,66,829 in 2014–15. In the private sector, there has also been poor employment growth with the exception of construction and lower end service sector jobs, which are perceived by Jats to be of low status and not suitable to their social status.
- 6 Mehrotra et al (2014) call this process a "historically unprecedented development in India's economic history." This is the first time in India's postcolonial economic history that a

- sectoral shift of this scale—from agriculture to non-agricultural work—of the workforce has ever occurred.
- 7 The IHDS was carried out by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in collaboration with the University of Maryland. This paper uses the most recent round, IHDS-II (2011–12). It is a nationally representative, multi-topic survey of 42,152 households conducted in 1,503 villages and 971 urban neighbourhoods across India.
  - 8 The IHDS provides five caste categories: Brahmin, Forward (excluding Brahmin), OBCs, SCs, and STs. The data also provides the caste list of the households surveyed. There are 361 caste names in the Haryana section of the survey. Using these caste names, we have generated a separate category for Jats. The caste names in that category, as self-reported, are Jaat, Jaht, Jat, Jat Sikh, Jath, Jatt, Jhat, and Ron Jat. We filtered the caste names further into “Forward,” “non-OBC,” and “non-SC.” Forward Castes were thus subdivided into “Jats” and “Forward Castes excluding Brahmins.”
  - 9 The calculation of mean income includes only the positive values and excludes the negative ones. The number of households having negative values is 25 and form 1.3% of the total households surveyed in Haryana. The average per capita income of excluded households is ₹7,991. For the sake of calculation, the average size of a household is taken to be equal across social groups. While it does vary marginally, the variation is not sufficient to alter the argument.
  - 10 The quintiles are slightly unevenly distributed, tilting towards the top. They are generated using a weight provided by the IHDS. Since income is calculated at a household, not individual, level, income quintiles are weighted quintiles of households, not of individuals. The IHDS suggests that the top quintiles have more individuals because high-income households tend to be larger.
  - 11 The categories of intra-group for within-group and inter-group for between groups inequality are used interchangeably in the paper.
  - 12 The dominance of intra-group inequality in the inequality decomposition exercise is a generally accepted trend. Deshpande (2000) shows that inter-caste inequality in Kerala is very low, yet she argues that caste matters, as there is a substantial difference in mean expenditure and other measures. Also, between-group inequality is defined or influenced by differences in population and in the consumption/income share of a subgroup, while within-group inequality is defined or influenced by the size of the consumption/income share and the Theil index of a subgroup.
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