

**AGRARIAN RELATIONS AND CASTE DYNAMICS IN  
CONTEMPORARY RURAL INDIA: A CASE STUDY OF AZAMGARH  
DISTRICT**

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**ABSTRACT**

Historically, land issues and caste system is intertwined in the traditional rural India. The growth and assertiveness of caste and community politics in Uttar Pradesh was the consequence of failure to promote economic development adequately and equitably and in the weakness of the centralized structures of governance and policy processes. In Azamgarh district too, the nature of Agrarian relation is unequal between upper and lower castes since past. After independence, the process of democratic decentralization and various state initiatives has improved the condition of marginal section of society and significant changes have taken places in land and caste relation in the Azamgarh district. This article discusses impact of land reforms and other state initiatives on the lower caste (SCs) of Azamgarh district. The findings reflect the changing status of lower caste and the changing agrarian relations from various state initiatives.

**Keywords:** Development, State initiatives, Agrarian relation, Lower Castes, Azamgarh.

**Introduction**

The uniqueness of Indian political process lies in the fact that there has been a continuous interaction between interest groups, caste dynamics, nation-building, democratization and decolonization challenging the legitimacy of Indian state and guiding the basic principles of 'public welfare', 'development', social justice and 'national interest.' These dynamic factors had shaped the nature and content of the relationship between state and society and have crucial outcomes through time which included, decline of upper caste hegemony through the rise of caste coalitions, impetus on decentralization, periodic decline of elite politics and rise of liberal economics along with transformation of growth strategy into development strategy; rise of

empowerment, state interventions, subaltern movements and other ethnic movements; and lastly, the rise of 'regional issues' rather than the 'nation' as the operational unit of the political system.

There have been various phases of tacit relationship between poverty and politics which set the agenda for the ideals and guiding principles of Indian state at different phases during post-independent era. The first phase was the 'constitutional process' which was nationalist in the nature and reflected in the early efforts of 'community development' and 'decolonization' apart from making of Indian constitution. Second phase can be termed as the 'development phase' which laid emphasis on the capacity building of the rural poor and caused the initiation of the 'land reforms of 1950s', which ultimately proved to be inappropriate as it failed to include landless laborers in its concept of reshaping rural power structure. The nationwide rural agitations of 1960s constructed the third phase when newly empowered farmers pressurized the system for improvements in their employments status, wages, dignity and justice causing state to respond with the comprehensive schemes which led to 'Green revolution'. Fourth and most crucial phase of relationship between poverty and politics started from 1980s onwards and it was reflected in the transition of state-centric welfare state to market oriented economy which was popularly termed as the 'era of liberalization'.

If we adapt this framework to understand the Indian scenario, particularly in context of Eastern Uttar Pradesh then it suggests that the regional disparities were created and widened under British colonial rule. The Pioneering works of Dadabhai Naoroji provided a comprehensive and systemic account of how infrastructures were created to drain the local resources from India to outside creating a vicious and chronic cycle of deprivation and poverty. Areas which were once flourished with skilled production were systematically deprived of their skills and transformed from the producers of finished goods to the producers of raw material and market of finished goods. Dutt (1940) further described this phenomenon of colonial exploitation and explained how it has created horizontal and vertical disparities which have assumed central stage in concerns of developmental policies targeting at reducing disparities and inequalities. However, many recent studies indicate that these policies and strategies could not achieve their objectives and there has been very little evidence of any convergence taking place among states and regions, especially after post-reform period. Noorbakhsh (2003) suggested towards divergence which have been taking place between different regions rather than convergence. Many other studies (Dreze and Sen, 1995) noted that there has been remarkable diversity in economic and social development among various states/regions in India. It was noted by Datt and Ravallion, 1998, that the states which were sincere in developing physical infrastructure and human recourses have achieved remarkable success in poverty reduction. In another study, Datt and Ravallion (2002) have found that difference in literacy rates in state played major role in defining the success in poverty reduction. It is in this background the impact of rural

development programmes on the lower caste (SCs) of Eastern Uttar Pradesh can be understood, however, with the caveat that the formulation and implementation these programmes were central in nature lacking the regional needs. The main objective highlights the status of lower caste in the Azamgarh district in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. It will also try to explore the changing agrarian relations from various state development initiatives.

### **Scenario of lower caste in India with special reference of U.P:-**

Caste is socio-cultural phenomenon which exists only in India. Caste has some specific features which regular the several of different grapes on the basis of given direction in Hindu philosophy (Ambedker; 1936, 1945). It is also a fact that caste system in the north Indian plains, where the Aryans and their Sanskritic culture had made the deepest impact, differs in a fundamental way from that in the south. In the south, Brahmins though small in numbers are the only representative of the twice-born castes. There are no counter-parts of the north Indian Rajputs and Vaishyas in the south. As a result, Brahmins in the south have tended to be more separated from the rest of the Shudra population. But on the contrary, a relatively large proportion of population in Uttar Pradesh is composed of the twice-born caste. Hence, Brahminism in north has been relatively less tyrannical. There is a greater continuity in the ritual ranks of the various castes in Uttar Pradesh which, in turn, has led to a general sharing of social status and political power. Along with the Brahmins, the other twice-born castes also have access to modern profession and power structure. This has remained one of the most dominant reasons that the state had not witnessed any massive mobilization of the lower caste Shudras or of the advanced Untouchable castes that had occurred in southern states and in Maharashtra in the past. The anti-Brahmanism characterized by steep and discontinuous traditional hierarchies, seems to have flourished in these states and this, in turn, have had fostered the political mobilization of castes still lower in the ritual-hierarchy. These states with a relatively higher proportion of twice-born castes, as mentioned above, and having more gradual and contiguous social handicaps seem to be, less susceptible to horizontal mobilizations from below comprising of ritually deprived castes seeking ,opportunities, status and political power (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987,76-79).

The caste system with its social hierarchy and implicit inequality of status and rank, in religious, educational, economic, political and juridical relationship among caste groups has been in existence from the earliest known historical times. At the top the hierarchy is the Brahmins and untouchables who come at the bottom end. Ritual purity and pollution as part Hinduism have pervaded all the walks of life. A gradation or hierarchy of values obtains in most mundane things as well as food, cloth and metals, not necessary always based on their utility (Parvathamma, 1981, 55)

Traditionally Indian society is characterized by social exclusion and glaring inequalities are structured in it. Some of the social inequalities and disabilities were centered on the institution of caste which constitutes status hierarchy with Brahmins at the top and the Scheduled castes or the so called untouchable at the base. This lowest stratum, on account of the low social and ritual status, suffered from social injustice and exploitation, which prevented it from rising above the social status fixed for it. Members of this caste were denied entry into general occupations which were relatively well paid, the road to knowledge was closed and they had no access to occupation and education. The position of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and women were almost the same and have a bearing on the social structure of the society. Caste as a customary social and economic system of society, based on hierarchical nature, is the cause of existed social tension in society. Dalit who constitute on fifth of total India population suffer most acute problem of discrimination and exclusion in every sphere of society and located at the bottom of them caste hierarchy. Existing untouchability in society, excluded Dalit from transaction with dominant community in society (Thorat and lee, 2005). Hierarchical caste relations are the bedrock of the Hindu society. The major problem of scheduled caste is poverty superimposed by social discriminate practice of untouchability and pathetic economic condition.

In Indian society, the caste represents a well-organized community life with a traditional social entity. Caste has a simple ritual hierarchy based on the notion of "pure" "impure" or a set of values and ideas (Dumont, 1952; Srinivas, 1962). The discussion on caste among sociologist is centered on its features such as segmental division of society, endogamy and hereditary occupations etc (Ghurye, 1969). The caste system with its social hierarchy and implicit inequality of status and rank, in religious, educational, economic, political juridical relationships among caste groups have been in existence from the earliest known historical times. At the top of the hierarchy are the Brahmins, untouchables come at the bottom and had been subjected to varieties of disabilities, deprivations, and oppression under the traditional system.

Uttar Pradesh India's fifth largest state has an area of 240928 sq km. and its total population is 19,95,81477, rural population is 15,51, 11022 and urban population is 4,44,70,455( census:2011). The state's percentage of scheduled castes who constitute a major chunk of the dalit population 21percent. If it were a separate country Uttar Pradesh would be the world's fifth-most-populous nation, trailing only China, India, the United States of America and Indonesia. As of the 2001 Indian census about 80 percent of Uttar Pradesh population is Hindu, while Muslims make up around 18.5 percent of the population. The remainder consists of Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Jains (Census, 2001).

The dawn of the twenty- first century was accompanied with some reorganization of administrative set up of the State which has 18 revenue division headed by a Commissioner spread over 71 district each having a Collector. The districts are further grouped into 312 tehsils

(sub division) and for purpose of development are organized into blocks (numbering 915). People's participations in political activities at the state level is ensured through elected representatives to the State Assembly of 403 members and second chamber the Council to which indirect elections are held from the Assembly and few direct ones representing special interest groups like graduates, teachers, etc. Total villages are 106774 in number of which 97184 are the inhabited villages (Census of India, 2011). The State has nominal presence of tribal groups, has 21percent of schedule castes and a non enumerated category in other Backward Castes (OBC's) in the census, and reservation for these three group cannot exceed 50 percent of seats (Chauhan, 2009).

The caste structure of Uttar Pradesh is not as rigid and exclusionist as were its counterparts in the southern state; continuous hierarchies, rather than sharp divisions and differences, characterizes the caste structure of UP. The growth and assertiveness of caste and community politics in Uttar Pradesh was the consequence of failure to promote economic development adequately and equitably and in the weakness of the centralized structures of governance and policy processes that excluded the majority of classes, castes, communities and groups from political power and governance (Hasan, 1998, p. 9).

Uttar Pradesh's population can be divided into three social blocs. First, there are the upper-caste Hindus, mainly Brahmins, Rajputs and Banias, who comprise roughly 20% of the population and dominate government jobs and landownership in the state (Hasan 1998, Kumar, 2018). The second bloc, about another 20%, constitutes the Hindu middle castes, which include Jats, particularly the upper sections of this group, such as Gujjars, Yadavs, and Kurmis, which are categorized as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) (Government of India 1980). The rest of the population mainly comprises Muslims (17%), Scheduled Castes (SCs) (21%), and Most Backward Classes (MBCs), whose share in the population is also around 20% (Government of UP 2001). Some of the Muslims and SCs are rich and can be classified as middle class, but the majority of them are poor and concentrated in informal sector jobs, working in extremely exploitative and insecure conditions (Kumar, 2018, p.40).

In Uttar Pradesh rural class structure is very unequal, distinguished by the presence of a class of big landowners and large number of poor's. Equally significant is its relatively small middle class created through privileged and restricted access to education, government, employment and politics. The poorest people consist of the Scheduled Castes, most backward classes and religious minorities (Ibid: p, 9).The deprived population has expressed resentment against the fact the benefits of development have been monopolized by upper castes-classes to their total exclusion. Democracy provided them the opportunity for the ventilation of grievances against their exclusion from the privileges of political power and the opportunities of development.

Many scholars have done intensive studies of Uttar Pradesh villages, some of the important studies are as follows - Academic studies have extensively documented the state of Uttar Pradesh and various facets of its rural life. W.H Wiser (1936) studied The Hindu Jajmani system in the village of Karimpur. Susan Wadley also studied Karimpur village and published her work, *Shakti: Power in the Conceptual Structure of Karimpur Religion* (1975), from Chicago. To continue the exploration, Bruce W. Derr (1979) studied the growing abundance of food and poverty in the same village, Karimpur during the period 1925-75. Bernard S Cohn (1987) studied the Chamars of Madhopur (Senapur). Incidentally, Senapur is a Thakur-dominated agricultural village situated 25 miles north of Varanasi. Cohn, in his study, explored the functioning of various pasts such as traditional and historic pasts of the Chamars of this village. Rudra Datt Singh (1948) also studied the same village to understand the division of labour. He collaborated with C. S. Coon in bringing out the discussion on the unity and extensions of an Indian village.

The full-length study of community projects in a "Rajput" and a "Tyagi" village was published in S.C. Dube's book, *India's Changing Villages* (1958). McKim Marriott (1955) did intensive fieldwork in the early 1950s, in the Kishangarhi village of Aligarh district in up. In Faizabad district, Harold Gould (1958) selected a small village called Berauli for understanding Jajmani (client-patron) relations as well as the political processes operating at the local and the district levels. O.M Lynch has studied the politics of untouchability in the city Agra (1969). P C Joshi (1974) lived in village Bijatka in Meerut district and recorded his field observations about the social classes in the rural setting. Jean Dreze spent a little over a year in Palanpur in 1983-84, and had since revisited the village on many occasions to study the functioning of the village economy. Yogendra Singh (1972) who based studies six villages of Basti district in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Y. Singh (2002) also including his own village Chanukhera near Indo- Nepal border for studying the effects of Zamindari abolition and emerging cultural response P.C. Joshi (1979) studied Bijakta village in Meerut district, the village was through links with the district unit of the Communist Party and the theme of studying social classes in the rural setting of the State. Raheja's work *Poison in the Gift* (1988) was based on intensive work in village Pahansu, in Saharanpur district. Some of these studies conducted as community development projects also influenced the policymaking process of the Indian state. Community projects, as programmes of rural development, had started in the early 1950s following the establishment of the Planning Commission in independent India (Chauhan, 2009, p.42).

The four economic regions<sup>i</sup> in which the state has been divided have uneven development. There is not any significant difference in the socio-economic and physical conditions of Azamgarh district and the other districts of the eastern region in having more or less similar geographical and climate conditions, economic activity pattern, population density and agriculture conditions. The eastern region in which Azamgarh falls is bounded by Nepal in

North, Madhya Pradesh in the south and Bihar in the west. The region is the eastern part of the great Gangetic Plain traversed by the rivers the Ganga the Yamuna and the Ghagra and their numerous tributaries. The tract slopes generally south east. The area has a tropical monsoon climate having an average annual rain fall of 80-120 cms, except in the northern Tarai belt where the annual rainfall is 80-120 cms. The highest temperature in the area varies between 43` C and 47`C and the lowest between 4`C and 7`C. The Soil of the region is agriculturally rich and 17 percent of the forests are found in this region. Although the state is not very rich in respect of mineral resources, some pockets of the eastern region are known to have some mineral deposits (Singh, 1987, p. 114). The eastern region is one of the three backward regions of the state.

Few Scholars studied in Azamgarh district like Sudha Pai (1985, 2000) and R.P Singh (1987). Sudha Pai (1985) examines the land-relations situations after independence in Uttar Pradesh, especially after the implementation of land reforms legislation, which broke-up the old system. It is clearly demonstrated that while the institution of absentee landlordism was shattered, but a new class of landowners the Bhumidars, emerged in U.P. The occupancy tenants in some cases benefited as the lands they had cultivated earlier became theirs by law. In its wake, however, the already miserable condition of the landless Harijans deteriorated still further. With the breakdown of the traditional order in UP, she argues, agrarian tensions increased, as poverty and unemployment expanded in the rural areas. An attempt has been made in the study, inter alia to identify the main agrarian and landed classes and determine the nature of the new emergent class relationship, in north-eastern UP, with a view to understanding the agrarian system as such.

Sudha Pai (2000) found that Scheduled Castes constitute disadvantaged, economically poor and socially backward groups. Owning little land, with low levels of literacy, they suffer from low levels of urbanization, employment and wages due to lack of rapid industrial development.

R.P.Singh (1987) emphasized that the idea behind IRDP was expansion of productive power of the weaker section equitable distribution of resources, and upliftment of rural people of Azmgarh district in Koilsa Block. His study indicated that economic and political development has largely remained confined to the upper strata of the society. The impact of the development programmes in helping the poor and the underprivileged has been inconsequential in order to make the process of “cumulative Inequalities” ineffective, both the social structure with system of distribution of socio-economic resources and the plants of rural development need basic transformation to effect restructuring the social and economic relationship in the society.

### **Understanding Agrarian structure and Agrarian relations in Azamgarh District:-**

#### **Azamgarh district: - A Profile**

Azamgarh, one of the eastern-most districts of the Uttar Pradesh, once formed a part of the ancient Kosala kingdom. Kosala figured prominently among the four powerful monarchies of Northern India during the time of the Buddha, when its prosperity reached its zenith. The district of Azamgarh possesses hardly any remains of much antiquarian value, except few. There are some deserted sites, forts and tanks to be seen in every tahsil of this district and they carry vague legends regarding their builders. The early history of the district can be traced only from the extant antiquities (Gazetteer, 1989, p.12)

According to the traditions former occupants of the district were Bhars or Rajbhars, Soeris and Cherus. According to a local tradition, the country of the Bhars, which was included in the kingdom of Ayodhya in Rama's time, was occupied by Rajbhars and Asuras. A Rajbhar chief named Asildeo lived at Dihaduar in pargana Mahul, of tahsil Phulpur of the district; and the old tanks and mounds at that place are said to be signs of his power. According to another tradition, Parikshit, the eldest son of Kuru<sup>ii</sup> (R.C.Majumdar & A Pusalkar: 1965), once occupied the tract, now called Nizamabad and the old Kot at Anwank, near which a battle was fought between him and the Muhammadans (Dark Brockman, 1911<sup>iii</sup>). A tradition also gives some support to the belief that the district was included in the ancient kingdom of Ayodhya (Census: 2011). The Suryavanshi dynasty founded by Manu is the earliest known dynasty of the district. The decline and fall of this dynasty was brought about by the victorious campaigns led by Pururvas, Nahusa and Yayati of the Chandravanshi dynasty and some of Manu's sons (A. Furher: 1883). Pururvas was succeeded by Ayu at Prathistana and Ayu was followed by a famous king Nahush. The district appears to have been under his authority, for a mound, locally known as '*Nahusa Ka Tila*' in tahsil Ghosi shows its association with king Nahusa. His son and successor Yayati is mentioned in Puranas and Mahabharata as a Samrat. Ayodhya rose to prominence under many famous kings like Mandhata, Sagar, Dilip II, Raghu and Rama of Ikshvaku dynasty. After six or seven generation from Bhagirath, Dilip II reestablished the single monarchy, and during his days Ayodhya emerged into prominence and acquired the name Kosala (R.C. Majumdar; 1964 quoted in Gazetteer, 1989). The above account is based on tradition, from sixth century onwards. We have evidence for the reconstruction of its more authentic history (Ibid Census: 2011).

Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara ruled for nearly half a century and in 273 B.C. the throne of Magadh passed on to Asoka, who later became one of the most zealous propagator's of the gospel of the Buddha Azamgarh was under his rule up to 232 B.C. After the fall of Mauryas, Pushyamitra Sunga, the founder of the Sunga dynasty, came into power and this district came under his rule. The history of the district is confused up to the period of the Kushanas. Later on Gupta's conquered this region and annexed it to their empire. This district came under the Gupta rule in 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. during the reign of Chandragupta II. The district fell within the kingdom first of the Maurya's and then of Gupta's dynasty whose remains have been found on all sides

(Ibid Gazetteer, 1989, 16). Ali Quli Khan (1559A.D.) was the first governor of Jaunpur including its dependencies Varanasi, Ghazipur, Chunar and Zamania after the reoccupation of India by Mughals. Nizamabad a town in the district of Azamgarh is said to have been a Hindu settlement previous to the Muslims occupation. The local tradition regarding its present name is that it is derived from a certain Sheikh Nizam-ud-din, a saint whose tomb is in this town, which bears a Persian inscription, dated A.H. 969, or 1561 A.D (Furher, 1969). The emperor Akbar marched from Nizamabad to Jaunpur and settled down there. He determined that so long as Ali Quli Khan and his brother should remain in the world, Jaunpur should be the capital of the state (Gazetteer, 1989, p. 28). The records of Akbar's reign in *Ain-i-Akbari*<sup>iv</sup> furnish a certain amount of information regarding the position of Azamgarh at that time, showing the state of cultivation, the revenue and principal landholders of each pargana. The administrative divisions of Akbar's reign appear to have been remaining unchanged till 1722 A.D. The *faujdar*<sup>v</sup> of the sarkar resided at Jaunpur. There must have been some subordinate collecting establishment, and apparently *kanungos* and clerks (*mutasaddis*) were stationed at the pargana towns (*kasbas*). Inferior civil judges (*kazis*) also resided there, and were subordinate to the chief judge (*sadar*) who was stationed either at Jaunpur or Allahabad (Gazetteer, 1989, p. 29).

In the latter part of the seventeenth and the early and middle parts of the eighteenth century, the management of the most of the Azamgarh parganas passed, into the hands, as grant, to a local potentate, who received the title of the raja of Azamgarh. The rise of family can be traced from one Chandra Sen., the Gautam Rajput of Mehnagar in pargana Nizamabad of this district. Chandra Sen had two sons, Sagar and Abhiman. Abhiman became a Muhammadan, took the name of Daulat Khan and left his home to seek employment elsewhere. He had no heirs, but Sagar his brother and five sons, Harbans, Dayal, Gopal, Jai Narayan and Kharak. Harbans was the eldest of them to whom, was transferred most of the wealth and local influence which Daulat's positions had gained for him. With the death of Daulat the further aggrandizement of the family was stayed. Harbans had two sons, Gambhir and Dharindhar, but it does not appear that either of them assumed the title of raja, Gambhir died childless, but Dharindhar had three sons Vikramjit, Rudra and Narayan. Vikramjit aggrandized himself at the expense of his brothers. He does not appear to have adopted the title of raja, but like his predecessor he also embraced Islam. He married a Muslim lady who bore him two sons, Azam Khan and Azamat Khan, the first Muslims born in the family. In the end Vikramjit was killed, and Rudra's widow was established in his place. Having no heirs, she adopted Azam Khan. Azamgarh, the headquarters of this district derives its name from Azam Khan in 1665 A.D (Ibid Gazetteer, 1989, p. 31) Since then the descendants of Azam Khan ruled till 1772 A.D., but in 1772 A.D. the internal system made it *Chakla*<sup>vi</sup>. By the treaty between the East India Company Governor and nawab Sadat Ali Khan of Avadh in 1801 A.D., a very large part of this area was merged with

East India Company in Gorakhpur. In 1832 A.D. again Azamgarh district was formed (Ibid Gazetteer, 1989, p. 35).

The people of the district had taken part actively in all freedom struggle movements moved by the Mahatma Gandhi and other freedom fighters for freedom from the British Empire. After the Second World War, the awaited time for freedom had come and on the 15th August 1947, India, along with the district got independence from British rule after a long time struggle. Prior 1904, there was 5 tahsils in Devgaon, Azamgarh, Mahul, Sagari, Muhammdabad and in 1904 Ghosi made the sixth tehsils. This district used to place its important in spin (Handicraft Industry), in 1901 there were 1300 hundred looms, Mau, Kopaganj and Mubarakpur were there main centers of this industry. Sugar refinery was also main business of this district. In 1957 the district was divided in to 29 development blocks, but in 1968 the number of development blocks was increased to 22, but again on 22 March 1972, it was divided in to 29 development blocks. In this District was separated on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1988 in the form of Mau and Azamgarh district. The above details speak about the historical upheavals and transformation in the profile of the Azamgarh district.

Presently, Azamgarh district is situated in the eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh. Under the Azamgarh division, and comprises an irregularly shaped tract, lying, south of Ghagra river between the parallels of 25°17' and 26°17' north latitude and 82°04' and 83°52' east longitude. Azamgarh is bounded on the east by Mau district on the south by the district Ghazipur and Jaunpur and south west by Jaunpur district on the west by Sultanpur district, on the north east and north by the districts, Ambedkar Nagar and Gorakhpur respectively. According 2011 census the district area is 4054.00 Sq.km. The district occupies fourth position among the districts of the state. The total population of the district is 4,613,913 in which 4,220,512 live in rural and rest 393,401 in urban parts. There are 7 tahsils in district; the thasils are Azamgarh, Sagari, Burahanpur, Nizambad, Lalganj and Mehnagar. The urban population in the district is 8.53 percent. The urban population is maximum at 26.9 percent in Azamgarh tahsil. In the district there are 4,101 revenue and 301 un-inhabited villages. Azamgarh is bounded on the east Mau, on the south-east by Gazipur, on the south-west Jaunpur and the North-west by Faizabad and Sultanpur. It had seven thasils and 22 development blocks (Census of India, 2011). The main occupation of the people of Azamgarh district is agriculture.

#### **Land tenure system of Azamgarh:-**

Azamgarh belongs to one of the backwards districts of the state. The district because of the backwardness received special attention of the government in its various plans. The government under the Five Year Plans has taken various measures and strategies to accelerate the process of economic development and social change in order to ensure the balanced growth of the region.

The Azamgarh district has been always on the forefront in the sphere of political mobilization before and after independence (Singh, 1987).

The agrarian history of Azamgarh and a description of the system of land holdings and the main agrarian classes who had resided there can be given only from 1801. From 1596 to 1801 the agricultural history of Azamgarh is a blank. Not a single record of any kind is available and the *amils*<sup>vii</sup> and their officials left for Oudh after the session in 1801. The district is described as nearly a waste which would in the course of one or two years more, become an entire scene of desolation (Pai: 1986: 47; Azamgarh Gazetteer 1811:103).

According to Amin (1981) the eastern districts in contrast from a region in which historically there has been a rare combination of extreme poverty and dense population with heavy pressure on agricultural land. While these districts have under gone considerable economic and social change, such change has been much slower in the west. These districts have very fertile soil adequate rainfall and abundant labour. But the landowning pattern has been skewed, the upper and middle castes owning large plots and the lower castes / classes marginal or dwarf plots. In some of the districts, sugarcane was grown and mills came up during the British Period. It was the Zamindars and the middle man who profited from sugarcane cultivation making it a debt servicing crop rather than a surplus accumulator for the peasants (quoted in Pai, 2004).

Land and caste system is intertwined in the traditional India significant changes have taken place in land and caste relationship in Azamgarh. In contemporary rural India traditional hierarchical order is however, neither the essence of the caste system nor the inevitable consequences of it but an expression of political power or political economic power. Before independence, the system of land tenure in the Azamgarh district was Zamindari, which had given Zamindars the juridical rights in land-ownership. The Zamindars who were mostly from upper castes were alone the proprietors of land and all others were their tenants holding the right to cultivate from them and paying land rent to them. According to 6<sup>th</sup> settlement report on the Azamgarh district, native custom had created two great orders of cultivators in the districts: (i) those who were supposed to employ farm servants to perform the more menial operations and (ii) those that did all for themselves. The former order contained mostly the upper caste people, while all the inferior castes of Hindu and Muhammadans were included in the second order (Singh, 1987, p. 84-85).

**Table-1**  
**Number of Holdings by size Classes for Scheduled Caste during Agricultural census 2000-01 to 2010-11 of Azamgarh district**

Sr. No.	Size class in (ha.)	Total holdings 2000-01		Total Holdings 2010-11	
		Number	Percentage to All classes	Number	Percentage to All Classes
1	2	3	4	7	8
1	Below 0.5	100879 (100)	83.47	109825 (100)	83.91
2	0.5-1.0	15902 (100)	13.16	17080 (100)	13.05
	Marginal	116781	96.16	126905	96.96
3	1.0-2.0	3577 (100)	2.96	3479 (100)	2.66
	Small	3577	2.96	3479	2.66
4	2.0-3.0	412 (100)	0.34	427 (100)	0.33
5	3.0-4.0	72 (100)	0.06	62 (100)	0.05
	Semi Medium	484	0.40	489	0.38
6	4.0-5.0	13 (100)	0.01	9 (100)	0.01
7	5.0-7.5	1 (100)	Neg	4 (100)	Neg
8	7.5-10.0	Neg	Neg	1 (100)	Neg
	Medium	14	0.01	14	0.01
9	10-20.0	Neg	Neg	Neg	Neg
10	20.0& ABOVE	Neg	Neg	Neg	Neg
	Large	Neg	Neg	Neg	Neg
11	ALL CLASSES	120863 (100)	100	130887	100

**Source:** National Information (NIC) Agriculture Census<sup>viii</sup> Division DAC, Ministry of Agricultural and Farmers Welfare. Website [agcensus.dacnet.nic.in](http://agcensus.dacnet.nic.in)

**Note: (1)** Total May not Tally Due to Rounding off,  
(2) Neg:-Negligible

The above table shows in Azamgarh district, under 2000-01 the number of landholding of marginal class in Scheduled caste was 11678 (96.16%) which was reduced to 126905 (96.96%) in 2010-11. Which is most affected in all size class through total observation, under the marginal size class below 0.5 in 2000-01 the land holding size was 83.47% which increased to 83.91% in 2010-11. In 2000-01 the small size class land holding was 3577 (2.90%), which decreased in 2010-11 to 3479 (2.66 %). If we talk about land holding size in semi medium, medium and large size more paternity is not examined. While the percentage of land holdings of the large size class from 2000-01 has remained unchanged. It is clear from the overview of the present data that the various efforts for the raising of the Scheduled caste by government and despite the programmes like land reform (land distribution) in last 10 year; but there has not been much change in land holdings. Due to the fact that presently most of Scheduled casts are working as agricultural labourers.

Implementation of land reforms and its impact varies across the region of the state. The way these reforms were designed and carried out brought out a change from cumulative inequality into dispersed inequality and linkage between caste and landownership never broke down totally, as upper caste *Zamindars* continued to be the biggest land owners, tenants who purchased land or benefited from land reforms were mostly OBCs and section of Dalit remained functionally landless agricultural labour (Trivedi, 2014).

The Zamindari Abolition Act was passed in 1952 to abolish the rights of intermediaries over land and to give proprietary rights to the tillers of the land. Several other tenancy reforms like ceiling on agricultural holdings, consolidation of the fragmented land and the distribution of land to the landless were adopted to eliminate all elements of exploitation and social injustice within the agrarian system so as to ensure equality of status and opportunity to all sections of rural population. Land reforms which could have led to a radical change in the agrarian structure and ushered in a measure of distributive justice had failed to bring about the required change in the agrarian structure (Singh, 1987, p. 125). The big farmers from upper castes and the intermediate peasant castes still own most of the agricultural land. Substantial parts of land still continue to be with the traditional upper castes. Other middle and lower middle castes have the marginal land. The enforcement of the land reforms legislations to distribute land among the Scheduled Castes could hardly achieve any tangible results. Landlessness still prevails among the Scheduled Castes in acute form (Ibid; p. 126).

The techniques and practices as well as the agricultural productivity in Azamgarh district as measured in terms of value of farm output per are is more or less the same to the state average. The distribution of land in Azamgarh and the other districts of the region is very skewed with

consequence that a very large number of families at the lower level have much less income than the indicated average income. The agricultural production in Azamgarh district is far from satisfactory. The production of food grains in the districts has been never excess to its requirements. The size of holdings in Azamgarh is very small and uneconomic. These uneconomic land holdings have, to a large extent adversely affected the agricultural production in the district. In spite of all these disadvantages and limitations efforts were made to increase the net area for agricultural use, through new- devices of agricultural productions and in making the land more fertile with the use of chemical fertilizers and the expansion of irrigational facilities (Singh, 1987, p.121)

### **Caste system in Azamgarh:-**

There was a close inter-relation between the land ownership and the caste hierarchy. The agrarian structure was marked by great inequality in the ownership of land. A small number of landlords from the entrenched castes owned most of the village land while a large number of small peasants had to depend for their existence on tiny fragmented holdings. And at the bottom, there existed a vast majority of the landless agricultural labourers whose socio-economic conditions was even worse and pitiable. The landowners invariably belonged to the intermediate farming castes and the agricultural labourers to the Scheduled castes and other lower castes a situation that led to economic disabilities being aggravated by social disadvantages (Singh, 1987, 125).

According to Census 1901, Azamgarh was mainly a Hindu district (85.85%) with not less than 76 different castes. The majors' ones are given below (Gazetteer, 1989, p. 103).The Chamars were the single largest class and collectively held a large amount of land during the colonial period. But their individual holdings were small and most of them were landless labourers occupying the lowest position in the social hierarchy. The Ahirs (Yadava) formed the backbone of the cultivating castes. The Brahmins of Azamgarh were described mainly as "*Sarjuparis*" and did not hold any high religious position. Their landed properties were small, except for large communities such as the Misra's of Akhaichanda in Gopalpur pargana. Of the landholding castes by far the important were the Rajputs (Thakurs). Their proportion of landholdings in some parganas ranged from 89.14 to 17.04 percent (Pai, 1986, p. 49).

The caste structure of the eastern U.P is not rigid and exclusivist as were its counterparts in the southern parts of India. Eastern U.P. is predominantly an agricultural one in which caste lies at the heart of people's religious and social experience. Continuous hierarchies' rather sharp division and differences, characterize the caste structure of these regions. Historically, the Brahmanical caste hierarchy approximately the four tiered Varna system is most fully articulated in this region. The four upper castes are Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Kayasthas.

According to 1931 census, Brahmins formed over 9% of the population in U.P. representing 40% of the entire Brahmin concentration (Hasan, 1998, p.9). This type of well-differentiated caste configuration in which the upper castes have a wide geographical spread, established a specific pattern of caste class in U.P. The caste system was prevailing among Muslims also Shaikh, Pathan, Sayyad, Ashraf, Ansari and Julaha were important Muslim castes. Apart from the rigorously observed distinctions between a whole variety of castes and sub-castes (Muslim as well as Hindu), the basic social division in the region as perceived at least by the locally dominant elements, was that between the *sharif* (or Ashraf, i.e. the respectable classes) and the *razil* (or labouring people).

In Azamgarh district nearly 84% of the populations were Hindus against the state average of 79.73%. Muslims was 16% and the remaining 0.42% comprised Sikhs, Buddhist, Christians, Jains, and others (Census, 2011). The most numerous Hindu castes are: Brahmans, Rajputs or Chhatris, Bhars, Koeris, Bhumihars, Lunias (Nonias) and Baniyas, Yadava (Ahirs), Kurmis, Kharas, Lohars, Kumhars, Telis, Nais, Kalwars, Kewats, Pals (Gaderiya), Sonars, Khatiks Chamars, Pasis, Dhobis, Dharkars, Musharas, Mallahs etc. Among the Brahmans the more numerous are the Sarwarins or Sarjuparis. Rajputs, who claim to be Kshatriyas, take the foremost place as regards their aggregate number and their social position. They belong to a great variety of clans, Sombansis, Chandels, Nikumbhs, Chauhan, Rathors, Raghubansis, Sikarwars, and Lunias (Nonias). The Baniyas are Kandus, a caste which seems to have affinity with Bharbhujas. Baniyas are numerous in Sagari but are found in all tahsils. The Kahars engaged in Personal service, general labour, and some extent in cultivation is found all thasils. The Ahirs and Kurmis both are clean cultivating caste; both are found in almost thesis. All the thasils the Chamars is the largest population compared the other castes like, Pasis, Dhobis and Mushars. Chamars whose traditional occupation was related to working with hides and skins are still responsible throughout most of northern India for removal of dead animals and female Chamars function as midwives (Cohn, 1987). Majority of the Muslims in the district belong to the Sunni sects. Muslims divided into Julahas (weavers), Shaikhs, Sayyad, Ashraf, Ansari and Pathans. They formed the majority in the towns of Saraimeer, Mubarakpur and a substantial minority in Phulpur, Chirakot, Azamgarh and several other places.

**Table-2 Number and percentage of Scheduled castes in Sub-districts, 2011**

Description		Total population	Total Scheduled caste population	% of Scheduled caste population to total Scheduled caste population
Azamgarh District	Total	4613913	1171378	25.39
	Rural	4220512	1123453	26.62
	Urban	393401	47925	12.18
Burahanpur Tahsil	Total	459068	103871	22.63
	Rural	449694	102498	22.79
	Urban	9374	1373	14.65
Sagari Tahsil	Total	901483	225404	25
	Rural	857676	219168	25.55
	Urban	43807	6236	14.24
Azamgarh (Sadar) Tahsil	Total	978799	217980	22.27
	Rural	715365	191033	26.7
	Urban	263434	26947	10.23
Nizamabad Tahsil	Total	595715	145640	24.45
	Rural	562812	141517	25.14
	Urban	32903	4123	12.53
Phulpur Tahsil	Total	696523	157663	22.64
	Rural	680948	155688	22.86
	Urban	15575	1975	12.68
Lalganj Tahsil	Total	581647	195222	33.56
	Rural	568180	192082	33.81
	Urban	13467	3140	23.32
Mehnagar Tahsil	Total	400678	125598	31.35
	Rural	385837	121467	31.48
	Urban	14841	4131	27.84

Source: Census of India, 2011

Table 2-depicts the distribution of Scheduled Castes population their percentage to total population of the district. Of the 4613913 total population of the district, 25.39 per cent of the

total population belongs to the Scheduled Castes. The percentage of Scheduled Castes population constitutes 26.62 per cent in rural population and 12.18 per cent in urban population. The highest percentage of total Scheduled Castes population is recorded in Lalganj tahsil (33.56) while the lowest is found in Burhanpur tahsil (22.63). The percentage of Scheduled caste population in the total population of this district is higher in the rural than the urban areas. Most of the Scheduled castes living in the countryside are agricultural laborers. U.P. has whole has a higher percentage of scheduled castes population (20.percent), then the rest of India (16.6) percent. Their population in the rural areas is (23 percent) almost of twice that in the urban areas (12.7 percent). There are 66 kinds of Scheduled Castes listed in the 2011 census (Census, 2011).

**Table-3 Working Population of Azamgarh District, 2011**

Description		Total	Rural	Urban
Main workers	Person	784272	695830	88442
	Males	611015	541151	69864
	Female	173257	154679	18578
Cultivators	Person	425630	421583	4047
	Males	317451	314361	3090
	Female	108179	107222	957
Agricultural Labour	Person	452055	444642	7413
	Males	269151	263923	5228
	Female	182904	180719	2185
Household Industry works	Person	115991	76174	39817
	Males	68233	43896	24337
	Female	47758	32278	15480
Marginal workers	Person	587760	557868	29892
	Males	330875	312921	17954
	Female	256885	244947	11938
Non workers	Person	32,41,881	311299	67057
	Males	13,43,114	231892	55163
	Female	18,98,767	79407	11894

Source: Census of India, 2011

According census 2011 in the district total population 1372032 were engaged in work activities 57.2% of worker describe their works as main work (employment or earning more than 6 month) while 42.8 % were involved in Marginal activity providing livelihood or less than 6 months of 1372032 workers engaged in main work 311060 were cultivators (owner or co-owner) while 153665 were Agricultural labourers.

Work participation rate in this district, in the total population of the district of 4,613,913 as much as 29.74 percent are workers and rest of 70.26 percent is non-workers. Among workers 17 percent are main workers and rest 12.94 percent are marginal workers of total population. The extent of main workers is highest at 19.17 percent in Azamgarh tahsil and lowest at 15.69 percent in Phulpur tahsil. In case of marginal workers the percentages is highest in Burhanpur tahsil as 14.28 percent in comparison to lowest percentage in Nizamabad with 11.25 percent. In the district among workers 31.02 percent are cultivators and 27.58 percent other workers<sup>ix</sup>.

**Table-4 Migrated people of Azamgarh District in the State, 2001**

Description	Total	Rural	Urban
Person	1026351	958421	67930
Male	150292	130130	20162
Female	876059	828291	47768

Source: Statistical Diary Uttar Pradesh<sup>x</sup>, 2015

The above table is indicative of the fact that the problem of unemployment and underemployment is widely acute in this district. A sizeable number of people from this district have to migrate to other parts of the country in search of seasonal or regular employment. Migration to other countries such as Malaysia, Burma, Singapore, Burma and Gulf countries (Saudi Arab, Oman, Quait, etc) was quite common among the lower strata of the population in the past but it has been checked in contemporary scenario on account of restrictions on immigration.

**Concluding remarks:**

Traditionally, inter-caste relations were very rigid. The members of different castes and sub-castes lived in almost water-tight compartments and inter-caste dining and marriages were either taboo or were sharply looked down upon. Recent scenario has drastically changed, especially in the post independence period, especially after 1980's. Inter-caste dining is no longer looked upon with disapproval by the people anywhere in the district particularly in towns. Inter-caste marriages though is not very common are now more frequent than before and many of the traditional restrictions on marriage based on caste are slowly disappearing as a result of spread of education, influence of westernization, growing gender equality and subsequent removal of gender-based disabilities.

Impact of land Reforms (U.P. Zamindari Abolition Act. 1951, Land distribution) and other State initiatives in this district brought many significant changes in socio-economic status of the deprived castes. It is also observed that absentee landlordism has disappeared drastically. However, agriculture still remained backward along with lack of industry as an alternative

employment. The rural elite (upper castes), consisting mainly of the Zamindars, who had been exploiting tillers of land several centuries, have been replaced by the middle caste categories like Yadavs and Kurmi's, which are progressive farmers owning land and cultivating it with full vigour, along with modern technique of agriculture.

It is to be emphasized that since 1980s, spread of HYVs of rice, consolidation of holdings, introduction of tube wells, rural electricity, has led to considerable agricultural transformation. Significant aspect of urbanization has taken place, leading to increased employment opportunities for weaker sections (Dalits &MBC's) on agriculture farms, brick kilns, construction sites, and rickshaw pulling in the cities. According to Tripathi (2012), the Post-Mandal phase in this area has reflected greater polarization of middle caste. Land ownership too has changed and lands have shifted to middle caste, especially Yadava. As a concluding remark, it is revealed during observation that the absolute dependence on landowners and old patron-client relationships have disappeared and Dalits have given up de-meaning occupations and avoid down fall of social dignity.

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Notes:-

<sup>i</sup> After the separation of Uttrakhand (9<sup>th</sup> November 2000) from Uttar Pradesh was restricted to only four economic region, these are Western region, Central region, Eastern region and Bundelkhand.

<sup>ii</sup>Majumdar, R.C. and Pusalkar, A (1965). *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. I, The Vedic Age, Bombay, p.p.299

<sup>iii</sup> Azamgarh: A Gazetteer, Vol. XXXIII of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, by D.L. Dark-Brockman, Allahabad (1911) p.p 155.

<sup>iv</sup> Aine-i-Akbari written by Abul Fazal . It is a 16<sup>th</sup> century detailed document of recording the administration of empor or Akbar's empire (Majumdar, 2007).

<sup>v</sup> He was subordinate military officers under Mughals.

<sup>vi</sup> Chakla was a subdivision.

<sup>vii</sup>Amil collected officially revenue under the Nawabs of avadh.

<sup>viii</sup> The Information of agricultural operational holdings of SC's and ST's was collected separately for the first time during Agricultural census 1980-81 to facilitate policy decision for welfare of these social groups(All India Report Agriculture census 2010-11).

<sup>ix</sup> Census of India, 2011, Part XII A, District census handbook Azamgarh: Village and Town Directory of Azamgarh in U.P No X, p.p 31.

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