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Research Topic: **Migrations, Social Change and Community Formation among the Jats of Northern India (1200-1900)**

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Findings

Unlike in the West, where peasant communities have almost disappeared due to the Great Transformation of the nineteenth century (caused by the Industrial Revolution and capitalist agriculture), the history of peasant communities in India, particularly that of north Indian Jat peasantry, presents a great spectacle of continuity and change over the last millennium. Although it is not the subject matter of the present study to discuss the reasons for the continued existence and resilience of peasant societies despite the structural changes of the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods, the study of the historical vicissitudes of the community of north Indian Jat peasants in the medieval and modern times is the focus of the present thesis. Additionally, the role of economic and political factors, caste, religion, memory, and institutions in the process of the formation of the Jat community and its identity is too fascinating a theme to be overlooked when one is exploring the history of Jats.

Thus, the primary objective of the thesis was to delineate the historical stages through which the Jats—a north Indian peasant community par excellence—evolved over a period of seven-eight centuries between the 11th- 12th and 19th-20th centuries. In short, the thesis has attempted to explore the process of the making of the north Indian Jat community over the *longue duree*. Drawing upon various categories of primary sources and modern historical

works, the thesis has focused on the reconstruction of the socio-political and economic history of the Jats and discussed the nature of the changes that occurred over time. These changes caused the social transformation of this community. The long period coincided with great transitions of the Sultanate, Mughal, and colonial periods. These transitions involved various developments during these centuries: the introduction of new agricultural technologies leading to agricultural expansion, the emergence of new peasant communities and their incorporation into the existing political systems and religious movements, growing stratification within the peasant society, and the growing power and resources of the agrarian intermediaries called zamindars, increasing conflict between the central powers and regional and local powerholders over the surplus produce of the peasants, widespread peasant uprisings led by powerful regional and local potentates, disintegration of the Mughal imperial authority and formation of regional states in the eighteenth century, and, finally, the establishment and consolidation of colonial rule.

These developments impacted the socio-political and economic conditions of the north Indian Jats, which, in turn, shaped the contours of community formation and identity consciousness among them. During the millennium between the 11th and 20th centuries, five broad stages in chronological order may be identified in the process of community formation among the north Indian Jats. The first stage saw the gradual transition of the Jats from pastoralists to agriculturalists in northwestern India. The second stage was marked by the growth of the settlements of the Jat peasants in various parts of north India and the emergence of the Jats as a peasant community par excellence. This stage was also characterized by the integration of the Jat peasants into the religious systems based on Bhakti, Sufi, and Sikh devotional movements. During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the third stage was marked by the growing power of the Jat zamindars and the growth of Jat political power. The fourth stage began to take concrete shape in the late nineteenth century when larger solidarities were sustained by the system of Khap panchayats and the large-scale recruitment of the Jat peasants in the British Indian army. The fifth and last stage—the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this thesis—is marked by developments in Jat society and politics during the post-Independence period.