



FIELD PATTERNS AND LAND-OWNING CASTES IN A PUNJAB VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

Field patterns and land-owning castes are intimately related. The land owned by different castes display different field patterns. It is because the amount of land under the possession of each caste varies and there are variations in the characteristics of farming and mode of living. In general, high castes have large land holdings and low caste people have small and therefore, field patterns of the two are different. The objective of the present paper is to study the evolutionary relationship of field patterns with the land-owning castes in a Punjab village. A reconstruction of field landscape showing fields occupied by different castes as existed in the year 1884 and 2016 has been attempted for village Dhanowali located in tehsil and district of Jalandhar in Punjab. The study is based on unpublished village maps and primary data available in Jamabandi and Shajra Nasab showing caste of the land owners collected from the revenue office and the Patwari of the concerned village. The study reveals that high castes have larger fields and land holdings than the low castes in 1884 as well as the existing 2016 field maps of the village. 'Jat' a traditional dominant land-owning caste in the village like many of the other villages in Punjab have big land holdings with large and rectangular fields situated in the prime land type areas close to the abadi-deh (settlement). The fields and holdings of other castes are smaller and found more near the village boundary in the inferior land type areas. The low castes do not own cultivated land but provide farm labour. The fields and holdings of the richer farmers are larger than the poor farmers irrespective of their caste.

Keywords: *abadi-deh, gotra, jat, land holding, shajra nasab.*

I. INTRODUCTION

An agricultural field is an important visible component of rural cultural landscape in the structure of Rural Settlements Geography. In a farming settlement a cultural group establishes a permanent relationship with land and create field pattern. Field pattern is the arrangement of parcels of land to which a cultural group is attached to practice agriculture. Attributes of field patterns such as size, shape and distribution change with the change in many elements including the caste of the people occupying these fields.

The importance of the study of field patterns has been discussed by a few writers. Mukerji in his research paper "Field Pattern in a Telangana Village" concluded that 'Field pattern as an element in the synthetic integrated picture of agricultural landscape is the concern of the cultural geographer who alone can observe and interpret fully the pattern of combination of fields with all its related elements like micro-topography, habitation complex, soil types, cropping patterns, tenure, land systems, methods of cultivation and technological and socio-economic organization of irrigation [1]. It has to be admitted that Indian geographers have made very limited attempts to study in detail the relationship of field patterns with the land-owning castes of a small area in the process of their evolution. In Manku's book *The Gujar Settlements; A Study in Ethnic Geography* there is a discussion on the field patterns of the Gujar settlements in the *kandi* (foot- hill) region of Punjab [2]. Singh in his paper *Evolution of Field Pattern in a Punjab Village* concludes that the fields and holdings owned by the *Jats*, a dominant caste were larger and regular than other castes [3]. The 2009 issue of *Survey of Advances in Research* in the book *Geography of India: Selected Themes*



published by Indian Council of Social Science Research has highlighted the limited coverage of field patterns in India [4]. The limited coverage on field patterns in Settlement Geography has generated the need to carry out studies on distribution of field patterns, as characterized in different areas in different historical periods, and their interpretation in terms of physical, cultural and technological factors [5]. The present study on the evolutionary relationship of field patterns with the land-owning castes in a Punjab village has been undertaken in this direction.

II.OBJECTIVE

The objective of the present research paper is to study the evolutionary relationship of field patterns with the land-owning castes in a Punjab village.

III.METHODOLOGY

Punjab is mainly comprised of plains with a broad physiographic and cultural homogeneity. Therefore a single village can be a sufficient area for effective research on relationship between field patterns and land-owning castes. In depth historical research is also possible for a single village in order to reconstruct the field patterns based on castes existed at different periods of time. The study of a single village is productive of much more than knowledge about a single village [6]. The justification for relevance of the study of a single village as a representative of the whole universe has been powerfully demonstrated by Grover. An in depth study of one individual village in India has much more meaning in the understanding of the

Indian rural scene in its social and cultural matrix, than perhaps a study of thousands of villages through sampling [7]. It is in this context that a reconstruction of field landscape showing fields occupied by different caste groups as existed in the year 1884 in the past and for the current year 2016 has been attempted for village Dhanowali located in tehsil and district of Jalandhar in Punjab.

3.1 Sources of Data and Method of Study

The study is based on field-work and primary data obtained from different sources. The historical data on field-wise ownership available in *Jamabandi* (book of land property records) and caste-wise data of the owners of fields written in *Shajra Nasab* (genealogical tree) of 1884 is collected from the District Revenue Office of Jalandhar in Punjab. The current village map and primary data for the year 2016 is obtained from the *Patwari* (village level government official) of the concerned village. The self drawn maps shown in this research paper are based on the unpublished *Shajra Kishtwars/Massavis* (village map showing field boundaries) of the study village. These maps showing distribution of fields according to land-owning castes for the year 1884 and 2016 were compared to draw results on evolutionary relationship of field patterns with the land-owning castes.

3.2 The Study Village

A reconstruction of field landscape showing fields occupied by different castes is attempted for village Dhanowali located in tehsil and district of Jalandhar in Punjab (Fig.1).

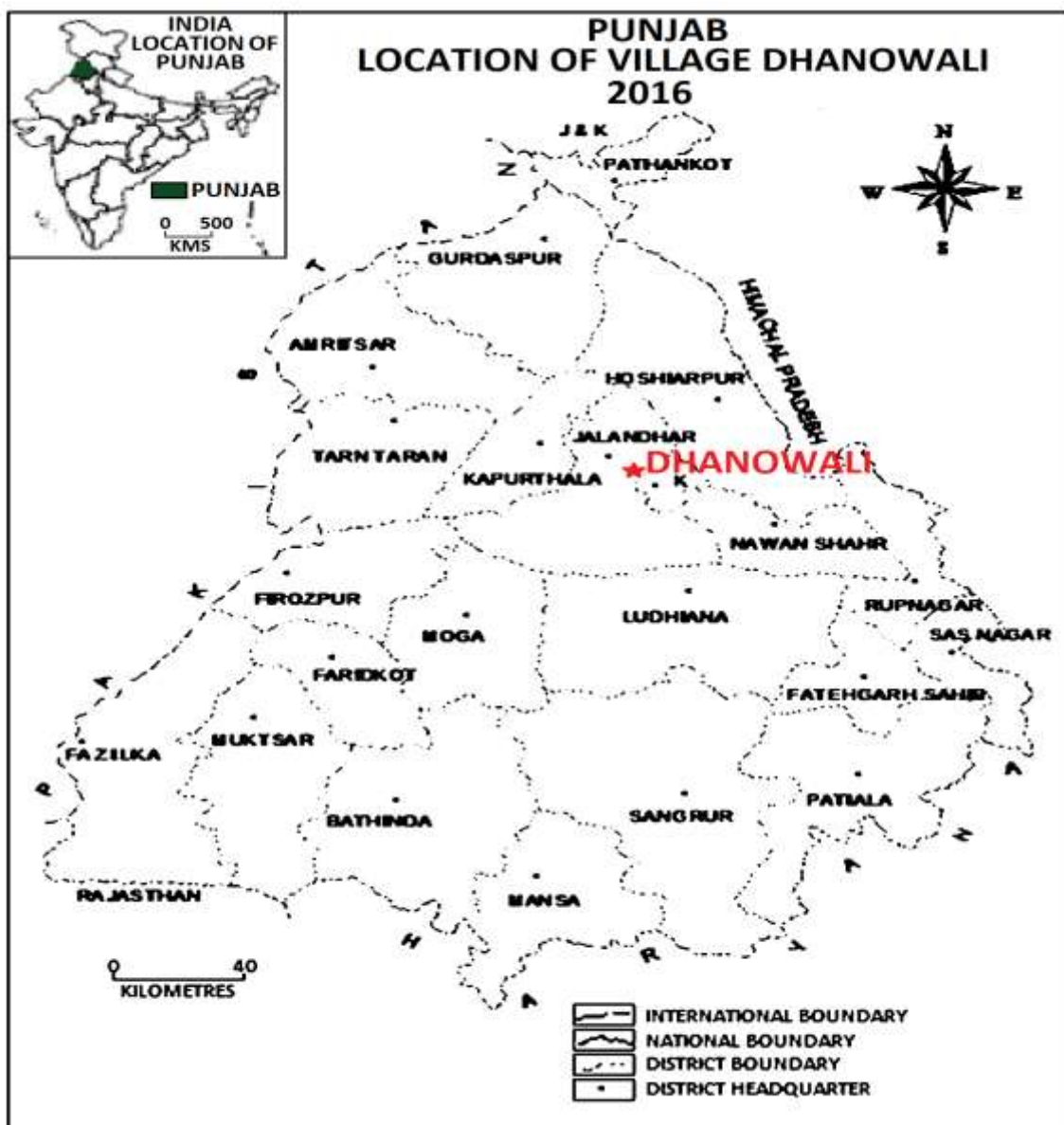


Fig. 1

It is situated at the periphery of Jalandhar city along the G. T. road (NH-1) from Jalandhar to Phagwara. The village has an area of 210 hectares. The soil is alluvial ranging from clay loam to sand. It experiences cold winters and rainy summers. The village was founded by a *Jat Randhawa* high caste family who came here from Amritsar district to settle in the study village. Since then, they are the main land-owners and dominant caste engaged in agriculture in the village. Many other castes also own agricultural fields in the study village. The

people are dominantly engaged in agriculture. Different class-owners of land; owner-cultivators, tenants and agricultural labourers are found. The agricultural system is mainly commercial type. The fields are under permanent cultivation. Wheat and paddy are the main commercial crops. Two types of crops seasons *Saoni* (summer) and *Harri* (winter) are prevalent. Modern Green Revolution technology is intensively used in the study village. People belonging to Sikh and Hindu religious faiths with different caste backgrounds are dominantly engaged in agriculture. Due to more pressure of land owners,



average per-capita size of land holding is less than one *killa* (0.4047 hectare).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Field Patterns and Land-Owning Castes in 1884

Land-owning castes have influenced the field patterns. The amount of land owned by different caste groups display different field patterns. In general, fields and land holdings of high castes are larger than those of the lower castes. The study village was first inhabited by a family of *Jat Randhawa* caste (*Jat* is a caste and *Randhawa* is a clan) who came here from Amritsar district of Punjab in mid seventeenth century as per the genealogical history of the village. At that time it was a uni-religious, uni-caste and uni-clan settlement. The village territory was divided into two *pattis* (directions), *patti* Diwani and *patti* Roorewali after the names of the original settlers belonging to *Jat*

Randhawa caste. The land near the *abadi-deh* (settlement) was brought first under cultivation due to its better productivity and the relative nearness by the *Jat Randhawas*. The prime land and fields situated near the *abadi-deh* (settlement) were owned exclusively by the *Jat Randhawas* in the subsequent stages also. Later on due to abundance of land and for better organization of agricultural landscape in other parts of the village territory and for caste solidarity, *Jat Randhawas* the original land owners offered some of their fields and vacant lands to the people belonging to other *gotras* (clans) of their own caste such as *Nagra* (a *gotra* of *Jat* caste) and *Seikhon* (a *gotra* of *Jat* caste) from their relative families. The left over surplus land was offered to people from other castes like *Khatri*, *Sunnar* (Goldsmith) and *Tarkhan* (Carpenter) to settle in the village and practise agriculture on these fields (Fig 2).

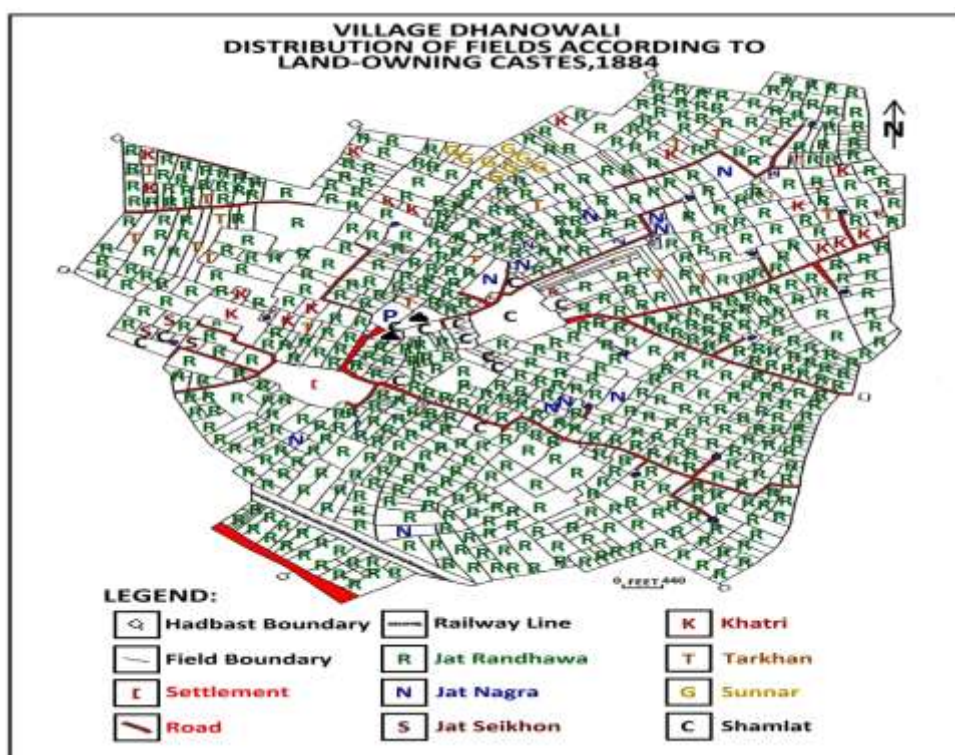


Fig. 2



People from low castes were invited to settle in the village and were employed as agricultural labour. They were not given cultivated land. *Jat Randhawa* remained the dominant land-owning castes having more than 90 per cent of the total cultivated fields and the cultivated area in 1884 field map. The fields and holdings owned by them were larger and regular than other castes. The fields belonging to people of high castes were located in the better land types with availability of *chah* (well) irrigation facilities. The fields of *Jat Randhawa* were also found intermingled with other castes in the village territory. The precious fields around the *abadi-deh*

(settlement) were owned by the people belonging to *Jat Randhawa* caste. The fields of other castes were distributed away from the *abadi-deh* (settlement) in poor land types usually without irrigation facilities. The fields of other castes were mostly scattered in different parts of the village territory in the form of small land holdings.

4.2 Existing Field Patterns and Land-Owning Castes in 2016

At present in 2016, *Jat Randhawa* continues to be the dominant land-owning caste. They have more than 93 per cent of the total cultivated fields and of the total cultivated area in their possession (Fig. 3).

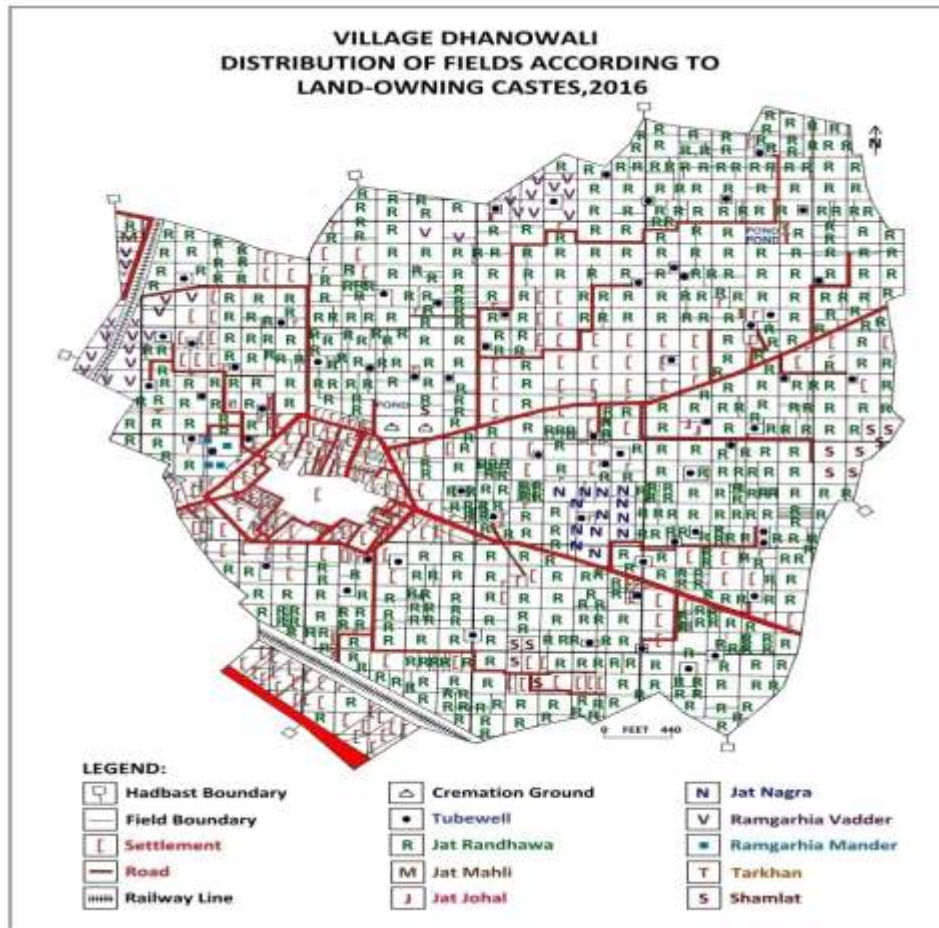


Fig.3



Their fields are large and regular rectangular. The fields and holdings of other existing castes belonging to *JatNagra* (a *gotra* of *Jat* caste), *Jat Johal* (a *gotra* of *Jat* caste), *Jat Mahli* (a *gotra* of *Jat* caste), *Ramgarhia Vadder* (a *gotra* of ironsmith caste), *Ramgarhia Mander* (a *gotra* of ironsmith caste) and *Tarkhan* (carpenter) are relatively small. *Khatri* and *Sunnar* (Goldsmith) castes who were having fields and land holdings in the 1884 field map do not have any field in the existing 2016 field map of the village. Their fields are now occupied by the people of other castes like *Ramgarhia Vadder* and *Ramgarhia Mander* backward classes castes. It is interesting to note that *Jats* are more attached to their agricultural fields than any other caste both in 1884 and 2016 field maps. It is observed in the study area that *Jats* consider agricultural field as their mother and therefore they always avoid selling agricultural land, whereas land is a symbol of power to a *Rajput*. A *Gujar* is not seriously attached to the land as he is engaged in the activity of transhumance. The holdings of other castes are small and are intermingled with the holdings of *Jat Randhawas*. The fields of other castes are distributed more near the village boundary. No difference is found in terms of shape of the fields, source of irrigation, crops grown and level of farm mechanisation of fields belonging to different castes after the adoption of consolidation of land holdings and Green Revolution technology. The low castes do not own cultivated land even in 2016 field map of the village. They have their own houses in the *abadi-deh* (settlement) and provide labour in farming practices of other castes. The role of castes is slowly fading, as the economic status of the farmer, rather than his caste now matters more.

V.CONCLUSION

The land owned by different castes display different field patterns. The people of high castes like *Jat Randhawas* have big land holdings with large and rectangular fields situated in the prime land type areas both close to the *abadi-deh* (settlement) and other parts of the village territory both in 1886 and existing 2016 field maps of the study village. The village is known as '*Randhawya da pind*' (village belonging to *Jat Randhawa* caste) as majority of the land of the village Dhanowali is owned by them. Similarly many villages in Punjab are known by the caste of the land owners. The fields and holdings of other castes in the village are smaller and found

more near the village boundary in the inferior land type areas. The low castes do not own cultivated land. *Jat* is the dominant land-owning caste in the village like many of the other villages in the state of Punjab. The economic conditions of different land-owning castes have a great bearing on field patterns. The rich farmers belonging to all castes have big land holdings, large and regular rectangular fields and practise mechanised farming. The holdings and fields of poor farmers are small irrespective of their castes.

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