

## **AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN DERA GHAZI KHAN DISTRICT**

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### **Abstract**

*In electoral politics of rural western Punjab, people for the pursuit of their interests strategically gather in their biraderi (extended family group), and then become the part of village level vote bloc under the leadership of some influential persons. Vote bloc leaders then play the role of a broker patron and deals with the politicians or candidates who are comprised of landed elite with background of Tumandars (tribal chiefs) and Sajjada nashins (custodians of shrines) for private or public goods in lieu of their electoral support. Sometimes biraderi (extended family) leaders who are normally economically well-off within the kin group themselves directly bargain with the politicians. The politicians, during the time of elections, realizing the emerging national political scenario and the political party expected to come in power, try to get its party ticket to contest the election. If they for any reason fail to get ticket from that party, they contest election as independent candidates so that after winning the election they could join the party in power. They always want to remain in power so that they could cater the demands of their supporters by giving them political patronage failing which would lose their political support that might end their political career. This is the case with the politicians contesting elections from this constituency of the area under research at both levels of provincial and national assembly seats. In this way, it has been explored that through these social and economic tools of vote bloc, biraderism and patronage, the ideological, policy oriented, horizontal class based politics is kept away and bar to emerge.*

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**Key Words:** Landed Elite, *Tumandars*, *Sajjada nashins*, Patronage, *Biraderi* networks, Vote Bloc, Broker Patrons, Political Ideology, Socio-Economic Stratification, Institutional bargain

### **Introduction**

Punjab formally came under British rule after the annexation of 1849 to colonial India. After annexation, a Board of Administration (BoA) consisting of three members was formed to run the affairs of the province. Among the three members of the BoA, two were brothers - John and Henry Lawrence. Henry was appointed as in charge of the political affairs of the province while John was appointed as in charge of the revenue administration of the province. In pursuance of colonial objectives in Punjab, John and Henry had different stances on the issue of land rights in Punjab. John was in favour of giving property rights to occupancy tenants. In this way the later would have become peasant proprietors. On the other hand Henry was supporting the idea that the traditional landed aristocracy of the Punjab must be retained. Finally the idea of the John Lawrence to be given the proprietary rights to the occupancy tenants was accepted by the British high ups.

In 1857, just eight years after the annexation of Punjab, war of independence started. This struggle was led by the peasant proprietors, while the landed elite of Punjab supported the administration. The events of 1857 prompted the colonial administration to strengthen the traditional aristocracy in the rural areas to maintain their control over the country side population. So the colonial masters introduced various institutional and administrative reforms which changed Punjab from being a land of peasant proprietors to landlords dominated province.

Other than this land control policy, the British also introduced further institutional and administrative reforms in Punjab. Under these reforms the traditional landed aristocracy was also given different administrative powers. So in this way,

the beneficiaries of these institutional and administrative reforms were mostly *tumandars*, elders of the clans and *sajjada nashins* (custodians) of the sufi shrines. Under these reforms they were given the authority of public services in their respective areas of influence, including local administration, revenue collection, maintenance of law and order, dispute resolution and intermediation with the state. The position of these rural landed elite as 'agencies of rule' entrenched them within the administrative and political structure of the Punjab at the expense of the weak class which economically, socially and politically became dependent upon them. During the post 1857 period, in connection of the above mentioned administrative reforms the British also introduced representative institutions in India.

In Punjab, after the introduction of Legislative Councils later on Legislative Assemblies, rural landlords, in order to protect their landed interests, joined together on non-communal basis under the aegis of Punjab Unionist Party. Their main objective was to face the threat of land reforms posed by Congress and Muslim League in their political agendas. In its result, the Muslim League could not establish its popular support base in rural Punjab until 1946. When the independence was imminent, these Muslim landlords of the Punjab perceived it better to join Muslim League. So Muslim League's main support came from the Muslim minority provinces while the support it got from Muslim majority provinces was not on ideology but under its strategic interests.

So at the time of independence, in the absence of strong organizational structure of Muslim League, the newly entered rural landlords got the control of the party in Punjab. These landlords bypassing the political leadership maintained their powerful positions as local intermediaries' patrons and Muslim League never developed its disciplined popular political base in the Punjab. Furthermore, the national leadership of Muslim League was not from the mainland Pakistan. They had left their

constituencies behind in India when they migrated to Pakistan. This also contributed in organizational weaknesses of the party. To fill this leadership gap, the colonial bureaucratic legacy continued and played its role of patronage. So the Muslim League leadership had to rely upon civil-military bureaucracy for its political control. In this way the politicians of Muslim League in coalition with civil bureaucracy succeeded in keeping the appearance of parliamentary democracy in absence of holding national elections from 1947-1958. This ultimately resulted in the coup of 1958, first by president Iskandar Mirza and in less than three weeks by Commander in Chief – Ayub Khan. In this way the balance of power turned in the favour of military-bureaucratic establishment in Pakistan.

After coming into power, Ayub Khan took different measures to change the established political and economic order. He banned political parties, promulgated Electoral Bodies Disqualification Order (EBDO) which barred those politicians who were found guilty of misuse of power while they were in government. He also introduced a local government system, which was meant to provide front for his representative system. Under Ayub Khan, Pakistan witnessed high economic growth. But the fruit of this economic growth was uneven. In industrial growth, the concentration of ownership of industries went just into the hands of twenty two families in 1968. In agriculture, as a result of mechanization due to enhanced productivity where the green revolution came, at the same time large number of field labourers and tenants, artisans associated with them in rural areas had to lose their jobs. Failure of this economic growth to benefit the poor and ban on political freedoms caused unrest in the country and large scale protests started which resulted ultimate end to Ayub Khan era.

With this background, in 1970, the next national election was held in the country. During the election campaign the concepts of Islamic socialism and *Masawat-i-Muhammadi*

(equality as preached by the Prophet Muhammad) were presented. However in the campaign the “key slogan was ‘*roti, kapra, makkān*’ (bread, clothing, shelter), a secular demand for a better life for the less-privileged. In this way, in 1970 elections, in West Pakistan, and largely in Punjab, PPP got its majority. In this election, for the first time the poor emerged on the political arena with horizontal class based ties of allegiance both in urban and rural areas. They voted on ideological lines and supported PPP and its programme.

Bhutto after coming into power introduced different measures, which despite its flaws did manage to enhance the interests of the rural poor through tenancy, land and homestead reforms. Among these steps, under land reforms, land was distributed to the landless tenants and small peasants. In the same way in homestead reforms, land in the village settlements was changed into residential schemes with 5- *marla* plots. It also took steps such as reappearance of the abolishment of *begaar* (corvee labour).

The Bhutto government came to its end in 1977, by a military coup, *deta* led by General Zia-ul- Haq. After coming into power, to get political legitimacy he developed his rural constituency by appealing to rural landlords by holding non-party local bodies’ elections first in 1979 and subsequent elections were held in 1983 and 1987. He gave local bodies enormous powers to raise and spend money. In this way the two terms of 1979 and 1983 local bodies’ elections changed the political system into decentralized structure of political patronage with landed power holders. Finally the 1985 non-party based national elections facilitated to develop the culture of local body politics to the provincial and national levels. With its tendency towards the localization and personalization of politics, Zia regime reached to its end with his demise in 1988. The next eleven years period in political history of Pakistan in which twice PPP and Muslim League-N came into power is marked with over-

dependence of political parties on the individual influence and association of local power holders. During this period, the politics of “*Thana Katcheri*” (literally access to police and courts) became stronger in every election. Now as through land reforms, land fragmentation and sales, the economic powers of the landed elite was not enough to win over their political objectives. Therefore for their political objectives, they have to respond the demands of the people to get vote from their clients.

In 1999, after eleven years of civilian rule, once again General Mushrraf imposed Martial law. He followed almost same policies towards the political parties as were followed by his predecessors. He also introduced devolution plan through which he once again localized politics, and strengthened the influence of rural elite by extending them patronage at the cost of rural poor. In 2008, after the end of Musharraff rule, five years civilian rule of PPP started. During the era of PPP, it seems that the balance of power remained in the favour of the establishment. After the successful completion of five years of PPP government, PML-N again came into power in 2013. After completion of its political term Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf came into power in 2018. But after these elections, in its consistency in politics of rural west Punjab, one can easily observe patron-client relationships, expedient political alliances, exploitation of *biraderi* networks and the use of governmental institutions to do favours to friends and make new political friends.

With this background of electoral politics, this article is about the voting behaviour of the rural citizens of West Punjab in which the landed elite dominate and the poor people provide them continued support.

### ***Biraderism, Vote Bloc and Patronage: The Socio-Economic Determinants of Voting Behaviour***

In social organization of the rural Punjab family constitutes the basic unit. The next to family in social

organization is *biraderi*. In its common concept, as a descent group, “*Biraderi* includes in principal all those between whom actual links of common descent can be traced in paternal line, regardless of the number of generations that have elapsed.” (Alavi, 1995, p. 5). The concept of *biradri* is not very precise and can be used to describe other relationships and affiliations like different occupational groups in rural areas (Alavi, 1995). In this context, *quoms* and *biraderis* are status groups which broadly refer to the position of a given class in rural hierarchy, based on occupational castes.

The concept of *biraderi* provides the most significant value and expression of social organization in rural Punjab. It has political and economic functions. Economic resources and social status available to dominant *biraderis* allow them to use these means of informal organization to deal with the state and achieve common objectives. The effectiveness and power of the *biraderi* which is based upon economic power and social status, determine the unity and cohesion among the members of the *biraderi*.

### **Vote Bloc**

Bailey (as cited in Martin, 2009) defines “faction” as “a group of persons without a common ideology as a basis for co-operation and recruited by a leader with whom they have a transactional relationship” (Martin, 2009, p. 17). Nicholas points out those factions are conflict groups for the control over human or material resources. They organize in political relations and have no function outside the politics (Nicholas, 1968, p. 23). They are managed by local political influentials. Through vote blocs, these political influentials act as brokers or intermediaries between the voters and the candidates to makes collective electoral decisions. The vote bloc members or its leaders may show their affiliation with any political party but they are not organized by them.

### **Patronage**

Scott defined patron-client relationship as "... an instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socio economic status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client) who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron" (Scott, 1972, p. 92). A change came from traditional patron usually the big landowners with the emergence of other people with outside connections with intermediate social status. They assume the function of broker patron in this political system. Scott (1972) presented this nature of relationship as "broker," "middleman" "serving as an intermediary to arrange an exchange or transfer between two parties who are not in direct contact" (Scott, 1972, p. 95). According to Powell (1970) these patrons act as "gatekeepers" to contact state officials and politicians (Powell, 1970, p. 413). Kenny (1960) writes that these "gatekeepers" "largely dominate the paths linking the local infrastructure of the village to superstructure of the outside urban world" (Kenny, 1960, p. 18). In this way, these patrons evolve their relations with the bureaucrats and politicians and help their clients to facilitate them.

### **Methodology**

This research about the electoral politics and domination of landed elite and the voting behavior of the people of West Punjab was conducted in a village Jhok Bodo as a part of Ph.D. research project for which the researcher spent almost two years time in the village. So in this research, the main data is collected through qualitative analysis based on participant observation. In this research structured and unstructured interviews of the key respondents, formal and informal discussions with the villagers, have been main sources of information.

### Social Structure of the Village

The village Jhok Bodo is at 25 kilometres towards South West from tehsil town Taunsa Sharif. The inhabitants of the village are divided into two main *quoms* – *zamindars* (landowners) and the *kammis* (artisans). Almost 85% of the village population is comprised of *zamindar quom*, *Qaisrani*, a tribe of the Baloches. While the 15% of the population is comprised of *kammi quom*.<sup>2</sup> In the village, both *zamindar* and *kammi quoms* are further divided into different *biraderis*. The division of *zamindar Qaisrani quom* into further *biraderis* is – *Malikaan-i-deh*, the initial settlers of the village land owners - Village Proprietary Body<sup>3</sup>*biraderis* and the later on coming - *Sakinaan -i- deh*, landless tenant *biraderis*. As there is only Baloch Qaisrani *zamindar quom* living in the village, so the different extended families form groups called themselves *biraderis*. The landowning village proprietary body consists of twelve *biraderis*. They form nearly 70% of the total population of the village. The landless tenant *biraderis* almost form 15% of the village population. While the other 15% of the population is consisted of four *kammi* (artisan) *biraderis* in the village. These artisan *biraderis* consists of *Moachi* (shoe maker), *Pawli* (weaver), *tarkhhan* (carpententer) and *jatt* (camel drivers). The landless tenant cultivators and artisans collectively form the 30% of the village population. They are almost equal in number. The population of the village comprises approximately 6,000 people.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Researcher's own calculation through structured interviews conducted during the stay in the village.

<sup>3</sup> The British, at the time of settlement, for the purpose of village administration, divided the village inhabitants into two categories – *Maalikaan-deh* (Village Proprietary Body) and *Sakinaan-deh* (Village Residents). For detail see (Douie, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> This calculation was made through household survey which was conducted through the people available at that time.

### **Politics of the Village**

The politics of the village is based on vote bloc. There are two major vote blocs in the village. These vote blocs are led by two big landowners and rich men of the *zamindar quom* of the village. The first vote bloc is led by Haji Latif Ghazi. He is in his late forties. He continuing the legacy of his father by leading his Ghazi *biraderi* started taking part in village politics. He developed his links with police and local administration. By his socio-economic position, he also started taking part in village level conflict resolution system. He also started actively taking part in village level access to state resources. So he has developed his reputation as an intermediary between the villagers and political elite of the area and the administration.

The second vote bloc is led by Dr. Riaz. He is in his late forties. He is politically active for the last almost twenty years. His *biraderi*, had been politically active from the beginning of the politics of the village. In general as well as in local government elections in the village, his *biraderi* remained at the top in political realm. He attends social gatherings like marriage ceremonies as well as funeral prayers of the villagers. Dr. Riaz is in good terms with Sardar Meer Badshah Qaisrani.

### **Landowning (Zamindar) Biraderis and Politics**

In the village, on the basis of the socio-economic position, landowning *biraderis* can be further divided into two groups. These are rich and middle income *biraderis*. There are four rich and eight middle income *zamindar biraderis*.

### **Rich Zamindar Biraderis**

Following is the description of voting behavior of a rich *zamindar biraderi* randomly selected among the four rich *zamindar biraderis* of the village.

### **Ghazi Biraderi**

This *biraderi* is comprised of almost thirty household and two hundred and twenty five persons. This *biraderi* is part of *Bhaddani* section of the Qaisrani tribe. They are among the village proprietary body *biraderi*. This *biraderi* is relatively small in number but economically very strong in the village. Most of the people of this *biraderi* are associated with business at tehsil town Taunsa. They are mostly living in Taunsa. They have huge and spacious beautifully constructed houses in the village. Many families of this *biraderi* have their motor cars. They with their additional income bought huge lands in the village and canal irrigated area of the nearby villages. Haji Muhammad Hussain Ghazi of this *biraderi* is the richest person of the village. His son Haji Latif Ghazi (as mentioned above) is *Nazim* Union Council and leader of one of the two main vote bloc of the village. He has good relations with the local landed elite of either tribal or religious background of the area. He has strong following of the members of different village land owning and landless *biraderis* along with his own *biraderi* members. So this kin group as core of his vote bloc in village politics works under his leadership.

### **Middle income Zamindar Biraderis**

In the village as mentioned above, there are twelve middle income *zamindar biraderis*. For the purpose of analysis of voting behavior of these *biraderis* through random sampling, a middle income *zamindar biraderi* was selected and following is the description of the voting behavior of that *biraderi*.

### **Mohli Biraderi**

This *biraderi* is comprised of almost thirty five households. Their population is comprised of nearly three hundred people. This *biraderi* is among the financially middle income landowning *biraderis* of the village. Although they have their considerable agricultural lands but most of the lands are in

hill torrent irrigated area of the village. These lands are not as such productive. Some people among this *biraderi*, in joint ventures have installed two electricity run tube wells to irrigate their lands. A few members of this *biraderi* are serving in different middle level jobs in government departments. A few members of this *biraderi* are also running their small businesses.

As the family of Haji Latif Ghazi is the biggest landowning family of the village. They are also running different agriculture related businesses like two tractors' show rooms, spare parts business, cotton ginning factory, dairy farm. The family of Haji Latif also runs five electricity tube wells to irrigate their lands. They remain in contact with farmers of the village and the area. Normally the cultivators have to face a lot of problems. Those who have their electricity run tube wells almost have to face different problems. Sometimes shortage of electricity in the form of load management, over charging of bills and other related issues. Sometimes they have to face issues related with lack of money for pesticides, seeds, fertilizers. In all these issues, they either have to contact with brokers to get money on high interest rates or to get support from their friends and families. As this *biraderi* is financially not sound, so mostly they have to face different problems. As most of the members of this family are associated with agriculture farming, they normally have to get help in different matters related to their fields. So in this way, they support Haji Latif Ghazi in his politics.

As has been already mentioned that one serious issue of the village is shortage of electricity voltage. In some *mohallas* (localities) of the village, there was more electricity load on a transformer. With this issue it becomes virtually impossible for the electric appliances to work. One such issue was with the *mohalla* (locality) of Mohli *biraderi*. During my field work, on the suggestion of Haji Latif Ghazi, this *biraderi* was provided a transformer from the development funds of the MNA Sardar Amjad Farooq Khosa. In an interview with Muhammad Afzal

Mohli, in his mid sixties about the voting behavior of his *biraderi* he told that, “ the politicians in the days of elections comes to us and makes promises but they after getting the votes respond only to those people who are well of and remain in contact with them. As we are in good terms with Haji Latif and cannot deny him. So realizing the nature of politics, we normally give vote to that candidate whom Haji Latif supports.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Voting Behaviour of tenant *Biraderis* of the village**

There are five tenant *biraderis* in the village. Despite the economic change and in its result, the elimination of economic dependence, most of the members of tenant *biraderis* because of insufficiency of economic resources, less education and lack of skills have to turn towards daily wage labour or the field labour. In this way, with this economic development, by losing their means of earning they turned from bad to worst economic position. As a representative of voting behavior of this group, following is the description of a tenant *biraderi* of the village selected through random sampling.

#### ***Kasai Biraderi***

This *biraderi* is comprised of almost twenty households and one hundred and fifty persons. As they are economically poor and in their dealings with the government officials like making of National Identity Cards, correction of electricity bills etc, they have to rely upon the members of the rich *zamindar biraderis*. Those members of the *biraderi* who are in government services they are not in effective positions to develop their own links in administration. So this *biraderi* is less active in politics. The members of this *biraderi* normally in elections divide their support according to the situation. As the members of this *biraderi* live in southern half of the village and because of their

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<sup>5</sup> Afzal Mohli, March 17, 2015.

closeness of their *mohalla* (residential locality) to the *mohalla* of Ghazi *biraderi* normally become part of the vote bloc of Haji Latif Ghazi. They also contact him in case of their problems related to public services. Some members of this *biraderi* because of their relations to other *biraderis* support them in their decision to become part of any vote bloc at the time of elections.

### ***Tarkhan (Carpenter) Biraderi***

There are four artisan *biraderis* in the village. The demographic profile of these *biraderis* is as follows:

The carpenter *biraderi* is consisted of almost twenty households. Their population is comprised of nearly one hundred and fifty people. They are related to each other and are descendants of a same ancestor who came to the village from eastern riverine area of the Indus at the initial settlement time of the village. They have their other *biraderi* members living in different nearby villages. They are related to them with marriages. They have no marital relations with other *biraderis* of the village. They are living in three different sides of the village. Three families are living in north western side of the village in the *mohalla* (vicinity) of Kamalwalai *biraderi*. They have their interaction with the neighbouring families of that *biraderi*. They normally attend the *visakh* (men's place) of that *biraderi* at night for gossip. Six families are living in centre north of the village in the *mohalla* (vicinity) of Hassani *biraderi*. They have their interaction with their neighbouring families. They attend the *visakh* (men' place) of that *biraderi*. They participate in the *khushi* and *ghammi* (joys and sorrows) of that *biraderi*. They also say their prayer in the mosque of that *biraderi*. The other three families are living in south east of the village. They are living in the neighbourhood of Lashkariwalai *biraderi*. They attend their *baithhak* for gossip. They also participate in the joys and sorrows of that *biraderi*. They say the prayer in the mosque of their *mohalla*. The members of carpenter *biraderi* are among the least

educated people of the village. They are financially independent. In their voting decision, normally they divide themselves and support the electoral bloc dominant in the *mohalla* (locality) with whom they live. So due to these constraints they have to cast their votes in accordance with the will of their patrons.

### **Conclusion**

In this research it has been found that new elite have emerged in rural areas with which political leadership having background of landed elite either *tumandars* or *sajjada nashins*, tends to establish personalized links. This stratum represents a new type of political operators who act as intermediaries between politicians and the public; deliver the votes to the former and provide somewhat diffuse security to the later. This network of personalized relationships keeps the needs and aspirations from being articulated in the form of issues. This type of political system based on patronage suits to the rural landed elite of Pakistan. They get their political support from their local influence. They do not want to come under the discipline of political parties.

The findings of this research also coincides with the findings of Mohmand who did her research in central Punjab that “majority of voters participate in vote blocs because of either a negotiated relationship that enables them to access public services and other material benefits or as a form of collective action in which they can act together with other members of their family or kin group to improve their material circumstances. Any given vote bloc can, therefore, be both a vertical network of patrons and clients, or a horizontal network of social solidarity and collective action. They were very rarely expression of dependence ” (Mohmand, 2011, p. 170).

So in this context, the challenge for democratic system in Pakistan is to turn the system towards party-based organization. This can be achieved through two means. According to one way

the state should deliver its services universally. The second way is to turn the system towards real democracy. This can be achieved through the mobilization of subordinate classes by a political party committed to change is necessary.

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