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The Caste Barriers to Economic Development in Pakistan

The paper aims to discuss the root causes and factors that have promoted the Caste System and thus affected the economic condition of a person due to being born in this birth-ascribed status. The paper will explain how the practices such as kinship and endogamy, that have existed in our culture for centuries and still exist, have strengthened this Caste (cum Class System of subcontinent) system in Pakistan. Finally the paper will also suggest how the society can change and leave the Caste System through awareness and policy making on the part of the government which would ultimately give an equal opportunity to every person in society. The Quaid-e-Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah's speech has to be the starting point for the research upon the topic being proposed in the essay. M Ali Jinnah in his speech in Lahore on 30th October 1947 stated: "Remember that the scrupulous maintenance and enforcement of law and order are the prerequisites of all progress. The tenets of Islam enjoin on every Mussalman to give protection to his neighbors and to the minorities regardless of caste and creed." (Wolpert 2012) Caste is simply defined by Merriam Webster dictionary as 'a system of rigid social stratification characterized by hereditary status, endogamy, and social barriers sanctioned by custom, law, or religion' (2012). The word 'caste' should not be confused with 'class' as the former is a 'birth-ascribed' status, whereas on the other hand latter is a 'non birth-ascribed' status. The caste system in Pakistan is not new and has been the part of this land for centuries, even before its birth. This social stratification was never part of Islam as a religion instead it existed only due to the continuous influence of

subcontinent's customs and culture that existed during that time and even before, which is very well stated by Yoginder Singh Sikand in 'caste in Indian Muslim Society': 'It was thus not the influence of Hinduism among a previously 'pure', 'uncontaminated' Muslim community as such, but, rather, the continued impact of Hindu beliefs and customs on the converts who still remained within a largely Hindu cultural universe and retained many of its associated beliefs and practices, that explains the continued hold of caste-related practices and assumptions among large sections of the Indian Muslim community'. (Sikand 2006) The caste structure had divided the population in Pakistan according to their traditional hereditary occupation which can be further placed into classes. The reason for placing castes into different classes is the very strong relation of caste to the nature of means of their subsistence for a person. Hence the amount of money earned has a direct relation to class a person belongs to. Thus the caste system in subcontinent is very much related to class. The caste structure is mainly divided into two class groups 'Ashrafs', the presumed noble or elites and the 'Ajlaf' the inferiors. The Ashrafs were the politically strong and have share of authority above people in a society which include castes such as the 'Jats', the people who have hereditary vast land ownerships; 'Rajputs', the pupil whose ancestors were princes at some point in time; 'Sayeds', those who have hereditary links with the Holy Prophet PBUH; etc. On the other hand the Ajlafs includes inferior castes such as 'Mautchi', those whose forefathers were Shoemakers; 'Telis', those whose ancestor were associated with the production of different kinds of Oils; 'Qamyar', the potters who made pots using earth or stones; etc. it is important to realize that all the caste are associated to some kind of occupation. It is important to recall history that <https://assignbuster.com/economic-development-in-pakistan-theology-religion-essay/>

proclaims about the people divided in these social stratifications during and before subcontinent were never allowed to choose their occupation but were bound to it by social pressures. Furthermore even if the people tried to change their situation in the past by attempting to change their professions from the ones that were considered inferior to a more so called respectable ones they were marked as the social outcasts and forced to take the same profession as their forefathers. The very historic Caste system is closely linked with the class system and thus the economic wellbeing of an individual of Pakistani society today. The Ashraf class who has all the power and economic and cultural dominance has ensured through their ancient customs, such as endogamy, that they have maintained their dominance over Ajlaf to this very day. Karl Marx's quote ' India has no history' (Marx 1853) rightly identifies the fact about Asiatic stagnation due to existence of caste system. If seen from the eyes of Marxist who believes the history to be changes or social development of labor and class structure, the Asiatic society took a stand still. The cultural norms that surpass religion were so strong that it took centuries to weaken them. Today in the modern developing subcontinent, as a result of colonial rule, a third class which is the ' Working Class' or ' Salariat' has emerged. The working class mainly includes the educated Ashrafs and very few Ajlaf who actually are wage earners. They neither are oppressed into doing the same professions as their fore fathers nor do they have enough stakes in societal authority to take decisions that would affect the life of others. To understand why the caste structure exists to this very day in Pakistan we first have to understand that it had nothing to do with religion, to set the context straight and invalidate a general perception, but is related with the intensions of the noted leaders

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involved in the struggle in creating Pakistan. The formation of Pakistan was never on agenda upon the formation of Muslim League in 1906. Nobody was bothered with the uplifting of Muslim Community as a whole due to vast social divide within Muslims themselves. Even notable people like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan looked upon low born people or the Ajlaf with disdain and his prejudice towards cast can be verily identified from his comments upon qualification for viceroy's legislative council during that time:" It is essential for the viceroy's council to have members of high social standing. Would our aristocracy like that a man of low caste or insignificant origin, though he may be a B A or an M A , and have the requisite ability, be placed in apposition of authority above them and have the power of making laws that affect their lives and property?"(Alvi2002). Till then this was the sentiment of most of the political elite. Any religious ideology was not only ignored but crushed as was done by Sir Raza Ali on the attempt of Shibli Nu'mani for proposing to Islamize Aligarh's syllabus. The words of Sir Raza Ali stated in Hamza Alivi's article are important to mention here as they not only give insight into the elite's retaliation against such attempts but also give essence of Muslim leagues ideology as these people were the forerunners in struggle and birth of Pakistan:' There is sometimes a conflict between reason and sentiments. But, he wrote, the conflict between reason and the sentiments that underlie Shibli's proposal is greater than such conflict about any other issue. The memory of the achievements of Cordova and Baghdad is as enticing to Muslims as her amulet (' taawiz')is to a superstitious woman who holds it close to her heart. The truth is that it is extremely difficult not to sympathize with such feelings of Muslims. But it is also true that to deny reality that is open and manifest, would also be very foolish. The proposal that is now in <https://assignbuster.com/economic-development-in-pakistan-theology-religion-essay/>

front of us (i.e., Arabic education, as proposed by Shibli HA) is, superficially, extremely appealing. However, we must not turn our faces away from reality.... The question before us is: 'What kind of education does our community want and need? In my view the kind of education that we most need is education that would be most useful in helping us to deal with the affairs of this world ...which can help the coming generations to earn their livelihood.' (Aimal Nama, p 170).' (Alvi 2002)It was not till the late 1940s when the landed class realized that subcontinent was going to get independence and the future for land owning class seemed grim as Congress was fully committed to the land reforms and for this Pandit Nehru was himself presiding over the committee. The only solution seen by the Punjabi Feudals was to hijack Muslim League and work towards a separate Pakistan that they would control. Mian Mumtaz Daulatana was first to see it and joined Muslim League in 1943 and till 1945 most of the landed magnates had joined the party too. Similar was the situation with Feudals of Sindh who also joined the party and started lobbying for an independent state, not for Islam, as the religious slogans were only used as a tool to mobilize Muslim masses, but for only the self-preservation of landed magnate. In the modern Pakistan there still exists the social stratifications of the past. Even though people know of its existence still try to ignore it as majority has realized, at least in the urban centers, that following the lead of caste structure would do them no good but instead may harm their reputation in society. This notwithstanding in the rural areas the people are still very much close to their kinship and are much more open about their biases towards other castes. The society has kept hold of this tradition due to its norms which are still being practiced openly or discretely. All of this division is being carried

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forward for the sole purpose of economic dominance and prolongation of higher castes hereditary rule. The first tradition that aids in survival of caste system is through the sacred institution of marriage, by the practice of endogamy. It is not much different from the marriage in the same class that was practiced in the past by the occident. In the orient a Jat, mostly landowning caste, marrying another Jat is a similar example. The probability of both belonging to a same family is high or even if not this then the culture of marriage within same caste keeps the majority landholding in the hands of a certain hereditary lineage. As the findings of the study on consanguineous marriages in Pakistan suggests that most of the women, approximately 61%, are married to the first or second cousins because of the sole fact that the wealth of an individual if not kept by the same person at least remains in the same family (Hanan G Jacoby and Ghazala Munsuri 2011). If the boundaries are further pushed the marriage of women has to meet the least criteria of being into the same Quom, also called caste. From the economic perspective, by this practice and special relationship with the kinship, less privileged never gets the chance to move higher as they are alienated totally from the rich hence from any monetary help and remain in the submission to the elite or the more privileged castes of the society forever. In Pakistan, still today, the economic and market transaction are also preferably done through kinship. To trade with castes that belong to higher class is considered respectable whereas business with lower castes is considered derogatory and if done then the bargaining power of the lower castes is very much compromised as they have to submit to the higher caste if not explicitly then implicitly. Low castes may be called by different names in different parts of the country, such as neechzaat in Punjab, Ghumlam in <https://assignbuster.com/economic-development-in-pakistan-theology-religion-essay/>

Balochistan, or badnasal in Khyber Pukhtunkha but all are maltreated or at least marginalized by the higher castes in the same way. The experience shared by Haris Gazdar in his article will give us a good enough picture of the common mentality of Pakistani elite about how much they despise the lower caste people in their society if not consciously then unconsciously: ' An urbane politician from Lahore did not intend any offence when, outraged at the state's desecration of the remains of a Baloch tribal leader killed in a military operation, he blurted out, " we don't treat even kammis like that!" No offence was taken, of course, because there was no-one to speak up for the kammi biraderi or to ask our Lahori friend how he treated his kammis.' (Gazdar 2007) This experience would give a good perspective of an elite class that to think of a marriage in castes belonging to different class groups was too far a catch but to even considering having any terms social, political or economic between these social strata is quite uncommon and bashed if found by common people. From the perspective of a lower caste member, the economic cost of living may not be high but the social cost is very high, especially for those living within or in vicinity of higher caste dominant areas, where the family settled to serve the land owning class. The lower caste people (Ajlafs) have to spend all day in submission to higher caste (ashraf), even their children have to bear social burden of belonging to the low caste. Ajlafs have to look to the higher castes for the food, clothing, roof and everything, in short for their subsistence. To make the matters worse their children too, who are made to do petty job around the house instead of receiving an education, are also made to pay for being born in derogatory caste. The discrimination is to such an extent that children of both classes are not allowed to mix. They do not sit together to eat study or even play,

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the lower caste children are tuned from their birth in this way to accept their social status and submit themselves to the privileged thus this upholds the phenomenon that Marx refers to of social stagnation, the concept of 'no history', of subcontinent. According to a research by Hanan G. Jacoby and Ghazala Mansuri who collected data from rural Pakistan to analyze the effect of caste based stigma and female seclusion upon educational opportunities. They found that enrollment of low caste children significantly drop in the high caste settlement as they are stigmatized and face high psychic costs of attending school (Hanan G Jacoby and Ghazala Munsuri 2011). Same paper mentions the lack of education's relation to constraints in economic development due to public discrimination of lower caste individuals. In context of schooling if the castes are not made public and remain a private matter then the most disadvantaged group will make the best of it and there would be tremendous increase in lower caste enrollment consequently a better Human Capital Formation and better ability to cross economic barriers. To cure the disease of Caste System present in Pakistani system first we have to look deep into the origin in this disease and ask a question. How the legitimization of caste came into being. First, after the spread of Islam out of the Arab world by the Umayyad Empire the acceptance of Islam by the different non-Arab groups, mixed with Greek and Persian cultures, where the hierarchies were already deeply entrenched, made the new acceptors of Islam somehow subordinate 'clients' or 'Mawali' that is the root acceptance of caste system in the subcontinent and later in Pakistan. Slowly the social division that was previously foreign to the Quran and Islam got incorporated into 'the corpus of writing of Islamic jurisprudence' or fiqh.

Later when 'fuqaha' or scholars of the different schools of Islamic
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Jurisprudence started to work on Kafa'a (status in matters of marriage) they instead of incorporating only the previous two standards of taqwa (faith) and Iman (faith) that were required to be enquired for marriage also included other standard that were only part of the culture but not the religion (Islam). The other standards included for Kafa'a were azadi (enslaved), maldari (economics status), peesha (economic status), ' aql (intelligence) and nasb (ethnicity)(Sikand 2006). This was the sole root for the encouragement of caste discriminatory behavior then and became the basis for the legitimization of caste system by many ' Ulemas' before and till this day in Pakistan. The paper has discussed the problems or more precisely the attitudes of the members belonging to different Castes now the paper will discuss how the situation can be improved and the society can be made more egalitarian in every sphere of their life especially within the sphere of economic development. The primary source of the problem is mistaken belief of religion Islam regarding legitimization of the Caste system and Kafa'a. First of all the Fuqahas be brought on a platform where they can discuss this issue and do this without the fear of their life. The result of this discussion would most certainly be the annihilation of the caste system in favour of the egalitarian society as the command of Allah and the Holy book of the Muslim, ' Quran', that are primary basis for Islamic debates and the other being ' Sunnah' says:' O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) most righteous of you (Surah al-Hujurat, 13).'And further the ' Sunnah'emphasizes:' Verily Allah has removed from you the stupidity of the Jahiliyya and their boasting of their

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ancestors. Whether you are god-fearing believers or wretched sinners, you are the sons of Adam, and Adam was created from dust (Sunan Abu Dawud,).’After reaching an agreement for removing this misconception the Fuqahas of all Islamic schools of thought have to stand together and make people aware through the demonstration of solidarity. They should seriously consider calling a ‘ Fatwa’, a legal opinion or decree handed down by an Islamic leader, so that the this concept is given a religious ruling and given a ‘ shariat’ legal standing, Islamic law based on Quran and teachings of Holy Prophet. In the past few Ulemas have given fatwas in this regard but were often uncalled later such as in the case of prominent Islamic scholar and Muslim United Action Committee convener Maulana Hameeduddin Auqil Hussami who called the Fatwa:" Islam has no caste system and the government's move is nothing but an attempt to divide Muslims." This was a good set by the religious leader but was later uncalled it on the basis that there was no need for these kind of fatwas upon political pressure (TwoCircles 2012). Secondly the problem of caste system should be addressed by the government through its policy. Although to expect any policy changes to take place through top bottom approach in current system would be expecting too much but it can only happen through bottom up approach, through the popular demand of the people, as many of the politician sitting in the government are from higher caste and thus class whim would never want to introduce a policy that would destroy their hegemony (Zaidi 2004). The people through mass mobilization should demand new land reforms be proposed as rightly pointed out by Yoginder Singh Sikand that caste system is being prolonged due to ‘ Feudalism of Islam’(Sikand 2006). Pakistan has had two major land reforms and other land

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related acts by the government but all of them have failed due to the half-hearted efforts at the hand of the political leaders. The Provincial Tenancy Act (1950) that failed miserably as the government failed to alleviate the problems of the farmers and the Act was only implemented in three provinces thus farmers of Baluchistan were completely deprived. Later the two land reforms, one in Ayub's era (1959 Land Reform) and other in Bhuttos's era (1972 land reform) only changed the ownership of the land. Previously the majority land was concentrated in the hands of few individuals now after the redistribution it was concentrated in the hands of few families. Although Bhutto realized that the 1972 land reforms failed or was not even near achieving the desired outcome therefore later 1977 land reform ordinance was introduced that also did not achieve much. The gravest of the mistakes were made by the Shariat courts and not by the political elite in this matter. The Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan in the Qazalbash Waqf case (Qazalbash Waqf v. Chief Land Commissioner, Punjab and others - reported as PLD 1990 SC 99) on August 10, 1989 (made effective from March 23, 1990) gave the judgment that in brief said, imposing land ceilings or restricting a person from acquiring more land is against Islamic practices and all the previous acts in this regard made were bad laws. This ruined all the previous efforts and the future aspirations of diminishing the caste divide. In my opinion the problem of vast land holding consequently caste system and ultimately unequal economic opportunity among people can be solved by direct and progressive taxation on land. When the landlords are charged for their land they will have lesser tendency to acquire more land and/or will put the idle land acquired to a good use which will not only give other deserving people an opportunity to acquire

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land but also provide job opportunities to the people and hence economic growth. The quota for different castes in government job should be devised for the wellbeing of lower caste members in society. This would incorporate them more thoroughly in every sphere of the socio-economic structure of the country until the population is made to realize that the lower caste people are no way a breed of humans with lower capacities. This may be the only pragmatic step for the defense of lower caste though not egalitarian.

Gradually castes would not matter and its structure ideally would fade away as supported by the research of Pierre L. Van Den Berghe on the caste related quotas worldwide (Berghe 1971). For the better and brighter future of Pakistan, with some immediate steps to curtail the problems due to caste structure, the government also has to look into long term measures that can be taken to improve the situation. One of the spheres in this regard that can be worked upon is education system. It is important to not only just make available education to every child in the state but to also give them the equal opportunity to make use of that education too. There should be schools everywhere in the state especially in higher caste discriminatory state where the education is given free of any kind of insecurity or biasness to all the children irrespective of the caste or economic stature. Hence the establishment of caste-concordant schools be encouraged within or away from higher caste settlements as advised by Hanan G. Jacoby and Ghazala Mansuri(Hanan G Jacoby and Ghazala Munsuri 2011). After stating a dire problem that is present in our society, is taking a form of cancer and discussing its root-causes, further giving a more difficult to implement than suggested solution it is important to highlight the need for it to be practically

implemented in the society and give a picture if the responsible stake
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holders fail to play their due role. If the people in a society are not given an equal economic opportunity then there will be people who are casted in the shadows of poverty who will feel deprived and after a certain point will indulge themselves in activities that will indeed harm not only themselves but also the other members in the society, such is the case with extremism and everyday violent unrests in Pakistan. If the political leaders cannot come together to address the problem for the sake of humanity then they should fight for their society as they themselves are part of it and they themselves will be affected too ultimately due to their negligence. In conclusion, after highlighting the presence of derogatory norms existing in our society such as endogamy and misbelieves that are sustaining those norms such as the ones related to Kafa'a, people should be made to realized that as a nation and primarily as a human being we need to shun these cultural values that are pejorative. People should care for the social environment and along with it also understand the true nature of Islam that is in line with it. The formation of Pakistan was also highlighted the sole intention to make us realize that there was a role of caste structure too in the mere establishment of Pakistan so it would not be easy for its people to get rid of it easily but steps need to be taken today to start a long journey towards a better future. The role assumed by governments and religious leaders is very important in this regard. Instead of doing what is popularly demanded by the people they have to now start taking steps that are better for their people and convince them the need for these steps. In all it is without doubt that every sane mind today is against the caste system and with will power on the part of stake holders in the society it can be ultimately eradicated.