

## **Dalit occupation of Punjabi Jutti-Makers: A study of Muktsar city of Punjab**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Punjabi jutti is one of the stylish footwear which is beautifully crafted in Northern India. Jutti symbolize the traditional footwear in its amazing designs and intricate or tricky patterns. Jutties are made from the leather material. Leather, on the one hand is decorated, the feet of the people but on the other hand, labeled its workers as untouchables. Everybody wants to wear good shoes. Wearing good shoes or jutti has enhanced the beauty of a person. But unfortunately the work of making shoes or jutti is not seen in our society with good eyesight. In fact, those who are shoe-makers get very lowest status in social hierarchy. They are related to Chamar caste, an untouchable, whose traditional occupation was removing animal carcasses, particularly those of cows and tanning the hides of these animals (Joseph Schehler, 1996). This paper deals with the socio-economic status of Punjabi Jutti makers in Punjab. The study was conducted in Muktsar city of Punjab. Muktsar is a very famous city for manufacturing of Punjabi jutti. Many changes have occurring in manufacturing activities with modernization and mechanism. The study also shows the changes and problems faced by the Jutti Makers in the modern era.

**Key Words :** Punjabi jutti, Status, Changing, Problems

### **INTRODUCTION**

Jutti is known worldwide for its unique patterns and different designs. Punjab, Rajasthan and Haryana are famous states for manufacturing Jutti at large scale. In Punjab, Muktsar, Malout, Abohar, Fazilka, Patiala cities are famous manufacturing centre of this dying art. The names of jutties are also famous on the names of cities such as Muktsari jutti, Patiala shahi jutti, Kasoori Juttietc. It is believed that jutti was also very famous in Mugal Empire because most of its designs are inspired by Mugal era. These 'pieces of art' are an inspirable part of Punjabi attire which is essentially complemented to the Indian casual wear. Jutti is known by many other names such as Khussa, Mojari, and Nagara. The Khussa and Jutties are manufactured with camel, cow or buffalo leather sole. Jutti can have closed or open heels. Gold and silver thread which is called 'tilla' in Punjabi, are used to weave embroidery

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on them. Fancy materials like, beads, pearls, colored threads, small mirrors and sea-shells are very useful in decorating Jutties. From the structural point of view, these are found to be very heavy and strong, provide the great protection to the wearer. It is crafted very beautifully by the jutti makers who are belonged to Chamar caste.

## METHODOLOGY

The universe of the study was Muktsar city of Malwa region of Punjab. 70 respondents were selected from the city. All the respondents were related to the shoe-maker families. The study was based on the primary data collection. For primary data, field survey, personal interviews, questioner and observation method were conducted. Random sampling technique was used to select the respondents in Muktsar city. The collected data was classified in form of frequency presented in tables, on the basis of respondent's views.

### Study of Muktsar city of Punjab :

Malwa region of Punjab is very famous for manufacturing of Jutti. Especially, Muktsar is a famous hub for this skillful art of jutti making. There is a huge demand of 'Muktsari jutti' in the whole world. There are also many famous 'Punjabi Boliyan' on Muktsari Jutti.

*"Lai de ve jutti mainu, Muktsari kadai wali,  
Pairan wich mere channa, jachugi payi bahali"*

Jutti manufacturing business was started at very small scale in Muktsar. In 1950s, near about 1000 of jutti makers families were migrated from Rajasthan to Muktsar. The jutti makers are known as 'Karigars'. The most of the jutti shops are situated in Main Market which is called 'Bhida Bazaar' in Muktsar. Not only males but females are also involved in jutti making process. The jutti is handcrafted by the ladies and shaping by the males. Karigars of jutti making are belonged to 'Ramdasi Chamar caste. At the beginning, even though this business starts slowly but gradually, this business reached the summit of progress. Along with Muktsar city, there is also a lot of impact on Punjab's economy. Apart from this, the socio-economic status of Jutti Makers has also improved. Jutties are exported from Muktsar to many Countries like America, Canada, Australia and England.

### Processing of jutti making :

Jutti has shaped in many styles in Punjab. The way to make jutti is same everywhere. Firstly raw leather is washed, and then rubbed with mustard oil. Then Karigars cut the leather and divided it into two halves; upper and sole. The upper part which is called Panna embroidered with 'tilla' and cotton thread and decorated with beads, pearls, small mirrors, shells etc. The embroidery on jutties is done by female karigars while cutting, shaping and assembling jutties are handled by male karigars. Inmaking a pair of jutti, Karigars from different communities are engaged. The process of raw hides and cut the leather is done by Chamar, coloured by Rangaars and pieces assembled and stitched by 'Mochies'.

### Dalit occupation of Ramdasi Chamar

From the beginning, the people of Chamar caste got very small place in India. Their culture, work, tradition, customs were always dishonored. M.N. Srinivas was also described

in his study of the Coorg tribe that the belief of lower section of society, the untouchables and the tribal's do not have any status as tradition. For him, Indian tradition are high caste Hindu traditions, lower caste tradition are no longer Indian tradition. The social history of Indian caste system was based on occupational activities of people. In India, caste was a closed ranked hierarchal occupational group in which one learns the capability from one generation to another. In rigid caste system, Brahmin thought that it was correct for him to be a priest, while the Chamar regarded it as his duty to cure hides and prepare shoes (Ghurye, 1950). The occupations of Dalits were vary from caste to caste i.e. one of those who work with human waste and other who work either with leather. Chamar get very lowest status in Indian caste hierarchy and considered as untouchables. It is a community of a people, who is educationally, economically and socially deprived. Not only them but their work of jutti making are also considered untouchable. Of course jutties or shoes are considered to be part of an Indian costume but those who make them not seen from the perspective of respect. There is no doubt that even today Chamar are still fighting to erase the stigma attached to their profession. The craftsmen of the Muktsar city are also considered their occupation as Dalit because their work not seen with respect in society.

#### **Problems faced by Jutti Makers :**

Punjabi jutties are now on decline. In the modern era, jutti makers are suffering from many problems by which their economic status have totally affected. 1) First, they are facing the problem of financial assistance. Due to the inflation, the price of goods and services gradually increased. This business is also stands in the line of competition. Due to the financial crises, it is not easy for the jutti makers to move toward new profession. Earlier Muktsar was the main hub of making jutti. Jutties were made at very large scale in Muktsar city. But now this business is run nearby cities such as Kotkapura, Malout, Abohar, Fazilka. By this, Karigar's income was much affected. There are near about 200-250 karigarhs working under one shopkeeper. One karigar can make only two pairs of jutties in a day. But they get only 90 to 100 rupees per pair. So it is very hard to satisfy the needs of their family members.

Second, Jutti makers are also faced many problems in buying raw material. Earlier jutti were made from camel, cow, buffalo leather sole but now lather become very expensive. It is very difficult for karigars to buy it. Now Karigars use raxin on the place of leather. Apart from this, velvet Japani, canvas, hardboards, sheet sole, leather board are used at large scale. These material are imported from Delhi.

Third, due to the competition in market system, socio-economic conditions of karigars have been much affected. Earlier the people of the whole family used to do the same work. But now members of the one family are engaged in different jobs to earn money, because it is very difficult to run the house expenses with one work.. The karigarhs of Muktsar city never allow their children to adopt this dalit trade.

Fourth, now not only Ramdasi Chamar community but people of the other castes are also adopting this business such as Arora, Khatri, jatt sikh etc. as a shopkeeper. Karigars are working under these shopkeeper on the basis of daily payment( wages).

Fifth, there are many reasons such as less profit in this business, use cheaper raw material on the place of pure leather by which durability of jutti has also gone down.

Sixth, No doubts that Punjabi Jutti has very high demand in all over the world but none of the successive government ever bothered for the implementation of special strategies to further develop the trade into a major profit making business. By this the manufacturing activities of Punjabi Jutti is slowly losing its presence and identity. In the Study of the Muktsar city 32.85% respondents were not satisfied with the efforts of the Government. No doubt that Government has removed subsidy on jutti but put VAT on the sale of Punjabi Jutti.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the study of the Muktsar city, majority of the respondents were male karigars. Table 1 shows that 60% were male and 40% were female respondents. Most of the respondents of jutti making were in the age group of 40-50. Table 2 shows that 21.42% of the respondents belonged to age group of 30-40. 35.71% were in the age group of 50-60. Majority of the jutti makers *i.e.* 42.85% were in the age group of 40-50.

Sr. No.	Sex	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Male	42	60%
2.	Female	28	40%

Sr. No.	Age	Frequency	Percentage
1.	30-40	15	21.42%
2.	40-50	30	42.85%
3.	50-60	25	35.71%

In case, of education, majority of respondents were illiterate. Table 3 shows that 44.28% jutti makers were totally illiterate. They did not even complete the study till primary. However, 27.14% were educated up to primary level and 21.42% up to middle level. Table shows that only 7.14% were educated up to higher level.

Sr. No.	Education	Frequency	Percentage
1.	High level	5	7.14%
2.	Middle level	15	21.42%
3.	Primary level	19	27.14%
4.	Illiterate	31	44.28%

On the basis of the caste, Table 4 shows that 87.14% karigars and shopkeepers were related to Ramdasi Chamar caste, however 7.14% were related to jatt Sikh and only 5.71% were belonged to other castes.

Sr. No.	Caste	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Ramdasi Chamar	61	87.14%
2.	Jatt Sikh	5	7.14%
3.	Other Castes	4	5.71%

Not only male members but other family member of jutti makers' families was also involved in this business. Table 5 shows that 38.57% families were those whose 2 to 4 members were engaged in jutti making process. There were 24.28% families whose 4 to 6 members and 27.14% families, whose 6 to 8 members involved in this business. Only 7.14% families had 8 to 10 members involved in such business. But the least number of joint families *i.e.* only 2.85% were those whose above 10 family members involved in jutti making business.

Sr. No.	Family members	Frequency	Percentage
1.	2-4	27	38.57%
2.	4-6	17	24.28%
3.	6-8	19	27.14%
4.	8-10	05	7.14%
5.	10- above	02	2.85%

In present context, a lot of changes can be seen in jutti making business. By which jutti makers' income has also had a lot of impact. Table 6 shows that majority of karigarhs of jutti making *i.e.* 55.71% were earned not more than 2000 to 4000 per month. 28.57% karigarhs had earned 4000 to 6000 per month. 12.85% karigarhs earned 6000 to 8000 per month only 2.85% karigarhs were earned above 8000 per month. The effect of the mechanical era can also be seen on this. But there are many reasons that influenced the jutti making business. Table 7 shows that 25.71% jutti makers agreed with the reason of less demands of jutties because now a day jutti is not used as a daily wear. 45.71% argued that the competition increased day by day in this field however 28.57% were argued that due to inflation, price of goods and service increased. It is not easy to purchase expensive raw material like leather.

Sr. No.	Income	Frequency	Percentage
1.	2000-4000	39	55.71%
2.	4000-6000	20	28.57%
3.	6000-8000	9	12.85%
4.	8000- above	2	2.85%

Sr. No.	Reason	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Less demand of jutti	18	25.71%
2.	Increase competition in this field	32	45.71%
3.	Expensive raw material	20	28.57%

Table 8 shows that 34.28% respondents had started learning jutti making art from their ancestors as a family tradition in very early age, when their age was below 10. While 58.57% had started learning this art in the age between 10 to 20. Only 7.14% had started learning after 20.

**Table 8 : Distribution of population on the bases age in which respondents started learning the art of jutti making (n=70)**

Sr. No.	Age of learning art	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Below 10	24	34.28%
2.	10-20	41	58.57%
3.	Above 20	5	7.14%

The raw materials used for making jutti have also changed. Table 9 shows that only 22.85% respondents were interested to use leather in making jutti. But 27.14% were kin to use raxin on place of leather because of the high rate of Leather. 28.57% respondents were interested to use canvas. Earlier the sole of shoes were made from cow, camel and buffalos hide but now 21.42% respondents told about the use of rubbersole sheets at high level.

**Table 9 : Distribution of population according to the use of raw material (n=70)**

Sr. No.	Raw material	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Leather	16	22.85%
2.	Raxin	19	27.14%
3.	Canvas	20	28.57%
4.	Sole sheets (rubber)	15	21.42%

Due to modernization, machines taking over many of the manufacturing activities. This change can also be seen on the activities of Jutti- Makers. They are suffering from many problems. Table 10 shows that majority of the respondents i.e. 28.57% were faced financials problems due to expensive raw materials that influenced the demand of Jutti. Whereas 20% respondents were argued that now a days jutti making business has less profit margins and 18.57% also told about higher level of competition in market in this field. While 32.85% were not satisfied with the efforts of Government that are also put impact on their business.

**Suggestions:**

**Table 10 : Distribution of population according to the problems faced by Jutti Makers (n=70)**

Sr. No.	Problems	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Financial problems	20	28.57%
2.	Marketing	13	18.57%
3.	Less profit	14	20%
4.	No Govt. Support	23	32.85%

Many suggestions have been given by respondent to improve this art.

- Make the raw material easily available at low price for artisans.
- Government should make and implement some policies in order to uplift the socio-economic profile of Jutti Makers.
- Government should also remove VAT on the sale of Punjabi Jutti.
- To preserve this old art, must introduce some new ideas, techniques, designs and stitching styles.

**Conclusion :**

Along with the changing of time and technological development, there are many changes in the art of making shoes. No doubt that the styles and designs of jutties are very well liked by youngsters. There are many patrons who appreciate original craftsmanship and want to take only the finest handcrafted pieces. But still there is question mark on protecting this art. Punjabi jutti needs no machines, but it does require recognition and support of people and government at global level. One such initiative put in this occupation can save the life of this art. With the development of this occupation, the morale of artisans also develops. But still they are wishing for bright future.

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