

# Jatavs' Mobility for the New Identity, 1917 to 1942

**Ranjeet Kumar**

*Depart. Of History, University of Delhi*

## Abstract

*At the beginning of the twentieth century, a social revolution was seen all over India, where the different Dalit groups started asserting a different or a new social identity. This assertion was intended by the social upliftment and this social upliftment was intended by the caste hierarchy. Every social group of that time, especially Dalits, wanted to be an uplifted community. Charmakars, who were considered untouchable, opposed such discrimination which was based on caste hierarchy. It was the time when caste rank was decided by caste occupation. However, it was not a new caste decision concept, rather it has been taking its shape since the later Vedic period. Now the caste concept become more rigid. On the other hand, other Dalit sub-groups like Jatav asserted a new social identity. They claimed a pure Kshatriya status under the caste hierarchy. They changed their occupation and renounced such work which was considered as polluting. Arya Samaj played a major role in Jatavs' mobilization. It cemented their roots for the Sanskritized Kshatriya identity. Many organizations and committees were established by the Jatav activists. The shared purpose of these Jatav organizations was to articulate a Kshatriya status, practice Hindu rituals and traditions, and maintain a pure and clean lifestyle of the Jatavs. In the transitional period of the Jatav mobility, the Jatavs' claim for the new Kshatriya identity was not accepted by the orthodox upper-caste Hindus. Therefore, the Jatav movement for the new identity turned into a separate caste identity under the enumerated caste list. Finally, they succeeded in 1942, the British parliament accepted Jatavs claim as a separate caste.*

**Keywords:** *Jatavs, New Identity, Dalits, Kshatriya, Charmakars, Sanskritization, Mobilization, Arya Samaj.*

In our social system, the importance of *the Varna* system was historically well established. At a later juncture, the caste system came to acquire more importance, and during the modern colonial setup and even later, caste became a significant marker in shaping social and political identities. We can also say that the *Varna* system of ancient Hindu society gave way gradually to a multiple caste system. The latter system over a period of time became more hierarchized which at a certain level encouraged the growth of many contradictions in the name of social order. Slowly, this caste system became so overwhelming in the Indian rural society, and also in some urban centers, that most social, organizational, and political activities got centered around this identity. Needless to say people at the lowest rungs of this social hierarchy were at the receiving end of most forms of discrimination.

Many social, religious, peasants, laborers, and national and international revolts and revolutions shaped the early twentieth social mindset. The social groups which were considered untouchable under the Hindu Varna theory, start articulating caste consciousness. Different social groups claim new social identities. It was not sudden but can be traced to the 1857 revolt. If we observe the caste consciousness in the revolt of 1857, it is clear that some groups were fighting not only for their people but also for a respectful identity. In the great revolt of 1857, the Jatavs were fighting for their new identity. It also emerges that the image of Dalit heroes who were part of this revolt continued to inspire the later Jatavs. At a different level, it resulted, at the beginning of the twentieth century in some educated Jatav elites thinking about their heroes who fought for the nation but had been largely forgotten in Indian history. The revolt of 1857 helped Dalits to find their roots in the context of a respectful identity.

Jatavs and other Dalit castes were getting inspired by their heroes who sacrificed their lives in the revolt of 1857 and subsequent events. Jatavs, at the beginning of the twentieth century, became much more conscious about their past and present identity. They were treated as untouchables, so they wanted to get rid of this condition. For this, they linked themselves with the Kshatriya clan. Many literary and religious sources were provided by the Jatavs to prove their claim. On the other hand, they started following and practicing many Vedic and Kshatriya rituals like wearing Yagyopavita (Janeu), bow and arrow on birth occasions, etc., which were being followed by orthodox Hindus.<sup>1</sup>

Jatavs wanted to establish a place equal to Kshatriya Varna in society. They tried to comprehend the basic reasons for their untouchability. They found that being Charmakar or associating with the leather work is the basic reason for their untouchability. Jatavs took note of the ideas of the Hindi novelist Premchand who hinted at three possible reasons for the persistence of untouchability, First: leather work, Second: alcohol, and Third: consuming dead animal's meat. When they identified the causes of their bad condition, they began to abandon some of these practices. First of all, they renounced eating beef and dead cattle meat. Then they stopped consuming alcohol and simultaneously they started disassociating themselves from the word- Charmakar. Jatavs did not want to be treated as Charmakars. They wanted to reform their condition within the Hindu Varna hierarchy. They created distance from the Charmakars who were considered as leather workers, and also asked their youth not to stay engaged with Charmakars and their activities.

During 1917-1924, many Jatav organizations and committees were established. Among them, the Jatav Mahasabha (founded in 1917) and the Jatav Pracharak Sangh (founded in 1924) emerged as the most significant in pushing the Jatav movement. In other words, these organizations sustained the incipient Jatavs' political and non-political movements. It was during this period that following the ideas embedded in Sanskritization, the Jatavs started tracing their historical roots to the Kshatriya Varna. Simultaneously, a large number of them were also drawn toward the Arya Samajist ideology. In a way, the growth of these organizations was a direct expression of this desire for Sanskritization or when looked at differently, these organizations pushed further the process of caste mobilization.

These disassociations from their idea about the reasons behind their untouchability led the community to imbibe the Sanskritization notions as well as follow the ideology preached by the Arya Samajists. Arya Samaj's idea was to connect people especially the lower castes with Vedic cultures. It can also be seen in its slogan "Go back to Vedas." Besides this, the Jatavs were also very much influenced by the notions of Sanskritization. Jatavs felt that these two newly found routes would enable them to establish an identity equal to the Kshatriya Varna. There is no doubt that they wanted to grow within the Hindu Varna hierarchy. To strengthen their identity of a higher place in this hierarchy, the Jatavs established many organizations. These organizations were also meant to facilitate the practice of Vedic rituals and notions of Sanskritization.

### **Disassociation from Charmakars and the term 'Charmakar'**

The classification of Jatav and Charmakar based on their differing ideology is a very interesting question to deal with. Whereas the Jatavs were bent upon to set up a new identity, the Charmakars were standing for social equality. Jatavs wanted to be uplifted and were keen to show their comfort with the upper castes, but the Charmakars, on the other hand, wanted to

<sup>1</sup> Ramnarayan Yadvendu, *Yaduvansh (Jatav Vansh) ka Aitihās*, Navyug Sahitya Niketan, Agra, 1942, pp.81-83.

reform the social structure and seek more rights to enjoy a respectable place in society. This created a situation where the Jatavs did not want to have any kind of relationship with the Charmakars based on caste identity.

It is an important question Why were Jatavs engaging in such activities which they had criticized earlier? We draw our attention to a few basic points, First, the Jatavs were observing the contemporary social mindset of Indian people where caste was central to the idea of social respectability. It was the time when caste mattered greatly in society. They wanted to get rid of the untouchable condition. Second, political motives were also an important part of their activities so that they could redress their issues. Conclusively, they wanted to uplift their community in the context of social hierarchy.

Jatavs assessed themselves as very different from Charmakars, claiming themselves to have been educators, traders, entrepreneurs, etc., whereas Charmakars were involved with leather and agricultural work. During the fieldwork, the researcher had a chance to interact with members from both communities. Some people of the Charmakar community insisted that they had always followed their ideology, and never compromised with it. Historically they were Kshatriyas, but unfortunately, they had fallen under the scourge of untouchability. They feel it is the result of a Brahminical conspiracy with the Charmakars and other Dalits. Calling their movement an effort at social upliftment, the Charmakars see Jatavs as ‘opportunists’.

Through his interactions, the researcher noticed that Charmakars complained that Jatavs did not possess their ideology and identity, and they had become part of the traditional Hindu conservatism and were blindly following Brahminical social structure. This bolsters the point that Jatavs and Charmakars are divided ideologically. This ideological separation can be observed on various other issues too, but religion, rituals, traditions, and the caste are most important parameters that separate them ideologically. Ian Duncan talks about the contradiction between Jatavs and Charmakars based on caste structure and the formation of a new identity. He explains the reasons why Jatavs distanced themselves from Charmakars and their Adi-Hindu movement.<sup>2</sup>

The separation between Jatavs and Charmakars can clearly be seen in the domain of social belief. The Jatavs wanted to uplift themselves within the Hindu social order therefore they claimed a Kshatriya identity (Yadu clan). It is interesting that Charmakars also claimed a Kshatriya identity but without renouncing the term Charmakar. If we look at the etymology of the term Charmakar, it points to leather work which in due course of time became the main cause of untouchability. Besides, Jatavs linked their genealogy with the Yadu race (Yadavs). They claimed that the word Jatav is the Apbhrashtra (or slightly distorted form) of Yadav and going further, historically, Yadavs are an ancient Kshatriya tribe. The Jatav activists and the president of Jatav Mahasabha and Jatav Youth League, Ramnarayan Yadvendu mentioned Jatavs as Yadavs. We can see that he mentioned the Jatav Youth League as the Yadav Youth League in many places in his book.<sup>3</sup> The Jatavs provided many sources and texts in support of this claim.

If we look at the Charmakars, they linked themselves with the ‘Chanvar dynasty’ which was a medieval period Kshatriya dynasty. They also provided many religious and other literary sources in their support. But, unlike Jatavs, they did not change their caste name, i.e. Charmakar. This difference in approach created an ideological divide between the two

<sup>2</sup> Ian Duncan, ‘Dalits and the Raj: The persistence of the Jatavs in the United Provinces’, *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, Volume-56, No.02, 2019, pp.132-135.

<sup>3</sup> Yadvendu, *Yaduvansh (Jatav Vansh) ka Aitihās*, pp.70-75.



communities. In contemporary times, though both communities do not clash over this issue, it continues to bear some significance as the Jatavs still do not wish to be recognized as Charmakars.

The Jatavs were not the only caste who carved an identity by distancing themselves from being Charmakars. Many smaller castes fashioned a new identity in this way. When the situation did not change by the 1920s, a very interesting incident was recorded: A small group of Kuril caste people in Kanpur told the Simon Commission that the consequences of their involvement in tanning and manufacturing leather goods were extremely bad for them. They were regarded as untouchables and were consequently mistreated. They asked the Commission for recognition as a separate caste group. They also recommended that their caste and tribe 'should be recorded as Aharwar, Kurli, Dhusia, Jatia, etc., but not Charmakar.'<sup>4</sup>

### **The Etymology of the Term Jatav and Questions about Its Authenticity**

Many sociologists and historians believe that 'Jatav' is a Sanskritized word. In the historical background of Jatavs, there were many obnoxious words in use for their social identification. However, the educated elite of the Jatav community discovered the authenticity of the Jatav word and its history. There was a myth about Jatavs. Some people said that the word 'Jatav' originated from 'Yadav', others suggested that this word was an equivalent of the word 'Jat'. There are many historical sources, mainly religious texts, social texts, literary texts, etc. in which the 'Jatav' word has been mentioned.

From ancient times to the early period, the number of regional languages grew. The Apabhramsa form of many Sanskrit words also started finding frequent use. Also, there were significant changes in the accent while using these terms. It was in this background, that it is likely that the Yadav name at some places got changed to Jatav or Jadav and became common. So, according to one set of opinions, Jatav and Jadav are the Apabhramsa of Yadav.<sup>5</sup>

Historical reference to the term Jatav comes from many literary sources. Chand Bardai's *Prithviraj Raso* (12<sup>th</sup> century) there are many instances in which the Jatav word has been clearly used. Chand Bardai discussed Aalha-Udal who fought in many wars. He described a war scene in which Aalha and Udal both brothers fought valiantly. The story of Aalha-Udal mentions many terms similar to Jatavs. In this text, there are many shlokas in which the Jatav word has been generally used as 'Jadava', 'Jadav', 'Jatavarai', 'Jatavar', etc.<sup>6</sup> The Apabhramsha of Yadav as Jatav can be read in this text. The Jadav, which is another Scheduled caste that mainly lives in Maharashtra, has also been mentioned in this text. It means the terms Jatavs, Jadavs, and even the Yadavs may have a common origin. Chand Bardai quotes Jatavs in this way: "hum yadav paari, yuddh dhaari chandel ubare". Here Yadav refers to Jatavs.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Babu Ramnarayan Yadvendu mentioned Jatavs in his notable work "*Yaduvansh ka Aitihis*". He also argued that the Jatav community had direct links with 'Yadu Vansh' or 'Yadu Clan' and the word 'Jatav' is Apabhramsha of 'Yadav'. Pt. Sundar Lal Sagar also interpreted his views about the origin of the 'Jatav' community in his book "*Jatav Jivan*". According to Pt. Sundar Lal Sagar and some other scholars, that words like 'Jatiya', 'Jatua', 'Jatave', 'Jatave', 'Jadhav', 'Jado', 'Jatav', and 'Yadav' are similar and have been used for one community Jatavs. They summarized that the use of these words has been similar but the meaning of these words reflects many different senses. He also argued that the 'Yadav' was in

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum from the Chamars (Cobblers) of Cawnpore, 1928, UP/659, OIOC.

<sup>5</sup> Yadvendu, *Yaduvansh (Jatav Vansh) Ka Aitihis*, p.70.

<sup>6</sup> Mentioned in Yadvendu's book *Yaduvansh (Jatav Vansh) ka Aitihis*, pp.70-72.

<sup>7</sup> Yadvendu mentioned these historical references in his book *Yaduvansh (Jatav Vansh) ka Aitihis*.

use first, but subsequently the use of this word as also its pronunciation changed and the Apabhramsa of Yadav, i.e. 'Jatav' came into existence. Therefore, he concluded that the Jatavs are historically Yadavs.<sup>8</sup>

The British historian J.C. Nesfield described the Jatavs' origin in his notable work "*Brief Review of caste system of North-West Provinces and Oudh*" (1885). Nesfield interpreted that the Jatavs are that branch of the Yadu race in which Krishna was born.<sup>9</sup> Another reference to the term 'Jatav' can be found in the book *Brahman Nirnay* (1911) by Chhotelal Sharma Gaud.

The word 'Jatav' is also found in some religious sources, e.g. the famous Nepali text *Lomus Ramayanar* has a reference to this word. The use of the term 'Jatav' can be seen in many places in this text. Swami Atma Ram wrote a book titled— *Gyan Samudra or The Ocean of Knowledge* around 1887, which emphasized that there could be no doubt that the Jatavs were among the Kshatriyas. Swamiji visited Agra and lived there for some time.<sup>10</sup> Thus from an early stage in the formation of the Jatav identity, it had embraced the belief that the community had descended from the Yadu clan.

### First World War and Jatavs

The Jatavs were happy with this war for many reasons. When we trace the background of this prosperity among Jatavs, we find that the First World War triggered many factors which added to it. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jatavs were trying to become socially and economically strong. The First World War provided them an opportunity to get uplifted economically.

During the war, Agra was the center of Army goods and necessary items like shoes, jackets, dresses, caps, blankets, belts, etc. These items for use by the British and the Indian soldiers in the war were made out of leather and cotton. The tenders of the goods were generally given to those who were working in leather and cotton factories. So, the benefit of the tenders was largely taken by the Jatavs of the city.<sup>11</sup> It boosted Jatavs' economic condition from poor to moderately rich. They became the owners of many leather, cotton, and shoe factories. Many 'Big men' or "Bade Admi" in the Jatav community emerged at the same time and owned such businesses which gave them a higher economic life.

These elites in the Jatav community provided new leadership to the community, worked for their political and educational upliftment, and helped them assert a new identity. Thus, the war indirectly helped push the caste-based movement among the Jatavs. Their engagement in the various political and non-political movements provided them an opportunity to establish their political ideology. There is no doubt that their political ideology was the result of their social issues. Now, they came into mainstream politics to reform their social grievances. For this political involvement, they also worked with the caste organizations to develop political consciousness among the brethren. Consequently, the Jatavs' movement received strong impetus in many regions of western Uttar Pradesh, especially in Agra post the First World War.

<sup>8</sup> Pt. Sunder Lal Sagar, *Jatav Jivan*, Shree Jatav Mahasabha, Agra, 1929. He explained the origin of the Jatavs and their gotras in his book and declared them as historically Kshatriya caste. He linked Jatavs with the Yadu clan.

<sup>9</sup> J. C. Nesfield, *Brief review of caste system of north-west provinces and Oudh*, North-Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1885.

<sup>10</sup> Yadvendu, *Yaduvansh (Jatav Vansh) ka Aitihis*, p.73; Sagar, *Jatav Jivan*; Owen Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1969, p.68; Ramnarayan Singh Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India*, Indiana University Press, 2012, p.127.

<sup>11</sup> Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability*, pp.22 and 33.

### **Jatavs and the Process of Sanskritization**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many Dalit caste groups initiated movements to assert a new identity. Many of them claimed Kshatriya status and wanted to be registered or recognized as such. To bolster their claim, they also started adopting such rituals, customs, and traditions that upper-caste Hindus performed in their daily lives. This practice of following the rituals and customs of 'greater tradition' has been referred to as Sanskritization by M.N. Srinivas. He explained "Sanskritization is a process by which a 'Low' caste Hindu, or a tribe, or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology, and the way of life in the direction of a high frequently "twice-born" caste."<sup>12</sup> Srinivas argues that it may be possible for the low caste people, in one or two generations, to rise to a higher position in the social hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism and by Sanskritizing their rituals and pantheon. Sanskritization has been noted as a feature in many messianic movements as well. So according to M. N. Srinivas, Sanskritization in short, is to 'adopt the upper caste's traditions, norms and rituals by lower caste groups to get a high caste status in the society'.<sup>13</sup>

The concept of Sanskritization recognizes the great regional mobility in the caste groups across linguistic, ethnic, and geographical boundaries. M.N. Srinivas has noted three conditions for Sanskritization, First, it is a group process and not applicable to individuals. Second, it is a process that takes many generations before it is successfully accomplished. Third, it seems to be a process that has never worked for untouchables who are below the ritual barrier of pollution.<sup>14</sup> Sanskritization provided a higher status to certain tribal groups and some other communities. It even helped in providing a separate caste identity to the Jatavs. But it only worked in the realm of cultural upliftment and did not work for their social upliftment as Jatavs were expecting initially. Therefore, in the transitional phase when Jatav realized that upper-caste Hindus were not accepting their claim as Kshatriya, they made strategic shifts by enlisting themselves as a Depressed Class.

Srinivas not only talks about Sanskritization but also Westernization. He noted that a process of Westernization began with the advent of the British in India. This involves the acceptance of Western dress, diet, manners, education, gadgets, sports, values, and so forth, though it seems to vary in detail from region to region in India. This westernization resulted in a new and secular caste system superimposed on the traditional system of India, in which the British and the new Kshatriya stood at the top while Brahmins occupied the second position, and the others stood at the base of the pyramid. What is notable here is that Westernization as well as Sanskritization is defined in cultural ways, not structural terms. So, Westernization does not imply a structural change in Indian society but is pyramidal.<sup>15</sup> Through this, the structure of the caste system was not disturbed, but only the cultural symbols and style of life identified who was at the top of the hierarchy. It was now a rather new definition of the social hierarchy where the British were at the top of this pyramid.

### **Assertion of a New Identity**

While searching for viable reasons behind the quest for a new identity, we are confronted with many questions, e.g. why did Jatavs want to gain a new identity? Why did they start separating themselves from Charmakars? Why did they adopt orthodox Hindu rituals? Why

<sup>12</sup> M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and society among the Coorgs of south India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1952,p.6.; also mentioned in Lynch's book, *The Politics of Untouchability*, p.5.

<sup>13</sup> Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability*, p.5.

<sup>14</sup> Srinivas, *Religion, and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*.

<sup>15</sup> Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability*, p.6.



did they want to be part of the same social hierarchy which was largely responsible for division based on castes and sub-castes? Why did they start Sanskritizing themselves?

The answer to some of these questions can be traced to the influence of various facets of Hinduism on a society that had, over a period of time, come to be dominated by caste-based sentiments. The formation and assertion of a new identity by the Jatavs can be largely seen in the context of a desire for social upliftment. Later, the same quest led to the infiltration of caste consciousness among Jatavs. In the Jatavs' bid to Sanskritize the group, the Arya Samaj also played a very significant role. The Jatavs were also influenced by the idea of dominance implicit in the caste-based hierarchy. They were attracted to the same ideology which had brought privileges or respectability to the upper caste Hindus. Therefore, they started claiming to be upper caste Hindus, the Kshatriya lineage, a warrior community of the traditional Hindu Varna system. Historically, Kshatriyas were known as kings, landholders, warriors, and the nobility. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jatavs have asserted a distinct identity which also meant that they refused to be referred to as Charmakars.

The characteristics of caste domination can be understood within the assumption that a high caste status brings better dominance in society and that this domination leads to more resources. Various Dharmashastras and Smritis, like that of Manu, prescribe varna-based functions in society. Resources, fame, respect, etc came with higher status in the Varna and caste hierarchy. Thus Jatavs wishing to get recognition and respect in society, started subscribing to the notion of a higher status in the caste hierarchy. Their urge to be seen as part of the Kshatriya lineage can be largely explained within this paradigm. Many literary, and religious sources and pieces of evidence were also provided in support of their claim.

Jatavs claimed Kshatriya lineage and saw themselves as descendants of the 'Yadu clan.' On the other hand, as discussed earlier, their newfound identity was driven by the urge to Sanskritize themselves and also by the concern about the conversion of Hindus raised by the Arya Samaj. As would be noted later, the Arya Samajists organized a Shuddhi campaign to reconvert to the Hindu fold those Hindus who had converted to other faiths and also reclaim those castes who were considered 'untouchables' by the orthodox Hindus. In Arya Samaj's curriculum, Shuddhi formed a significant component. Having observed the reasons underlying untouchability, they did not want to coordinate with the Charmakars at all. They wanted to create and develop their new and separate identity. They started engaging themselves with industrial work and established many industrial factories like leather factories, cotton mills, shoe factories, etc. In this social and economic reformation, both the First and the Second World Wars played a significant role in the Jatavs' upliftment by triggering their business potential and bringing huge financial benefits.

Many Jatav politicians, scholars, and social reformers emerged during the first half of the twentieth century. They played an extraordinary role in the mobilization to claim an upper caste status in society. They fought for their rights, and status and were committed to providing a respectful place to every single person in their community. This effort continued during the post-colonial time. However, Jatavs did not find an autonomous space as a separate community among the Dalits in the early twentieth century. Their emergence as a strong community is described in the words of M.P.S. Chandel: 'Jatavs of Uttar Pradesh were like Mahars of Maharashtra and Nadars of Tamilnadu.'<sup>16</sup> Chandel points out that Jatavs became more conscious of forming and setting up their new identity in the early twentieth

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<sup>16</sup> M. P. S. Chandel, *A Social Force in Politics: study of Scheduled Castes of UP*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p.51.

century. Chandel argues that since the Jatavs realized that it was impossible to carve a new identity without a noticeable movement or activity, they started engaging with some new or different political strategies.<sup>17</sup> They founded some political and social organizations to mobilize the community, and for this, they spread awareness about caste consciousness among Jatavs. They took several steps to cement their identity which they had started claiming at the beginning of the twentieth century.

First, though the Charmakars linked themselves with the Chanvar dynasty which had the Kshatriya status in the medieval period of Indian history, the Jatavs refused to be attracted to such a logic. English historian James Tod wrote a book *The History of Rajasthan*, in which he mentioned that Chamars are a warrior community and had a status similar to those of the Rajputs in the past. Since the Jatavs did not want to be identified as Charmakars this finding was not advertised much by the Jatavs. Second, they started concentrating on alternative historical facts like linkage with the Yadu clan, so the connection of the term Jatav with Yadav, which is an ancient Kshatriya tribe, was highlighted. A historian, social activist, and president of many Jatav organizations Ramnarayan Yadvenu has pointed to this trend. Many historical and religious sources have been presented by the Jatavs in support of their claim like *Lomas Ramayana*, *Gyan Samudra*, *Prithviraj Raso*, etc.

Jatavs established many political and non-political organizations to strengthen their ideology like Jatav Mahasabha (1917), Jatav Pracharak Sangh (1924), Jatav Youth League etc. The motives behind the foundation of these organizations were to articulate a new identity and to practice Vedic rituals. It was their effort to establish a connection with a glorious past that they said they had lost, unfortunately. The elite people of the Jatav community were leading such movements. They were mainly social workers, reformers, traders, and also the more educated. They started to unearth texts and references to assert a new identity, often referring to many sources that had shown Jatavs as part of the Kshatriya Varna. It was a time when every lower caste group was claiming a new identity to achieve a higher caste status. The noted sociologist M.N. Srinivas explains this trend in terms of *Sanskritization*, where any lower caste and community can claim a higher status in the social hierarchy by adopting higher castes' rituals. Jatavs were largely adopting a similar path.

Construction of historical image for invoking a respectable identity was a most highlighted feature of the Jatav politics in western Uttar Pradesh. A series of historical texts were written and published in the United Provinces in the pre-Independence period on the background of the Jatav society. U.B.S Raghuvanshi wrote *Shree Chanvar Purana (1910-1916)* while Jaishwar Mahasabha published *Suryavanshi Kshatriya (1926)*, Pt. Sunder Lal Sagar wrote *Jatav Jivan* and Ramnarayan Yadvenu wrote *Yaduvansh ka Itihas (1942)* etc. These historical texts explore Jatavs' history and underline their mobility to achieve a new and separate identity. Sagar and Yadvenu claimed Kshatriya status for the Jatavs by associating their lineage with the Yadav tribe of Lord Krishna. As we already know the fact that most of the Jatavs who were located predominantly in the western parts of Uttar Pradesh with a large presence in Meerut, Agra, Moradabad, and Badaun districts asserted Kshatriya status by claiming descent from the Yadu clan.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Chandel, *A Social Force in Politics: study of Scheduled Castes of UP*, pp.51-52.

<sup>18</sup> Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability*, p.123; G.W. Briggs, *The Chamars: The Religious Life of India*, Association Press, University of Michigan (USA), 1920, p.20.



Jatavs' objective for identification as Kshatriya was not intermarriage, rather it was primarily a demand for a dominant status and therefore, for a rank within the Hindu caste system. The crucial task then was the legitimization of this claim. By asserting that the Jatavs were the modern descendants of the Yadu clan, they claimed that they belonged to the Kshatriya Varna. Further, many similarities were also shown between Jatavs and Yadavs including identical gotras and other Kshatriya ceremonies like shooting cannons or guns at weddings and performing bow and arrow rituals at the time of birth. It became a basis of identification as Kshatriya at least to the Jatavs.<sup>19</sup> Ironically, when the Jatavs realized that the upper castes did not accept their claim of belonging to the Kshatriya Varna, they began to assert their Dalit status and started fighting for equality through political participation and conversion. This change of strategy might have been spurred by the resolute appearance of Bhimrao Ambedkar on the socio-political scene of the country.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

The beginning of the twentieth century can be seen as that rational phase where identical movements from Dalit groups were taking shape. Jatavs were also a part of this rational quest. The Jatav community which had pre-existed, came into prominence only during and after the nineteenth century. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the influence and ideology of the community also developed in some historically-defined stages. Though historically they were part of the Charmakar community, during the period of discussion and with caste mobility becoming an important social manifestation, they claimed a higher social status, adopting the Kshatriya's manners and rituals to show themselves as belonging to a higher caste. From the middle of the First World War and going up to 1924, the organizational basis of the Jatav mobilization took a concrete shape. In the fast-changing political climate of the country, the Jatavs' efforts to organize themselves had two important implications: first, the realization that it was only through strong organizations that they could both seek higher caste status and also impact the British officials and second, a sound organizational basis would be necessary for elites among them aspiring to secure a place in the reformed councils and other political bodies.

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- <sup>4</sup> *Memorandum from the Chamars (Cobblers) of Cawnpore*, 1928, UP/659, OIOC.
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- <sup>6</sup> *Mentioned in Yadvendu's book Yaduvansh (Jatav Vansh) ka Aitihas*, pp.70-72.
- <sup>7</sup> Yadvendu mentioned these historical references in his book *Yaduvansh (Jatav Vansh) ka Aitihas*.
- <sup>8</sup> Pt. Sunder Lal Sagar, *Jatav Jivan*, Shree Jatav Mahasabha, Agra, 1929. He explained the origin of the Jatavs and their gotras in his book and declared them as historically Kshatriya caste. He linked Jatavs with the Yadu clan.
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- <sup>12</sup> M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and society among the Coorgs of South India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1952,p.6.; also mentioned in Lynch's book, *The Politics of Untouchability*, p.5.
- <sup>13</sup> Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability*, p.5.
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- <sup>18</sup> Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability*, p.123; G.W. Briggs, *The Chamars: The Religious Life of India*, Association Press, University of Michigan (USA), 1920, p.20.
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