

## **LIVING ON THE MARGINS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE VALMIKI COMMUNITY IN JAMMU**

**Sonali Gupta**

Research Scholar

Department of Sociology and Social Work, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla

**Niranjna Bhandari**

Professor and Director

Centre For Religions and Civilizations, Central University of Jammu, Jammu

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Valmiki community, primarily associated with the Dalit caste, has historically been marginalized from the mainstream societal structures in India. In the Jammu region, this community represents the most marginalized social groups in various social, economic, and political spheres due to the presence of Article 370 and 35A which gives special status and citizenship rights to the permanent residents of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. This study aims to explore the systematic exclusion of the Valmikis who migrated from Punjab region to Jammu in 1957 and were confined to sanitation work only. Through qualitative research, including interviews with 50 members of the Valmiki community, the study uncovers the lived experiences of marginalization and other issues and problems faced by them in Jammu. It also explores the implications of this marginalization for social cohesion and regional development. The study highlights the need for policies that ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for the Valmiki community and urges the state and civil society to address the deep-rooted prejudices and barriers, ensuring that the Valmiki community no longer remains beyond the margins of society.

**Keywords:** Valmiki Community, Marginalization, Sanitation, Discrimination, Dalit, Jammu

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper examines the discrimination and marginalization experienced by the Valmiki community in Jammu. Marginalization remains one of the central concerns of sociology because it reflects unequal access to power, resources, opportunities and social recognition. Communities positioned at the margins of society often experience multiple forms of exclusion that extend beyond economic deprivation to include discrimination in education, employment, housing, healthcare and political participation. It is shaped by structural inequalities arising from factors such as caste, gender, ethnicity, occupation and religion (Singharoy, 2010). Marginalized groups often experience limited access to education, healthcare, employment, housing and decision making processes, resulting in persistent socio-economic disadvantages and reduced life opportunities. In the Indian context, caste has historically been one of the most significant determinants of marginalization, with communities engaged in traditionally stigmatized occupations facing generations of discrimination (Ziyauddin, 2009). Understanding marginalization is therefore essential for examining the lived experiences of disadvantaged communities and for developing policies that promote social justice, equality and inclusive development.

In India, caste has historically functioned as one of the most significant institutions shaping social stratification and unequal life chances. The Valmiki community, primarily a dalit caste, occupies a unique position within this framework of caste-based marginalization. Traditionally associated with

sanitation work, the community has historically faced untouchability, occupational stigma and social exclusion (Sharma, 1995). The experience of the Valmiki community in Jammu is particularly distinctive because of its migration history and the institutional arrangements that governed their lives for decades.

In 1957, following a sanitation workers' strike in Jammu, several Valmiki families were brought from Punjab to address the shortage of municipal sanitation workers (Nargotra, 2020). Although they settled permanently in Jammu, successive generations experienced restricted socio-economic opportunities and remained closely tied to sanitation work (Raksha, 2012). Prior to the constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir in 2019, many families faced significant barriers in accessing broader educational and government employment opportunities due to the legal framework then in force. Following the repeal of Article 370, the laws pertaining to permanent resident certificates (PRCs) were repealed and replaced on August 5, 2019, by the new domicile legislation which is a constructive step in the upliftment of the conditions of the Valmikis in Jammu (Sareen, 2019).

From a sociological perspective, the Valmiki community represents an important case for understanding the relationship between caste, occupation, identity, citizenship and social mobility. Their experience demonstrate how structural inequalities become institutionalized across generations, reproducing poverty and exclusion despite constitutional guarantees of equality. This study seeks to examine the living conditions and everyday experiences of the Valmiki community in Jammu through the lens of sociological theories of marginalization and social exclusion.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore the discrimination and marginalization experienced by the Valmikis in Jammu.
- To give suggestions and recommendations for enhancing the social inclusion of the Valmikis.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What issues did the Valmikis encounter after coming to Jammu in 1957?
- What expectations does the community have of the government and the general public?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research adopted an exploratory research design and qualitative approach to analyse the exclusion among the Valmikis. This study has been conducted in the Jammu city as the Valmikis were settled here only in few colonies namely Valmiki colony Gandhi Nagar, Dogra Hall, Resham Ghar, Preet Nagar and Bakshi Nagar. The sample for this research consists of 50 respondents from the Valmiki community and were selected using purposive sampling technique. The data was collected from both the primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected from the respondents by conducting interviews for which semi-structured interview schedule was prepared whereas the secondary data was collected from books, newspapers, research papers, articles, journals, etc.

## FIELD INSIGHTS

Since their arrival in Jammu, the families of the Valmikis were facing different forms of discrimination and exclusion which are enlisted below:

- **Ownership of Property:** Being non-permanent residents of the state, the Valmikis were not allowed to purchase any land or have any property permanently in the state. Moreover, they were not even having the documents of the allotted areas in which they were living. Over the

years, when their families enlarged, their second, third and fourth generations have built multi-storeyed structures over the small pieces of land allotted to them.

- **Education:** The children of the Valmiki community living in J&K were not granted Permanent Resident Certificates, which prevented them from enrolling in professional and technical programs like B.Ed., MBBS, BE, etc.
- **Employment:** Since their arrival in the state, the Valmiks were engaged in sanitation work only. Despite having lived in various parts of the state for the previous so many years, Valmiks were not allowed to seek for any government jobs in J&K other than sweepers since they were not granted Permanent Resident Certificates. Although their children were able to complete their education up to the graduation or university level, they were not qualified to seek for state government positions.
- **Promotions in job:** The Valmiks working as Safai-Karamcharis in the state government were not eligible for promotions since the government of Jammu and Kashmir did not acknowledge them as the permanent residents of the state.
- **Voting Rights:** Another significant consequence of the Valmiks' lack of a PRC was that their community members could only vote in the Lok Sabha elections and not in State Assembly or Municipal elections.
- **Reserved Category Benefits:** The people of the Valmiki community belong to the Scheduled Caste category in the rest of India. But, there was no mention of Valmiki community in any of the caste based survey of the erstwhile state due to which their families could not avail any such benefits.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Valmiks of Jammu and Kashmir are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty due to unemployment, a lack of property, and other economic and social impairments. The discrimination and exclusion they experience blatantly demonstrate the violation of their human rights as well as the fundamental rights granted to the Indian citizens by Articles 14, 15, 16, and 21 of the Constitution. Now that Article 35-A and the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir have been repealed and new constitutional developments have occurred in Jammu and Kashmir, the Valmiks are depending on the government of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir to provide them with justice in the near future. By virtue of the new domicile law, which was announced on March 31, 2020, they are entitled to Domicile Certificates, which will address the majority of their issues. The following recommendations have been proposed to address the challenges faced by the Valmiks:

- Most significantly, the government of Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory must conduct the official enumeration of the Valmiks which has not been done yet.
- The government must take into consideration their demand for the regularisation of their colonies and appropriate housing arrangements for their families.
- For the youth of the community, awareness programs and special recruitment campaign should be organised.

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