

## Research Scholar Information Sheet

Institute of Kashmir Studies, University of Kashmir



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Title of PhD: Understanding Exclusion: A study of “Watals” in Kashmir

Short Summary (300-400 words): A wide number of communities, who live in Kashmir, experience exclusion for instance communities like Blacksmith(khaar),Washer man (dhobi), Butcher(puj),Baker(kaandur), and Carpenter(tchaan) etc. All these communities are socio-economic as well as educationally and politically backward.Kashmiri society being itself an unprivileged, the long term development of these communities has not taken place .Among these excluded communities ,one such community is Watal community. The Watals form a minority in J&K, who live in Srinagar, Sopore, Kupwara, Kulgam, Bandipora, Tangmarg, Handwara areas of Jammu and Kashmir. In Srinagar they are mostly clustered around the foothills of Hari Parbat, a hillock in Srinagar. The community is called watals by outsiders, though they always prefer to be called as Sheikhs. Rahila, (2015). The watals have been called the gypsies of Kashmir. The watals who refrain from eating carrion , are allowed to worship in Mosques and in the religion of Islam, while on the other hand those watals who eat the flesh of dead animals are not allowed in the Islamic fold. The watals are a nomadic group, sometimes they settle down in a village, but the roving instinct is too strong, after few years, the family moves on.( Lawrence,2011). The watals are not just like the rest of the poor. They have been identified as a separate caste group in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir. The watals are disadvantaged by who they are and where they live. The onus of

defiling job nature and ill ethical position leave them at the lower rung of the social hierarchy. Educationally they are also backward, which leaves them poor, thus pushing them towards this old-aged profession, which then becomes reason of their exclusion. This knocks them out from a range of benefits and other entitlements. The individuals from the watal community are not taken into consideration for discussing important matters as if they do not constitute a part of the broader society. Also due to their ill reputation, they do not have much social recognition which becomes an obstacle in several matters of their life. The watal community also finds it difficult to get a high level job or a partner from outside their own community for marriage because of the legacy of their work. Also people do not want to share even neighbourhood with them. Thus the research undertaken will try to bring out the causes and consequences of their exclusion by finding out the present socio-economic status of the watal community.

Current Status: I am working on the fourth chapter of my thesis which is data based.