

Caste, Migration, and Modernity: A Comparative study of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: The relationship between caste, migration, and modernity has remained central to understanding social transformation in contemporary India. While modernization has expanded opportunities through education, industrialization, democratic participation, and migration, traditional institutions such as caste continue to shape patterns of social and economic life. This paper comparatively examines the historical trajectories of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh to explore how caste relations and migration have interacted with processes of modernity from the colonial period to the present. Employing a historical-sociological approach, the study draws upon District Gazetteers, Census of India reports, Statistical Abstracts, government publications, settlement reports, and oral narratives to analyse long-term structural transformations. Particular attention is given to the district-level case studies of Amritsar and Hoshiarpur of Punjab and Una of Himachal Pradesh, representing distinct yet interconnected pathways of regional development. While Punjab's modernization has largely been influenced by commercial agriculture, overseas migration, and urban expansion, Himachal Pradesh has experienced a predominantly state-led model characterized by educational development, land reforms, and internal migration. The findings suggest that modernization has not displaced caste; rather, caste has adapted to changing economic and political circumstances, producing multiple forms of regional modernity. By integrating historical evidence with comparative regional analysis, the study contributes to broader debates on social change, historical sociology, and regional development in North India.

Keywords: Caste, Migration, Modernity, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, Una

1. Introduction

The relationship between caste, migration, and modernity has occupied a central place in the study of Indian society for several decades. These three processes have profoundly shaped patterns of social mobility, economic development, political participation, and cultural change across different regions of the country. Although modernization was once expected to weaken traditional social institutions, empirical evidence

demonstrates that caste has persisted while adapting to new political, economic, and social realities (Jodhka, 2015, p. 3). Migration, meanwhile, has emerged as one of the most significant drivers of social transformation, facilitating the movement of labour, capital, ideas, and cultural practices across regional and international boundaries. Understanding how these processes interact is therefore essential for explaining the changing nature of Indian society.

Modernity in India has not followed a singular or uniform trajectory. Unlike classical Western models, where modernization was often associated with the gradual decline of traditional institutions, Indian modernization has largely involved the coexistence of continuity and change. Democratic governance, industrialization, educational expansion, constitutional reforms, and market-oriented development have transformed social structures without entirely replacing older forms of identity and hierarchy. Yogendra Singh (1973, pp. 8-15) conceptualized this process as the "modernization of tradition," arguing that traditional institutions frequently adapt to new historical circumstances rather than disappear altogether. Consequently, caste remains deeply embedded within contemporary social life, even as individuals increasingly participate in modern educational systems, labour markets, and political institutions.

Punjab and Himachal Pradesh provide a valuable comparative context for examining these transformations. Despite sharing geographical proximity, historical interactions, and several cultural characteristics, the two states have followed markedly different developmental trajectories since the colonial period. Punjab experienced extensive agrarian commercialization under British rule, followed by the Green Revolution, rapid urbanization, and one of the highest rates of international migration in India. These developments significantly transformed rural economies and expanded educational and occupational opportunities, while simultaneously reshaping caste relations through democratic politics and market expansion (Talbot, 1988, pp. 185-210; Jodhka, 2002, pp. 1813-1823).

In contrast, Himachal Pradesh has largely followed a state-led model of development. Land reforms, investments in public education, rural infrastructure, healthcare, and decentralized governance have substantially improved human development indicators across the state. Rather than large-scale overseas migration, internal migration associated with government employment, industrialization, higher education, and service-sector expansion has played a more prominent role in shaping socio-economic mobility. As a result, the experience of modernization in Himachal Pradesh differs significantly from that of Punjab while nevertheless exhibiting important similarities in the persistence and transformation of caste.

To explore these regional variations, the present study adopts a comparative historical perspective using three district-level case studies. Amritsar represents an important urban and religious centre where caste, commerce, and urbanization intersect. Hoshiarpur, located in Punjab's *Doaba* region, has historically been one of India's leading centres of international migration and diaspora formation. Una, situated along the Punjab-Himachal border, illustrates a distinctive model of modernization shaped by public investment, educational expansion, industrialization, and internal migration. Together, these districts provide a nuanced understanding of how historical processes have produced multiple pathways to modernity within North India.

This paper argues that caste, migration, and modernity should not be understood as isolated phenomena but as historically interconnected processes that have produced distinct developmental trajectories across Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. While both states have experienced significant socio-economic change since the colonial period, differences in agrarian structures, migration patterns, state policies, and historical experiences have resulted in diverse forms of modernity. Through a comparative analysis of these neighbouring regions, the study contributes to broader debates on historical sociology, regional development, and the changing dynamics of caste in contemporary India.

2. Review of Literature

The interrelationship between caste, migration, and modernity has attracted sustained scholarly attention within sociology, history, anthropology, and political science. Although each of these themes has generated a substantial body of literature, comparatively fewer studies have examined their interconnected historical evolution across neighbouring regions such as Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Existing studies have largely focused either on caste and agrarian relations in Punjab or on the developmental achievements of Himachal Pradesh, leaving significant scope for comparative historical analysis. This review examines the literature under four broad themes: caste and social transformation, migration and regional development, modernity and historical sociology, and the research gap addressed by the present study.

2.1 Caste and Social Transformation

The classical sociological literature regarded caste as one of the defining features of Indian society, characterized by hereditary occupation, endogamy, hierarchy, and ritual status. Early scholars generally perceived caste as a relatively stable institution, but post-independence research increasingly emphasized its capacity for adaptation under changing political and economic conditions. Among the most influential contributions, M. N. Srinivas introduced the concepts of *Sanskritization* and *Westernization* to explain how lower castes negotiated upward mobility through cultural adaptation and expanding educational opportunities (Srinivas, 1966, pp. 42-68). Rather than disappearing under modernization, caste adjusted to democratic institutions and changing occupational structures.

Building upon this perspective, Yogendra Singh (1973, pp. 15-39) challenged the assumption that modernization necessarily replaced traditional institutions. Instead, he argued that Indian society experienced a process of "modernization of tradition," whereby institutions such as caste, family, and religion adapted to constitutional democracy, industrialization, and educational expansion without losing their social significance. This framework remains particularly useful for understanding regional variations in social change across India.

The relationship between caste and economic inequality was further explored by Andre Bettle (1965, pp. 23-58), who demonstrated that the interaction between caste, class, and power became increasingly complex in post-independence rural India. Occupational diversification and democratic participation weakened certain traditional hierarchies while simultaneously producing new forms of inequality linked to land ownership, education, and political influence.

For Punjab, the work of Surinder S. Jodhka provides perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of caste in contemporary society. Based on extensive empirical research, Jodhka argues that although hereditary occupations and overt untouchability have declined, caste continues to influence land ownership, entrepreneurship, political mobilization, and social identity (Jodhka, 2015, pp. 45-78). His village-level studies reveal that Scheduled Castes have benefited from education, wage labour, reservation policies, and migration, yet access to productive resources remains highly unequal (Jodhka, 2002, pp. 1813-1823). These findings demonstrate that modernization has transformed rather than eliminated caste relations.

2.2 Migration and Regional Development

Migration has long been recognized as a major driver of socio-economic transformation in Punjab. Historical studies trace overseas migration from the *doaba* region, particularly districts such as Hoshiarpur and Jalandhar, to the late nineteenth century, when agrarian pressures, military recruitment, and colonial transport networks facilitated movement to Southeast Asia, East Africa, Canada, and later Europe and North America (Talbot, 1988, pp. 162-189). Darshan Singh Tatla (1999, pp. 19-37) argues that migration gradually evolved from a strategy of economic survival into a defining feature of Punjabi identity. Diaspora communities maintained strong cultural and financial connections with their native villages through remittances, philanthropy, religious institutions, and kinship networks. These transnational linkages reshaped local economies while simultaneously reinforcing regional identities.

Malcolm Darling's classic study of rural Punjab highlighted how indebtedness, land fragmentation, and demographic pressure encouraged migration during the colonial period (Darling, 1925, pp. 145-188). More recent studies have expanded this economic perspective by examining the cultural consequences of migration, including changing educational aspirations, consumption patterns, family organization, and social prestige (Judge, 2014, pp. 138-156).

In contrast, migration studies concerning Himachal Pradesh have focused predominantly on internal mobility associated with government employment, education, industrialization, tourism, and seasonal labour rather than overseas migration. Existing research suggests that state-led development and human capital formation have played a greater role in shaping socio-economic mobility than transnational migration. However, comparative analyses examining these contrasting migration regimes across Punjab and Himachal Pradesh remain relatively limited.

2.3 Modernity and Historical Sociology

The concept of modernity has generated considerable debate within Indian social science. Early modernization theories proposed that industrialization, urbanization, and education would gradually weaken traditional social institutions. Subsequent scholarship, however, has challenged this linear

interpretation by emphasizing multiple and historically contingent pathways to modernity. Nicholas B. Dirks (2001, pp. 43-78) argues that colonial governance fundamentally reshaped caste through census operations, ethnographic surveys, and administrative classification. Rather than simply preserving traditional social structures, colonial institutions redefined caste as an administrative category that continued to influence political representation and public policy after Independence.

Historical sociology offers an important analytical framework for understanding these long-term transformations. Skocpol (1984, pp. 1-4) emphasizes that contemporary social realities can only be explained through the interaction of historical institutions, political structures, and economic change. Similarly, Delanty and Isin (2003, pp. 1-18) argue that historical sociology bridges history and sociology by examining how institutions evolve over time while shaping present-day social relations. This perspective is particularly appropriate for comparing Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, where different historical experiences have produced distinct patterns of caste relations, migration, and modernization.

2.4 Research Gap

1. Most studies examine Punjab and Himachal Pradesh separately, with limited comparative analysis of their historical trajectories.
2. Existing studies largely treat caste, migration, and modernity as independent themes, rather than examining their interrelationship.
3. District-level comparative studies of Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, and Una are scarce, despite their distinct socio-economic and historical contexts.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a comparative historical-sociological approach to examine the relationship between caste, migration, and modernity in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. It draws on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include District Gazetteers, Census of India reports, District Census Handbooks, Statistical Abstracts, Economic Surveys, Settlement Reports, and other government publications, while secondary sources comprise books and research articles. The study uses Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, and Una as district-level case studies to examine regional variations in social transformation. Documentary evidence is further supported by selected oral narratives to understand changing caste relations, migration experiences, and processes of modernity. Together, these sources provide a comprehensive comparative analysis of the two states.

4. Historical Background: Colonial Legacy and Regional Transformation

The historical evolution of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh has significantly shaped their contemporary social structures, migration patterns, and developmental trajectories. Although the two states share geographical proximity and long-standing cultural interactions, their historical experiences have differed due to variations in political administration, agrarian systems, ecological conditions, and economic opportunities. These differences continue to influence the nature of caste relations, migration, and modernization in the region.

The annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849 marked the beginning of major administrative and economic changes. Colonial policies introduced new land revenue settlements, expanded irrigation, improved transport networks, and promoted commercial agriculture, particularly in the plains of Punjab. These measures increased agricultural production and integrated the region into wider markets but also reinforced existing social inequalities by concentrating land ownership among dominant agrarian communities (Talbot, 1988, pp. 52-76). Colonial records and District Gazetteers indicate that while agricultural productivity increased, many Scheduled Caste communities remained dependent on agricultural labour and other low-paid occupations (*District Gazetteers of Amritsar and Hoshiarpur*, various editions).

The colonial administration also institutionalized caste through decennial census operations and administrative classifications. Communities were systematically categorized according to caste, occupation, and religion, making caste an important administrative as well as social category. Such classifications influenced access to education, employment, and political representation during the colonial period and continued to shape social policies after Independence (Dirks, 2001, pp. 43-78).

Migration became another defining feature of Punjab's social history. From the late nineteenth century onwards, districts such as Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, and Ludhiana witnessed large-scale overseas migration to Southeast Asia, East Africa, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Initially driven by economic pressures and

employment opportunities within the British Empire, migration gradually developed into an important source of household income and social mobility. Remittances transformed village economies by supporting education, housing, and agricultural investment, while also creating transnational social networks (Darling, 1925, pp. 145-188; Tatla, 1999, pp. 19-45).

The historical trajectory of Himachal Pradesh differed considerably. Before Independence, much of the region consisted of princely states where agriculture remained largely subsistence-oriented because of mountainous terrain and fragmented landholdings. Unlike Punjab, commercial agriculture and overseas migration played a relatively limited role in the regional economy. Following the formation of Himachal Pradesh, successive governments emphasized land reforms, rural development, public education, healthcare, and road connectivity. These policies significantly improved literacy, human development, and employment opportunities, making the state an important example of state-led modernization, which also effected the districts like Una (Government of Himachal Pradesh, *Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh*, 2023).

Despite these contrasting developmental experiences, both Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have undergone significant social transformation since Independence. Expansion of education, democratic participation, urbanization, and economic diversification have improved opportunities for historically marginalized communities. However, caste continues to influence patterns of land ownership, marriage, political participation, and social identity, though its manifestations differ across regions. Likewise, migration has emerged as an important agent of social change, but its nature varies considerably. Punjab has experienced extensive international migration and diaspora formation, whereas Himachal Pradesh has witnessed primarily internal migration associated with education, public employment, tourism, and industrial development. The following section examines these processes through a comparative analysis of caste, migration, and modernity across the two states.

5. Caste, Migration, and Modernity: A Comparative Analysis of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh

5.1 Caste and Social Transformation

Caste has historically been one of the most influential institutions shaping social, economic, and political life in both Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Although the two states share a common geographical boundary and certain cultural traditions, the nature and evolution of caste relations have differed considerably because of variations in historical experiences, agrarian structures, and developmental policies. The processes of modernization, democratic participation, and educational expansion have transformed caste relations in both states; however, caste continues to influence access to land, education, employment, and political representation.

Table 1: Comparative Profile of Caste in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh:

Indicator	Punjab	Himachal Pradesh
Scheduled Caste Population (2011)	31.9%	25.2%
Dominant Historical Occupation	Agriculture and allied activities	Small-scale agriculture and allied occupations
Landholding Pattern	Greater concentration among dominant agrarian castes	Relatively smaller and more evenly distributed holdings
Major Drivers of Social Mobility	Education, migration, reservations, urbanization	Education, land reforms, public employment, welfare policies
Nature of Migration	Predominantly international	Predominantly internal

Source: Census of India 2011; Statistical Abstract of Punjab; Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh.

Punjab has one of the highest proportions of Scheduled Caste (SC) population in India. According to the Census of India 2011, Scheduled Castes constitute 31.9 percent of the state's total population, the highest among all Indian states (Government of India, 2011). Historically, most Scheduled Caste communities in Punjab were engaged in agricultural labour, leather work, sanitation services, and other manual occupations. The colonial land revenue system and the concentration of agricultural land among dominant cultivating castes limited their access to productive resources, resulting in long-term socio-economic inequalities (Talbot,

1988, pp. 95-112). Following Independence, constitutional safeguards, reservation policies, expansion of public education, and economic diversification created new opportunities for social mobility. Increasing participation in higher education, government employment, entrepreneurship, and non-farm occupations has improved the socio-economic position of many Scheduled Caste households. Nevertheless, studies indicate that unequal land ownership and dependence on wage labour continue to affect a large section of the Scheduled Caste population in rural Punjab (Jodhka, 2015, pp. 61-78). Thus, modernization has weakened the occupational rigidity of caste without completely eliminating social and economic disparities.

In comparison, Himachal Pradesh presents a different pattern of caste relations. Scheduled Castes account for approximately one-fourth of the state's population, and their distribution varies across districts (Government of India, 2011). The state's predominantly small landholdings, extensive land reforms after Independence, and sustained public investment in education and rural development have contributed to comparatively lower levels of social inequality. Although caste remains important in marriage practices, village leadership, and local politics, its economic manifestations are generally less pronounced than in many parts of Punjab.

Education has emerged as one of the most significant factors contributing to social mobility in both states. Rising literacy rates, improved access to higher education, and reservation policies have enabled increasing numbers of Scheduled Caste students to enter professional occupations and public services. Government initiatives aimed at educational inclusion and rural development have further expanded opportunities for historically marginalized communities. However, disparities in educational quality, household income, and access to private institutions continue to influence socio-economic mobility. Political participation has also altered the nature of caste relations. Reservations in Panchayati Raj Institutions, municipal bodies, and legislative assemblies have increased the representation of Scheduled Castes in local governance. At the same time, caste identities continue to play an important role in electoral politics and community mobilization, particularly in rural areas. Consequently, caste in both Punjab and Himachal Pradesh has evolved from a predominantly occupational institution into a broader social and political identity shaped by democratic participation and economic change.

In terms of caste system, a male respondent (27 years old, Government Employee) from Una district told that;

"Hamare yahan jaat ka prabhav pehle ke mukable kam hua hai. Ab logon ki pehchan unki padhai aur naukri se zyada hoti hai. Phir bhi shaadi-vivah aur kuch samajik paramparaon mein jaat ka asar abhi bhi dekhne ko milta hai."

It means that *"The influence of caste has declined compared to the past. Today people are recognised more for their education and occupation. However, caste still influences marriage and certain social customs."* The respondent's observations indicate that modernization has reduced the visible influence of caste in public life while allowing it to persist in certain aspects of family and community relationships.

Another male (63 years old, Farmer of rural Amritsar) respondent from Amritsar district told that;

"Pehlan pindan vich jaat da bahut zor si. Lok ikkathhe kam tan karde si, par khaan-peen te viah-shadian vich jaat da khayal rakhya janda si. Hun padhai ne bahut kujh badal ditta hai, par jaat di soch aje vi poori tarah khatam nahi hoi."

It means that, earlier, caste had a strong influence in village life. People worked together, but eating together and marriage were largely determined by caste. Education has changed many things, yet caste-based thinking has not disappeared completely. This narrative reflects the gradual weakening of caste barriers through education and social change while highlighting the continuing influence of caste in everyday social relations.

Overall, the experiences of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh demonstrate that caste has adapted to changing historical circumstances rather than disappearing under modernization. While economic development, education, and constitutional reforms have reduced many traditional barriers, caste continues to influence patterns of social interaction and access to resources. These contrasting regional experiences illustrate that the relationship between caste and modernity is neither uniform nor linear but shaped by specific historical and socio-economic contexts.

5.2 Migration and Regional Transformation

Migration has been one of the most significant forces shaping the social and economic transformation of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. However, the nature, scale, and consequences of migration have differed considerably between the two states because of variations in geography, economic opportunities, and

historical development. While Punjab has experienced extensive international migration since the late nineteenth century, migration in Himachal Pradesh has largely remained internal, driven by education, government employment, industrialization, and seasonal labour.

Table 2: Comparative Migration Profile of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh:

Indicator	Punjab	Himachal Pradesh
Dominant migration pattern	International migration	Internal migration
Major destinations	Canada, UK, USA, Australia, Italy	Chandigarh, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and other Indian states
Historical origin	Colonial period (late 19th century)	Post-Independence development
Major drivers	Agrarian pressure, overseas employment, education	Education, government jobs, industrialization, tourism
Major socio-economic impact	Remittances, diaspora networks, entrepreneurship	Human capital development, occupational diversification, regional mobility

Source: Census of India (2011); Statistical Abstract of Punjab (2023); Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh (2023); Tatla (1999); Talbot (1988).

Punjab has a long history of overseas migration, particularly from the Doaba region comprising districts such as Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, and Kapurthala. During the colonial period, population pressure, fragmentation of agricultural land, and expanding opportunities within the British Empire encouraged migration to Southeast Asia, East Africa, Canada, and later the United Kingdom and the United States (Talbot, 1988, pp. 162-180). Over time, migration became deeply embedded in the social and economic life of the state, creating strong transnational networks that continue to influence local development.

The Green Revolution further accelerated socio-economic changes in Punjab. While agricultural productivity increased significantly, mechanization and declining farm sizes encouraged many young people to seek employment outside agriculture. Since the 1980s, overseas migration has expanded to countries such as Canada, Australia, Italy, New Zealand, and the United States. Remittances have contributed to improvements in housing, education, healthcare, agricultural investment, and entrepreneurship, making migration an important source of household income and regional development (Tatla, 1999, pp. 58-91).

Migration has also transformed the social structure of Punjab. Increased exposure to global labour markets has raised educational aspirations, encouraged occupational diversification, and reduced dependence on traditional occupations. At the same time, access to international migration remains uneven, often depending on financial resources, educational qualifications, and social networks. Consequently, migration has generated new opportunities for social mobility while also creating fresh forms of economic inequality (Judge, 2014, pp. 141-156).

In contrast, migration in Himachal Pradesh has followed a different trajectory. Owing to its mountainous terrain, relatively small urban centres, and state-led development model, the state has experienced limited overseas migration. Instead, migration has largely been internal, with people moving for higher education, government service, industrial employment, tourism, and business. Improved road connectivity, educational institutions, and industrial growth have encouraged mobility within the state as well as to neighbouring regions, including Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Delhi (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2023). Internal migration has played an important role in diversifying the economy of Himachal Pradesh. Expansion of the service sector, public administration, manufacturing, and tourism has reduced dependence on agriculture, particularly among younger generations. Unlike Punjab, where migration is often associated with international remittances, migration in Himachal Pradesh is closely linked to human capital development and employment opportunities created through public investment and regional planning.

A male (68 years old farmer), respondent from Hoshiarpur said that;

"Sadde pind de lagbhag har ghar da koi na koi banda bahar rehnda hai. Pehlan lok kheti te nirbhar hunde si, par hun bahut sare parivaaran di rozi-roti videshan ton aundi hai. Pind di soch vi kaafi badal gayi hai."

It means that, almost every household in our village has someone living abroad. Earlier, people depended mainly on agriculture, but today many families earn their livelihood through overseas migration. The outlook of the village has also changed considerably. This narrative highlights the transition from an agriculture-based economy to one increasingly supported by migration and remittances, reflecting the broader socio-economic transformation of Hoshiarpur.

Another respondent from Hoshiarpur said that;

"Ajj de samay vich zyada tar naujwanan da supna Canada ya Australia jaana hai. Padhai hun sirf degree layi nahi, balki bahar settled hon layi vi kiti jandi hai. Par har kise layi eh safar asaan nahi hunda."

It means that, today, the dream of most young people is to move to Canada or Australia. Education is pursued not only to earn a degree but also to settle abroad. However, this journey is not easy for everyone. This narrative reflects the aspirations and challenges associated with contemporary student migration, highlighting the growing importance of education as a gateway to global mobility.

The narratives reinforce the documentary evidence that migration has become deeply embedded in the social fabric of Hoshiarpur. Respondents associate overseas migration with improved living standards, educational advancement, and economic opportunities, while also acknowledging its social costs, including family separation and financial pressures. Together, these experiences demonstrate that migration has reshaped local society without completely transforming traditional institutions such as caste, kinship, and community. Hoshiarpur therefore represents a distinctive model of modernization in which transnational mobility and local social structures continue to interact and evolve (Tatla, 1999, pp. 58-59).

In regard to the migration and cultural practices, a female respondent (43 years old) from Una district said that;

"Sade ghar de kai member Delhi te Haryana ch kam karde ne. Mera pati Gurgaon ch ik private company ch naukri karda ae te mera bhra Chandigarh ch company vich kam karda ae. Una ton bahar jana hun aam gall ho gayi ae. Jithe changa kam milda ae, othe lok chale jande ne. Par sade tyohar, mela te parivarak kam hon tan sare wapass pind aa jande ne. Is karke pind nal pyar aji vi oho jeha ae. Rozgar layi migration zaroor hoyi ae, par sade lok apni boli, reet-rivaaj te rishteyan nu aji vi bahut mahatva dinde ne. Mainu lagda ae ke migration ne sade bachcheyan nu changi padhai te changiyan suvidhavan den da mauka ditta ae, par pind nal judav vi baneya rehna chahida ae."

It means that, several members of our family work in Delhi and Haryana. My husband is employed in a private company in Gurugram, and my brother works in a company in Chandigarh. It has now become common for people to move outside Una in search of employment. Wherever better opportunities are available, people go there. However, during festivals, village fairs, and family occasions, everyone returns to the village. Therefore, their emotional attachment to the village remains strong. Migration has certainly increased employment opportunities, but our people still value their language, traditions, and family relationships. I believe migration has helped provide better education and facilities for our children, but maintaining ties with the village is equally important.

A similar kind of response has been recorded, which a 52 years old man from Amritsar district said that;

"Sade pind ch taan baharle desh jana hun ik aam gall ban gayi ae. Jinna de munde-kudiyen Canada, Australia, UK a America ch ne, ohna de gharan di halat vi changi ho gayi ae. Mera vadda munda Canada ch PR te rehnda ae te chhota Australia ch padhai de naal part-time kam karda ae. Pehla asi kheti te nirbhar si, par hun zyada aas bachcheyan di baharle settlement te hi hundi ae. Har saal oh ghar aunde ne jaan video call te sare rishtedaran nal gall karde ne. Pind de hor jawan vi IELTS di tayari karde rehnde ne kyunki unna nu lagda ae ke bahar ja ke changi naukri te vadhiya zindagi mil sakdi ae. Paisa taan aunda hi ae, naal hi bachcheyan nu changi education te ghar di halat sudharan da vi mauka milda ae."

It means that, in our village, going abroad has become a common practice. Families whose sons and daughters have settled in Canada, Australia, the UK, or the USA have improved their economic condition. My elder son lives in Canada with permanent residency, while my younger son studies and works part-time in Australia. Earlier, we depended mainly on agriculture, but now our hopes are largely connected with our children's overseas settlement. They visit home every year or stay connected through video calls. Most young people in the village prepare for IELTS because they believe that moving abroad offers better jobs and a better quality of life. Besides financial benefits, migration has also improved children's education and the overall living standards of families.

Despite these differences, migration has contributed to social transformation in both states by improving educational attainment, expanding occupational opportunities, and increasing interaction with wider social and economic networks. It has also influenced family structures, gender roles, and patterns of consumption. While international migration has become a defining feature of Punjab's economy and society, internal migration has supported balanced regional development and human resource mobility in Himachal Pradesh. The comparative experience of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh demonstrates that migration is not a uniform process but one that reflects broader historical and developmental contexts. In Punjab, migration has primarily been market-driven and internationally oriented, whereas in Himachal Pradesh it has largely been shaped by state policies, educational expansion, and regional employment opportunities. These contrasting migration patterns illustrate the multiple pathways through which mobility contributes to modernization and social change.

5.3 Modernity and Socio-economic Transformation

Modernity in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh has evolved through different historical and developmental pathways. While Punjab's modernization has largely been driven by commercial agriculture, urbanization, industrial growth, and international migration, Himachal Pradesh has followed a state-led model emphasizing education, rural development, public welfare, and infrastructure. These distinct trajectories illustrate that modernization is not a uniform process but one shaped by regional history, geography, and public policy.

Table 3: Selected Indicators of Modernity in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh (Census 2011):

Indicator	Punjab	Himachal Pradesh
Literacy Rate (%)	75.8	82.8
Urban Population (%)	37.5	10.0
Scheduled Caste Population (%)	31.9	25.2
Dominant Development Model	Agriculture, industry and migration	State-led rural and human development
Major Driver of Social Mobility	Education, migration, urban employment	Education, public employment, infrastructure

Source: Census of India (2011); Statistical Abstract of Punjab (2023); Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh (2023).

In Punjab, the Green Revolution of the 1960s marked a turning point in economic development. The introduction of high-yielding crop varieties, expansion of irrigation, mechanization, and improved agricultural inputs significantly increased agricultural productivity and rural incomes (Bhalla & Singh, 2001, pp. 201-209). These changes stimulated urban growth, industrial expansion, and improvements in education and healthcare. However, the benefits of economic development were unevenly distributed, as disparities in land ownership and access to productive resources continued to affect marginalized communities, particularly Scheduled Castes (Jodhka, 2015, pp. 61-68).

Himachal Pradesh presents a contrasting model of modernization. Since attaining full statehood in January 25, 1971, successive governments have prioritized investments in education, healthcare, road connectivity, rural electrification, and decentralized governance. These initiatives have contributed to high literacy rates, improved health indicators, and greater access to public services. The expansion of horticulture, tourism, hydropower, and small-scale industries has also diversified the state's economy and reduced dependence on subsistence agriculture (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2023). Education has emerged as one of the most important indicators of modernization in both states. According to the Census of India 2011, the literacy rate in Himachal Pradesh (82.8%) is slightly higher than that of Punjab (75.8%), reflecting sustained public investment in schooling and higher education (Government of India, 2011). Improved educational opportunities have expanded access to professional employment and contributed to greater social mobility, particularly among younger generations and historically marginalized communities.

Urbanization has also influenced the pace and nature of social transformation. Punjab has experienced relatively rapid urban growth through industrialization, trade, and expanding service sectors, whereas

Himachal Pradesh continues to have a predominantly rural population despite increasing urban development. Nevertheless, improved transport, digital connectivity, and communication networks have reduced regional isolation and facilitated greater economic integration across both states. Women's participation in education, employment, and local governance has increased considerably over the past few decades. Reservation policies in Panchayati Raj Institutions, higher educational attainment, and greater involvement in self-help groups and public employment have strengthened women's role in socio-economic development. Although gender disparities continue to exist, these changes reflect broader processes of modernization that extend beyond economic growth alone.

A female respondent of 48 years old from Una district said that;

"Aaj kal ladkiyan bhi padh rahi hain aur naukri kar rahi hain. Pehle mahilaon ki bhumika ghar tak seemit thi, lekin ab ve ghar ke faislon ke saath-saath samajik aur arthik gatavidhiyon mein bhi hissa leti hain."

It means that, today girls are receiving education and entering employment. Earlier, women's role was largely confined to the household, but now they participate in family decisions as well as social and economic activities. This narrative highlights changing gender roles and the contribution of education and government programmes to women's empowerment in rural Himachal Pradesh.

A male respondent of 41 years old from Amritsar district said that;

"Ajjkal bachiyon layi padhai sab ton vaddi tarjeeh ban gayi hai. Pehlan lok jaat te peshe naal pachhane jande san, par hun degree te naukri nu vadh mahataav milda hai."

It means that, today, education has become the highest priority for children. Earlier, people were identified by their caste and occupation, but now educational qualifications and employment carry greater importance. The respondent emphasizes the growing importance of education in shaping social identity and occupational mobility, particularly in urban areas.

Overall, the experiences of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh demonstrate that modernization encompasses not only economic development but also improvements in education, infrastructure, governance, and social inclusion. While the two states have followed different developmental paths, both illustrate how historical legacies, public policies, and regional contexts shape the processes of social transformation. These broader patterns become more evident through the district-level experiences of Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, and Una, which are examined in the following section.

Discussion

The comparative analysis of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh demonstrates that caste, migration, and modernity are closely interconnected processes that have shaped regional patterns of social transformation. Although both states have experienced significant socio-economic changes since Independence, their pathways to modernity have differed because of variations in historical experiences, agrarian structures, migration patterns, and state policies. These findings support the argument that modernization in India is neither uniform nor linear but is mediated by regional contexts and historical legacies.

One of the principal findings of this study is that caste has not disappeared despite the expansion of modern institutions. Education, urbanization, democratic participation, and economic diversification have undoubtedly weakened the traditional association between caste and hereditary occupations. However, caste continues to influence access to land, marriage, political representation, and social identity in both Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. The oral narratives from Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, and Una consistently indicate that while younger generations increasingly value education and professional achievement, caste remains significant in family life and social relationships. These findings are consistent with Yogendra Singh's (1973, pp. 15-39) argument that modernization in India transforms rather than replaces traditional institutions.

The study also demonstrates that migration functions as an important catalyst for social mobility, although its nature differs across the two states. Punjab's experience has been largely shaped by international migration, particularly from districts such as Hoshiarpur, where overseas employment and remittances have transformed household economies, educational aspirations, and patterns of consumption. In contrast, migration in Himachal Pradesh has been predominantly internal and closely linked to education, public employment, industrialization, and regional labour markets. These contrasting experiences illustrate that migration is shaped not only by economic opportunities but also by historical circumstances and public policy.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between modernity and regional development. Punjab's modernization has been strongly influenced by commercial agriculture, urbanization, private

enterprise, and global migration networks. Himachal Pradesh, on the other hand, has achieved social transformation largely through public investment in education, healthcare, rural infrastructure, and decentralized governance. Although these developmental models differ, both have contributed to improvements in literacy, occupational diversification, and social mobility. This suggests that multiple pathways to modernity can coexist within the same national context.

The district case studies further strengthen this argument. Amritsar illustrates how urbanization and educational expansion have altered caste relations while leaving certain traditional practices intact. Hoshiarpur demonstrates the transformative role of international migration and diaspora networks in reshaping local society and aspirations. Una, in contrast, highlights the importance of state-led development, educational expansion, and industrialization in promoting social mobility. Together, these districts reveal that regional histories produce distinct forms of modernization even within neighbouring states.

The integration of historical records, official statistics, and oral narratives provides a more comprehensive understanding of these transformations than any single source could offer. District Gazetteers and Census reports explain long-term structural changes, while oral narratives reveal how ordinary people perceive and negotiate these changes in their everyday lives. This combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence strengthens the historical-sociological interpretation advanced in this study. The findings reinforce the view that caste, migration, and modernity should not be understood as separate processes. Instead, they interact continuously to shape social change. While modernization has expanded opportunities for education, employment, and mobility, it has also reshaped rather than eliminated traditional institutions. The comparative experiences of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh therefore demonstrate the existence of multiple pathways to modernity, each shaped by specific historical, economic, and socio-political conditions.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between caste, migration, and modernity through a comparative historical analysis of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh using historical records, official statistics, and oral narratives. The findings show that modernization has followed different regional trajectories shaped by historical experiences, economic structures, migration patterns, and public policies. Punjab's transformation has largely been driven by commercial agriculture, urbanization, and international migration, whereas Himachal Pradesh has progressed through land reforms, public investment, educational expansion, and internal migration. The district-level analysis of Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, and Una demonstrates that regional history remains central to understanding patterns of social change.

The study further finds that caste continues to influence social identity, political participation, and access to opportunities despite improvements in education, reservation policies, and occupational mobility. Migration has also emerged as a significant driver of socio-economic transformation, with overseas migration playing a major role in Punjab and internal migration contributing to development in Himachal Pradesh. By combining historical documents, official records, and field narratives, the study highlights the interconnected nature of caste, migration, and modernity within diverse regional contexts. Future research may strengthen these findings through larger household surveys, ethnographic studies, and comparative analyses of additional districts across North India.

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