

Subject: Anthropology

Production of Courseware

 -Content for Post Graduate Courses**Paper No. : 04 Indian Anthropology****Module : 11 Jajmani system**

Development Team

Principal InvestigatorProf. Anup Kumar Kapoor
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi**Paper Coordinator**Prof. Anup Kumar Kapoor
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi**Content Writer**Dr. Meenal Dhall
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi**Content Reviewer**Prof. Subir Biswas
Department of Anthropology, West Bengal State University

Description Of Module	
Subject Name	Anthropology
Paper Name	Indian Anthropology
Module Name/Title	Jajmani system
Module Id	11

 **Pathshala**
पाठशाला
A Gateway to All Post Graduate Courses

Contents of this unit

1. The Jajmani System
 - 1.1 An Introduction
 - 1.2 Principles behind The Jajmani System
 - 1.3 Background
2. The Hindu Jajmani System
 - 2.1 The Jajman-Kamin Relation
3. Characteristics of the Jajmani System
4. Advantages of the Jajmani System
5. Disadvantages of the Jajmani System
6. Disintegration of the Jajmani System
7. Summary

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- To know about the Jajmani System.
- To understand the principles behind the Jajmani system.
- To understand the Jajman-Kamin relation.
- To know the characteristics of the Jajmani system.
- To understand the advantages and disadvantages of the Jajmani system.
- To find out the changes which are responsible for the disintegration of the Jajmani system?

1. THE JAJMANI SYSTEM

1.1 AN INTRODUCTION:

The Jajmani system is the system of exchange of goods and services between the members of different castes. It is an important institution that developed during the medieval period and continued till modern times in the rural society. It is the traditional jati-based division of labour in Indian villages in which lower castes performed various functions for upper castes and received grain in return. It consists of a set of traditional rules about the exchange of products and services between the members of different castes. In other words, each caste has specific commitments towards the others. In fact, the jajmani system is a system of economic, social and ritual ties among different caste groups in a village that bound them together.

There are two terms-‘Jajman’ (patron) and ‘Kamin’ (client) that are popular in North Indian villages under Jajmani system. As this system is found all over India, the terms used for jajman and kamin are different in different regions. The term ‘*jajman*’ comes from the Sanskrit word ‘*yajamana*’, meaning ‘sacrifier’ (as opposed to ‘sacrificer’): ‘he who has a sacrifice performed’. It can be seen that etymologically the jajman is the master of the house who employs a Brahmin as a sacrificer. According to Hindi dictionary, jajman can be defined as ‘he who has religious (*dharmik*) rites performed by Brahmins by giving them fees, etc. On the other hand, there are many words to designate the specialists, who are more like clients in their relation to a patron than employees in relation to an employer, since the relationship is a personal one: in Hindi, *praja* (also ‘creature, descendant, subject’), *kamin*, *pauni*, *purjan*, *kamkarnevala* (workman), etc.

There are, briefly, two kinds of castes: those who hold the land and those who do not. In each village, the land is held by one (or several) castes. This caste is thus the ‘dominant’ caste, enjoying economic power, allowing for its subsistence. All the other castes are dependent. Their members obtain direct or indirect access to the means of subsistence through personal relationships with the members of the dominant caste, in virtue of the functions which they are fit to perform and which the dominant caste requires. The link between caste and profession is weak in the case of the intermediary agricultural functions (farmers, share-croppers, tenants, etc.) and is strong in the case of specialist castes, for the most part religiously marked, and also in the case of unfree labour, generally untouchable.

It is a complementary relationship between the groups of dominant peasant castes on the one hand and service and artisan castes on the other. In this system, the service castes rendered services to the land-owning peasant castes as well as to the high and dominant castes and were entitled to traditionally fixed shares of the produce and in some cases to a small plot of land. Thus, the leather-workers, the barbers, the priests, the washermen, the ploughmen, and various types of smiths worked for the high

castes or dominant landowning groups and were paid in kind on certain occasions or in the form of a land allotment. However, such service castes always retained some freedom to sell their goods and services. It could be said that the Jajmani system is a system of distribution where landowning families of high castes are provided services and products by various lower castes such as carpenters (Khati), barbers (Nai), potters (Kumhar), blacksmiths (Lohar), washermen (Dhobi), sweepers (Chuhra), etc. The servicing castes are called kamins while the castes served are called jajman. For the services rendered, the servicing castes are paid in cash or in kind (grains, fodder, clothes, and animal products like milk, butter, etc.).

Under jajmani system, the primary function of the Brahmin caste is to perform various religious and ceremonial rituals. The 'Kumhars' or Potters make certain pots. In the village the people use earthen pots for various domestic purposes. The 'Dhobi' or Washerman washes the clothes of others in the village. The Barber dresses the hair of villagers, the Carpenter meets the wood-work requirements and 'Lohar' or Blacksmith makes agriculture equipment and other household products like tong, hammer etc. which are made of iron. Everyone in the village works for certain family or group of families, with whom he is linked hereditarily. The son performs and will perform same kind of duties performed by his father or forefather. Thus, professions and services in villages are determined by the caste and have come fixed by long traditions.

The jajmani system is ideologically connected with and justified through religion, and thus contributes to maintaining notions about purity and impurity and about relative rank within the caste system. The fact that members of the sweeper caste actually sweep is interpreted as evidence that they are actually polluting; at the same time, they have to sweep because they are perceived as polluting. In this way, the social and symbolic aspects of caste are interconnected, and contribute to reinforcing each other by creating a correspondence between ideology and practices.



Figure: The Jajmani System

1.2 PRINCIPLES BEHIND THE JAJMANI SYSTEM:

1. Firstly, it makes use of hereditary personal relationships to express the division of labour: each family has a family of specialists at its disposal for each specialized task.
2. Secondly, it regulates prestations and counter-prestations in a way which accords with custom: for the usual tasks, repayment is in kind: it is not made individually for each particular prestations but is spread over the whole year, as is natural for a permanent relationship in an agricultural setting: a little food may be provided each day, and there is always the right to a fixed quantity of grain at harvest time, and finally there are obligatory presents (often of money) on the occasion of the main festivals of the year and, above all, at the major family ceremonies, which are advantageous occasions for the *praja* of the house.

1.3 BACKGROUND:

The first detailed study of jajmani tradition in India in a village of Uttar Pradesh was made by William H. Wiser in his book “The Hindu Jajmani System”(1936) where he described in detail how different caste groups interact with each other in the production and exchange of goods and services.

Thomas O. Beidelman (1959), in his monographs “A comparative Analysis of the Jajmani System” and Pauline Kolenda (1963), in her article “Towards a Model of the Hindu Jajmani System” attempted comparative studies of the jajmani system on the basis of field studies. His observations are based on field work which he undertook during 1954-55 in the north Indian village of Birauly (pseudonym: Sherupur) district Faizabad (UP). Gould (1987) says that the caste system differentiates people into endogamous clusters of joint families in terms of occupational specialization and standard of differential ritual purity. As a result, the attitude of social avoidance becomes a major aspect of village life. But, the requirements of community living, especially where there is an advanced division of labour, are that a certain degree of functional integration be achieved and maintained. The jajmani system, which is a non-pecuniary pattern of economic interaction, accomplishes this task and facilitates the exchange of goods and services without violating the connubial, commensal, and occupational exclusiveness.

Gould (1987) further says that the jajmani system binds the families in a manner comparable to the kinship ties. A particularistic set of relationships is established between families of different ritual occupational status. It affords assurance of indefinite durability, stable provision of essential services and observance of host of kin-like diffuse obligations. Gould observes that jajmani-purjani networks are not confined within a given village but radiate into the “local culture” because no village has a full

quota service caste and must, therefore, utilize appropriate families in nearby village. Each purjan will normally have several jajmans. The formal payments for the services rendered are in terms of certain quantities of grains per six months apart from other informal exchanges. Unlike Beidelman (1959), who explicitly equates the jajman with “exploiter” and characterizes the system as “feudal”, Gould (1987) emphasizes that the system does not rest upon a simple dichotomy between rich and poor rather it arises from a religious dichotomy between pure and impure. It is often the mutual wish of the jajman and purjan to practice certain rituals and a way of life necessitating the avoidance of impurity. He also asserts that the system cannot be exploitative where the jajman and the specialists are of approximately equal status or the specialist, who is providing the service, is better off than his client.

According to Oscar Lewis, “Under this system each caste group within a village is expected to give certain standardized services to the families of other castes”. Oscar Lewis had made more elaborate study of this system. Various sociological studies on jajmani system conducted in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Malabar, Cochin, Hyderabad, Gujarat and Punjab regions show that this system is universal in rural India.

Prof. Y. Singh describes jajmani system as a system governed by relationship based on reciprocity in inter-caste relations in villages. Ishwaran holds the view that it is a system in which each caste has a role to play in a community life as a whole called as “aya” in Mysore in South India; each caste plays a role consisting of economic, social and moral functions. The jajmani system essentially operates at the family level. The landowning family has its jajmani ties with one family each from Brahmin, Barber, Carpenter, etc.

The term as N.S Reddy observes, the farmer who engages Carpenter or iron smith for manufacture or repair of his tools is jajman and the Carpenter and the iron-smith are Kamin or prajans. Between jajman and prajans the relationship is hereditary. Jajman’s get a variety of jobs done by prajans, for example, the Barber dresses the hair and shaves the beard. Kahar brings water from the well or river as the case may be, sweeper does sanitary jobs. For these services prajans are paid something, in a majority of cases farmers in Indian villages give grains for the services of the prajans. In modern times currency notes are fast replacing all other media of exchange even in villages. In jajmani system, jajman enjoys so much respect that he is often referred to as Rajah (King) and prajans as subjects.

The jajmani relations required ritual matters and social support as well as economic exchanges. On occasions like birth, marriage and death the serving castes render their services by performing the ritual and ceremonial duties at the jajman’s house and receive gifts in addition to customary payment. The support of jajmani associates is also needed at the time of factional contest.

Thus, the jajmani system involves interdependence, reciprocity and cooperation between castes and families in villages. D.N. Majumdar has cited the example of a Thakur family (of Rajput caste) in a village in Lucknow district in U.P. which is served by as many as families often castes for the life-cycle rites. As for example, at the birth-feast of a child, the priest presides over the ceremony of 'Nain-Sanskarana', Washerman washes dirty clothes, Barber carries messages, Goldsmith provides the gold ornament of the new-born, Blacksmith provides iron bangle, Pasi provides 'patal' (leaf-plates) for taking food, Carpenter provides wooden tool on which the child was kept for the ceremony. The Potter provides jugs for keeping cooked vegetables and drinking water; scavenger cleans the place after the feast.

Louis Dumont in his book "Homo Hierarchicus" has mentioned this system as the system corresponding to the prestations and counter-prestations by which the castes as a whole are bound together in the village, and which is more or less universal in India. According to him, it is the basic form of the division of labour in traditional India.

Henry Orenstein has mentioned that the families of village officials or village servants like the watchman maintain jajmani relations with the whole village rather than with particular families. Thus, a watchman's family is entitled to get contribution during harvest seasons from every landowner's family in the village.

2. THE HINDU JAJMANI SYSTEM:

According to Louis Dumont and David Pocock, "the key stone in any Jajmani system is the dominant caste." The jajman was a landowner or cultivator. All other castes were his economic dependents. Thus even the community that was kept at the top of the caste hierarchy was the servant of jajmanS and according to Cohn's observation fed by them. During the 1930's and 1940's, the most widely held prevalent mode among patron-client relation was one in which particular households of artisan, servicing and labouring groups were rewarded by their landowning patrons with agreed upon quantities of grain. The relationship was dyadic, between the patron and the client, and each region had its own term to denote it. The first anthropologist to provide a full description of it was W H Wiser who studied a village in the Hindi region and wrote about in a book titled The Hindu Jajmani System [Wiser 1936]. Wiser considered the system to be one of great antiquity and traced its origins to the laws of Manu. William Wiser coined the term 'Jajmani System' to denote client-patron dyadic relation. He used Hindi word to describe the patrons as 'Jajmans' or 'Yajamana' and clients as 'Kamins'. However, Wiser's assumptions were refuted by the political scientist, Peter Mayer in 1993 on an extensively researched paper entitled, 'Inventing Village Tradition: The Late 19th Century Origins of the Jajmani System' [Mayer 1993:357-95]. He wrote: "I argue that the jajmani system is of relatively recent origin

and is essentially a feature of the Gangetic plain”. He pointed out that the system became popular only in the latter half of the 19th century. Two forces of change converged to facilitate the emergence of jajmani: the first of these was the growing partition of zamindari and bhaiyacharya villages into individual holdings; the second was the mounting pressure on landholders to offer significant incentives to village artisans to retain their services. Mayer seems to assume that all over the Gangetic plain, all land in villages was owned either by a body of agnatically related males (bhaiyacharya or biradri) or by a zamindar, with the result that artisans and others served the entire village and not the households of individual landowners. The relationship between artisan and servicing castes was ‘demi-urge’ a la Max Weber and became dyadic only at a later stage when land came to be owned by individuals.

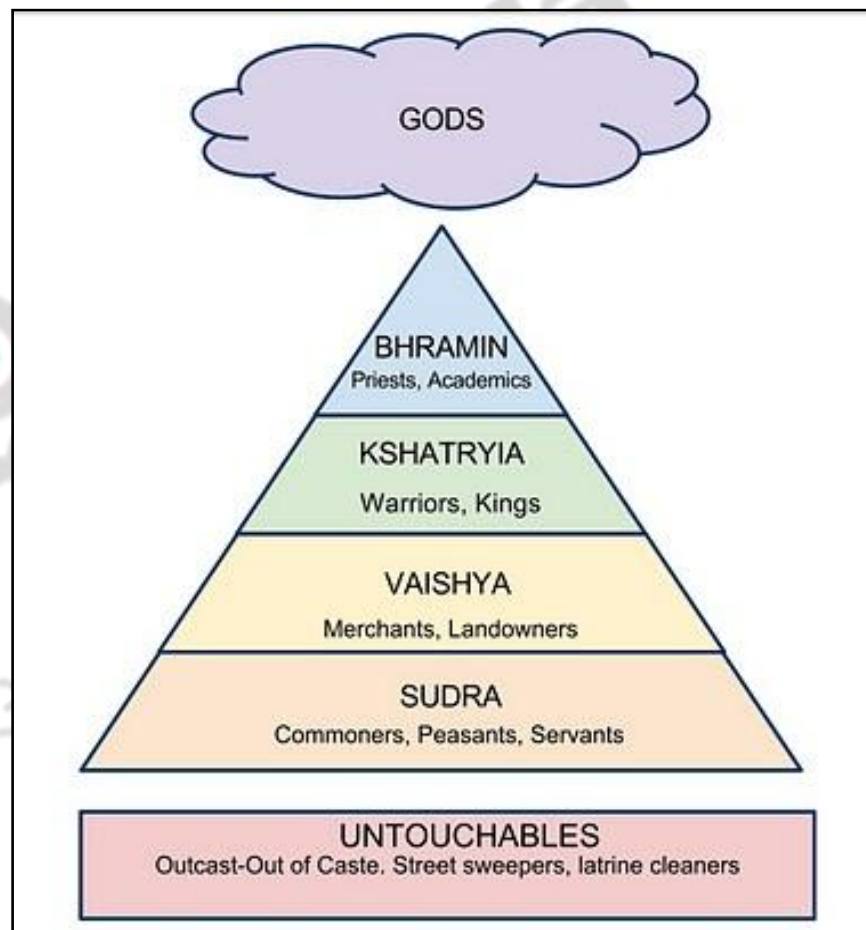


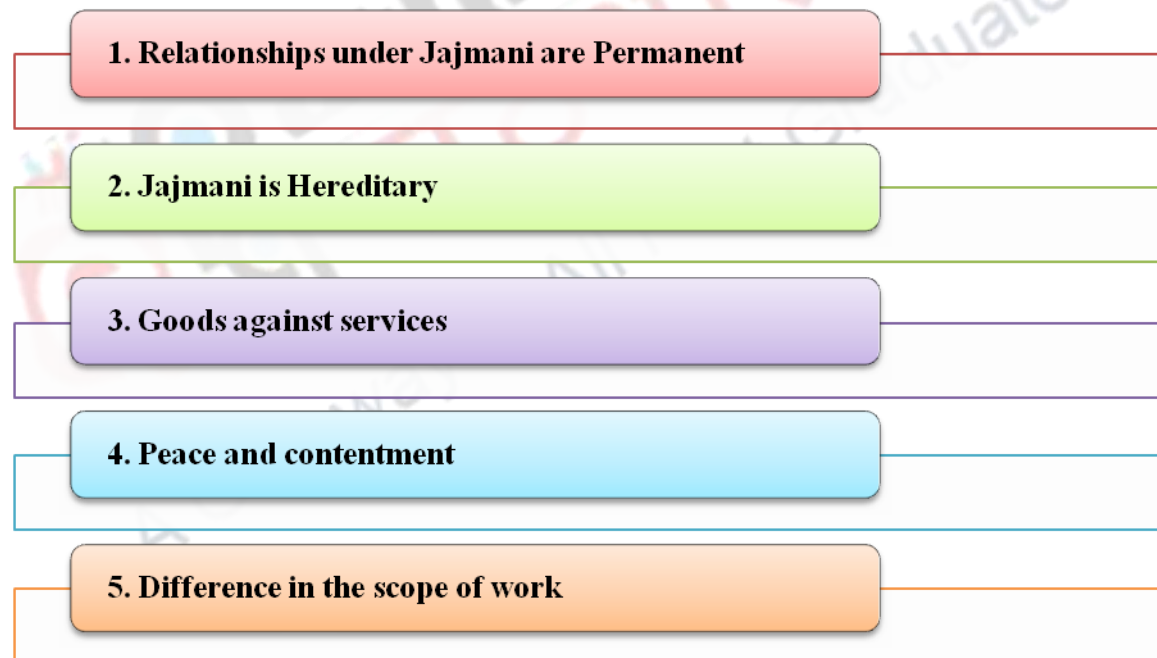
Figure: Hindu Caste System

[Source:https://nataliepeart.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/caste_system-oo4t9n.jpg]

2.1 The Jajman-Kamin Relation:

In India, a classic feature of rural social organization has been the jajmani relations, whereby landowners, small or large, operate with a clear and strong group interest, and are the patrons of the landless. Jajmani is basically a client-patron relationship. The jajmani system basically functioned to maintain a status quo in society. It is a reciprocal system of exchange of goods and services mainly in kind rather than credit. However, it exceeds the process of exchange, there is a bonding and relationship which builds up and harbors and a mode of reverence and loyalties is developed which is passed on down the generations and the jajman-artisan relation is maintained over decades. Jajmani system is based on the reciprocal behavior of occupational service and security. With time, occupations change thereby leading the jajmani system to fizzle out. Industrialization, Green revolution, White revolution has led to the degradation of the jajmani relationships among people.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE JAJMANI SYSTEM:



The above mentioned characteristics of the jajmani system are described below in detail:

1. Relationships under Jajmani are Permanent: The more striking and essential feature of the jajmani system is that it ensures the availability of certain essential services to farmers. Thus on

account of this system certain individuals or groups of them needed for assistance in agriculture or to meet the essential requirements of the agriculturalists stay permanently in the villages. Thus, a village is able to function as a relatively self-sufficient unit. It is on account of this system that if any Kamin leaves a village he provides for his substitute. We also come across examples where jajmani rights are sold. According to Shree Inderdatta Singh a sweeper can sell his jajmani rights for about Rupees 200. However, generally jajmani rights are not sold. These are not even exchanged or transferred, because a Kamin does not like to leave a particular village to go to some other village. Thus, the system of jajmani ensures that no one moves away from the village in which he was born so that there may be no disruption of services available in a village. Thus, a permanent structure of economic order and continuance ensured by jajmani system. In fact, abdication of jajmani rights amounts to abandonment of natural birth rights. The abdication of these rights is not only economically hurtful but hurts also the prestige. Sometimes in order to prevent migration of a Kamin from a village, great pressure is brought to bear his caste members. S.S. Nehru has cited an instance of a village in which a law was framed by its panchayat according to which no ironsmith could leave the village. According to S.C. Dube while a Kamin had no right to desert his jajman, the jajman also has no right to replace his Kamin. That is, the spirit behind jajmani system was to ensure life-long fixed and permanent relations so that the rural economy was undisturbed. According to S.C.Dube, "It is not easy for an agriculturist to remove a family attached to his household and secure the services of another. For example, A, a barber is attached to the family of B, an agriculturist. If for any reason B is greatly dissatisfied with the services of A and wants those of another, he cannot abruptly dismiss A. His difficulty will not be dismissing A, but finding a substitute. Each of these castes has its own inter-village council. Occupational caste have a developed trade unionism. No one else would be willing to act as a substitute for fear of being penalized by the caste panchayat.

2. Jajmani is Hereditary: Second major feature of jajmani system is its being hereditary. According to N.S.Reddy, the rights of jajmani jobs are considered to be proprietary. These are passed on to sons from his father and in case of separation of brothers these rights are also split among them. If someone has no son but only a daughter jajmani rights pass on to the husband of the daughter. However, jajmani rights are not equally distributed among families. For example, an ironsmith may be giving service to 30 families, whereas another may have only 10 or less clients. Moreover, with the increase in the number of male members in a family jajmani rights are split among them and this leads to reduction in the number of clients. On the other hand, if there is rapid increase in the members of jajman families, the number of clients may grow.

3. Goods against services: Another important characteristic of jajmani system is that instead of receiving cash payment against his services, the Kamin is paid in kind, that is, he receives grains like wheat, rice, etc. Thus, under jajmani system the relation between jajman and Kamin is not that of

employer and employee, as is the case under the capitalist system. In fact, in return for the services of Kamin, jajman is anxious about the needs and welfare of the Kamin and furnishes him goods he needs most. The relationship between jajman and Kamin is not purely economic but is a human relationship. Accordingly, jajman takes full responsibility for the welfare of Kamin and Kamin serves jajman with divotion and dedication. Jajman not only provides Kamin with food but also gives him clothing and residential accommodation. The amount of grain given to Kamin depends upon the nature of services rendered. In his study of jajman system in Rampur, Oscar Lewis collected following data regarding the amount of food given for each kind of work:

No.	Caste	Nature of Service	Compensatory Rights
I.	Carpenter	Repair of Agricultural Implements.	One maund food grain in a year. 2 ^{1/2} seers of food grain at the time of harvesting.
II.	Ironsmith	-do-	-do-
III.	Potter	Provision of earthen vessels and odd jobs during marriages.	Food grain according to the value of pots and grains according to situation and capacity at the time of marriage.
IV.	Sweeper	Removal of Filth, Making Gobar Cakes, Stringing Beads.	Two meals per day. As much food grain as he can carry at the time of harvest. More food grain at marriages.
V.	Shoemaker	Assistance in agriculture. Removal of Carcasses.	1/20 of produce and skins of dead animals.

As can be gauged from the above mentioned list, kamins get enough food to meet their personal requirements. That is why they prefer payment in kind rather than in cash. However, these days there is a tendency to substitute by cash payment the payment in kind.

4. Peace and contentment: According to W.H.Wiser, a significant feature of jajmani system is a peace and contentment which is provided to villagers. The kamins of a jajman feel a sense of security. They are free from the worry of finding employment to make both ends meet. As the nature of the tasks they have to perform is well known to them in advance, they feel great mental peace and are well prepared for these tasks: and this saves them the botheration of adjustment. However, the picture is not altogether rosy. There are quite a few instances in which kamins are exploited and given too little for their services.

5. Difference in the scope of work: Under jajmani system the range of activity of different kamins is not uniform. It is not necessary that a certain Kamin should work only for a single family or even a single village. If the nature of his work or activity is such that he can effectively cater to the needs of two or three villages, there is no provision in jajmani system against such an arrangement. For example a family needs the services of a barber once or twice a week and these, too, for an hour or so. Naturally, therefore a barber can easily cater to the needs of a dozen or so families. He can even work in more than one village. Another factor which restricts or widens the spread of one's activity is the nature of demand and supply. If a village is prosperous, it may have one or more shopkeepers but if the village is small and demand of goods is low, there may not be one exclusive shopkeeper in that village. We do not find shoe makers in every village. S.S.Nehru studied 54 North Indian villages and found that only in 18 out of these there were shoemakers. Potters were in 30% of the villages and shopkeepers only in 16%. Ahirs were found in 60% and Brahmin, barber and ironsmith and Teli were found each in 40% of the villages. From the above points it is clear that not every type of Kamin is to be found in every village. In the absence of a particular Kamin people perform that task by themselves or go to other village for it. For example, residents of a village may get their hair dressed from a neighbouring village.

4. ADVANTAGES OF THE JAJMANI SYSTEM:

The main advantages of the jajmani system are as follows:

1. Security of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As mentioned earlier, the professions in jajmani system are hereditary; and are, therefore, permanent and fixed. The sons of kamin do not have to look for jobs; they get jobs as a matter of birth right.
2. Economic security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In jajmani system, jajmans look after each and every need of their kamins. Thus, a kamin enjoys economic security.
3. Close personal relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jajmans and kamins are related to each other by heredity and long tradition, their relationship is intimate and personal. They know each other very well and are, therefore, sympathetic to the needs of each other. Their relationship is not purely economic or professional. As a matter of fact, their lives are interlinked.

5. DISADVANTAGES OF THE JAJMANI SYSTEM:

However, jajmani system is not free from faults. Like caste system it was of great value in the past but has now degenerated into an instrument of exploitation and discrimination. As Oscar Lewis has pointed out in his study of jajmani system in Rampur village, whereas in past it was based on personal relationship, it has now become an instrument of exploitation of kamin by jajman. In jajmani system, the kamins are treated as inferior and lowered. In fact, the word kamin itself means lowly or inferior. D.N. Majumdar and colleagues found in their survey of the villages that the conditions of kamins are miserable and the upper castes subject them to great harassment and trouble.

6. DISINTEGRATION OF THE JAJMANI SYSTEM:

There is a gradual change in the jajmani system these days. This system is disappearing because old caste system is giving way to groupism and class struggle. There is a good deal of evidence from rural village studies indicating that the jajmani system is in decline as a result of manufactured goods, which purchasers prefer to the hand-made local craft goods – mill-made cloth and shoes, manufactured brass vessels instead of pottery ones, and so on. Population increase has also meant that landholdings have fragmented; many are so small that landholders cannot afford the traditional panoply of servant and artisan dependents. And cash cropping has meant that producers prefer to sell their produce, rather than share it with their dependents. Either unemployment or population pressure or both have led to some specialists leaving the rural areas. In rural areas, carpenters probably continue to be well-employed, while water-carriers have largely been displaced by courtyard pumps, or else people can no longer afford to employ them. In brief, it can be said that all the factors which are responsible for decline and disintegration of the caste system are also responsible for the decline and disintegration of the jajmani system.

7. SUMMARY:

- The jajmani system is the traditional jati-based division of labour in Indian villages.
- It is an important institution that developed during the medieval period and continued till modern times in the rural society.
- It consists of a set of traditional rules about the exchange of products and services between the members of different castes.
- Each caste has specific commitments towards the others.
- Jajmani system is the backbone of rural economy and social order.

- The term 'jajman' refers to the patron or recipient of specialized services and the term 'jajmani' refers to the whole relationship. In fact, the jajmani system is a system of economic, social and ritual ties among different caste groups in a village.
- It is a complementary relationship between the groups of dominant peasant castes on the one hand and service and artisan castes on the other.
- Here, landowning families of high castes are provided services and products by various lower castes such as carpenters (Khadi), barbers (Nai), potters (Kumhar), blacksmiths (Lohar), washermen (Dhobi), sweepers (Chuhra), etc. The servicing castes are called kamins while the castes served are called jajmans. For the services rendered, the servicing castes are paid in cash or in kind (grains, fodder, clothes, and animal products like milk, butter, etc.).
- The jajmani system is ideologically connected with and justified through religion, and thus contributes to maintaining notions about purity and impurity and about relative rank within the caste system. It combines economic and ritual factors.
- In this way, the social and symbolic aspects of caste are interconnected, and contribute to reinforcing each other by creating a correspondence between ideology and practices.
- In modern India, it can be difficult to make the jajmani system function according to traditional practice.
- This system of service-relationships is now breaking up under the influence of monetisation, urbanization and industrialization.