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Map Series No. XI

PUNJAB-HARYANA REGION: SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF SCHEDULED CASTES POPULATION, 2011

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Even a cursory examination of distributional pattern of scheduled castes population in India brings out vividly that Punjab-Haryana region constitutes one such area in the country where the proportion of scheduled castes population was significantly high-almost two times that of the national average. The comparatively high proportion of scheduled castes population in the study region was associated with (a) comparatively long spell of feudal rule; (b) large landholdings; (c) pioneering status in the country's green revolution; (d) intensive agriculture; (e) large proportion of agricultural land under labour demanding crops like rice, cotton etc. and (f) their in-migration during last 50 years or so not only from surrounding areas but also from such far off areas as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh etc. The green revolution brought a revolutionary change in the agricultural scenario here as intensification and commercialization of region's agriculture not only increased the demand for agricultural labour but also farm wages witnessed an unprecedented increase.

However, in tune with the national scene, as is evident from the three maps, the study region also displays relatively higher concentration of scheduled castes population in the rural areas (30.00 per cent) than that in urban areas (19.24 per cent). Such rural bias in the distribution of scheduled castes population is attributable to a number of historical and cultural factors like: (a) this segment of Indian populace traditionally constituted the artisan class in the countryside, who provided various services under the traditional *jajmani* system whereas the social structure of urban areas belied any such rigidity as some of the services were provided in urban areas by people belonging to other castes as well; (b) while in the countryside, bulk of scheduled castes population could now be absorbed on the farm as agricultural labour, there was no such single occupation in the urban areas which could absorb them *en masse*; (c) green revolution and the associated developments in the study region increased the demand for agricultural labour which helped arrest the flight of scheduled castes population from rural to urban areas, to some extent, which was imminent due to break up of the *jajmani* system in the countryside.

The spatial pattern of distribution of scheduled castes population in the region displayed congruence both in rural and urban areas akin to a declining gradient from north-west to south-east. Significantly, while most of Punjab sub-region had characteristically high concentration of scheduled castes population on all three maps of total, rural and urban population (Fig. 1, 2 and 3), such parts of Haryana sub-region which were part of the National Capital Region of Delhi displayed the lowest proportion of scheduled castes population on all the three maps. However, Mewat district of Haryana, which had
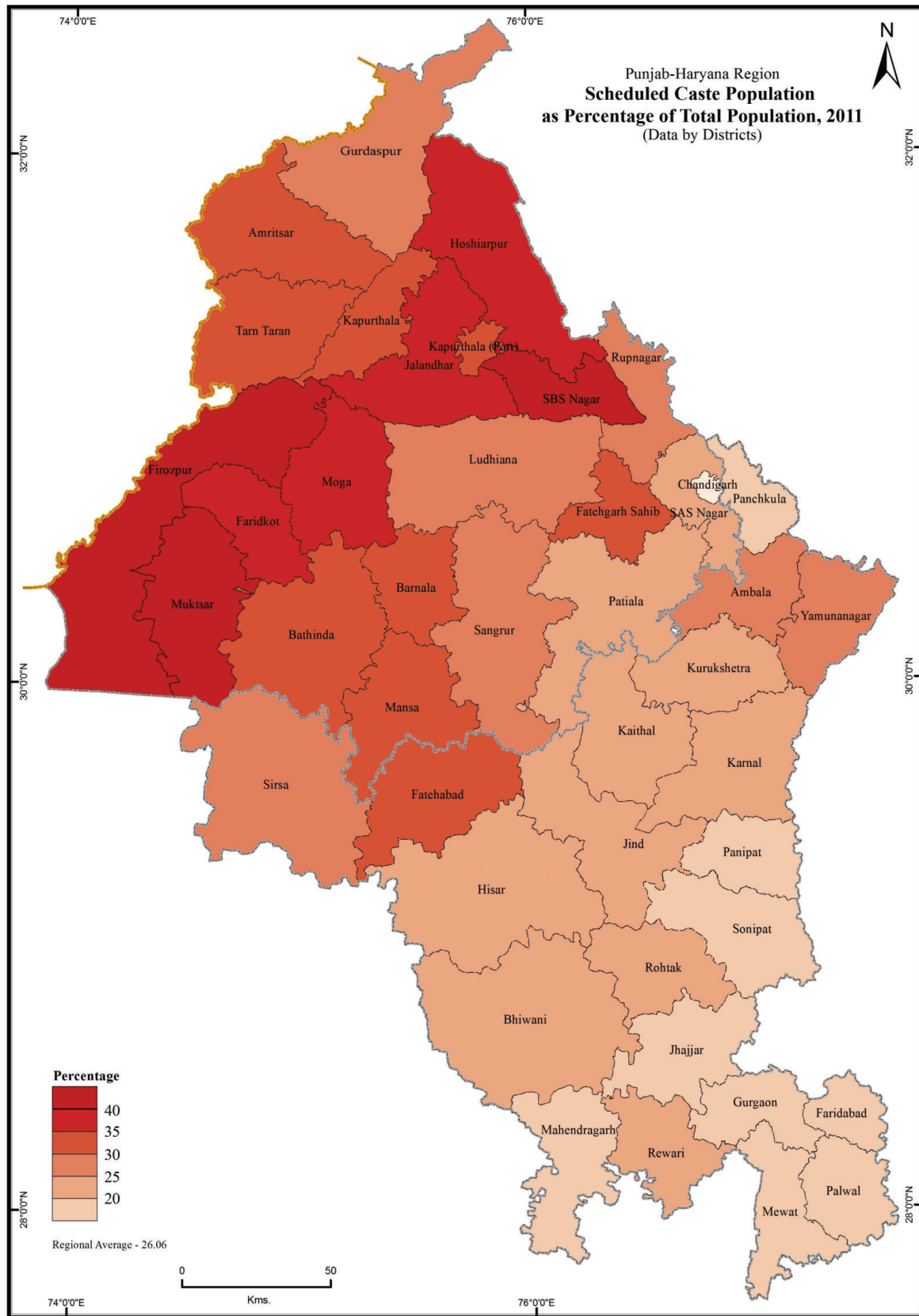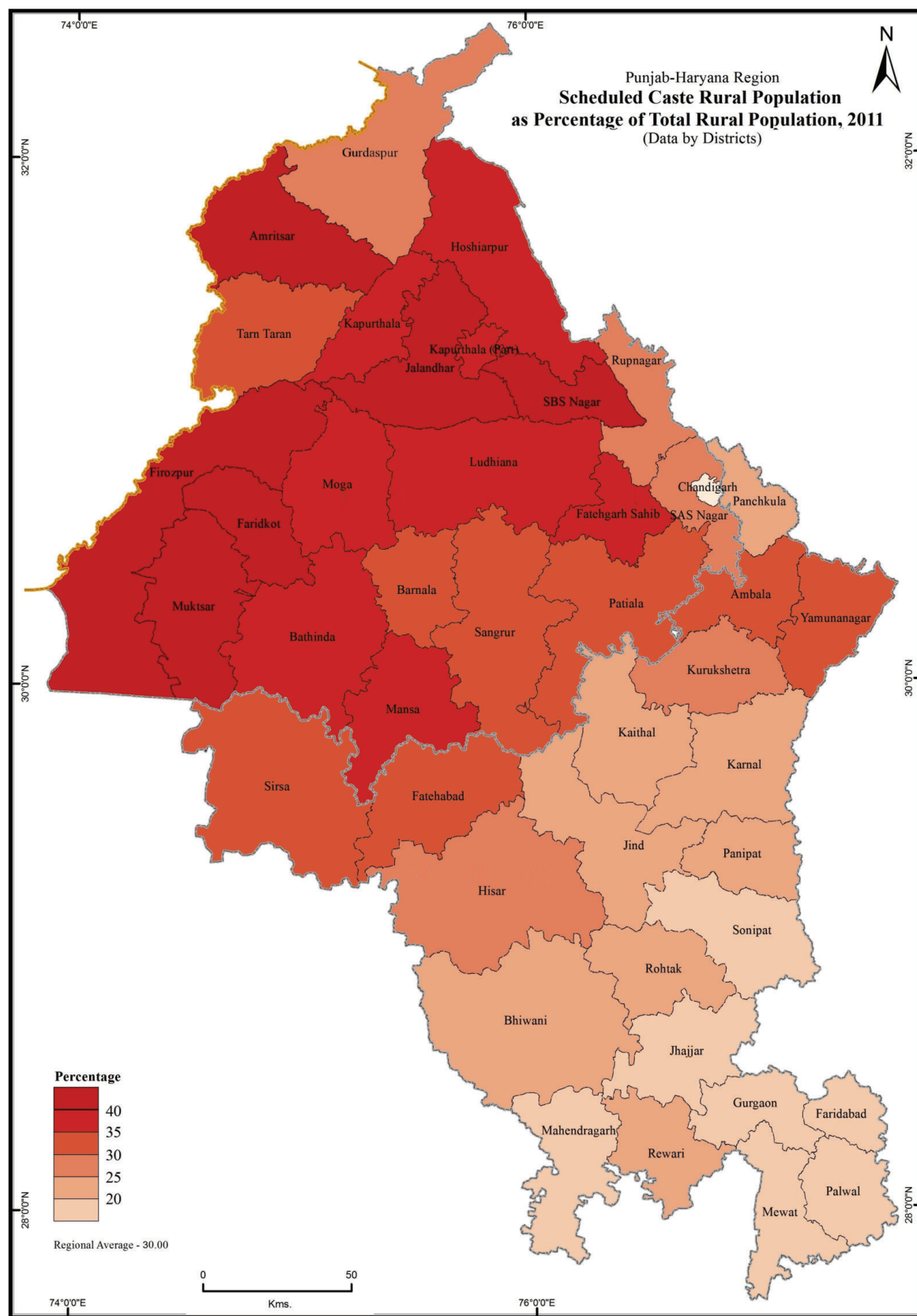
Fig. 1

Source: Census of India, 2011

Fig. 2

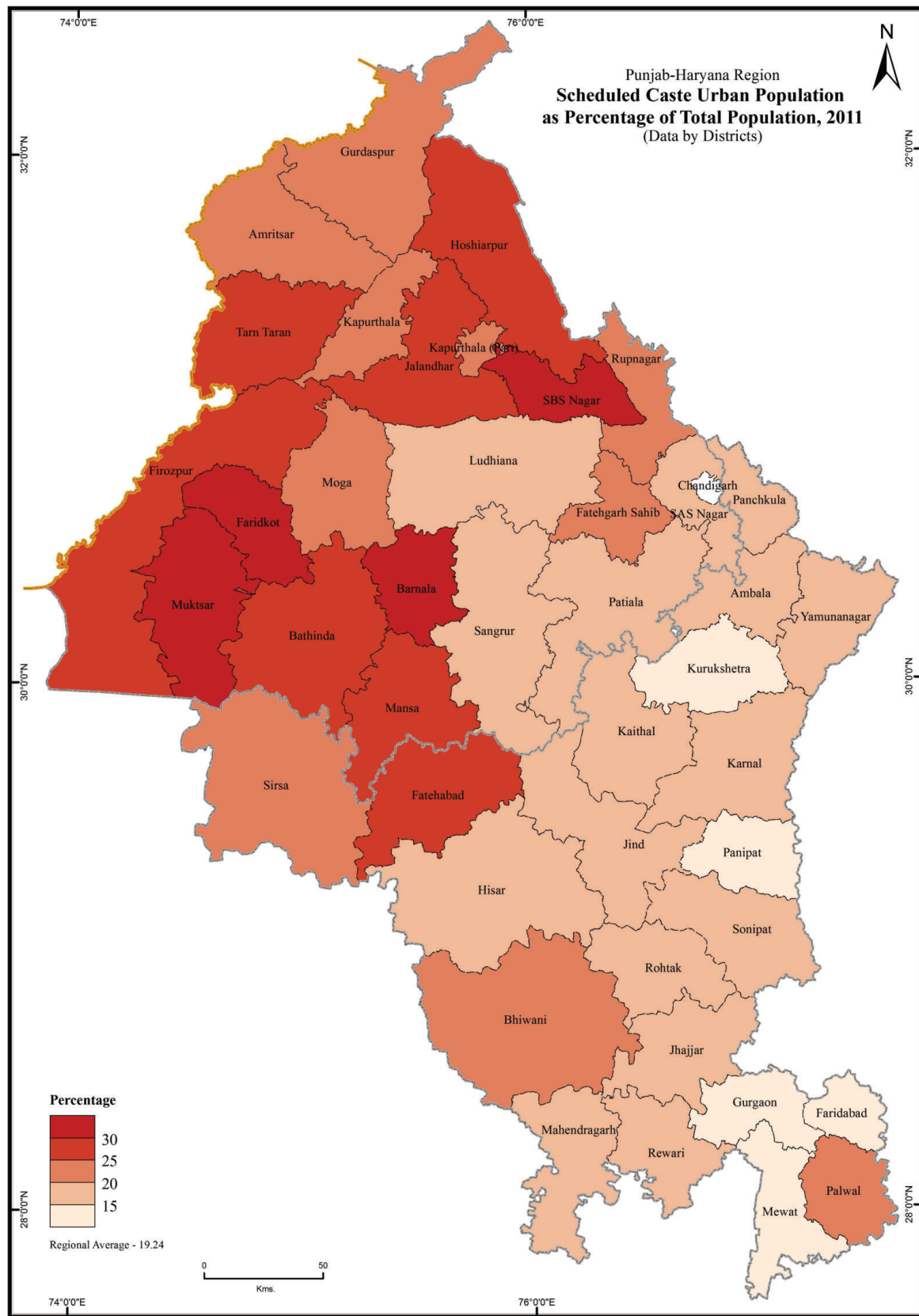Source: Census of India, 2011   Fig. 3

considerable proportion of Muslim population displayed the lowest proportion of scheduled castes population (6.90 per cent), especially in rural areas (5.93 per cent) suggesting that the inverse correlation between proportion of scheduled castes population and that of Muslim population in India as observed by Sopher (1977) in one of his studies, still holds true.

Since Punjab sub-region is often considered an area experiencing out-migration of general population, on a large scale, facilitated by in-migration of scheduled castes population, this peculiarity of migratory ethos of this sub-region warrants an elaboration here. Chandna (1989) observed that fast declining size of agricultural landholdings in the sub-region and its historical international and intra-national migratory links have, on the one hand, encouraged emigration or out-migration from the Punjab sub-region, and, on the other hand, the agricultural innovations have encouraged in-migration to the sub-region, though of different class of population, to meet the increased demand for agricultural labour. In Punjab sub-region it is often considered profitable proposition to depend more on hired labour and spare more and more family hands for other activities in India or abroad. Consequently, while the local educated, more enlightened and progressive people of Punjab sub-region are moving out from the state, the relatively poor, semi-literate or illiterate population mostly belonging to scheduled castes, is in-migrating to the state to work on farms, thus, changing the basic composition of population of Punjab sub-region. It may be interesting to note here that during last 40 years that is during 1971-2011 the share of scheduled castes population in the total population in Punjab has increased from 24.7 per cent in 1971 to 31.94 per cent in 2011. In case of Haryana, it increased only from 18.90 to 20.10 per cent during the same period which may be

associated with their relatively higher rate of natural increase in comparison to non-scheduled castes population.

In fine, the study region is characterized by comparatively higher proportion of scheduled castes population, much above the national average, especially in rural areas. The rural bias in the distribution of scheduled castes population may be partly due to a number of historical, cultural and economic factors and partly due to the fact that the scheduled castes people being more an artisan class seem to fit more in the countryside than in the urban areas. Above all, scheduled castes people could be absorbed on the farm as agricultural labour in the countryside, whereas in the urban areas there was no such single occupation to absorb these people en masse. The spatial pattern of scheduled castes population in the study region displayed a declining gradient from north-west to south-east, implying highest proportion of scheduled castes population in northern and western Punjab and lowest proportion in south-eastern areas of Haryana falling in National Capital Region of Delhi. Significantly, Mewat district of Haryana also located in the south-east and having significant proportion of Muslim population had the distinction of having lowest proportion of scheduled castes population in the study region corroborating a negative correlation between the proportion of scheduled castes population and that of Muslim population. Lastly, such a distributional pattern of scheduled castes population in this labour deficit area of the study region was partly the product of in-migration of scheduled castes workforce from labour surplus areas of adjacent states and partly because of out-migration/emigration of Punjabi population to the traditional areas of out-migration both within and outside the country. Interestingly, both, though belonging to different class of people, yet seem to be moving in search of

greener pastures.

References

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