

OCCUPATIONAL TRANSFORMATION AND OCCUPATIONAL ENTRY IN INDIA

*Ganesha Somayaji **

Occupational transformation is one of the important dimensions of social change in contemporary India. It is characterised by the emergence and growth of new occupational activities and the change in the form and content of old ones. This is well documented by the growing sociological literature on those engaged in different occupations and professions.¹ This paper seeks to explore the nature of occupational transformation in India.

Understanding Indian Occupational Structure

The occupational structure of contemporary India is complex and it is characterised by diversification, specialisation and the marked growth of new occupations. We may understand it better by a comparison with what obtained during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It has been mainly an agrarian structure and agriculture as an occupation has been followed by the members of different caste groups. However, there was a difference between people owning the land and tilling the land. Some tilled the land taken on rent and some others only tilled the land as labourers. The other occupational roles, apart from these agricultural status roles, were characterised by *jajmani* relations. The occupational roles of village artisans- carpenter, blacksmith, potter, tailor, and barber-were caste-based and necessary skills were acquired through socialisation in the family. To a very large extent, an individual's birth in a family and a caste determined what type of activity would be allotted to her/him (Desai 1981: 135). For this reason Ghurye (1969:18) considered the 'lack of unrestricted choice of occupation' as one of the important features of caste system in India. He observed that a Brahman thought that the right occupation for him is to become a priest, while the Chamar deemed it as his duty to cure hides and prepare shoes. However, it is an over simplification to associate a caste with only one occupation. Very often, the members of a caste in addition to their caste callings followed some other occupations like agriculture (Srinivas 1991:9).

The process of occupational entry was governed by tradition: Occupations were attached with notions of purity and pollution and graded and ascribed to different caste groups. In such a situation, aspiring for an occupation other than that of one's own was not proper, if not actually sinful (Pande : 1986). Traditionally,

* Reader, Dept. of Sociology, Goa University, Goa - 403 206

the shifting over to non-caste and non-familial occupation followed a pattern. Brahmans for example, while taking up occupations other than priesthood preferred those occupations which were not polluting. The argument is that an occupational category is not simply associated with a caste and also not all members of a caste were forced to follow the caste occupation even in the past. As the traditional occupations could not provide adequate income to the artisan castes throughout the year their members had to work on land. This elasticity in a way facilitated the continuation of the association between castes and occupations. Srinivas argues, "in the context of a growing population, the occupational aspect of caste system would have broken down completely if the surplus in the artisan, trading and serving castes had not been either absorbed in agriculture or able to migrate to other areas" (1991: 15-9). However, as mentioned earlier, the mobility trends were governed by the notions of purity and population.

Along with occupational entry the social relationships among the different occupational roles were also governed by tradition. Work and person were not separated to the degree they are now. A person's occupational activity was neither demanded nor offered by himself. Labour or occupational skill was not a commodity to be sold or brought as in contemporary India, which is regarded by Desai (1981:136) as the biggest change in occupational relations and occupational structure of contemporary Indian society.

Social Transformation and new occupational activities

India has emerged to be an occupational society, marking the emerging role of achievement along with ascription.² This transformation affects the relationship between occupation on the one hand and the institutions of family, caste and village community on the other. Now an individual is rather less constrained to move out of his traditional occupational activity and enter a different one. While doing so he may seek the help of his relatives and caste well-wishers, but may not be dictated by them. The comparative occupational freedom of a contemporary Indian is facilitated by the growth of new economic institutions which are very closely associated with new occupational relationships. Modern system of production for the market and the resultant expansion of the entrepreneurial sector had been made possible by the availability of free labour and free capital. Sociologically, this process is very significant, for it is associated with the problematic of occupational entry and social mobility. Its clear understanding facilitates discerning the process of social transformation that is going on in India.

The decades after World War I saw the growth of industrial and service occupations which were the result of the general modernisation of Indian society. This was organically linked to such processes as migration, urbanisation, and industrialisation. After the Second World War and Independence these processes have acquired momentum and there has been massive growth in urban

centres and industrial units. The urban population of India grew from 25.8 million in 1901 to 217 million in 1981, i.e., a six-fold increase in eight decades. Also the social composition of older and larger cities has radically changed because of migrant population.

Migrants constitute a sizable section of urban India. Rural to urban and urban to urban migration accounted for 30 million in 1961 and 39 million in 1971, showing a decadal increase of 30 per cent (Rao et al. 1991: 70). The urban-ward migration is male-dominated in India as it is in many Asian and African countries. In 1961 and 1971 Urban India had 10 million and 21 million male in-migrants respectively. The urban-ward male migration accounted for nearly 38 per cent of the total male migration in 1961 and roughly 40 per cent in 1971. During the decade 1951-61 about 11.62 million people migrated from the rural to urban areas and nearly 3 million migrated in the reverse direction. In the next decade (1961-71) the number of rural urban migrants was 10.98 million whereas the number of urban to rural migrants was 5.33 million (Premi 1981 quoted in Rao 1991:80). As per the 1981 census there were 15.74 million rural-urban migrants and 6.39 urban-rural migrants by place of last residence during 1971-81 (Cherunilam 1987:92 quoted in Rao 1991:80). The net result of these processes is that between 1951-1991 about 985 towns/town agglomerations emerged in India and the number of Urban Agglomerations/Cities with million plus population increased from one to twenty-three (Bose:1994-26).

In India along with urbanisation substantial industrial expansion has also taken place: The number of joint-stock companies, both public and private, rose from 30461 in 1971 to 118305 in 1985. The growth in the number of private companies has been more than that of public companies. The expansion of industries has been accompanied by a rise in the number of labourers working in the organised sector, from 12.09 million in 1961 to 24.2 million in 1984. Sociologically, these changes have had major implications for social transformation not only in these sectors of activity but also in the society in general (Singh 1993 :33). Occupational transformation is one among such implications.

Occupational transformation is manifest at the first instance in the continual development of new occupations. These are the secular, caste-free, or Entry-Type occupations rather than the traditional, caste, or Exit-Type occupations.³ They characterise Indian society as an occupational society. These occupations are also found in other occupational societies like England. In his study of social grading of occupations in India D'souza (1962: 125-159) found out that there is a high degree of similarity between social grading of occupations in India and England. They are graded hierarchically and entry into them is achievement based, for the recruitment is based on education and training rather than birth into any group. Most of the thirty occupations he had chosen-Doctor, Company Director, Business Executive, Lawyer, Chartered Accountant, Government Offi-

cial, Priest, Works Manager, Owner Cultivator, News Paper Reporter, Insurance Agent, Primary School Teacher, Sales Representative, Labour Contractor, Hotel Keeper, Carpenter, Fitter, Bus Driver, Mason, Taxi Driver, Agricultural Labourer, Dock Worker, Mill Hand, Waiter, Railway Coolie and Sweeper- have been the outgrowths of social transformation and to this list we may add many more. One result of such an expansion is the increase in the number of alternative occupations available for the individual and enhancing the possibility of occupational change and mobility. However, the processes of occupational change, occupational entry, and mobility as aspects of occupational transformation are governed by multiple factors. They are influenced by both traditional and modern components of social structure and initiatives and responses of individuals concerned.

Traditional Factors: From Determination to limitation

The relationship between the processes of occupational entry and caste has undergone change. The dominant role played by caste in occupational selection and entry has been disrupted to a great extent by the emergence of 'caste-free' and 'Entry-Type' occupations in urbanising and industrialising India. The traditional occupations have been replaced by new occupations which are ranked on the basis of economic considerations and not on the notions of purity and pollution defined within the caste frame-work (Desai et al. 1985:5). The caste ruling on prescription of traditionally highly ranked occupations like priesthood and land owning for higher castes and subsequent correlation of upper castes with upper classes worked so long as non-agricultural occupations were limited, interaction of villages was confined within a narrow territorial boundary, market for agricultural surplus was limited and man-land ratio among the land owning castes was not skewed (Ibid :6). In the changed socio-economic context no caste is a category consisting of homogeneous family units. It will be incorrect to argue that all upper caste members also are upper class members or all lower caste members are lower class members because of their respective families following hereditary prescribed caste and family occupations. Various village studies from different parts of the country confirm the fact that no caste community is any longer a homogeneous structure in terms of occupation and wealth and caste is today a limiting factor and not a determining factor of occupational entry (see Bailey 1950 and Gough 1950). Such studies point out the intra-caste economic differentiation based on land-ownership and occupation (Desai et al. 1985:7). Sometimes the occupations selected and pursued by some members, among other factors, traditionally acted as bases for sub-caste formation and demarcation among themselves (Ghurye 1969). Such sub-caste formation processes have been interrupted by the processes of class formations within castes and sub-castes and also formation of mobile-kin and village networks. The former, termed as 'internal stratification' by Jayaram (1996: 80), has been due to the unequal spread of education and resultant access to modern professions and high status occupations. The latter process has been on account of the collectivist ethos of

Indian civilization which entails an individual to share his resources with his kin and well-wishers. These two forces, one differentiating and the other integrating, are very influential in the process of occupational entry.

Just as caste has been reduced to a limiting factor so also the family especially the traditional joint family, and the socio-economic exchanges within the village community characterised by the *jajmani* system underwent transformation. In the structural net-works of caste, family and village community in India, either some groups monopolised certain skills and secrets associated with certain occupations or have been simply assigned with certain occupational tasks because they are 'pure' or 'impure' and 'high' or 'low'. The former, associated with the earliest division of labour across the world,⁴ associated in India with such occupations as rendering medical services, bell metal casting, magical practice, and so on. In the latter case the priesthood could be chosen by the members of eligible Brahman groups and the scavenging could be solicited by the so called untouchable caste members. In both the categories some are caste occupations and some others are family occupations. Even those occupations which had association with caste have some relations to family as an institution. In an actual practice the caste occupations are actually family occupations because they actually were followed by families as parts of larger caste groups. Some occupations are only family occupations the following of which is not governed by caste ideals and dictates.

Two traditional Indian institutions that facilitated the continuation of caste, family and occupation nexus within a region or a cluster of villages had been caste panchayats and *jajmani* system. Now- a days both the institutions have lost their importance (Karanth 1996:89). The caste panchayats regulated the processes of occupational entry. With independence and passing of the Constitution of India (1950), caste panchayats were made legally redundant. This in effect meant that the members of a given caste were free to choose the occupation they liked and caste exclusiveness of occupations was no longer tenable in law. In the past encroachment into an occupation by members of another caste was resisted by the specialist castes through the caste panchayat and the local village panchayat. The constitution deprived the panchayat of this power (Ibid:90). The second institution which underwent drastic modifications in many regions and lost significance in many other is *jajmani*. The institution marked the interdependence of families and *jatis* (Mandelbaum 1970:161-180), but has been declining steadily (Kolenda 1978: 37-61 quoted in Jayaram 1996:73). As early as 1950 Bailey (quoted in Desai et al. 1985:7) observed in a Orissa village, " Not every person works at his traditional occupation. The distillers do not touch liquor. The Kond potters do not know how to make pots. The fishermen do not fish. The warriors are cultivators. Everywhere there is scope for practicing an hereditary occupation not all members of caste engage in work". In the southern state of Tamilnadu Gough (1960) noted, " The caste community is no longer homogeneous in occupation and wealth, for caste is today a limiting rather than a determining factor in

the choice of occupation. Exactly half of Kumbapettai's adult Brahmans are now employed in towns as government servants, school teachers or restaurant-workers. Of the remainder, some own up to thirty acres of land, others as little as three. One runs a grocery store and one a vegetarian restaurant. Among the non-Brahmans, the fishermen, toddy-tapers, Marathas, Kallans, Koravas and Kultadis have abandoned their traditional work" (quoted in *Ibid.*:7).

Interplay of Traditional and Non-traditional Forces

The new forces that entered the realm of occupational entry are many: industrialisation, spread of modern education, urbanisation, improved means of transport and communication, emergence of new and secular occupations, and migration. Social transformation that is underway is marked by both old and new roles attached to traditional factors of family, caste, and village community and creation of altogether new forces and factors like migration and occupational diversification. The contours of transformation are defined and redefined on a continuous basis and in such an extremely complex social scenario a wide variety of occupations can be recognized and their categorisation conceived. Subsequently, an individual's selecting an occupation or entering it has become a complex process with varieties of experiences.⁵

The extent of the complexity may be elucidated by referring to the phenomenon of occupational entry in the context of 'Entry-Type' and 'Exit-Type' categorisation. Some occupations, including those of temple-archakas, which once were the prerogatives or socially dictated to be followed by the members of some castes are now becoming secular and can be selected by anybody at least theoretically. Jayaram (1996:76) notes that in some government-controlled temples the members of scheduled castes are being appointed as pujaris. These are examples of mobility within the occupational structure. It marks the partial transformation of an 'Exit-Type' occupation (for instance, fishing and haircutting). Such a mobility is either due to increasing income associated with these occupations in the changing socio-economic milieu or due to the government intervention in terms of subsidies and other welfare programmes. Among the totality of the members pursuing these traditional occupations in the modern set up are found both members of traditionally assigned groups and new entrants.

With regard to certain 'Entry-Type' occupations (for instance, agriculture and allied occupations, employment in courts, and military services) which are found both in the traditional social structure and amidst the contemporary transformation, occupational entry had been/is being influenced by forces of both ascription and achievement. Accordingly, a land-lord's son had all the good fortunes of continuing on father's line as a land-lord acquiring more land than his father had or improve upon what father held by employing new scientific knowledge and techniques of cultivation. In the contemporary situation of availability of

professional education, national citizenship and consequent migration the traditionally privileged father's son may select an occupation and subsequently enter his selection available within the wide spectrum of occupations. In a quite opposite situation a traditionally affluent father's son may, on account of his own miscalculations, ruin his good fortunes ascribed upon his life by birth into a particular group and can be forced to select a comparatively menial occupation for his livelihood. The explanation clearly shows that ascription and achievement, tradition and modernity, affluence or otherwise are not categorical influences but analytic theoretical extremes which in actual situations have highly varying influences for different individuals and groups and categories.

The above observation holds true of even new and modern 'Entry-Type' occupations which are functional to the ever expanding modern occupational structure. The principle of ascription and conditions of achievement simultaneously play subtle roles in deciding who will join what type of occupation and how long he will stay in that occupation and other related questions. While modern developments act as conditions the traditional elements supply resources and thereby influence the process of occupational entry. As early as 1955, Desai, while analysing joint family, wrote about the sociological pattern of migration, in that the family, the caste and the village moved to city. "After an individual came to the city and was settled in a job his next concern would be to bring someone from his joint family to city, failing some other relatives from the village or the caste. This pattern could be seen in the personnel of the private commercial establishments and of the factories" (Desai 1981: 92-111). Panini, on the basis of a review of several studies conducted since independence in India, recognises the occurrence of the phenomenon of caste clustering⁶ in the various professions and occupations in India. He observed that the membership of a caste made a person part of a person-based social network which controlled insider's information about economic opportunities, transmitted skills and provided varied types of human and material support. As a result, the social network of a caste itself became an important social resource for its members. He argued further that the conditions created by the socialist economic regime reinforced the tendency for a person who became privy to knowledge of a certain economic opportunity or for a person who gained access to a new economic opportunity to retain such advantages largely for the benefit of members of his kin and caste network. Such a network, designated social resource, had been actively used in the recruitment of new members in the profession of engineering, medicine, banking, journalism, colleges, universities, and research institutes. Its presence had also been reflected in the social background of industrial entrepreneurs and organised and unorganised workers. In the case of industrial entrepreneurs, the social capital had also been useful in promoting their economic interests and in expanding their industrial base (1996:28-39). The membership of an individual in his primary groups ensures him of some guidance and assistance in the matter of occupational entry; it acts as social capital. In fact, it assists the individuals to sense the opportunities available in the modern world and to articulate the responses.

Such a role of social capital has been identified in a recent study of occupational entry and occupational mobility of Udupi hotel-keepers in Goa. Being in-migrants in Goa these hotel-keepers run small and medium sized hotels and restaurants. Various reasons like poverty, unemployment and business aspirations acted as push factors for their out-migration from their native place, i.e., Udupi. Their actual course of migration ending up in their entry in to hotel work of different types had been guided by the primary relational networks of family, caste, village and friendship. Their entry into hotel work, many of them felt, was not a deliberate selection. This shows that the recruitment in even an Entry-Type or modern occupation like that of hotel-keeping has been influenced by traditional forces (Somayaji 1997:158-161).

On the basis of the foregoing it may be argued that emergence of a modern occupational structure in India by itself does not liquidate traditional procedures of occupational recruitment. We may at best tell that the nature of traditional procedures has been transformed: From ascription and determination to achievement and limitation/guidance.

NOTES

1. For example, there are sociological studies of teachers (Bhoite 1987; Hiremath 1983), of the managers (JAIN 1978), of the doctors (Madan 1972; Oommen 1978), of the industrial workers (Jorapur 1979), of the potters (Behura 1978, Srinivas 1959), of the warrior merchants (Mines 1984), of the coal miners (Pramanik 1993), of the artisans (Brouwer 1995), and so on. This list, though not exhaustive, reflects the expansion and diversification of India's occupational structure on the one hand and the growing body of sociological knowledge of occupations and professions.
2. Based on the role played by ascription and achievement in the entry/allocation of occupations to their individual members, Form (1968: 245-254) distinguishes between "status societies" and "occupational societies".
3. In place of the traditional usage of caste and caste-free occupations, Philips (1979: 102-123) suggests a typology of "Entry Type" occupations : Entry-Type occupations are caste-free occupations which are open to all. Exit-Type occupations are caste occupations; from which exit is possible but into which the entry is restricted. The two types of occupations, according to Philips, correspond to the systems of class and caste which cross-cut the Indian society.
4. Caplow 1970: 13-14 provides a description of such division of labour.

5. The experiences of women in this context have been identified by Dube (1996: 2-6). The occupational change for men implies continuation of caste-based occupations and maintenance of households by women. "When men give up their traditional occupation on account of its low ritual status or inadequate returns, the entire burden of occupational work often falls on the women. Many men migrate to towns leaving behind their families. Women continue their contribution in terms of services or crafts, but for want of male help they face the choice of losing their clientele or coping with a doubled work burden." Dube also identifies the nature of occupational activities of those lower caste women who migrate to cities along with their men-folk. The Padyachi and Nadar women from Tamil Nadu in Delhi, for example, took up work as domestic helps in private homes. Their men generally considered it below their dignity to do such job. Among these migrant groups, women's experience of multi-faceted housework becomes the basis for maintaining the household.
6. By 'caste clustering' Panini (1996:32) meant the marked tendency for certain castes to cluster in particular 'Entry-Type' occupations.

REFERENCE

Bailey, F.G. 1957. *Caste and Economic Frontier*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Behura, N.K. 1978. *Peasant Potters of Orissa: A Sociological Study*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.

Bhoite, U.B. 1987. *Sociology of Indian Intellectuals*. Jaipur: Rawat.

Bose, Ashish. 1994. *India's Urban Population*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Brouwer, Jan. 1995 *Caste, Craft and Ideology*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Caplow, Theodore. 1970. *The Sociology of Work*. Allahabad : Central Book Depot (1954: University of Minneapolis press).

Cherunillam, Francis. 1987. *Migration: Causes, Correlates, Consequences, Trends, and Policies*. Delhi: Himalaya Publishing House.

Desai, I.P. 1981. *The Craft of Sociology and other Essays*. Delhi: Ajanta.

Desai, I.P. Shah, Ghanashyam. Bose, P.K. Punalekar, S.P. and Gupta, Dipankar. 1985. *Caste, Caste-Conflict and Reservations*. Delhi: Ajanta.

D'Souza, Victor, S. 1962. 'The Social Grading of Occupations in India', in *The Sociological Review*, July: 145-159.

Dubey, Leela. 1996. 'Caste and Women', in M.N.Srinivas(ed.), *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avtar*, pp. 1-27. New Delhi: Viking Penguin.

Form, William, H. 1968. *Occupations and Careeres*', in David L.Skills (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol.: 252.

Ghurye, G.S. 1969. *Caste and Race in India*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

Gough, Kathlen. 1960. 'Caste in a Tanjore Village', E.R. Leach (ed.), *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hiremath, S.G. 1983. *Sociology of Academics in India and Abroad*. Delhi: Sandeep Prakashan.

Jain, S.P. 1969. 'Social Mobility in a Town- An Intergenerational Analysis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4: 1703-1710.

Jayaram, N.J. 1996. 'Caste and Hinduism: Changing protean Relationship', in M.N. Sreenivas

[ed], *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avathar*, pp. 69-86. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India.

Jorapur, P:B. 1976. *Occupational Mobility of Industrial Workers*. Dharwad: Karnatak University press.

Karant, G.K 1996. 'Caste in Contemporary Rural India ', in M.N. Sreenivas [ed], *Caste ; Its Twentieth Century Avatar*, pp. 87-109. New Delhi; Viking Penguin India.

Kolenda, Pauline. 1978. *Caste in Contemporary India*. Menlo Park, California; The Benjamin/ Cummings Publishing Company.

Madan, T.N. 1978. 'Doctors in a North Indian City: Recruitment and Role Perception', in S. Seberwal [ed] *Beyond the village: Approaches to the study of Macro- society In India*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.

Mandelbaum, David, G. 1970. *Society in India: Continuity and Change and Change and Continuity*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

Mines, Milson. 1984. *Warrior Merchants: Textiels, Trade and Terrotory in South India*. Cambridge University Press.

Oommen, T.K. 1978. *Doctors and Nurses: A Study in Occupational Role Structure*. Delhi: Macmillan.

Pande, Sunananda. 1986. *Trends of Occupational Mobility among Migrants*. Jaipur: Rawat.

Panini, M.N. 1996. 'Political Economy of Caste' in M.N. Srinivas [ed], *Caste: Its twentieth Century Avatar*, pp. 28-68. New Delhi. Viking Penguin India.

Pramanik, P. 1993. *Coal Miners in Private and Public Sector Collieries*. Reliance: New Delhi

Premi, Mahendra, K. and Judith Ann L Tom. 1985. *City Characteristics, Migration and Urban Development Policies in India*. Honalulu: East West Center.

Rao, M.S.A. Bhat, Chandrashekar. and Lakshminarayanan, L.[eds]. 1991. *A Reader in Urban sociology*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Ltd.

Singh, Yogendra. 1993. *Social Change in India: Crises and Resilience*. New Delhi: Har Anand Publications.

Srinivas, M.N. 1991. *India: Social Stucture*. Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation.