



OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY AMONG THE SCHEDULED CASTE COMMUNITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF MAJULI DISTRICT

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Abstract:

Occupational mobility refers to the socio-economic phenomenon of changes in individual occupational status. It helps in sustaining the dynamism of a society, while at the same time aiding social and economic progress. In general terms, occupational mobility refers to shifts in a person's traditional or ascribed occupational status to an achieved one. It can be understood better if we analyze it at different levels, namely, family, group and individual. But Indian society sets peculiar complexities in this regard, particularly because of its unique stratification on the basis of caste. While the determinant of caste cannot be ignored, there are other determinants as well. Improvement of economic and social position through more agricultural production, business, prestigious occupation and education contribute to enhancement of status of certain families. In this study, we focus on the patterns of occupational mobility among the Scheduled Caste communities of the Majuli Island in Assam.

Key words: *Push factors; pull factors, upward mobility, downward mobility etc.*

I. Introduction:

Occupational mobility among the members of a social community indicates the level of socio-economic advancement of the community. But it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which takes into account a range of different factors. Direction of occupational mobility may be classified under the higher, lower or at the same level of the economic rank by moving individual or groups. All these different forms of mobility can be broadly classified under the categories of Horizontal and Vertical mobility.

Horizontal indicates a change in position, job or occupation without the change of status. For example a fisherman may leave the profession of catching fish to join as a fish seller at the local market. By horizontal mobility, we mean the transformation of an individual from one position or occupation or a job to another within the same status level or stratum. In the words of S. Patwardhan (Rao; 1974, 324) horizontal mobility takes place when there is a change from one occupation to another, which indicates a change within the field of the same status level rather than strata. Urbanization offers scope for such horizontal mobility. In our study area, most of the sample household families change their traditional occupation of fishing to daily wage earner after settlement of their villages permanently at the nearby semi-urban places. This mobility of occupation has not been raised their status or position of occupation.

The vertical mobility implies movement up and down of an individual from one position i.e. status to another. In other words, the occupational mobility that takes place either from a lower stratum to a higher one or from a higher stratum to a lower is known as vertical occupational mobility. An individual's mobility up or down is measured of how his achieved status compares with his ascribed status. There are two forms of vertical mobility- namely, (i) upward mobility and (ii) downward mobility. Upward mobility of occupation refers to the movement of people or



groups from a lower status to a higher one. It involves changes in class, occupation and power. For example, the movement of people from occupation of labours to that of a bank clerk. According to Sorokin, following the detection of transition, upward mobility is also called "Social climbing" or ascending. Downward mobility of occupation indicates the movement of an individual from a higher position or status to lower one. It arises due to the factors like loss of prestige, loss of fortune, social and economic innovations, out casting, benefit of reservation, the failure of groups and individuals to maintain the status of the ascending generations etc.

The dimension of Space: The physical movement of a person from working place to another is called spatial mobility. For example movement of people from village to city involving change of residence and change of place of work is known as spatial mobility.

The unit of mobility: The unit of mobility may be an individual, family or group. Individual mobility is the movement of individual alone which sometimes even dissociates him from his membership group. For example, in a class based society an individual may join any class lower or higher on the basis of his personal efforts and achievements. On most of the occasions, when an individual moves in the social ranking his family also moves with him. This becomes most observable when the individual happens to be head of the family. On the other hand, group mobility has been perceived as a feature of caste based society. The group mobility demands homogeneity and united efforts of all the members of the group. Many a time individual and group mobility may be perceived occurring simultaneously.

II. Objectives:

- To study the patterns of occupational mobility among the people belonging to the SC communities of Majuli district in Assam.
- To understand the impact of caste in determining the occupational status of the communities.
- To understand the various pull and push factors that lead to upward and downward mobility of occupations, respectively.
- To study how occupational mobility impacts the social and economic status of these communities.

III. Methodology:

To carry forward the study and to find out the empirical evidences both survey and exploratory methods have been used in this paper. To know the impact of occupational mobility among the Scheduled Caste population of study area intensive survey has been made to collect primary data. Books, journals and government reports have been extensively analyzed to collect secondary data.

IV. Discussion:

Our study area is Majuli district in Assam. As per 2011 census, the total size of the population in the island-district is 1,67,304, out of which 21,498 people belong to the SC population. There are two development blocks, namely, Majuli and Ujani Majuli block. 8 gaon panchayats fall under Ujani Majuli block, while remaining 12 panchayats fall under the jurisdiction of Majuli



development block. There are 55 Scheduled Caste villages and 3 reserved panchayats for SC depending on the proportion of their population. Here we find 4 communities of SC people, namely, Kaibartra, Jhalow malow, Bania and Hira. For our indepth study, 399 households respondents were purposively selected from two dominant communities of Kaibarta and Jhalowmalow.

We can observe three broad patterns of occupational community among these people. These have been described below:

Marginally going up: In our study area the status of some families of the fishermen have marginally going up by their self efforts either in the form of attaining education, taking prestigious occupation or job, maintaining standard of living.

Marginally going down: It is reverse of the marginally going up pattern. The status of some families of the fishermen have been noticed decreases due to adherence of the so called degrading practices.

Maintaining status quo: In our study area a great majority of the sample households have maintained their present status as it is, as it was earlier. In an in-depth study on Socio-economic condition of the scheduled castes of Assam, Bezboruah has showed that the lower level of education, and the greater the percentage of respondents identifying themselves with status quo. The graduate maintaining status quo is negligible.

Factors responsible for occupational mobility: Occupational mobility among the fishermen particularly kaibarta and Jhalomalo occur due to many factors. These factors can be classified under two heads viz.- (a) Push factors and (b) Pull factors. Push factors are the factors which compels them to leave their traditional occupations to avoid them disadvantage situations. Impact of these factors on occupational mobility are given below.

Reasons:

(a) Push factors: (i) Erosion (ii) Loss of sources of fishing (iii) Damage of agriculture by flood. (iv) Growth of population.

(b) Pull factors: (i) Education (ii) Better economic prospect (iii) Opportunity of new occupation. (iv) Allotment of new land.

Table :1

Reasons of occupational mobility	No. of Respondents changed their occupation	Percentage
1.Push factors	99	24.80
i] Erosion	85	21.20
ii] Loss of free sources	85	21.20
iii] Damage of flood	71	17.00
iv] Growth of population	41	10.08
2.Pull Factors	41	10.08
i] Education	40	10.02
ii] Better economic prospect	15	3.70
iii] Allotment of new land	48	13.20
Total	399	100.00



The push and pull factors area given in table - It reveals that out of 399 sample households 99 (24.80%) respondents have shifted their occupation of fishing because of large scale erosion by the river Brahmaputra Originally, most of the villages were located at the bank of the river which facilities them to take fishery as livelihood. But after erosion, they were shifted to other safer places i.e. on P.W.D. roads, on embankments where the scope of fishing is very limited. They had left the occupation of fishing and engaged in other occupations e.g., daily wage earner, carpenter etc. The intensity of erosion in the study area is so high that every year many fishermen families lost their permanent property and become homeless which compels them to leave the traditional occupation of fishing.

On the other hand 85 (21.20%) sample households shifted from the occupation of fishing to other fields because of lost of traditional free sources of fishery. The Kaibarta and Jhalomalow communities earned their livelihood by catching and selling fish from the natural sources i.e. rivers, beels, ponds and water bodies. The system of lease, occurrence of flood and erosion compelled the fishermen to leave their traditional occupation and they were in search of alternative ones. If a fisherman spends whole day on catching fish then, he can hardly catch 1 kg to 3kg fish and half of the total fish have to be given to lessee, and by selling this a meager amount could earn which is unable to run the family. This facility is also not available at the time of breeding season, as the government imposes law on catching fish.

Damage of agriculture field by the regular occurrence of flood and erosion has been considered as prime factor of occupational mobility among the fishermen families. Those families who were formerly engaged in cultivation, now they have shifted from cultivation to fishing and fish trading which abnormally increased number of fishermen families at the limited sources of fishery. 71 families (17%) shifted their occupation due to damage of crops by flood. One hand, it created burden in the fishery sector and other hand, it makes hundreds of families extremely poor. As they cannot earn reasonable income from their occupation, they always eagerly look for govt. BPL card, financial assistance etc.

Growth of population: The growth of population is another major factor for occupational mobility among the fisherman families. During the time of survey it is found that sample villages are thickly populated which breeds many vital problems. Sample household family members become vendors, small traders, house servants to assist the head of the family. 41 families (10,58%) shifted their occupation due to growth of population Fishermen Kaibarta and Jhalomalo families have been migrated to towns and sub-urban places in search of alternative occupations. It is also found that due to illiteracy and poverty once there size of family and rate of growth of population was abnormally high but the situation at present has been changed to some extent due to expansion of education, health and medical facilities. Growth of population have been noticed gradually slow down and original joint family has been turned into nuclear family

Better economic prospects and opportunity of new occupations: Modernization and expansion of education have expanded the new fields of occupation at their locality and abroad.



Educated boys and girls of fishermen have shifted their father and forefathers occupation where the prospect of earning, promotion, better working condition is very bright. Catching and selling fish is considered as low grade occupation in our society and the working environment is also not congenial. Due to better economic prospect 15 families (3.70 %) shifted their occupation and they considered their fishery profession as low grade one. The small fish sellers require more time, energy and labour. But the new generation prefers to engage them in those occupations where working place is hygienic and the society also give them due recognition.

Allotment of new land: It is also other important factor of occupational mobility among the fishermen. 48 households (13.20%) had shifted their occupation due to allotment of new land by the government where the provision of fishing is not available. In our study area, fishermen kaibarta and Jhalomalo have been rehabilitated by the government after their villages had been eroded by the river. To know the relationship between occupational mobility and pull factors particularly education and better economic prospect' heads of the sample fishermen families were interviewed. The respondents gave their answer in the following way. Our hypothesis was no significant relation between pull factors and occupational mobility.

Table: 2
Pull factors and occupational mobility.

Pull factors for shifting occupation	Yes(%)	No(%)	Mixed(%)	Total
Education	67	55	62	184
Allotment of new land	98	107	110	215
Total	165	162	172	399

Source : Field Study

Calculated value of χ^2 at 1 d f and at 5% level of significance is 18.82. On the other hand, the table value of χ^2 at 1 d f at 5% level of significance is 5.99%. Hence $18.82 > 5.991$ i.e. calculated value is greater than table value. Our hypothesis is rejected and we find significant relationship between pull factors and occupational mobility among the fishermen.

During the time of survey, 399 heads of the fishermen families were interviewed and they were asked what they consider "erosion or loss of free sources of fishery as significant factor for shifting their occupation. The answer was given in following manner.

Table :3

Factors for shifting occupation	No. of shifted household	Remain in fishery	Total
Erosion of fishermen villages	110 (37.42)	85 (80.95)	195 (48.87)
Loss of free sources	184 (62.58)	20 (19.05)	204 (51.13)
Total	294	105	399

Source: Field Survey



Our hypothesis is that erosion and loss of free sources of fishery is significant factor in shifting their occupation. But by using chi-square test it is found that $C.V > TV$ at 1 d f and 5% level of significance i.e. $58.53 > 3.84$. Hence our hypothesis is rejected and we confirmed that erosion and loss of free sources are not significant factor for occupational mobility among the fishermen. To know the nature and pattern of occupational distribution and in depth study was carried on in the study area. Findings have been given in the following table.

Table: 4

Nature and pattern of occupational distribution of sample households and their earnings

Occupation	No. of persons employed	%	Place/ Nature/ Type	Income
Fishery as main occupation	105	26.39	i) throughout the year ii) Selling fish at markets iii) Fish vendors	i) Monthly earning ranges from Rs. 3500-Rs.4000 ii) Daily earning ranges from Rs. 50-Rs. 80 iii) Daily earning ranges from Rs.60-Rs.70
Cultivation	50	12.54	i) Ahu, Cultivation ii) Rabi crops cultivation, seasonal nature	i) Yearly income ranges from Rs3000-Rs7000 ii) Yearly income ranges from Rs.6000-Rs.8000
Small traders	46	11.54	i) opening grocery shop at own villages ii) Selling goods at nearby markets	i) Daily earning ranges from Rs.50-Rs.200 ii) Daily earning ranges from Rs.50-Rs.120
Daily wage earner	115	28.83	i) work as contractual labourer at public carrier, residence etc. ii) Carpenter, helper	i) Daily wage earning ranges from Rs.70-Rs.170 ii) Daily income ranges from Rs.120-Rs.150
Govt. employee	45	11.28	i) teacher ii) office assistant iii) bank officers, college lecturer etc.	i) Monthly income ranges from Rs.12000-Rs.15000 ii) Monthly income ranges from Rs.13000-Rs15000 iii) Monthly income ranges from Rs.20000-Rs.45000
Driver, Mechanic, Security guard, Waiter etc.	38	9.43	i) Driver, conductor at private vehicles ii) Security guard at town, cities outside Assam iii) Waiter at hotels and private residence	i) Monthly income ranges from Rs.3000-Rs.5000 ii) Monthly income ranges from Rs.3000-Rs.4000 iii) Monthly income ranges from Rs.1000-Rs.1500

Source: Field survey

Among the sample households who were found as fishermen in the first point survey, after in depth study it was found that 105 households heads (36.39%) earn their livelihood from fishery as their primary occupation. These family heads engage in fishery activities throughout the year. They engage in catching fish, selling at markets or work as fish vendor and earn Rs. 3,500 - Rs.



4000 monthly. Another 50 households (12.54%) shifted their occupation from the fishery to cultivation due to various reasons and earn Rs. 3000 Rs. 7000 per annum; if their crops are not damaged by natural calamities. 46 households (11.53%) earn their livelihood from small trading. Those who opens grocery shops at their own villages, they earn who sells goods at nearby daily markets they earn Rs. 50 to Rs. 120 per day. On the other hand a few persons established themselves as middle class businessmen particularly from Jhalomalow community. 115 households heads run their family engaging themselves as daily earner. The 28.83% heads of the family earn their income by engaging contractual labour at public carrier i.e. trucks, tractors or work at private residence. Those who works at public carrier their daily income ranges from Rs. 70 to Rs. 150 and those who earn livelihood from carpentry, their income ranges from Rs. 120 to Rs. 150 per day. 45 heads of the households (11.28%) were found govt. employee and they were mainly teachers, lower division assistants and a few ones established as bank officers and college lecturers. Another 38 heads of the households (9.43%) shifted their occupation from the fishery to driver, mechanic, security guard etc and a greater section youth have already left their birth place in search of work at outside Majuli and Assam. It also important to note that the youths from Jhalomalow community have not migrated to outside Majuli for their employment. The migrations of boys from the Kaibarta Community have been taken place but the migrations of girls are not found among both the communities i.e. Kaibarta and Jhalomalow.

V. Conclusion:

To conclude, there is an urgent need to make these people aware of the various affirmative action policies so that the benefits of such policies do not remain confined to a particular class within the community. At the same time, creating employment opportunities through the skill development plans is an imperative for the community's upliftment in the broadest sense of the term.

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