

Occupational Mobility and Change in Marriage Patterns among Dhobis of Upper Assam

Suresh Kumar Sahu



Abstract: *The Dhobis in Assam is passing through gradual institutional change specially marriage patterns due to occupational mobility for last two decades. Therefore, this paper reviews the changes with occupational mobility that has taken place in the marriage patterns among Dhobis of upper Assam. The data were collected on 25th Oct to 3rd Dec 2015 by administering structured interview schedule to a random sample of Dhobi respondents of both Hindi speaking and Bengali Dhobis of Dibrugarh district of upper Assam.*

Keywords: *Dhobis, Occupational mobility, Marriage patterns and Institutional change.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Occupational mobility among Dhobis signifies the rise of scheduled castes and social change in India's caste system. Spread of education, reservation policies of government in jobs and educational institutions, policies of state and central government have led to the emergence of middle class in the society. The educationally mobile Dhobis have entered into modern occupations and have improved their social position are on the rise from social margins. This movement refers to intragenerational (within the same generation) and intergenerational (between two or more generations) mobility, specially due to industrialisation and urbanisation of the society, which bring occupational opportunities and result in social, cultural, economic and political changes. Under influence of urbanization, industrialization, modernization, globalization and other forces, the changes like new occupations, marriage patterns, disintegration of large family, decline of traditional values, taboos and customs are discernible among Dhobis of Assam. They have been losing their traditional culture, and their original way of life is changing gradually.

Establishment of the British rule and its reformative measures gradually improved the socio-political and administrative structures in the region. They found new opportunities in the changing political structures. However, one can perceive occupational mobility and the resultant change in social behaviour and institutions specially marriage patterns in a section of the urban Dhobis. Here, a question is posed: What kind of interrelationship is perceived between occupational mobility and institutional change specially marriage patterns among Dhobi communities in the urban and industrial areas of upper Assam?

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* Correspondence Author

Suresh Kumar Sahu*, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Naharkatiya College, Naharkatiya-786610, India.

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II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

In this paper, various studies available on Occupational mobility and social change have been reviewed.

These are studies which explain social change among the scheduled castes at two levels of social mobility-occupational and educational mobility. Desai (1994); Shyamlal (1984); Malik (1979) and Roy (1999) reveal that occupational mobility has occurred among them due to the welfare measures of central and state governments, non-governmental organisations and educational achievement. Paul (2008) states that in urban area they mainly work in unorganised sectors where exploitation is found more than that in rural setting. Prasad (2007) and Karade (2009) have stated that educational and occupational mobility has led to change in their socio-economic life and they suggest that certain new method based long term schemes will help raise their socio-economic status.

Thus, occupational mobility has led to change in their socio-economic life and also found that they are exploited in urban setting due to work in unorganized sectors.

III. OBJECTIVE:

To understand the interrelationship of occupational mobility and institutional change specially marriage patterns among Dhobis of upper Assam.

IV. METHODOLOGY:

The study is based on oral responses collected from a random sample of 428 Hindi and Bengali speaking Dhobis of Dibrugarh district by administering a structured interview schedule. A stratified sample of around 30% from adult Dhobis has been taken from the universe (1397) after enlisting all the units with the help of electoral rolls and informed persons of the Dhobi communities in the district. First, the universe was divided into three age groups (18-35, 36-59 and 60 & above) and then males and females were selected by random sampling method. The samples were selected from the two genders equally in each of the age groups. Since the figures were rounded off to the subsequent number, the sample size increased, a little, over the pre-decided 30% of the universe. The study has analysed the empirical data in a comparative perspective of occupational mobility of the Dhobi communities in the district. At first, tables are classified and analysed those who experience occupational mobility and those who do not; and finding are drawn by analysing average of two communities on occupational aspects.

V. OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY AND THE CHANGE IN MARRIAGE PATTERNS

Marriage patterns among Dhobis have been changing gradually during last two decades under influence of urbanization, industrialization, modernization, globalization and other forces that lead occupational mobility. It is studied through the following factors: i) Change in Marriage Type ii) Change in Selection of Spouse and iii) Change in Preferred Marriage Type for their Children, which also refers continuity and change in their marriage patterns.

Occupational Mobility and the Change in Marriage Type

Institutional life specially Marriage among Dhobis bears an impact of their occupational mobility. Love marriage and arranged marriage are taken here to study institutional change among them. The following table shows the inter-relationship between occupational mobility and the change in marriage type:

Table 1
Occupational Mobility and the Change in Marriage Type
(Percentage in Parentheses)

| Status of the Respondents' Occupational Mobility | No. of the Respondents | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| | Hindi Speaking Dhobis | | | Bengali Dhobis | | | Total | | |
| | Arranged Marriage | Love Marriage | Total | Arranged Marriage | Love Marriage | Total | Arranged Marriage | Love Marriage | Total |
| Experienced No Occupational Mobility | 111 (51.86) | 6 (40) | 117 (51.09) | 8 (16) | 2 (33.33) | 10 (17.85) | 119 (45.07) | 8 (38.09) | 127 (44.56) |
| Experienced Occupational Mobility | 103 (48.13) | 9 (60) | 112 (48.90) | 42 (84) | 4 (66.66) | 46 (82.14) | 145 (54.92) | 13 (61.90) | 158 (55.43) |
| Total | 214 (100) | 15 (100) | 229 (100) | 50 (100) | 6 (100) | 56 (100) | 264 (100) | 21 (100) | 285 (100) |

Source: Field Study Conducted during 25th Oct-3rd Dec 2015.

The table indicates that 61.90% occupational mobile respondents having love marriage and 54.92% having arranged marriage in their families. Thus, occupational mobility plays significant role in change from arranged to **Occupational Mobility and the Change in Selection of Spouse**

Selection of spouse changes among Dhobis who experience occupational mobility. It brings more freedom among people and allows choosing a spouse. Spouse selection by

love marriage among the respondents. More of the Bengali respondents (66.66%) with occupational mobility have love marriage in their families than their Hindi speaking counterparts (60%).

parents/relatives and friends/oneself refers to continuity and change respectively. The following table depicts the relationship between occupational mobility and selection of spouse among respondents by parents/relatives and friends/oneself.

Table 2
Occupational Mobility and the Change in Selection of Spouse among the Respondents (Percentage in Parentheses)

| Status of the Respondents' Occupational Mobility | No. of the Respondents | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| | Hindi Speaking Dhobis | | | | | Bengali Dhobis | | | | | Grand Total | | | | |
| | Parents | Relatives | Friends | Self | Total | Parents | Relatives | Friends | Self | Total | Parents | Relatives | Friends | Self | Total |
| Experienced No Occupational Mobility | 84 (51.21) | 18 (62.06) | 9 (52.94) | 6 (31.57) | 117 (51.09) | 7 (20.58) | 2 (28.57) | 1 (16.66) | -- | 10 (17.85) | 91 (45.95) | 20 (55.55) | 10 (43.47) | 6 (21.42) | 127 (44.56) |
| Experienced Occupational Mobility | 80 (48.78) | 11 (37.93) | 8 (47.05) | 13 (68.42) | 112 (48.90) | 27 (79.41) | 5 (71.42) | 5 (83.33) | 9 (100) | 46 (82.14) | 107 (54.04) | 16 (44.44) | 13 (56.52) | 22 (78.57) | 158 (55.43) |
| Total | 164 (100) | 29 (100) | 17 (100) | 19 (100) | 229 (100) | 34 (100) | 7 (100) | 6 (100) | 9 (100) | 56 (100) | 198 (100) | 36 (100) | 23 (100) | 28 (100) | 285 (100) |

Source: Field Study Conducted during 25th Oct-3rd Dec 2015

The table shows that 78.57% of the respondents who had own choice; 56.52% of those who had friends' choice; 54.04%-parents' choice and 44.44%-relatives' choice in spouse selection. These respondents have occupational mobility, too. This clearly indicates that one's own as well as friends' choice in spouse selection is highly significant

who have undergone occupational mobility among the respondents.



Hence, here is a close relationship between occupational mobility and change in spouse selection among the respondents in society. Comparatively, more of the Bengali respondents than their Hindi speaking counterparts with occupational mobility have exercised their own and friends' choice to choose their spouses.

Occupational Mobility and the Preferred Marriage Type for Children

It is seen that occupational mobility brings change in individual's mentality towards marriage type. To know about preference regarding type of marriage for their children, love and arranged marriage are taken as indicators of change and continuity, the following table presents a relationship between occupational mobility and the preferred type of marriage for children among the respondents:

Table 3
Occupational Mobility and the Preferred Marriage Type for Children among the Respondents
(Percentage in Parentheses)]

| Status of the Respondents' Occupational Mobility | No. of the Respondents | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | Hindi Speaking Dhobis | | | Bengali Dhobis | | | Grand Total | | |
| | Love Marriage | Arranged Marriage | Total | Love Marriage | Arranged Marriage | Total | Love Marriage | Arranged Marriage | Total |
| Experienced No Occupational Mobility | 19 (29.23) | 160 (56.53) | 179 (51.43) | 9 (20.45) | 5 (13.88) | 14 (17.5) | 28 (25.68) | 165 (51.72) | 193 (45.09) |
| Experienced Occupational Mobility | 46 (70.76) | 123 (43.46) | 169 (48.56) | 31 (86.11) | 66 (82.5) | 81 (74.31) | 154 (48.27) | 235 (54.90) | |
| Total | 65 (100) | 283 (100) | 348 (100) | 36 (100) | 80 (100) | 109 (100) | 319 (100) | 428 (100) | |

Source: Field Study Conducted during 25th Oct-3rd Dec 2015

The table shows that 74.31% occupational mobile respondents prefer love marriage while 48.27% prefer arranged marriage for their children.

This means that occupational mobility determines parents' preference of love marriage for their children to a greater extent while arranged marriage is largely associated with the respondents without occupational mobility. Comparatively, more of the Bengali respondents (79.54%) with occupational mobility than their Hindi speaking (70.76%) counterparts prefer love marriage (a choice) for their offspring.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(i) Occupational mobility plays a vital role in a change from arranged to love marriage among the respondents. It is seen that 54.92% arrange married and 61.90% love married respondents experience occupational mobility. More of the Bengali respondents (66.66%) with occupational mobility experiencing love marriage of a family member than their Hindi speaking counterparts (60%).

(ii) One's own as well as friends' choice in spouse selection is very significant among the respondents who have undergone occupational mobility. Hence, there is a close relationship between occupational mobility and change occurring in spouse selection among Dhobis. Most of the respondents with occupational mobility (78.57%) who had own choice; 56.52% of those who had friends' choice; 54.04% of those who had parents' choice and 44.44% of those who had relatives' choice in spouse selection. Comparatively, more of the Bengali respondents with occupational mobility than their Hindi speaking counterparts have exercised their own and friends' choice to choose a spouse.

(iii) Occupational mobility determines parents' preference of love marriage for their children to a greater extent and arranged marriage is largely associated with the

respondents who do not experience occupational mobility. It is seen that 74.31% respondents prefer love marriage and 48.27% respondents prefer arrange marriage belong to the respondent who experience occupational mobility for their offspring. Comparatively, more of the Bengali respondents (79.54%) who experienced occupational mobility than their Hindi speaking (70.76%) counterparts prefer love marriage (a choice) for their children.

VII. CONCLUSION

Occupational mobility determines love marriage, One's own as well as friends' choice in spouse selection and parents' preference of love marriage for their children to a greater extent while arranged marriage, parents' choice/relatives' choice in spouse selection and parents' preference of arrange marriage for their children is largely associated with the respondents without occupational mobility. Thus, occupational mobility plays significant role in institutional change specially marriage patterns among Dhobi communities in the urban and industrial areas of upper Assam. It is also seen that comparatively change is faster in Bengali Dhobis than Hindi speaking Dhobis in this regard.

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AUTHORS PROFILE



Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Naharkatiya College, Naharkatia-786610, India