

# Impact of Caste on Occupational Change and Social Mobility: A Study among Assamese Nepali Community of Assam

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**Abstract:** Caste is one of the most important features of Indian society. In every aspect of peoples life caste play an important role. In occupational change and social mobility caste play important rule. The Asomiya Nepali community also Known as Assamese Nepali community are one of the largest community of Assam. Though in our common understanding we imagined Nepalese as cook, bodyguard, warrior, or as a dairy farmer but we ignore the caste system prevalent among them. The Nepalese of Assam do follow a caste system, but in variations with other groups. So in this paper the impact of caste on occupational change and social mobility among Assamese Nepali community will be discussed by using primary data.

## INTRODUCTION

Caste is one of the most important features of Indian society. In every aspect of peoples life caste play an important role. In occupational change and social mobility caste play important rule. Caste determines the socio-economic and political position of a person. Caste is ascribed status, hence a person born to a caste. In caste system, there are many rules or norms on purity and pollution. There are purity and pollution related to occupations, food habits, marriage etc. Castes are divided into various subgroups known as 'jati'. Though many people claimed that at present situation, caste has no relations with occupations, but the significance of caste is not abolished from people's mind when they choose an occupation. In addition, when we saw a person working lower paid work we consider him or her as belonging to lower caste. Various scholars discuss how caste still matters in occupation. By using their economic and educational advantage, higher castes qualify themselves for higher occupation and helped their relatives to find information as well as helped them to gain higher education, business etc. The lower caste because of their lower economic, educational and political power could not qualify themselves for new kind of occupation. Therefore though the government provides various measures for their improvement their social mobility is still less. In this study, the role of caste in occupational change and social mobility among Asomiya Nepali community will be examined. The Asomiya Nepali community also Known as Assamese Nepali community are one of the largest community of Assam. Though in our common understanding we imagined Nepalese as cook, bodyguard, warrior, or

as a dairy farmer but we ignore the caste system prevalent among them. The Nepalese of Assam do follow a caste system, but in variations with other groups. In Assam, most of the Nepalese are engaged in animal husbandry, dairy farming, and agriculture. However, caste play role in choosing their occupation.

### METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on the data collected by the researcher from Ouguri Nepali Gaon. The village is belongs to Jorhat district and 45 kilometer far from main town. It is situated in the both side of the bank of Jhanji River. Jhanji River is a tributary of mighty Brahmaputra. The population of the study consists of both male and female members of three different caste group of Asomiya Nepali community in Ouguri Nepali Gaon. From the total population 27 household is selected. I interviewed 27 household and I talk with people from neighboring area to clarify their statement. There are 85 household in the village and total population is 750.

### ANALYSIS

The village has mainly three caste groups that are Brahmin or Bahun, Chetry and Dorji. Traditionally Bahun or Brahmin are priest, Chetry are warrior Dorji's are tailor. In present context different castes are engaged in different occupation. This led to downward or upward social mobility. The Brahmins and Chetry have traditionally occupied a higher position. Therefore, they have more social, economic and cultural capital then the Dorji's. In terms of job or occupation they get some kind of privileges. While the Dorji's are traditionally lacking this. It is also seen that because of their economic condition now a days the higher castes are also bound to take occupation, which are low in terms of their status. In such condition, their social status becomes lower. On the other hand, the lower caste through their new education and Constitutional right are able to get higher occupation. Which increase their economic condition and simultaneously it led to the growth of their social status.

From the study it is found that, occupational mobility helps in social mobility. Change in occupational status impact on the larger social status of a family, individual, household or caste group. Occupational change may help in upward or downward social mobility. When a family or caste group changes occupation which are lower than their status is considered as downward occupational mobility and it led to downward social mobility. On the other hand when a family or caste group changes their occupation which is higher than their status is considered as upward occupational mobility. In Ouguri Nepali Gaon both upward and downward social mobility is noticeable. The impact of occupational mobility in social mobility is broadly seen in Caste class relations, Sanskritization and education.

- i) Change in Caste – Class relations: In Ouguri Nepali Gaon traditionally caste structure dominated the economic and political life of the village. Caste structure play pivotal role in land use and land control. Earlier the Bahun are the landowner who had control over the land. Following Bahun, Chetry had second control over land. Dorji were traditionally deprived from land control. Also in other occupations the Bahun and Chetry were in higher position than the Dorji. Dorji were related with lower occupation. So the economic position of Bahun and Chetry were higher than the Dorji. Along

with caste structure class structure is also present among them. As the village is an agrarian village so the presence of agrarian class is noticeable. By using Daniel Thorner's idea on agrarian class we can say that, in the village Bahun's are absentee landlord. Small landowners, Substantial tenants are found among Chetry and Poor tenants, sharecroppers and landless labourers are found among the Dorji's. So generally we can say that traditionally in the village the Bahun were the Maliks, Chetry were Kisans and Dorji were Mazdoors. But after occupational change the traditional relations of caste and class changed. In the village I found people of Chetry caste who have property rights over land and appoint labor from other lower caste. Among the 'Bahun's' and Chetry downward mobility is found. Traditionally they are engaged with high paid and higher status occupation. But in present I found some Bahun (Brahmin) plough by them. Some also worked as Peon, Postmaster, and Chowkider. The lower occupations also lower their status in society. But it is mostly found in case of plough. The government job though they are lower in rank is not considered as degraded. One respondent said now it is tough to find government job, so they are willing to do any kind of government job. He also added "A government job is a government job and it is not polluted." On the other hand if a Bahun plough he and his children can't do ritual in marriage or death ceremony. They only can take 'daan'. They are considered as deviated from society. One old 'Bahun' said traditionally Bahun didn't plough, though it is not possible for them to follow traditional occupations, at least they didn't have to plough. Also most of them said the Chetry and Dorji are better off than them and have more social and political power. On the other hand some Bahun people work by themselves in the land. So they can be regarded as Kisan. So change in occupation change the class of different caste. So their social position in the society has changed. As I mentioned in the beginning the relations of castes in this village is mostly agrarian. So the impact of occupational change is noticeable in the agrarian relations among castes. Earlier the Bahun's are mostly dependent on Chetry for agriculture. But after occupational mobility among Chetry's they became economically well off. They no longer wanted to work in Bahun's family. Some Chetry's buy land on their own and cultivate on their land. Now in the village people don't want to do agriculture as its need hard work. So they are searching for subsidiary activities. That's why the Bahun's needs to appoint Dorji in agriculture and vegetable garden. Earlier Dorji's are not preferable. After economically settled the Chetry's became powerful in the village. Though in the village still more Maliks are from Bahun but the overall class positions of Bahun are lower than the Chetry. So they constituted the Dominant caste in the village. The social and political power of Bahun is replaced by Chetry. They Chetry's get preference in any decision making activity in the village, either it is regarding Durga puja or regarding changes of any norms or rules in the village. Now they are the people taking initiatives in different festival or occasions to be held in the puja mandir. So they get advantage not only economically but also socially and politically. An old Bahun man said that a Chetry boy married a non - Nepali girl, earlier they have restriction regarding this. But in this case the villagers decided to don't take any strict rules and welcome the couple. He said as the boy is from Chetry and they are dominant in the village so they could not obstruct them. He also added the society

- is changing and we have to change our tradition. The occupational mobility among Dorji improves their situation in society. Earlier all of them have to depend on Chetry and Bahun's in some cases for agriculture. But now the economically better of Dorji no longer depend on them. Occupational mobility in father's generation helped the future generation to get higher education. It helps them in getting occupation. The economically advance Dorji have better position than the economically poor. One Chetry women said now Dorji's have better position than them by using reservation policy. But in reality only a few of them have good position than the economically weaker Bahun's or Chetry.
- ii) Sanskritization: Sanskritization is the process through which lower caste adopt the beliefs, values, food habit, ritual, in a sense their day to day life to seek upper status in society. The Dorji's in the village are Sanskritized themselves to get higher position in society. Now economically well off Dorji's don't want to do degraded occupation. They 'sanskritized' themselves in reference to Bahun and Chetry, like them they also don't want to rear pig or eat pig, local drinks etc. Though occupational mobility helped Dorji in economic sufficiency, it does not help them to improve their position in society. They avoid drinking 'jaar' (the local drinks). They only drink it occasionally. They also gave up rear pig. Only economically weaker sections rear pig. The occupational mobility helps the Dorji to sanskritize themselves. The Dorji families which have economic security can manage to avoid rear pig. The other family has to rear it to fulfill economic need. Though the Dorji's sanskritized themselves but their social position has not change in society. Their position as lower caste remains the same. They may be economically well of but could not have right to enter in the 'monikut'.
- iii) Education: Occupational mobility helped in higher education. Upward occupational mobility increase economic condition of a family. Higher education needs lots of money. On the other hand when anyone from a family pursues higher education than that family's position in society automatically increase. Earlier the economic position of Dorji's was very low in society, so their educational status is also very low. But after occupational change their economic position increase therefore their educational status also increases in society. On the other hand from the past the economic and educational position of Bahun and Chetry are higher in society. But from the field study I found that in present the educational status of Dorji's are higher than the Bahun. The Dorji's are more tend to pursue higher education because it helps them to change their status in society. But in average the Chetry's have higher rate of educated person. One Dorji person said that earlier their family got little attention in society. But after their daughter went to pursue B.Sc. people started respecting them. So we can say that occupational mobility helped in educational improvement which led to social mobility.

### CONCLUSION

So from the study I found that caste has impact on occupational mobility and social change. Though the social restrictions are losing gradually, the importance of caste on personal choices cannot be ignored. Everyone is aware about their caste position. The caste group has been changing their traditional occupation because of different kinds

of factor like economic, social, educational, modernization. But the higher castes still hesitate to do lower occupation and their social capital helps them to continue with the higher occupation.

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