



## Occupational mobility among the Kaibarttas: the study based on three urban fringe villages of Dibrugarh district of Assam, India

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### Abstract

*Occupation refers to a set of activities usually associated with the earning of the individuals. Occupation is a specific activity which an individual continually pursues for the purpose of obtaining a steady flow of income. In traditional Indian Society each caste pursued particular occupations which are regarded as hereditary by tradition and custom of Hindu social system. It is a process of movement from one occupation to another. Occupational mobility may be intra-generational or inter-generational and horizontal or vertical. The basic objective of the paper is to focus occupational mobility among Kaibarttas (SC) living in Urban fringe villages. The study has been confined in three urban fringe villages of Dibrugarh district of Assam, India. The head of the family were the respondent in this study. The respondents of the present study were selected randomly by using sequential list method. Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study. The study reflects a clear picture of occupational mobility from the generation of grand fathers to the present generation i.e. respondents generation with the change of their traditional fishing occupation.*

**Keywords:** Occupation, occupational mobility, Kaibartta, urban fringe village.

### Introduction

The very term occupation signifies a set of activities usually associated with the earning of the individuals. The sociology of occupations owes its existence to the fact that work in any society is a socially desired activity and its ubiquities. Occupations are roles performed by the individuals within society, that are defined by the nature of work. The nature of occupation also decided the functional importance of man to society<sup>1</sup>. In defining occupation Hallin this book "Occupations and the Social Structure" states that it must be inclusive in two ways<sup>2</sup>. It must first include the great variety of activities that can legitimately be called occupations and second, suggest the fact that an occupation has multiple consequences for the individual and society. Everett Hughes states that "an occupation, in essence is not some particular set of activities, it is the part of an individual in any ongoing set of activities. The system may be large or small, simple or complex"<sup>2</sup>.

In traditional Indian Society, occupations were believed as close patterns. Particular caste groups or communities were generally associated with certain occupations which were regarded as hereditary by tradition and custom of Hindu social system. In traditional India, the relationship between caste and occupation was particularly close in case of Scheduled castes. The Scheduled Castes people were previously associated with some unclean and menial occupations like tanning and skinning of hides, leather works, sweeping, scavenging etc. Consequently, they occupied the lowest stratum in the caste hierarchy<sup>3</sup>. These castes also regarded as "polluting" even though majority of their person pursued agricultural activities or other clean services<sup>4</sup>.

**Occupational mobility:** The social mobility concerned with the occupation of the members of a society is known as occupational mobility of that society. The study of occupational mobility relates a present to a part social position. It is a process of movement from one occupation to another. According to Form occupational mobility refers to both mobility of occupations themselves as well as individual movement from one occupation to another<sup>5</sup>. It may involve changes in occupational attributes as locus, functions, income prestige and power.

An occupational mobility may be inter-occupational mobility or intra-occupational mobility. In the former it refers to mobility from one occupation to another and the later, it comes within the same occupation with changing job specification as well as prestige, power and income etc. occupational mobility like social mobility may be both horizontal and vertical. The present paper is an emphasis on the study of vertical occupational mobility in the upward direction with change of traditional occupation of the Kaibartta community.

**The Kaibarttas:** The Kaibarttas are the aboriginal inhabitants of Assam<sup>6</sup>. They are one of the sixteen scheduled castes communities in the state as per constitution (scheduled castes) order of 1950. The Kaibarttas are the largest scheduled caste group in the Brahmaputra valley. The Kaibarttas of Assam are of Dravidian origin. The word Kaibarttas is Sanskritized from the prakrit Kevatta, The dictionary meaning as stated in the 'Hemkush', The word Kaibartta is derived from two words i.e 'Koi' means water and 'Brit' means 'to live'<sup>7</sup>. It signifies that the

Kaibarttas is that community who lives in reverie areas and earns livelihood by merchandizing through river. They are the disciple of religions institution (SATRAS), which trace its origin to Mahapurush Sankardeva, the 15<sup>th</sup> century great saint and the great apostle of New Vaishnavism in Assam. Beside, a good number of Kaibarttas of Upper Assam are the disciple of "Mayamora Satra" originated by Sri Sri 'Anirudha Deva' a Vaishanava Guru.

There are 6,93,219 Kaibartta population in Assam and 31,676 in Dibrugarh district. The Kaibarttas constitute 31.07% scheduled castes population of Assam as per census report 2011. The Kaibarttas of Assam used to live on the bank of the river side mainly for their fishing profession as fishing is the traditional occupation of the Kaibrattas<sup>8</sup>. Beside traditional occupation, Kaibarttas are nowadays engaged in other income earning activities. They are an important segment of greater Assamese society for whose socio-economic upliftment various measures have been adopted under scheduled castes component plan.

**Urban Fringe Village:** Urban fringe villages are those which are situated in proximity to urban centers, town or city. These villages are generally located within the rural urban fringe zones. The fringe zone sometime comprises of gram panchayats or revenue village and a few nagar panchayats or municipal town<sup>9</sup>. Urban fringe villages are contiguous to town or city. The people of the urban fringe villages are primarily based on town or city for their daily earning as well a livelihood.

**Objective of the study:** The basic objective of the paper is to focus occupational mobility of Kaibarttas living in urban fringe villages.

## Methodology

**The field:** The Assam state is bounded by Himalayan foothills and bordering states of Bhutan and Tibet on the North; on the south of it, there are Myanmar (Burma) and its hills and to the west, Bangladesh. The land area of Assam is 78,438 sq.km and total population is 3,12,05,576. At present, the state of Assam has 33 districts including four districts of BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area District)<sup>10</sup>. The Dibrugarh district is situated on the southern bank and the upper reaches of the river Brahmaputra and lies on the North Eastern corner of Assam. The total area of the district is 3381.00 sq.km with 3330.36 sq.km rural areas and 50.64sq.km urban areas. The total population of the district is 13,26,335 whereas 676434 are male and 649901 are female<sup>11</sup>.

The field of present paper has been confined in three Kaibartta villages, which are situated in the fringe zone of Dibrugarh town, the head quarter of Dibrugarh district of Assam. The villages are Natun Gaon, Tingkhong and Amaraguri village. Among these three villages, The Natun gaon is located under Rajabheta Gaon Panchayat of Borboruah Development Block, which is within the jurisdiction of West Revenue Circle of

Dibrugarh District. The Amaraguri village is located under municipal board of Dibrugarh town in the North Amulapatty area, comprises of ward No- 9 and 10 which is situated on the southern bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra. The Tingkhong village is situated under Rajabheta Gaon Panchayat of Borboruah Development Block. This is within the West revenue circle of Dibrugarh district. This village is also located in the Southern Bank of the river Brahmaputra in the western part of the Dibrugarh town.

**Respondents:** There are 490 families in three studied villages. Out of 490 families 231 families in Natun Gaon, 133 families in Amaraguri village and 126 families in Tingkhong village. We have selected randomly 196 families (40% from each village) by applying sequential list method i.e. serialization of families of each village. The villages are exclusively inhabited by the Kaibartta (SC). The head of the family were the respondent in this study.

**Collection of data:** Both primary and secondary data have been used in the present paper. The primary data were collected from the respondent with the help of interview, interview scheduled and observation. The secondary data were collected from various books and journals and Government records from the offices concerned.

## Results and discussion

Mobility is an important consideration from the development perspective in the nature of social system and for the analysis of occupations as well. The analysis of mobility exclusively based on data about occupations of individuals or groups. Occupational mobility may be intra-generational or inter-generational. Inter-generational occupational mobility signifies a change of social status from one generation to the next generation. This change can be measured by comparing the son's occupation to his father's occupation. In order to determine the extent of mobility we need to know the starting point of the unit i.e. individual or groups from which we may compare the destination (current or last position).

For example, son's current occupational positions may be compared with the father's position at some point of time.

In this direction, an emphasis has been made to study occupational mobility of the community under reference. In the present paper, for assessing the occupational mobility the data were collected from the respondents for three generations. Though the data were collected for three generations, it is only the respondents who have answered for the two earlier generations.

The three generations taken into consideration in this particular study are the respondents' grandfather, respondents' father and respondents' themselves.

The following table depicts the occupation of respondents.

**Table-1:** Occupation of Respondents.

Occupation	Respondents	%
Fishing	17	8.67
Fish Selling	35	17.86
Cultivation	5	2.55
Business	36	18.37
Service Govt. and Private	68	34.69
Any Other	35	17.86
Total	196	100%

Any Other: Wage earner Carpenter, Driver, Mason, Bus Conductor, Salesman, Electrician, Rikkshaw Puller, Cart Puller.

The above Table-1 reveals that out of 196, majority of the respondents i.e. 68 consisting 34.69% are employed in various Government Departments and private sector services. Among this group of respondents we found them engaged, defense personal, school teacher, Oil India Ltd. employee including other departments employee of the Government. On the other hand, some of them are engaged in various private sector services like working with motor dealers, shopping malls, Mobile Telephone Company and other private sector industries. Followed by 36 respondents i.e. 18.37% are pursued small and medium size business such as grocery shop, vegetable selling etc. only a few of them are engaged as contractors in versions Govt. departments and also at block development level. From the table it is clear that similar number of respondents i.e. 35 consisting 17.86% are engaged in fish selling and any other occupations category as their present occupations. In the same way, numbers of respondents 17 i.e. 8.67% are still pursuing fishing as their present occupations and the lowest number of respondents i.e. only 5 consisting 2.55% are engaged in agriculture as their present occupations. They produce paddy and other rabi-crops like potato, brinjal, mustard seed and other vegetable seeds.

From the field situation, it has been observed that there is no scope for fishing in the Natungaon as there is no massy land, river, beels (a wet land) etc. nearby the village.

So, some of the respondents of this village are pursued fish selling as this present occupation, they purchase fishes from the Mahalsder as well as whole seller supplied from out of state i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Kanpur (UP) etc, and they sell these in the nearest market with some profit.

In the same way, we have tried to trace out occupations of the respondents fathers generation for assessing occupational mobility. The Table-2 shows occupations of respondents' father.

**Table-2:** Occupations of Respondents father.

Occupation	Fathers	%
Fishing	98	50
Fish Selling	52	26.53
Cultivation	4	2.05
Business	16	8.16
Service Govt. and Private	9	4.59
Any Other	17	8.67
Total	196	100%

It is clear from the Table-2 that majority of fathers generation i.e. 98 consisting 50% were pursuing fishing occupation for their livelihood. Followed by 52 respondents fathers i.e. 26.53% were engaged in fish selling as their occupation. 17 respondents father i.e. 8.67% were engaged in any other occupations. 16 respondents father i.e. 8.16% were engaged in small and medium size business activities for their livelihood. It is also known from the table that in the fathers generation only 9 i.e. 4.59% were employed in different Govt. and private sector services, where only 4 i.e. 2.05% were pursued cultivation as their occupation.

In this study respondents' mothers occupation is also felt necessary. Hence, we have tried to focus respondents' mothers occupations. The Table-3 shows occupations of respondents' mother.

**Table-3:** Occupation of Respondents' Mother.

Occupation	Mothers	%
Fishing	114	58.16
Fish Selling	51	26.02
Cultivation	4	2.04
Business	Nil	0.52
Service Govt. Of Private	1	0.52
Any Others	26	13.26
Total	196	100%

The Table-3 reveals that out of 196, 114 consisting 58.16% respondents mother were pursuing fishing occupation. Followed by 51 i.e. 26.02% respondents mother were engaged in the fish selling occupation. The table depicts that 26 respondents mother i.e.13.26% were engaged in any other occupations, where 4

respondents mother i.e. 2.04% were pursued cultivation and only 1 i.e. 0.52% were employed in government service. From the table it is clear that no one mother were engaged in any kind of business work.

Similarly, in this study we have tried to trace out occupation of respondents grand fathers to draw a clear picture of occupational mobility among the community under studied. The Table-4 shows occupations of the respondents grandfather.

**Table-4:** Occupations of Respondents Grandfathers.

Occupations	Grandfather	%
Fishing	144	73.47
Fish Selling	45	22.96
Cultivation	4	2.04
Business	3	1.53
Service Govt. of Private	Nil	-
Any other	Nil	-
Total	196	100%

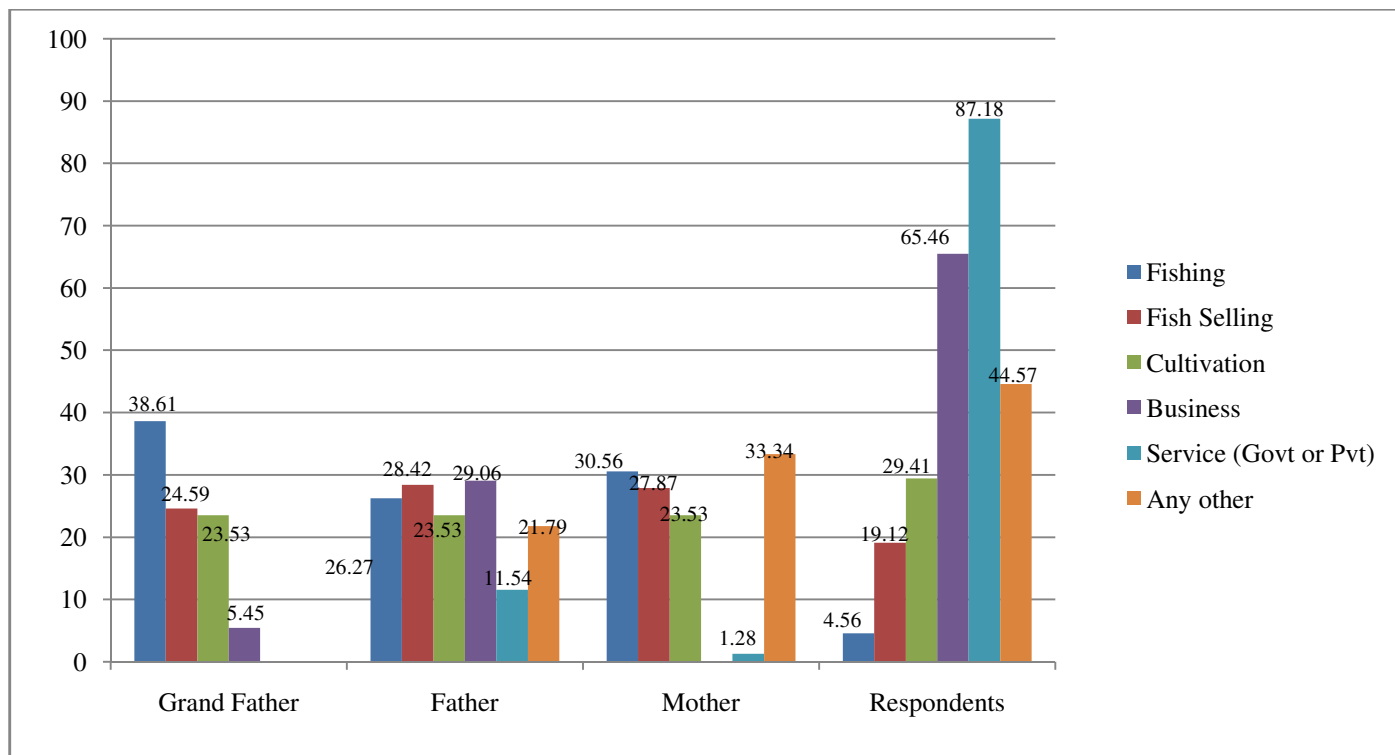
The Table-4 clarified that in the generation of grandfathers Govt. or private sector service holder and any other category occupations were totally nil. In this generation only 3 i.e. 1.53% were engaged in small or medium size business activities, 4 grandfathers i.e. 2.04% were engaged in cultivations. The table shows that 45 respondents grandfathers i.e. 22.96% were pursued fish selling occupation and majority i.e. 144 respondents grandfather consisting 73.47% were pursued fishing occupation for their livelihood.

However to make this occupational mobility study more specific the generation wise occupational position is need to be mentioned. The following table depicts the generations wise occupational position and occupational mobility of the Kaibarttas under studied.

The Table-5 shows the occupations of three successive generation's i.e. grandfather father and respondents. It can be inferred from the table that in the generation of grandfathers 144 i.e. 38.61% were solely depended on fishing occupation and followed by 45 i.e. 24.59% were pursued fish selling occupation for their livelihood. But in the generation of respondents fathers were somewhat different from that of their grandfathers. In the generation of father 98 i.e. 26.27% were engaged in fishing occupation and 52 i.e. 28.42% were engaged in fish selling occupation. These occupational position of respondents fathers shows that though fish selling occupations were slightly increased, the fishing occupation were decreased in the father's generation. At the same time, among the respondents mothers 144 i.e. 30.56% were engaged in fishing and 51 i.e. 27.87% were engaged in fish selling occupation. In fact most of the respondents mother were house wives, besides household works, they performed these income earning activities for helping their husbands and smooth running their family as well. On the other hand, the respondents generation is entirely different from the former two generations. In the respondents generation, we found only 17 i.e. 4.56% are pursued fishing occupation whereas 35 i.e. 19.12% are resorted to fish selling occupation. These occupational position of three generations show a declining trend of traditional occupation. Modern education, urbanization, industrialization, development of transportation and communication etc. have brought about tremendous changes in the respondents' generation and pave the way for new occupational avenues.

**Table-5:** Generation wise Occupational Mobility.

Generation	Occupation					
	Fishing	Fish Selling	Cultivation	Business	Service Govt. private	Any Other
Grandfather	144 38.61	45 24.59	4 23.53	3 5.45	Nil	Nil
Father	98 26.27	52 28.42	4 23.53	16 29.09	9 11.54	17 21.79
Mother	144 30.56	51 27.87	4 23.53	Nil	01 1.28	26 33.34
Respondents	17 4.56	35 19.12	5 29.41	36 65.46	68 87.18	35 44.57
Total	373 100%	183 100%	17 100%	55 100%	78 100%	78 100%



**Figure-1:** Generation wise Occupational Mobility.

In case of agriculture, in both the generations, grand fathers and fathers including respondents mothers we found similar number i.e.4 consisting 23.53% were engaged in agriculture as their occupation. But, in the respondents generation it is slightly increased to 5 i.e. 29.41% are pursued cultivation for their livelihood. We have stated earlier that this study has been conducted in the fringe villages. Though a few of them engaged in cultivation, cultivable land is very scarce among them for which agricultural occupation is not much popular among the Kaibarttas under studied. In the field of business, in the grandfathers’ generation only 3 persons i.e. 5.45% were found engaged in business. But it was found increased up to 16 numbers i.e. 29.09% in the fathers’ generations. Among the mothers it was totally nil. In the respondents’ generation, a good number of respondents i.e. 36 consisting 65.46% are found engaged in business. Thus, most significant change and development of occupations has been noticed in the generations of respondents.

In the generation of grand fathers’, not a single person was found engaged in service sector either government or undertaking. But, there was a slight fall in the generation of fathers i.e. 1 consisting 11.54%. Among the respondents mother, only 1 i.e. 1.28% were found employed in service sector. In the respondents generation a remarkable member of respondents i.e. 68 consisting 87.18% are found engaged in different services i.e. govt., semi govt., industry, co-operation and other private sectors. In the occupations of any other category (wage earner, carpenter, driver, mason, bus-conductor, salesman, rickshaw puller, cart puller, electrician etc.) no any

person were found among the grandfathers’ generation. In the fathers generation 17 i.e. 21.79% were found to be engaged in any other occupation. At the same time among the respondents mothers 26 i.e. 33.34% were found engaged in these occupations. In the respondents generation a considerable number i.e. 35 (44.57%) are found dependent primarily on such occupations for their livelihood.

Thus the study reveals a clear tendency in general to move away from traditional occupation to different occupations and services opened up in the recent age. Obviously, these occupational positions of the three generations reflect a picture of occupational mobility among the Kaibarttas under studied. In this context several factors are found to be operating in shifting of occupation from traditional to modern as well as welcoming of new one by them. It has also been observed that there is a significant growth of education in the present generations which open their eyes for new avenues of occupations and help them to look their lives a fresh. Besides, extension of communication and transportations facilities, industries and commerce also create new situation and help them in adopting new occupation and various business activities as well.

However, in support of the above information regarding occupational mobility, the following cases are mentioned which may make these particular study more vivid.

**Case-I:** The 54 years old Mr. A is one of the respondent in the present study. Mr. A is an inhabitant of Natun gaon, which is located in the western part of near Dibugarh town. His family is

consisting with his wife and two children. Mr. A is HSSLC (XII standard) passed and he is an employee of state Government and his monthly income is about 38000.00. Mr. A's wife is HSLC (X standard) passed, but she is a house wife. Mr. A's grandfather was illiterate and fishing was the prime occupation of his grandfather. His father and mother both were barely literate. Mr. A's father was also engaged in fish trade occupation for their livelihood. Mr. A's both the child young age at present. His 25 years old boy has completed B.Sc. degree and PG diploma course in Tea Technology, his 24 years old girl has completed MA degree from Dibrugarh University, Assam.

**Case-II:** The 46 years old Mr. X is an inhabitant of Amaraguri Village near Dibrugarh Town. Mr. X's family is a joint in nature, consisting with his wife and two children, his two married bothers with their wives and 3 years old child from his younger brother side. Mr. X's is UP (Upper Primary) level passed only. By occupation he is a businessman and he has a grocery shop. His monthly income is about 30,000.00. Mr. X's wife is also Up Level passed and she is house wife. Mr. X's both the brothers are graduate and they are also business man. They have a pharmacy and a stationary shop, their wives are HSSLC passed but they perform the role of housewife no other engagement. Mr. X's grandfather was illiterate and his occupation was fishing and fish selling. Mr. X's father and mother both were barely literate (know three-four alphabet, know to write their names but no formal education). Fish selling and other small business were the occupation of Mr. X's father. At present two children of Mr. X are reading in class VI & VIII in a English medium private school.

From the above description of Mr. A and Mr. X's, it may be stated that the occupational position from the grandfather to their time reflects an upward occupational mobility as well as change of traditional occupations among them.

## Conclusion

From the above discussions we may conclude that the Kailbarttas are traditionally a fishing community of Assam. Their traditional occupation was confined only to fishing or related activities. They are also considered as one of the socially and economically weak and deprived community. We have already known that in traditional India, the relationship between caste and occupation was particularly close in case of Scheduled Castes. The Kaibarttas of Assam were not different from the scenario of Scheduled Castes. At present, they are engaged in variety of income generating activities to augment their socio-economic position by changing their traditional occupation. Their present paper reflects a clear tendency of general movement away from traditional occupation to different occupation and services open up in the present age. The vast majority of the fore fathers generations of respondents of the studied villages were engaged in traditional occupations but the scenario is now changing rapidly among the present generation i.e. respondents generations. In this context, modern education

has been played very significant role. It has been observed in the studied villages that growth of education among the present generations as well as new generations opened their eyes of mind for new occupational avenues. Moreover new communication and transportation facilities, urbanization, industries and commerce also played role in changing their traditional occupation and thereby adopting new occupations. Of course, it has also been noticed that still some of the Kaibarttas people are socio-economically lagging behind. In this context, a proper mechanism, should be generated for building awareness in this fast changing societal scenario among them for their overall development. Of late, the Kaibartta populations constitute an important socio-economic and cultural potentialities in terms of formation of greater Assamese society and national development process as well.

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