

# Caste and Occupation: A Study on Dalits in Coochbehar

**Dibangon Pandit**

Research Fellow, Department of Sociology  
Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India  
Email : [panditdibangon@gmail.com](mailto:panditdibangon@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** As we all know the caste system in India came from the ancient time but it changes as time goes on. The differentiation of caste is defined by hereditary occupation. At the top of the hierarchy were Brahmins who were mainly teachers and intellectuals and came from Brahma's head. Kshatriya, or warriors and rulers. Vaishyas, or the traders. At the bottom were the Shudras, who came from Brahma's feet. The mouth signifies its use for preaching, learning, etc., the arms protection, things- to cultivate or business, and feet help the whole body, so the Shudras must serve all the others. In this paper researcher has tried to denote how the caste influences occupation and vice-versa. Caste identity and occupation have been involuntarily connected for a very long and this research explains the process of interconnection and separation from each other due to various reasons. Researchers tried to find the cohesion between caste and occupation which we used to and still believe relates to our social identity, esteem, prestige, etc, but how society evolved like Max Weber talked about achieved and ascribed status and it became so complicated. In this paper, researcher has collected data from the Dalits of Bhanukumari I G.P in the Coochbehar district.

**Key Words:** Caste, Occupation, Hereditary, Rajbangshi, Namasudra, Jalia Kaibarta, Jhalo Malo.

## 1. INTRODUCTION : CASTE AND ITS OCCUPATION :

The social structure of the Indian sub-continent commonly known as Caste system. The broad super structure of traditional Hindu social ordering in the Varna system. The Aryan people already had a social structure containing three hierarchical social groups: the Brahmins are mainly priests by their occupation, Kshatriyas are warriors and aristocrats by their occupation, and Vaishyas are merchants by their occupation. At some point after the conquest, a fourth Varna, the Shudras who are mainly peasants, laborers, and servants means as per as the society the lower graded job, and which was emerged. The categorization omitted the groups later known as dalits (untouchables), who were completely barred from the Varna system and therefore from most of Indian village life. Varna system was to define a broad hierarchical scheme of social relations within which thousands of castes and sub-castes would be placed. The caste system is related to, but distinct from, the Varna hierarchy. Each member of Hindu society was (and for the most part still is) born in to a *jatis*, or caste, which in turn usually belongs to a *Varna*. Historically, castes were occupationally distinct and limited to specific regions or communities. One's work was essentially fixed because caste membership was granted by birth. Formally called the *jajmani* system, this intricate web of ties and duties among the *jatis* arose to resemble trade in a traditional monetary economy. In a hamlet, each caste was customarily required to carry out its designated tasks for the good of the society, even while its members utilized the services of those in other castes carrying out their inherited professions. The foundation of the caste system is made up of the *jatis*, not the more well-known Varna.

## 2. OBJECTIVES:

1. Relation between Scheduled Caste and Occupation across the Coochbehar district.
2. How the dalits of Coochbehar district maintaining their socio-economic condition?

### **3. METHODOLOGY:**

An important aspect of research is methodology. He will discuss methodology as an important aspect of the research. I.e. How and what method was used to carried out this research, In fact, methodology means, the psychological evaluation of investigative techniques within a discipline, a concern with the conceptual, theoretical and research aspect of knowledge. The techniques and strategies employed within a discipline to manipulate data and acquire knowledge methodology basically discuss how the research will be conducted, which methods will be used to collect data and the rationalization behind using these methods.

The population:

For the purpose of the study, Bhanukumari 1 G.P of Coochbehar district was chosen as the field of study. The purposive sampling and convenient sampling method was adopted. The sample consisted of 30 respondents, 10 respondents from Rajbangshi Community, 10 respondents from Namasudra community, 5 respondents from Jalia Kaibarta community and 5 respondents from Jhalo Malo community these all are living at Bhanukumari 1 G.P of Coochbehar District.

Method of data collection:

Data has been collected with the help of an interview schedule and participant observation. The interview schedule comprised of both open and closed ended questions. After building rapport with the respondents, they were administered the interview schedule. I had to translate the questions into local language. Researcher interviewed them and personally filled the answers.

Informal interviews had made with some respondents and in this research researcher have taken semi-structured and unstructured questionnaire while doing this research. Primarily to carry out this research a qualitative and quantitative data had collected. Both primary and secondary data had collected from field through out survey method and from some previous books, journals, office data (Bhanukumari 1 G.P's B.D.O office and panchayat office) based on their population, occupation, governmental schemes, education, and economic structure.

In addition to interviewing their environment, living condition, their daily life, way of life, expenses, status of them among the society and other abstract manner had observed throughout conducting this research. Researcher carefully recorded the information obtained through interview and participant observation and if it is necessary to took pictures which is subjected in this research.

### **4. COLLECTIVE SELF OCCUPATION:**

Occupations are frequently claimed to constitute the backbone of social stratification systems, providing the fundamental framework of positions into which societal resources flow and serving as a foundational variable in the social sciences for determining people' life chances. In the mid-twentieth century, sociologists determined that this backbone was consistent throughout civilizations. All known civilizations appear to rate vocations similarly, so that whether in the United States, Sweden, Russia, or Thailand, engineers rank higher than garbage collectors, college professors score higher than secretaries, and bankers rank higher than mechanics. This discovery was cemented in Donald Treiman's (1977) work, which became known as the Treiman constant, and it is one of the most trustworthy discoveries in the social sciences. Treiman conceptualized this as a prestige ranking, but the phenomena can be observed in practically every occupational scale established by sociologists, allowing us to talk more broadly of an occupational hierarchy that is unrelated to any specific underlying theoretical framework. The degree to which occupational hierarchies differ within local settings is a challenge raised by recent advancements in the local structuration of inequality, notwithstanding its cross-societal empirical validity. Research on social stratification has shifted more and more towards examining the local contexts—such as neighborhoods', industries, workplaces, local political economies, and labour markets—where disparities manifest themselves. Researchers attuned to such local variation have found that core stratification outcomes, such as income inequality and educational attainment (Sutton, 2017), vary across these localized social spaces. In this paper researcher have collected data from SCs

from Bhanukumari 1 G.P, and he found diversities in occupations. As that local space diversities make division of the society and the division makes hierarchy. And how occupation gets hierarchically organized within that society? Furthermore, it is now widely acknowledged that lower correlations at the individual level might be partially attributed to an issue with aggregation, whereby individual differences are averaged out by correlations of correlations, resulting in consistently greater aggregate correlations. And the co-relation between 4 sub castes (RajBangshis, Namasudra, Jalia Kaibarta and Jhalo Malo) in occupation as in the society where researcher have conducted his research, he found most of them are linked with agriculture, very few are engaged with others job. So the division of that society coming by their credibility and capability of producing goods and simultaneously which will not being neglected that is how much agricultural land they have. Along with coming from their heredity there have some specificity of occupation like Rajbangshis are engaged with agriculture where namasudras are doing the same for their living. Where other two sub-castes are engaged with fishing and fishery (As per as the previous generational data). Mainly these agricultural economy is coming from the market demand. And the market demand consists societal expectation regarding their occupation or specific occupation. But as per as the research, 30 respondents from whole category and out of 30 respondents 20 respondents are engaged with agriculture and rest 10 respondents are indirectly linked with agriculture. So the division of the society is the majority of people in a single category are linked with a single occupation, how much they are producing? And how much profit they earn from each session. And the caste based hierarchy is only seen by their hereditary occupation and how of them are following of that. Hierarchy leads to stratification, but in this case occupation is imitating by everyone, no matter from which caste you are belonging, but the societal stigma as per as their sub-caste is still exist. It will not being applicable if researcher could say each caste have their specific occupation. Sanskritization can be applicable in occupational manner, may be not uplifting their ritual hierarchy but uplifting their standard of living.

## **5. OCCUPATIONS OF RAJBANGSHI COMMUNITY:**

Researcher has conducted his research at Bhanukumari 1 No G.P of Bakshirhat village of Coochbehar District of West Bengal. Where not only the SC but there is much other general or obc caste's people does exist. But the researcher chooses to collect data only from the SC's of Bhanukumari 1 G.P. As per as the previous discussion Rajbangshi are the majority by their population, and within their livelihood (which are the researcher didn't focused) occupation is a most important part in life and the way of life also. Researcher conducted this research within 10 household of Rajbangshi. Where all of them are connected with agriculture directly or indirectly, some of them are directly linked with and some of them are connected but not in an as main occupation. As per as the data all of them (Head of their family) have their own land of cultivating. 7 respondent directly related to agriculture, it means they cultivate on their own land and rest 3 respondents are working in different field as like first respondent is a BSF, second one have him own mill and the last one is doing water pipe line or plumbing job in agricultural land along with household plumbing work. Those who are not doing agricultural or field based agriculture but they are not deviated from agriculture, they are giving their land to other peasants to cultivate and they took some percentage (approx Rs.2000/bigha) from income (which is not a monthly basis). In the all season they cultivate their lands, as per as the respondents February-March within these months they cultivate corn and in the month of may-june they cut that corn, those who don't cultivate corn they don't let their lands free they cultivate jute, april-may they cultivate Amon Dhan & Bodo dhan and it will be cut within October-November, next they switch to vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, chilli, potato, multitude and oil oriented crops like sorse etc which are cultivating manily within december-april. Amon and Bodo dhan are produced in a large amount. According to this research researcher collect data from the head of every family and their age is between 40-60. All the 7 respondents hire (their wages 300/day) two or three people for plugging digging that lands it only happened in the beginning of cultivating and after all the works done and lastly on the stage of cutting they again hire people for cutting and cleaning. 1 respondent within the agricultural category have his own pond in front of his house and he cultivate fish (Glasscup, tangra, koi, Chinese puti etc), but that is not for his own purpose but for the market purpose. On his own generation he only do this job in the rest of the time and when the all fishes are ready to sale he hires 2-3 workers to make his job easier and sometimes he is totally given his pond some fishermen to cultivate fish on a rental/percentage basis(20% income). 1 respondent of agricultural category also have another source of income which is farming. He has a half bigha of land in front of his house which is fully occupied for chicken farming. But the respondent doesn't do farming, it's fully rental basis.

Within the 3 respondents who are engaged non-agricultural job, the one who has mill, his machinery is breaking rice to paddy and separating chida from rice. He owned that mill since 2013. Before 2013 he was a farmer now he is rented his land on a lease basis and earning some profits from that rental land along with this mill. Another respondent on this category is a BSF(Border Security Force at Falakata Camp) he got this job in 2016 and his father is alive who was engaged in agriculture previously, nowadays his father only looking after the lands(they are giving these agricultural land to cultivate). The last respondent is engaged in water pipe line/plumbing repairing (agricultural machinery, generator, water pumping machine and plumbing at agricultural land and household) job category.

## **6. OCCUPATIONS OF NAMASUDRA COMMUNITY:**

At the Bhanukumari 1 G.P there are few Namasudra people, they are mainly living the Raydhak river side. As per as the research the 6 respondent's source of earning is agriculture and 4 respondents are engaged in non-agricultural work. Those who engaged in agricultural work they mainly cultivate Amon Dhan and bodo dhan(similar to some rajbangshi's job) in a bulk amount and secondly they cultivate jute because of the river. The raydhak river is the main proponent of their livelihood and source of earning. They utilize river in various ways as like they cultivate watermelons, sugar cane in the summers, separating jute from the main root is very easy accessible due to this river, some of them are fishing in that river, and during flood season(August-September) many kind of woods floating away from the top they collect them for seeling and more on. Not only Amon dhan, Bodo Dhan they cultivate corn, jute, flowers (Gada ful), vegetables (Potato, Ladies finger, Mulo, cabbage, cauli flower, parwal, gourd etc).

The four respondents are related to non-agricultural job First respondent is an invited teacher in Bengali at Bakshirhat High school along with he is teaching many students in tuition batch, once a while he was also engaged with agricultural but his father was a farmer on their own land sometimes in the pick session they borrow 2-3bighs of lands from other to cultivate on a rental basis. Second respondent in this category is a security guard at SBI(Tufanganj branch) and he was an Army, on his age of 50 he retired and he joined as a security guard but his father was a peasant. Next respondent has his own grocery cum tea stall alongside the river. In his free time he is fishing in that river majorly for his own purpose sometimes he sales excess fishes in his shop. The last respondent, whom the researcher found in this category who is a fisherman. He has his own pond in front of his house, he is fishing (Koi, tengra, glasscup, Boirali, Chinese putietc) for business purpose by his own hand he does the all regarding fishing in all the seasons. And in the rainy sessions he is going in nearby streams or closed reservoir for searching for fishes (Magur, Sing mach), because according to the respondent it is so much beneficiary, its only found in the over rainy session. According to the respondents who are under the agricultural category they told their income isn't stable in some months/sessions they are so profitable and it depends on weather, pesticides, Fertilizer, market, demand and supply. And sometimes they are not so profitable as much as they expected due to these reasons and majorly flood.

## **7. OCCUPATIONS OF JALIA KAIBARTA COMMUNITY:**

At the area of Bhanukumari 1G.P the people who are belonging from this community is not so large community. In this research researcher collect data from 5 household to conduct this research. All the main earner of their family is related to fishery and fishing. The first 3 Kaibartas have their own pond within 0.5-1bigha and last 2 respondents don't have their own pond. All of them cultivate for market demand, it's a seasonal (May-October) based job. The 3 respondents those who have their own pond their income is higher rather than the rest 2, because the 2 respondents have to give an amount (Rs. 7000-8000) to the pond owner in a season (for the whole session they borrowed for). All of them bought fish eggs from Bakshirhat market and sell them after when it constitutes a good weight. They mainly cultivate Rui, Katla, Khoka Ilish, Boirtali, Chang, Chinese Puti, Glasscup. 1<sup>st</sup> respondent have his own agricultural land also, he cultivate Amon, Bodo dhan in the rest of the months, or sometimes he cultivates Corn or Veggies. 2<sup>nd</sup> respondent have his own grocery shop in front of his house along with he has agricultural land, on that land he cultivates amon dhan, chillis, corn with the help of helper/worker(paid helper), and his grocery shop runs by his wife but he only bought all selling products from market. 3<sup>rd</sup> respondent do the same agriculture in the rest of times along with he has a small business of dry fish. Which he produced from his fishing from his pond or raydhak river. The last 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> respondent do fishing in their borrow pond, they are borrowing ponds from them

those who have larger amount of lands and 2-3 ponds and sometimes they need to go outside of 1 G.P. They also cultivate the same fishes what the others do. The 4<sup>th</sup> respondent engaged with some handicrafts work (Bamboo oriented products like Sital Pati, Bera, Chalon, Bloom), because of some extra profit. The 5<sup>th</sup> respondent borrow pond from the jamindar, sometimes he goes to Bhanukumari II G.P for fishing and his taxes depend on the size of that pond if that is within 0.5 bigha then the tenure will be 7000-8000 and if the sizes of ponds exceeds then the tax will increases. It's all his responsibility to bring all the eggs, foods, water pump, and trammel net to fishing. Along with he does helping as like in agriculture in a daily wages basis.

## **8. OCCUPATIONS OF JHALO MALO COMMUNITIES:**

At the area of Bhanukumari 1 G.P there are very few families who are jhalo malo. In this research researcher has taken 5 household as sample of this community. 5 respondents are directly or indirectly related to agriculture. 2 respondents of jhalomalo are directly engaged with agriculture, as in both have their own agricultural land of 2-3 bigha and they cultivate Amon dhan and Bodo dhan in the rainy session (March-August) they cultivate jute. According to the respondents jute is so profitable agriculture but processing of the whole process is so hectic, and then they are going to Bakshirhat bazaar and Kasiabari bazaar to sell all the products. And sometimes some wholesalers (from Assam) come to their end to buy all the products. The 2<sup>nd</sup> respondent only engaged in producing rice and he borrowed land from other jamindars in the exchange of some crops/money (Rs. 2000-3000). And it depends on how much land they have taken as a lease, as per that they need to give that much of revenue from products. Although it is not possible to cultivate all the 4-5 bigha of land to cultivating, plugging, cutting, cleaning etc by his own, that's why he hires 2-3 workers as per as daily wage basis. Included all the seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, wages of laborers, tractors rent and if the land is borrowed then expenses as per bigha Rs. 5000-6000 and from each bigha 15-16 mind (1 mind= 40kg) rice produced. And rest 3 respondents are also linked with agriculture but not in directly they are just looking after their land, and that's totally contract basis to someone who are willing to cultivate. Or sometimes they hire worker to cultivate and manufacturing goods (Amon Dhan, Bodo Dhan, Corn). 1<sup>st</sup> respondents of this category were fully engaged in agriculture but on 2009 he got a job as a teacher at local government primary school. After that his secondary source of income became agriculture. 2<sup>nd</sup> respondent of this category, who is a mason and this is his primary occupation, and he has his own ancestral land, alongside he is plugging his own land rest of the time. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and the last respondent in this category has his agricultural land but he is not engaged in this peasantry occupation what's his father did. He is giving his land to the willing farmer to cultivate with the exchange of some amount of crops/money. But his source of earning is fishing and fishery and he is a Manager of the largest govt registered pond (Chadgaon Bill) at Bhanukumari 1 G.P. he is the managing director of that managing committee from the last ten years. That bill is having government helps {Fishing Net, Money, fish, food, Cycle, house (Gitanjali Schemes)} and this pond (kind of lake) is a business hub for the locals because it is given as a contract for 5 years, and who are having that contract they need to give 4-5 lacks for 5 years to that committee. The 5<sup>th</sup> respondent is earning 12-15k from this source. According to the respondent sometimes it excels because of much legal or illegal way (moral legality).

## **9. CONCLUSION:**

All complex societies have the challenging challenge of assigning people to positions that are essential to the survival of the group. There should be as little disagreement and misunderstanding as feasible in these jobs. People have to be willing to fill both low-status and highly prestigious responsibilities in the workplace. The town is home to physicians, attorneys, and educators. Others gather trash, control traffic, and put out fires. Determining who will play which position involves very little friction, despite the fact that they are not all equally prestigious. Caste is one, if not the most significant, set of role cards in India. A person's caste is attributed; their rank is passed down to their offspring. Indians are handed a caste card at birth. This contradicts the notion of the "good society" held by a large number of Americans. We hear a thousand times from our parents, friends, professors, and relatives that our lives are what we make of them, and many of us believe that all civilizations need to follow the same set of norms, or at least try to. However, it's crucial to keep in mind that status is never determined only by an individual's work in any culture.

Indians, like Americans, employ class (economic) cards in addition to caste, which is a highly important set of role cards. Class and caste function together. A sweeper, for example, from a very low caste may save some money by getting a decent job unrelated to cleaning. With his fortune, the sweeper could construct an opulent home and send his kids to college, where they would go on to become physicians, attorneys, and public servants. While some people inherit their money, this kind of job is often attained. In India, it is also possible to become politically powerful independently of one's caste or class. A person from a lower caste might be very skilled at winning elections and gaining entry into the national government. Throughout his political career, Jagjivan Ram, a member of the Dalit (formerly Untouchable) caste, has held many cabinet positions. Power is the foundation of this status-gaining method. Typically, power is not innate; rather, it is a position that is attained. In India, people engage in power struggles, class struggles, and caste struggles.

Clan members in a certain region may recognize the castes above and below them since castes are graded in India. Based on cleanliness and contamination, which are frequently connected to bodily functions, castes are ranked. Mental functions like speaking, thinking, teaching, and learning are seen as pure. Polluting activities include those involving faces, feet, and skin. As a result, professors who historically taught and presided over religious events were Brahmins at the pinnacle of purity. At the bottom of the hierarchy, untouchables removed human waste, gathered trash, chopped hair, de-skinned animals, and cleaned clothing. Society had the opinion that contact with an Untouchable was dangerous because their jobs mostly included dealing with waste—human, animal, and social.

How castes are ranked is shown via the preparation and sharing of food. Any caste under the Brahmin caste is welcome to accept and consume food that has been cooked with oil. With general, individuals of one's own caste or those of lower castes can consume food cooked with water. Only the lowest classes nearly never consume leftover, uneaten food. The food that is most widely available and acceptable to people of all castes is raw food. Additionally, everyone, regardless of caste, receives prasad, which is sanctified food left over following religious offerings. A variety of clean and impure meals are also available. Meat and eggs are not as pure as vegetables and cereals. Fish is the most pure non-vegetarian food, followed by chicken, goats, pigs, and water buffalo; beef is the most impure. Sweet pastries cooked in deep oil are among the most popular dishes among all castes. By seeing how food is cooked and served, whether its raw or cooked, one may begin to estimate the purity-pollution rating of the caste groups involved.

## REFERENCES:

### Books:

1. Dumont, L, '*Homo Hierarchicus* (3rd ed.)', (2002).
2. Ahuja, R, 'Indian social system', Jaipur. 2012, pp.293
3. Barman, Rup.kumar, 'Fisheries and Fishermen', 2008, pp.13-38.
4. Baviskar, A., Shah, G., Mander, H., Thorat, S., & Deshpande, S. (2006, August 4). *Untouchability in Rural India*. <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780761935070>
5. Béteille, A, '*Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*', 2003(September), <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780195658347>
6. Risley, H, 'The Tribes and Castes of Bengal' (2 Vols.), first published in 1891, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, reprint edn., Calcutta, Firma Mukhopadhyay, 1981, Vol. II., p. 65.
7. Ghurye, G, S, '*Caste and Race in India*', September(2016).
8. Bendix, R, & Lipset, S, M, 'Class, status, and power: Social stratification in comparative perspective' (1966), pp. 17-52, Free Press.
9. Sharma, K, L, '*Social stratification and mobility*', (2006).

Journal papers:

10. Avent-Holt, Dustin & Hällsten, Martin & Cort, David. (2019). Occupational Status and Organizations: Variation in Occupational Hierarchies across Swedish Workplaces. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 70, 100423. [10.1016/j.rssm.2019.100423](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2019.100423).
11. Barman, D, 'The Kaibartas in Brahmaputra Valley from 1901 to 1947'. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Science Society and Culture*, 3(1), 2017(June), pp. 205–213.
12. Avent-Holt, D., Hällsten, M., & Cort, D. (2020, December). Occupational status and organizations: Variation in occupational hierarchies across Swedish workplaces. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 70, 100423. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2019.100423>
13. Deshpande, R., & Palshikar, S. (2008). Occupational Mobility: How Much Does Caste Matter? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(34), 61–70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40277879>
14. DESAI, S., & DUBEY, A. (2011). Caste in 21st Century India: Competing Narratives. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(11), 40–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41151970>
15. Ahmad, I, 'Caste Mobility Movements in North India. *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*', 1971(June), pp.164–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946467100800203>
16. Arya, S, 'Dalit or Brahmanical Patriarchy? Rethinking Indian Feminism'. *CASTE / a Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, 1(1), (February 14 2020), pp.217–228. <https://doi.org/10.26812/caste.v1i1.54>
17. Basu, S, 'Book Review: Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal', 1872–1947. *Indian Historical Review*, 41(1), 2014(June), pp.112–115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0376983614521627>