

Industrialisation and Urbanisation in India

Growth of Urban Settlements in India

In simple words, the process of urbanisation denotes population growth of the cities and towns. Sociologically, it also denotes the spread of urban way of life to the country-side. Thus, the process of urbanisation has demographic as well as social dimensions. In present times, with the spread of industrialisation, the process of urbanisation has received unprecedented momentum all over the world and more specifically in the third world countries. It is predicated, on the basis of the current rates of urbanisation, that within a few decades the urban population of the third world countries will grow twice that of the present industrialised societies.

The rapid growth of urban population in the third world countries has led to the availability of public utilities becoming scarce. In India, such a situation in big cities has made it very difficult for the local administration to cope with the increasing population and arrive at any enduring solution. In social science, this has led to formulation of the controversial notion of over-urbanisation. In order to ameliorate the fast deteriorating conditions of urban living systematic urban policy and effective measures, urban renewal have become inevitable in India and all other third world countries.

Urbanisation in its demographic sense refers to the trends of growth of the urban population. In societal context and in its sociological sense it also denotes a distinct way of life typically associated with living in the city and the process of transforming rural ways of life into urban ones.

Urbanisation has its bearing on social relationships in community living. The relationships of community-living tend to become impersonal, formal, goal oriented, contractual and transitory. With urbanisation, transformation of economic activities from the agricultural sector to the non-agricultural sector takes place, and the proportion of population engaged in secondary and tertiary sectors of activities increases with division of labour and specialisation of work. Further, the process of urbanisation also leads to breakdown in the functioning of traditional institutions and patterns of behaviour and of social control. It leads to a situation of continuity and change in the sense that the traditional forms often continue to persist, but their functions undergo major re-adaptations in the face of urbanisation. As pointed out by **Yogendra Singh**, "many new roles, often rational and modern in orientation, are added on to the traditional institutional forms." In India, the traditional institutions like caste, joint family and neighbourhood, etc., offer ample evidence of such continuity and change in cities.

Urban growth coupled with industrial development induces rural-urban migration whereby the cities of bigger size, offering opportunities of improving life, tend to overflow with the rural migrants. On the one hand, such migration accelerates the pace of urbanisation and, on the other, it creates excessive population pressure on the existing public utilities with the result that cities suffer from the problems of slums, crime, unemployment, urban poverty, pollution, congestion, ill-health and several deviant social activities. In this context, it is essential to know the various facets of over-urbanisation and urban problems in India.

Urbanisation has been viewed as an important force of social change. In India, this process has, on the one hand, meant economic growth, political change, new values and new attitudes. It reflects also the elements of continuity between rural and urban social structures.

Socio-cultural Character :

In the process of urbanisation the towns and cities of India have achieved heterogeneous character in terms of ethnicity, caste, race, class and culture. In the urban areas there has always been coexistence of different cultures. Studies show that though various ethnic and/or caste groups have adjusted themselves with each other in the city, they have also tried to maintain their traditional identity. The migrants have maintained distinctive cultural traditions in the towns. Various migrant groups have maintained their own cultural identity.

N.K. Bose points out that the migrants tend to cluster around people with whom they have linguistic, local, regional, caste and ethnic ties. A study by Jagannathan and Haldar on the pavement-dwellers in Calcutta shows that they retain close ties with kinship and caste groups for socializing and transmitting or receiving information from the village. Thus cultural pluralism has been an important socio-cultural dimension of the urbanites. Social stratification has taken a new form in the urban society. It is assumed that with urbanisation caste transforms itself into class in the urban areas. But caste systems do exist in the cities though with significant organizational differences.

Marriage and family are two important aspects of social life. In the urban areas caste norms have been flexible with regard to the selection of mates. There have been increasing opportunities for the free mixing of young men and women. Again the voluntary associations have encouraged inter-caste marriages. As a result there have been more inter-caste and inter-religious marriage in the urban areas than earlier. Though it has been pointed out that joint families are breaking down in the urban areas.

PROBLEMS OF URBAN AREAS

The current process of urbanisation has faced many problems in different parts of India. The most important of these are:

- Over Urbanisation;
- Inadequate Housing;
- Unsafe and insufficient water supplies;
- inefficient and inadequate transportation facility;
- pollution;
- environmental decay;
- emergence of slum;
- migration;
- problem of sanitation and hygiene.

In India, urbanisation along with westernisation and modernisation has furthered the process of rapid social change both in the rural and in the urban areas. One of the important results of urbanisation is the rural to urban migration. Migration has become a continuous process affecting the social, economic and cultural lives of the villagers widely.

Srinivas pointed out that urbanisation in southern India has a caste component and that, it was the Brahmin who first left the village for the towns and took advantage of western education and modern professions. At the same time as they retained their ancestral lands they continued to be at the top of the rural socio-economic hierarchy. Again, in the urban areas they had a near monopoly of all non-manual posts.

As a result of migration there has been a flow of urban money into the rural areas. Emigrants regularly send money to their native villages. Such money facilitates the dependants to clear off loans, build houses and educate children.

The urban centres of India have become the centres of national and international linkages. At present, many cultural traits are diffused from cities to the rural areas. For example, dress patterns like pants, shirts, ties, skirts, jeans etc. diffuse from cities to the rural areas. Besides these, new thoughts, ideologies are also diffused from the cities to the rural areas due to increase in communication via radio, television, newspaper, computer, the Internet and telephone. The urbanism, which emerges in the cities gradually, reaches to the rural areas, depending on their proximity to the cities.

Thus it can be concluded by saying, that urbanisation has great sociological importance. The rapid pace of industrialisation as a necessary corollary to globalisation is playing an important role

in the modernisation of Indian society, transforming it faster than one could imagine. The differing viewpoints held by various sociologists wherein one expects urbanisation as a leading force pushing Indian society towards modernisation thereby transforming caste into class, while on the other hand sociologists like MN Srinivas points out that it is transforming caste old into caste new rather than changing caste into class.

Slum and deprivation in urban areas

The current process of urbanisation has faced many problems in different parts of India. The most important of these has been the development of slums, in the urban areas. Slum population accounts for a substantial share of urban population in all types of cities in India. Even a planned city like Chandigarh has not escaped slums.

Slums are characterized by substandard housing, overcrowding and lack of electrification, ventilation, sanitation, roads and drinking water facilities. Slums have been the breeding ground of diseases, environmental pollution, demoralisation, and many social tensions. Crimes, like juvenile delinquency, gambling, have also increased in number in slum areas.

The National Institute of Urban Affairs, New Delhi, has recorded that the emergence of slums is essentially the product of three forces:

- demographic dynamism of a city attracting more people from the rural areas offering greater potential for employment;
- its incapacity to meet the rising demand for housing; and
- the existing urban land policies, which prohibit the access of the poor to the urban land market.

Characteristics of Slums

The physical aspects and general conditions of the slums are by and large the same everywhere. The foremost characteristics of slums are:

- Dilapidated and poor houses in slums are made of poor design and scrap materials. These are often raised on unauthorised land.
- High density of population and housing leads to over-crowding and congestion; one room is often used for all practical purposes of domesticating living.
- Lack of public utilities and facilities, such as, drainage, sanitation, water taps, electric light, health centres, common latrines and public parks, etc., are widely observable characteristics of slums.
- The slum-dwellers are functionally integrated with the mainstream of the city life, yet the high incidence of deviant behaviour such as crime, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, drug use, beggary, illegitimacy, illicit distilling of liquor, gambling and other social evils are associated with slum areas. It does not mean that all those residing in slums are necessarily associated with

such deviant behaviour. The slum areas, socially and physically provide greater opportunity for such kinds of deviant behaviour.

- Though the slum-dwellers are functionally integrated to the city life, apathy and social isolation characterise a slum. It means that largely slums are subject to neglect and apathy of the larger community. These areas are looked down upon and considered inferior. Such a reaction from the larger community renders slums into social isolation, detached from the city as a whole. Under these circumstances, the slum-dwellers find it almost impossible to improve these conditions through their own efforts.

In case of India it is estimated that almost 36% of the GDP is coming out of informal sector. In every Indian city people migrate from villages to urban centre in search of livelihood. People living in slums are not always poor and marginalised. Looking at the growing cost of urban land, some of the traders and land mafias encroach over the land in slums and rent it out. They wait till the land gets authorised, which usually happens just before the election. Therefore slum operates as a big source of profit for them.

People living in particular slum largely come from one area therefore they address to each other in primary kinship terms and follow traditional form of rituals. Therefore slums are evolving into mini cultural Centre.

Slums manifest cultural poverty because people living in slums do not have access to education, political participation therefore they engage themselves in typical form of activities which are not respected and non-rewarding. Contradicting to this **MSA Rao** advocate that slums are not the 'centres of cultural poverty' rather they are 'centres of cultural prosperity'. People living in slums glorify, practice and promote their culture and considered outsiders as suffering from cultural poverty.

MS Gore conceded that slums and urban growth are complementary to each other because for the construction of roads, buildings migrant workers come from different pockets of the country. They offer their service at a cheaper rate to the mainstream occupation. He further said that slum provides emotional comfort to people and therefore slum is the lifeline of urbanity, it's the sweet spot on the beautiful face of urban India.

Marxist sociologist point out that urban centres develop out of the sweat and blood of poor people for which they do not get any benefit. They further consider that most of the people living in slums are accused of crime, drug paddling and other kinds of criminal activities. Slums are used as a source of cheap labour by the urban upper and middle class and therefore growth of slum is talking about exploitation between haves and have-nots in modern society.

GS Ghurye in his book "sociology of slums" consider that slums are the other cultures that doesn't carry commonalities with Sanskritic Hindu culture therefore, protest movement coming out from the slum is questioning to the unity and integrity of Indian society.

In conclusion it can be advocated that slums is not a challenge to urban planners, rather it is an area of sociological research that takes into consideration the factors like:

- functions and dysfunctions of slums,*
- slums and social change,*
- slums and deviance.*

Informal Sector

The informal sector or informal economy is defined as that part of an economy that is not taxed, monitored by any form of government, or included in any gross national product (GNP), unlike the formal economy, in India around 70% of the potential working population earn their living in the informal sector. Agricultural workers constitute by far the largest segment of workers in the unorganized sector.

The informal /unorganised sector in India continues to remain bigger than the organised sector in many key respects in spite of the large control over resources and social economic power enjoy it by the organised sector. It is nearly a century and a half ago that modern industry and the corporate form of organisation began in India. But still these two, the main components of the organised sector, in terms of their sharing GDP and the occupational structure, remained far from occupying a substantial, leave alone, major part. Thus despite its large, substantial place in economy, the unorganised sector is a relatively neglected sector in the arena of public policy support and academic discourse.

Features of informal sector:

- *low level of organisation; small in scale usually employing fewer than 10 workers and often from the immediate family;*
- *heterogeneity in activities;*
- *easy entry and exit than in the case of former sector;*
- *usually minimal capital investment; little or no division between labour and capital;*
- *mostly labour-intensive work, requiring low-level skills; there is usually no formal training as workers learn on the job;*
- *labour relations based on casual employment and/or social relationships as opposed to formal contracts; employer-employee relationship is of an unwritten and informal with little or no rights;*
- *due to their isolation and invisibility, workers in the informal sector are often largely unaware of their rights, cannot organise them and have little negotiating power.*

Categories of workers in the informal sector:

- **Based on occupation:** *Small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural labourers, share croppers,*

fishermen, those engaged in animal husbandry, in beedi rolling, labelling and packing, building and construction, collection of raw hides and skins, handlooms weaving in rural areas, brick kilns and stone quarries, saw mills, oil mills, etc.

- *Based upon nature of employment: attached agricultural labourers, bonded labourers, migrant workers, contract and casual labourers et cetera.*
- *Specifically distressed categories: scavengers, carriers of head loads, drivers of animal driven vehicles, loaders, unoaders et cetera.*
- *Service categories: midwives, domestic workers, barbers, vegetable and fruit vendor is, newspaper vendor's et cetera.*

Problems in the informal sector

Social problems emanate from the low status of agricultural workers in the rural hierarchy and the economic problems are due to the inadequacy of employment opportunities, poor security of tenure, low-income and inadequate diversification of economic activity in rural areas. They are dispersed, unorganised and generally have poor bargaining power. Due to seasonal work they often have to migrate for alternative avenues of employment in other areas like construction etc. during off-season.

Circumstances force many of them to borrow, from time to time, from private sources either for consumption purposes (even to maintain a subsistence level) or to meet social obligations (marriages, etc.) and some of them end up as bonded labourers.

The issues and problems of home based workers are very complex because of the absence of any direct master-servant or employer-employee relationship between the home worker and the person or organization for whom he works. The relationship being ambiguous and indefinite, the home worker is subjected to exploitation in various forms.

In India, there is no authentic data on home based workers. Official data sources such as Census of India, do not recognize these workers as an independent category but have included them in the broad category of those working in house-hold Industries. As such, home based workers are not visible in national statistics. However, it has been estimated that over 3 crore workers in the country are home based workers. Among these, 45 lakh workers are employed in beedi rolling, 65 lakh in handloom weaving, 48 lakh rural artisans and craft persons. The other major occupations of the Home based workers are agarbatti makers, zari workers, papad makers, cobblers, lady tailors, carpenters, etc.

One of the major features of construction industry is that it is prone to risks of accidents. Due to non-detection and non-reporting, accurate statistics of the number of such accidents is difficult to obtain.

Several other problems faced by workers in the informal sector are:

- sexual exploitation of women migrant workers;*
- very less amount of money paid in the form of wage,*
- most of the migrant workers in the informal sector live in slums with poor sanitation leading to health hazard.*

Social security measures taken by government for workers in the unorganised sector

Of late, the issue of provision of social security to the growing segment of unorganized sector workers gained enhanced significance in the development discourse in India. Various efforts of the Government of India, in recent years, such as designing of new social security schemes, recasting of earlier schemes, introduction of innovative methods towards effective identification and enrolment of beneficiaries, contemplation of comprehensive legislations to ensure social protection for unorganised sector workers and so on testify a paradigm shift in the social security front. These schemes are in the nature of:

- centrally funded social assistance programs,*
- social insurance scheme,*
- social assistance through welfare funds of Central and State governments, and*
- public initiatives.*

The centrally funded social assistance programs include the employment oriented poverty alleviation programmes such as Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojna, employment assurance scheme, national social assistance programme comprising old-age pension, family benefits and maternity benefits to address the social security needs of the people below the poverty line. The social insurance scheme include several schemes launched by the Central and State governments for the benefit of weaker section e.g. Janshree Bima Yojna, Rashtriya Swasthya bima Yojna, etc.

Several public institutions and agencies are also imparting various kinds of social security benefits to the selected group of workers. Among these Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has made significant achievement in promoting social security through the formation of cooperatives.

Child Labour in India

Millions of children in today's world undergo the worst forms of child labor which includes Child Slavery, Child prostitution, Child Trafficking, Child Soldiers. In modern era of material and technological advancement, children in almost every country are being callously exploited. The official figure of child laborers world wide is 13 million. But the actual number is much higher. Of the estimated 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 who are economically active, some 50 million to 60 million between the ages of 5 and 11 are engaged in intolerable forms of labor. Among the 10 to 14-year-old children the working rate is 41.3 percent in Kenya, 31.4 percent in Senegal, 30.1 percent in Bangladesh, 25.8 percent in Nigeria, 24 percent in Turkey, 17.7 percent in Pakistan, 16.7 percent in Brazil, 14.4 percent in India, 11.6 percent in China.

ILO estimated that 250 million children between 5 and 14 work for a living, and over 50 million children under age twelve work in hazardous circumstances. United Nations estimate that there were 20 million bonded child laborers worldwide. Based on reliable estimates, at least 700,000 persons to 2 million, especially girls and children, are trafficked each year across international borders. Research suggests that the age of the children involved is decreasing. Most are poor children between the ages of 13 and 18, although there is evidence that very young children even babies, are also caught up in this horrific trade. They come from all parts of the world. Some one million children enter the sex trade, exploited by people or circumstances. At any one time, more than 300,000 children under 18 - girls and boys - are fighting as soldiers with government armed forces and armed opposition groups in more than 30 countries worldwide. ILO estimates that domestic work is the largest employment category of girls under age 16 in the world.

India has the dubious distinction of being the nation with the largest number of child laborers in the world. The child labors endure miserable and difficult lives. They earn little and struggle to make enough to feed themselves and their families. They do not go to school; more than half of them are unable to learn the barest skills of literacy. Poverty is one of the main reasons behind this phenomenon. The unrelenting poverty forces the parents to push their young children in all forms of hazardous occupations. Child labor is a source of income for poor families. They provide help in household enterprises or of household chores in order to free adult household members for economic activity elsewhere. In some cases, the study found that a child's income accounted for between 34 and 37 percent of the total household income. In India the emergence of child labor is also because of unsustainable systems of landholding in agricultural areas and caste system in the rural areas.

Bonded labour refers to the phenomenon of children working in conditions of servitude in order to pay their debts. The debt that binds them to their employer is incurred not by the

children themselves but by their parent. The creditors cum employers offer these loans to destitute parents in an effort to secure the labor of these children. The arrangements between the parents and contracting agents are usually informal and unwritten. The number of years required to pay off such a loan is indeterminate. The lower castes such as Dalits and tribal make them vulnerable groups for exploitation.

The environmental degradation and lack of employment avenues in the rural areas also cause people to migrate to big cities. On arrival in overcrowded cities the disintegration of family units takes place through alcoholism, unemployment or disillusionment of better life etc. This in turn leads to emergence of street children and child workers who are forced by their circumstances to work from the early age. The girls are forced to work as sex-workers or beggars. A large number of girls end up working as domestic workers on low wages and unhealthy living conditions.

Sometimes children are abandoned by their parents or sold to factory owners. The last two decades have seen tremendous growth of export based industries and mass production factories utilizing low technologies. They try to maintain competitive positions through low wages and low labor standards. The child laborers exactly suit their requirements. They use all means to lure the parents into giving their children on pretext of providing education and good life. In India majority of children work in industries, such as cracker making, diamond polishing, glass, brass-ware, carpet weaving, bangle making, lock making and mica cutting to name a few. 15% of the 100,000 children work in the carpet industry of Uttar Pradesh. 70-80% of the 8,000 to 50,000 children work in the glass industry in Ferozabad. In the unorganized sector child labor is paid by piece-by-piece rates that result in even longer hours for very low pay.

Inadequate schools, or lack of schools, or even the expense of schooling leaves some children with little else to do but work. The attitudes of parents also contribute to child labor; some parents feel that children should work in order to develop skills useful in the job market, instead of taking advantage of a formal education. From the time of its independence, India has committed itself to be against child labor.

Article 24 of the Indian constitution clearly states that "No child below the age of fourteen years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or employed in any hazardous employment" The Bonded Labour System Act of 1976 fulfills the Indian Constitution's directive of ending forced labour. A Plethora of additional protective legislation has been put in place. There are distinct laws governing child labour in factories in commercial establishments, on plantations and in apprenticeships. There are laws governing the use of migrant labour and contract labour. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation law) of 1986 designates a child as a person who has not completed their 14th year of age. It purports to regulate the hours and the conditions of child workers and to prohibit child workers in certain enumerated hazardous industries. However there is

neither blanket prohibition on the use of child labour, nor any universal minimum age set for child workers. All of the policies that the Indian government has in place are in accordance with the Constitution of India, and all support the eradication of Child Labor. The problem of child labor still remains even though all of these policies are existent. Enforcement is the key aspect that is lacking in the government's efforts.

Child labor is a global problem. If child labour is to be eradicated, the governments and agencies and those responsible for enforcement need to start doing their jobs. The most important thing is to increase awareness and keep discussing ways and means to check this problem. We have to decide whether we are going to take up the problem head-on and fight it any way we can or leave it to the adults who might not be there when things go out of hand.

Working Class: Structure, Growth, Class Mobilisation

The question 'who and what is working class' is not an easy one to answer. There are several reasons for this. The working class is not a cohesive entity and it has numerous differences and contradictions. There is a problem of where to draw the line. Who belongs to the working class and who does not? The difference further extends in terms of skill, sex, age, income and caste. Hence the working class is a complex, contradictory and constantly changing entity. One cannot have a single definition which will be all inclusive. This is because of the blurring of boundaries between classes and the different working class. For example, a worker in 1970 is not the same as a worker in 2005. That is, the composition, the size and the character of a class changes over a period of time. Therefore the requirement is of a series of definitions, which have to change in accordance with the changes in social structure.

In the Marxian scheme, the capitalist society is characterised by two principal classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat. Bourgeoisie owns the means of production and proletariat sell their labour for wages in order to live.

India has a multi-structural economy where a number of pre-capitalist relations of production co-exist with capitalist relations of production. Correspondingly, here a differentiated working class structure exists i.e. the numerous types of relations of production, consumption and accumulation of surplus combine to produce a variety of forms of the existence of the working class. This is further compounded by the structural features of Pan-Indian society along with local conditions. So the composition of the working class is affected by the caste, tribe, ethnic origin and the gender based division of labour between male and female and associated patriarchy. This implies that despite internal structural differences and the relations of productions through which working people have been and continues to be, there exists a group of people denoted as 'working class'.

Growth of Working Class in India

The modern working class came into being with the rise of capitalist mode of production. This mode of production brought with it the factory type of industry. In other words, rise of factory system of production and working class happened simultaneously. Conversely, without a factory industry there can be no working class but only working people.

The formative period: The forced intrusion of British capital in India devastated the old economy but did not transplant it by forces of modern capital economy. So, traditional cottage industry and weavers famed for their skill through the centuries were robbed of their means of livelihood and were

uprooted throughout India. This loss of the old world with no new gains led to extreme impoverishment of the people. Subsequently, with the introduction of railways and sporadic growth of some industries, a section of these very people at the lowest rung of Indian society who had been plodding through immense sufferings and impoverishment in village life entered the modern industries as workers. The first generation of factory workers, it appears, came from this distressed and dispossessed section the village people.

Emergence of working class: With the growth of modern factory industries, the factory workers gradually shaped themselves into a distinct category. The concentration of the working class in the cities near the industrial enterprises was an extremely important factor in the formation of the workers as a class. Similar conditions in factories and common living conditions made the workers feel that they had similar experiences and shared interests and react in similar fashion. In other words, the principal factors underlying the growth and formation of the working mass as a class in India in the latter half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, I bear similarities with the advanced countries of Europe.

Hence, the consciousness of being exploited by the capitalists/ owners of factories was evident as early as 1888, when workers of Shyamnagar Jute Mill assaulted the manager. That is, the reactions against the exploitation in early phases were marked by riots, affrays, assaults and physical violence.

Consolidation of the working class: The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th was marked by the organised national movements and consolidation of the working class. The national movement, especially in Bengal and Maharashtra had already assumed a developed form which exerted a great impact on the later national awakening of the entire country. The partition of Bengal in the year 1905 aroused bitter public indignation and gave rise to mass national upsurge. This political development worked as a favorable condition for the Indian working class too for moving ahead with its economic struggles and raising them to a higher pitch. These struggles led to the laying of the foundation of the first trade unions of the country. Moreover, the turn of the century was also marked by the advance in industrialization with concomitant swelling of the working class in numerical strength.

Nature and Structure of the Working Class Today

Given such an eventful history and evolution of the working class in India, it is worthwhile to examine the nature and structure of the working class in the present circumstances. As mentioned above, due to the existence of multi-structural economy and effects of primordial affiliations, a variety of forms of the working class exists in India. On top of all the differences, the differences in wage is also the basis of divisions among the working class. On the basis of wage, there are four types of workers.

First, those workers who are permanent employees of the large factory sector and get family wage. (By 'family wage' it is meant that the wage of the worker should be sufficient to maintain not only the individual but also the worker's family).

Second, there is a large and preponderant section of the working class that does not get a family wage. This includes workers in the older industries like cotton and jute textiles, sugar and paper.

Third, there is a section of the working class at the bottom of the wage scale — the mass of contract and sometimes casual labourers in industry, including construction, brick making and other casual workers.

Fourth, below all these lie a reserve army of labour, who work in petty commodities production in petty trading, ranging from hawking to rag-picking. They are generally engaged in the informal sector and carry on for the want of sufficient survival wage.

The existence of a majority of workers, who are not paid family wage means that either the worker gets some form of supplement from other non-capitalist sectors or the worker and his/her family cut down their consumption below the minimum standard. Not only is there wage differential among the working class, there is also variation in the terms of working conditions. Hence, better paid labour has also much greater job security. However the workers on the lower end of the wage scale have not only job security but also considerable extra-economic coercion and personal bondage which leads to lack of civil rights. Similarly, working conditions for the low paid workers are uniformly worse than for high paid workers. So, in the same plant or site there is a clear difference in the safety measures for the two groups of workers. The situation worsens further with regard to women workers.

Social Background of Indian Working Class

Indian working class, as mentioned earlier, came from diverse social backgrounds in which primordial identities such as caste, ethnicity, religion and language played very important roles. In recent years, the significance of these elements has been reduced but they do persist nonetheless. The dominant position of the workers from upper caste was also brought out in a study of Kerala. This study points out that in higher income jobs upper castes dominate whereas Dalits/adivasis have preponderance in low wage jobs.

The middle castes are concentrated in middle to bottom ranges. Even in public sector, the representation of backward castes, schedule castes and tribes is not up to their proportion in the population. Moreover, it seems that caste based division of labour is followed in the class III and IV

jobs in government and public sector enterprises. So the jobs of sweepers are reserved for dalits and adivasis. In coal mines, hard physical labour of loading and pushing the coal tubs is done by dalits and adivasis. In steel plants the production work in the intense heat of coke oven and blast furnace is mainly done by adivasis and dalits. This is because of 'pre labour market characteristic' such as education and land holding. So those who possessed more land and education ended up in a higher wage sector. But then if upper and lower caste people own comparable levels of landholding and education, the upper caste worker will get into a higher segment of the wage than the lower caste worker. This is because of the continuing importance of caste ties in recruitment.

Caste also serves the function of ensuring the supply of cheap labour for different jobs with the fact of not paying more than what is necessary. In other words, the depressed conditions of adivasis and dalits helps in ensuring a supply of labour, who can be made to work at the mere subsistence level. Hence, caste on one hand plays a role in keeping the lower sections of the society in the lower strata of the working class, on the other hand, the upper caste get a privilege in the labour market. Further, caste is not only a matter of marriage and to an extent residence, but more so a continuing pool of social relation for the supply of various kinds of labour for the capitalist mode of production.

The working class at the conceptual level seems to be fairly simple, but if one tries to define it, the problem magnifies. The reason is that this is not a homogeneous entity. Rather it is a complex, contradictory and constantly changing entity. Another reason is that the concept of 'class-consciousness', is very slippery with regard to the working class. The consequence of this is that it is often proclaimed that either the working class is shrinking in size or everybody except a few at the top are working class. However the fact is that working class is a distinct entity, with characteristics of its own. In India, the situation is much more complex because of several reasons like,

- (a) the forced intrusion of British capital in India;
- (b) simultaneous existence of multiple relations of production; and
- (c) never ending identification of working mass with primordial features such as caste, religion and other ethnic divisions of the society.

The coming into being and consolidation of the working class in the world as well as in India, has been affected by local and international events of both economic and political nature. So for carrying out further studies on the working class, these peculiarities have to be taken into account.