

Ethnographic Profile of the Textile Workers of Uttar Pradesh

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ABSTRACT With the changing industrial landscape of the country, new working class areas have come into being and old ones are expanding. In the new areas, adaptability to this culture depends on the extent and strength of the workers' link with rural areas. The characteristics of the Textile Workers revolve around Social Composition, Sex Composition, Emergence of Tribal Labour, Low Level of Literacy, Heterogeneity of Working Class, High Rate of Absenteeism, Labour Turnover and Migratory Character. An anthropological attempt has been made in the present study to analyse the ethnographic profile of the textile workers of Uttar Pradesh. A total number of 463 adult workers working in different sectors in seventeen different factories were interviewed. The religious and ritualistic analysis of the observance of actions or procedures in a set and ceremonial way of the Hindu and Muslim textile workers of Uttar Pradesh, reflects that the religious rites and rituals of Hindu workers were more complex than Muslim workers and they believe in the concept of actions (*karma*) and earn merit (*punya*) for themselves, their families, their ancestors, their future and society in general.

INTRODUCTION

The textile industry occupies a unique place in our country. One of the earliest to come into existence in India, it accounts for 14% of the total Industrial production, contributes to nearly 30% of the total exports and is the second largest employment generator after agriculture.

Textile Industry is providing one of the most basic needs of people and the holds importance; maintaining sustained growth for improving quality of life. It has a unique position as a self-reliant industry, from the production of raw materials to the delivery of finished products, with substantial value-addition at each stage of processing; it is a major contribution to the country's economy (Economic Surveys 2010). In India, traditionally labor-oriented markets are changing towards more automation and mechanization, at the same time general awareness about occupational safety, occupational and environmental hazard is limited in the society. Lack of education, conservative religious belief, and lack of awareness about the hazards of their occupations, general backwardness in sanitation, poor nutrition and proneness to epidemics aggravate their health hazards from work environment (Vilanilam 1980). One of the most important features of an ethnographic religious profile of the workers in any industry is that life style and ritual practice play an instructional role in their life (Argonte 2000; Alavi et al. 2008).

Multi-religious and multi-cultural country like India, where both primitive features and multinational modernism exist side by side, so the research on culture and religion will have to give importance in to know the ethnographic features in India. The research approaches need to balance between understanding the way of life, religious belief and health risks of traditional sectors like textile and small scale industries. So far not much attention has been paid to the Ethnographic Profile of Textile Workers, those working in several unorganized sectors. Being exposed to extreme dusty environmental conditions, chemicals and poisons and mechanical hazards, much attention is needed to reduce the accidents and diseases in these groups (Chaudhary 2000). Despite proper evidence from ethnographical data or information systems, meager information about life style is available from small-scale and community based studies, which may be used for exploratory understanding of the total way of life of these Textile workers in India.

In India, the religious and cultural features of industrial workers were heterogeneous in concept and nature (Sharma 1982; Wolcott 1994; Tybout 2000; Mukherjee 2004). Their way of living or life style was religiously very complex and quite different from their normal activity (Edward and Sachau 1910; Hussain 1998). Not only Hindu workers (Wolcott 1994; Thapar 1997; Jha 2006), but also Muslim workers (Haque 1993; Mishra et al. 2003; Haider 2005) were ethnographically

different from the non-worker group (Henrich et al. 2001; Jayaram 2007).

Christiani et al. (2009) contend that religious ceremonies play an important role in the life of workers. They further advocate that only during festivals do these workers enjoy their normal life. Ettie (2005) observes that despite changes in the status over time on the role of the workers, he or she still needs to be an economic visionary and have expertise to ensure that their family lead a better life.

A number of studies have been carried out on ethnographic religious profile of the workers, for example in cement industry of Madhya Pradesh (Gardner et al. 1986) and Denmark (Raffn et al. 1989), textile industry of Uttar Pradesh (Goel et al. 2008), handloom industry of Bihar (Musungu and Musungu 2006) and coal industry of Orissa and Jharkhand (Murugaiah 2002; Fujimoto et al. 2006). In almost all the studies the researchers are agreed on the obligatory relationship between rituals and life style of the worker.

Up till now, most of the studies were conducted on clinical health dimensions mainly by the medical professionals, a lacuna in anthropological perspective is observed. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to study the comparative analysis of the Ethnographic Profile of the Hindu and Muslim Textile workers of Uttar Pradesh.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted from August 2006 to September 2007. A total number of 463 textile workers from (cotton, wool, and silk) 17 different factories were interviewed to gather the information on their ethnographic profile.

Preliminary visits were made in different factories for motivation of factory owners and workers, for obtaining their full cooperation for administrative reason for this study. During these visits, the purpose of the survey was explained to the owner and the workers. The workers of the factory were registered and then the workers were examined. The workers who were out of station and in night shifts could not be examined and were not included in the study. Interview schedule contained questions pertaining to a brief history of each individual, demographic profile, socio-economic conditions and religious rituals performed by each individual. Among Hindus and Muslims, both adult males and females were studied, and were divided into three age groups, that is, 20-29, 30-39 and 40-49 years.

RESULTS

Table 1 reflects the demographic features of the textile workers. The mean ages of the Hindu male and female textile workers were 32.95 ± 11.00 years and 29.60 ± 7.90 years respectively whereas mean age of the Muslim male textile workers was 31.50 ± 12.46 years and of the Muslim female textile workers was 29.00 ± 10.48 years.

However, 52.6 percent of the Hindu male textile workers and 47.4 percent Hindu female textile workers were living in rural community whereas, 51.9 percent of the Muslim male textile workers and 48.1 percent Muslim female textile workers were living in rural community.

The sex ratio of the Hindu textile workers was 894 whereas the sex ratio of the Muslim textile workers was 918. Literacy rates of Hindu male and female textile workers were 41.2 percent and 33.1 percent respectively whereas 37.3 percent of the Muslim male textile workers and 27.4 percent Muslim female textile workers were literate.

Table 1: Distribution of Textile Workers (TW) according to demographic features

Demographic features	Hindu		Muslim	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Age (years)				
20-29	40 (8.64)	38 (8.21)	45 (9.72)	40 (8.64)
30-39	40 (8.64)	36 (7.77)	40 (8.64)	38 (8.21)
40-49	36 (7.77)	35 (7.56)	42 (9.07)	33 (7.13)
Total	116 (25.05)	109 (23.54)	127 (27.43)	111 (23.98)
Mean $\pm$ SD	32.95 $\pm$	29.60 $\pm$	31.50 $\pm$	29.00 $\pm$
	11.00	7.90	12.46	10.48
Community				
Rural	52.6%	47.4%	51.9%	48.1%
Urban	53.6%	46.4%	52.6%	47.4%
Sex Ratio	894		918	
Total	Sex ratio: 898			
Literacy Rate	41.2%	33.1%	37.3%	27.4%
WPR*	47.3%	17.5%	44.6%	12.4%
Family Type				
Nuclear	80 (17.3)		109 (23.5)	
Joint	176 (38.0)		98 (21.2)	
Migration Status				
Autochthon	86 (18.6)		80 (17.3)	
Migratory	165 (35.6)		132 (28.5)	

* Work Participation Rate

However, the work participation rate of Hindu male textile workers was 47.3 percent and of the Muslim male textile workers were 44.6 percent. Similarly 38 percent Hindu textile workers were

living in joint families system and 17.3 percent were living in nuclear families system but in Muslim textile workers 21.2 percent living in joint families system and 23.5 percent were living in nuclear families system. The percentage of Hindu migratory workers was more than the Muslim.

Table 2 shows the comparative analysis of the religious ethnographic profile of Hindu and Muslim textile workers. The religious rituals and customs at every stage of life in Hindu textile workers were more different and comparatively complex than that of the Muslims. Each and every

Table 2: Ethnographic profile of Hindu and Muslim textile workers

Rituals	Hindu textile workers	Muslim textile workers
Before Birth	<i>Garbhadana</i> -A prenatal ceremony, performed at the time of conception <i>Pumsavana</i>-Ceremony performed seeking a male child <i>Simantam</i> - The parting of hair ceremony seeking safe delivery.	<i>Pregnancy</i> - In the seventh or ninth month of pregnancy a fertility rite is performed
At Birth	<i>Jatakarman</i> - At the time of birth and before severing the cord.	When the child is born, the <i>azam</i> or summons to prayer is uttered aloud in its right ear, and the, <i>takbir</i> or Muslim creed in its left. The child is named on the sixth or seventh day.
Childhood	<i>Namakarana</i>-Naming ceremony(10th or 12th day) <i>Niskramana</i> - Performed on the first outing or the first viewing of the sun. <i>Annaprasana</i> - Performed on the occasion of the first feeding of the child with solid food <i>Vidyarambha</i> - Performed on the occasion of a child's initiation into education. <i>Upanayana</i> - Ceremony involving the wearing of the sacred thread (ages of 8 and 24). <i>Vedarambha</i> - Ceremony marking the beginning of the study of the Vedas. (ceremony is performed in select cases only) <i>Kesantha</i> - Ceremony marking the first shaving of the beard(male) or the beginning of menstruation <i>Samvartana</i> - Performed when a student completes his education and returns home from the school.	<i>Ukika Sacrifice</i> - On the fortieth day, the child is placed in a cradle for the first time and a sacrifice, in the name of the child, of two he-goats for a boy and one for a girl is performed. <i>Ear-boring</i> - It was once customary among Muslims to bore the earlobes of a girl when she was one or two years old. <i>Sal-girah</i> - child's birthday
Student	<i>Upanayana</i> - Ceremony involving the wearing of the sacred thread (ages of 8 and 24). <i>Vedarambha</i> - Ceremony marking the beginning of the study of the Vedas. (ceremony is performed in select cases only) <i>Kesantha</i> - Ceremony marking the first shaving of the beard(male) or the beginning of menstruation <i>Samvartana</i> - Performed when a student completes his education and returns home from the school.	<i>Madarsaa</i>
Householder (Marriage)	<i>Upanayanam</i>- Performed a day before the marriage ceremony (boys are elevated to the twice born status by investing them with a sacred thread)	<i>Nikah</i> - No specific religious ceremony is required, nor any rites essential for the contraction of a valid marriage, if both persons are legally competent, and contract marriage with each other in the presence of two males or one male and two female witnesses
Death	<i>Vivaha</i> - Marriage ceremony. Funeral rites performed after death and up to 15 days.	Muslims bury their dead, and the same word <i>janazah</i> is used

rituals were having a specific rules and the rules were not only depend on the age but also day, date and time of birth.

DISCUSSION

The quest for India's national identity through the route of religious nationalism began in the nineteenth century and has continued ever since. In recent years, however, it has received an unprecedented boost from those communal forces, which brought a virulent version of Hindu cultural chauvinism to the centre stage of contemporary politics and produced a warped perception of India's past (Prinjie 2005; Sharma 1982).

The present study brings into limelight the stark realities of India's social structure. The data compiled and analysed in this paper gives a comparison between the Hindus and Muslims male and female textile workers. Apart from their normal religious duties, they uphold social institutions and religious values, also confirm their obedience to divinities and commitment to divine centered religious life. Comparable results were also found by Hussain (1998), Raffin et al. (1989), Thapar (1997), Jha (2006), Musungu and Musungu (2006) and Fujimoto et al. (2006), Goel et al. (2008).

Samskaras are the rites of passage a person is expected to perform during the various stages of his life, starting from his birth till his death. They are connected with his present and future, providing meaning, structure, purpose and order to his life. Although meant for an individual, they are primarily social events in which a number of people participate, with or without the participation of the individual for whom they are meant. By performing or participating in these obligatory rites and rituals, each and every person in Hindu society must acknowledges their religious duties (Edward and Sachau 1910; Hussain 1998 and Jayaram 2007).

In Muslims, the Sunnis and Shias are the dominant categories where the Sunnis are numerically very strong and barring a few Shia families, most of the affluent families are Sunnis. Among the Sunnis, there are Barehvis, and Deobandis. Ahl-i Hadis constitute a distinct group. The rites and ceremonies observed by Muslims chiefly consist of those as relating to pregnancy, birth, naming, sacrifice, initiation, betrothal, marriage, and death (Denny 2007).

It was observed that the Hindus textile workers and Muslim textile workers, both males and females did not differ much with respect to the rituals

processes performed at birth, marriage/ *nikah* and death indicating that there was a similarity in their religious rituals even though it is called by different names like at birth, *Jatakarmān* in Hindu and the *azam* in muslim; at marriage, it is called *Vivah* in hindu and *Nikah* in muslim etc as in all this ritual practices the rules and regulation may differ but the overall religious meaning of the ritual is the same. Mishra et al. (2003) and Haider (2005) also established the analogous result while studying the ethnological features of cement workers of South India.

Gardner et al. (1986) in his study on cement industry of Madhya Pradesh shows that workers were very particular about the rituals as they perform some religious activity before going for work. They also reported that the marriage ceremony of Muslim community were similar than the Hindu, a similar response were also reported from the present study.

Goel et al. (2008) studied the religious and economic profile of textile industry of Uttar Pradesh; in their study they explain the relationship between different religious rituals and economy, as the workers of higher economic condition perform their ritual ceremony in much more systematic ways than the workers of comparatively poor in economy. They also explained that the rituals of Muslim community were simpler than that of Hindu community. Quite comparable responses were also found in the studies of Musungu and Musungu (2006) on handloom industry of Bihar and Fujimoto et al. (2006) on coal industry of Orissa and Jharkhand.

Workers of both the religious groups were mostly illiterate. When both the groups were compared with each other, it was found that both male and female Hindus textile workers had better literacy and work participation rate than Muslim textile workers. Similarly, male Hindus had better literacy and work participation rate than the females, a more or less very related report was also given by a Committee on Plan Projects (Mehta Committee on Literacy) set up by the Government of India which reported in 1964 that in five sectors of organised industry (tea plantations, coal mining, jute, cotton and iron and steel), more than 71% of the workers were illiterate and there have been variations from region to region and state to state in the same industry (Manoria and Manoria 1984). The studies of Musungu and Musungu (2006) and Fujimoto et al. (2006) also reflected that the workers were mostly illiterate and work participation rate of females were less than the male workers.

However, the sex ratio among the Muslim textile workers was better than the Hindu textile workers working in different sectors of the textile industry. Kurilova's (1977) and Zuskin et al.'s (1997) studies also had similar results.

Most of the Hindus and Muslim textile workers were living in the joint family system and were migratory, which is a notable characteristic feature of the textile workers in India, indicating that majority of the workers are immigrants from the adjoining rural areas and they even now maintain connections with their rural homes (Manoria and Manoria 1984). The other main characteristics of the textile workers found from the present study were,

i. Social Composition of Textile Workers:

Earlier, the labour force in industries, mines and plantations was generally provided by the lowest castes, depressed classes and the unfortunates in the society. Nowadays, the workers come from other communities and higher castes as well, that accounts for the emergence of mixed work force.

ii. The Sex Composition of Textile Workers:

In the earlier stages, only male workers predominated in the work class of the industries. But now, women workers have increasingly taken to industrial work—both skilled and semi-skilled.

iii. Emergence of Tribal Labour: The tribal labour has emerged in sizable proportion as industrial labour. The process has led to urbanization of tribal areas.

iv. Low Level of Literacy: In view of the fact that the percentage of literates in total population is very low, it is quite natural that the industrial workers also have a very low percentage of literacy.

v. Heterogeneity of Working Class: Industrial working class has not been a homogeneous class for the reason that people of different castes, communities, ethnic groups, religious beliefs, with different languages and regions come to work in textile industry, where everyone is a total stranger to others.

vi. High Rate of Absenteeism and Labour Turnover: One of the important characteristics of Indian workers is that they are in the habit of abstaining from work and similarly, they have a greater propensity to change the factory than the workers in other countries. The rate of absenteeism ranges from 13 to 30%, and it varies with the seasons in the year, the highest being during March-June every year. Absenteeism is largely concerned with authorised and unauthorised reasons.

Under 'authorised' reasons are included (a) sickness, which contribute to about 3% of the total absenteeism, (b) accidents (0.2 to 0.4%), (c) leave (3.0 to 3.5%), which may be availed for visiting villages, attending to marriages, festivals and social functions or for inability to attend the work place as it is far off and no transport facilities are available.

'Unauthorised' causes include (i) fatigue of the workmen, (ii) bad habits like drinking, gambling, etc. (iii) indebtedness, (iv) punishment for absenteeism, and (v) local festivals etc.

Undoubtedly, absenteeism is one of the major labour problems faced by the industry. In addition to the loss of worker's income and efficiency, this results in a big loss of production (about 5% to 25%) and productivity and thereby shatters the economy of the country. The problem, therefore, emphasizes the need for evolving some ways and means to control and minimize absenteeism.

The result of the present study gave the idea that the ethnographic profile of the Hindu and Muslim textile workers of Uttar Pradesh, acknowledges their religious duties, upholds social institutions and religious values, confirms their obedience to divinities and commitment to divine centered religious life, accepts their position or status or identity in the social order with humility as a consequence of his previous actions (*karma*) in the past lives and earns merit (*punya*) for himself, his family, his ancestors, his future and his society in general, most important of all becomes a refined and religious individual qualified to transcend his lower nature and awaken in his higher.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of religious activities and attitudes in workers produced the following main findings: positive religious attitudes remained stable despite general decline in religious activities; there were several significant and substantial relationships between religion and work, feelings of usefulness, and adjustment. These relationships also tended to be stronger for older persons and tended to increase over time. It has been assessed that ethnographically the religious rites and rituals of Hindu workers were more complex than Muslim workers.

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APPENDIX

Annaprasana: means ritual performed on the occasion of the first feeding of the child with solid food such as rice, ghee and lentils. Now a day this ceremony is performed both for boys and girls.

Garbhadana: means the rite of conception, a prenatal ceremony, performed at the time of conception.

Janazah: means Muslims bury their dead, and the same word janazah is used for the corpse, the bier and the funeral.

Jatakarmam: means ritual performed at the time of birth and before severing the cord.

Karma: means the concept of "action" or "deed".

Kesantha: means the ceremony marking the first shaving of the beard or the approach of manhood. In case of girls, in some regions, there is a corresponding ceremony to mark the beginning of menstruation or change in dress from a gown to a sari.

Madarsaa: means the educational or learning centre for the Muslims.

Nikah: means Marriage ceremony in Muslim communities.

Namakarana: means naming ceremony performed usually on the 10th or 12th day after birth.

Niskramana: means ritual performed on the first outing of the baby and usually involves the first viewing of the sun.

Pumsavana: means ceremony performed seeking a male child or to increase the chances of the birth of a male child.

Punya: means virtuous deeds (good deeds).

Sal-girah: means the child's birthday.

Samskaras: means accomplishment, embellishment or consecration.

Samvartana: means ritual performed when a student completes his education and returns home from the school.

Simantam: means the parting of hair ceremony seeking safe delivery. This is usually performed for women and celebrated by the women.

Ukika Sacrifice: means in Muslim communities after child-birth the mother must not pray or fast, touch the Kuran (holy book) or enter a mosque for forty days.

Upanayana: means the ceremony involving the wearing of the sacred thread, which is confined to the upper three castes only and performed between the ages of 8 and 24.

Upanayanam: means a rituals performed a day before the marriage ceremony. It is an elaborate ritual in which the boys are elevated to the twice born status by investing them with a sacred thread consisting of three strands of cotton worn over their left shoulders.

Vedarambha: means the ceremony marking the beginning of the study of the Vedas. Now a day not all children show interest in the study of the Vedas. The priestly profession is not very fetching. So this ceremony is performed in select cases only.

Vidyarambha: means ritual performed on the occasion of a child's initiation into education. Nowaday this is performed on the first day a child goes to school and starts practicing the alphabet beginning with the letter AUM.

Vivaha: means marriage ceremony in Hindu communities.