CHAPTER - IV

ANATOMY OF THE WORKFORCE
An analysis of the workers and employees in the jute, coal and cotton textile industries reveals many interesting facts that had a bearing on the managerial control of labour during the first three decades of the present century.

The Jute Industry:

The first jute mill started working in Bengal in 1855. The fragmentary evidence from the annals of different jute mills tells us that in the first four decades of the industry the bulk of the labour force came from the local people, the Bengalis. By 1905, the situation changed completely. B. Foley, who was appointed by the Government of Bengal to enquire into the question of the supply of labour in some Bengal industries, reported in 1906:

"Twenty years ago all the hands [in the jute industry] were Bengalis. These have gradually been replaced by Hindustanis from the United Provinces and Behar.....so that at present in most of the mills two-thirds of the hands are composed of up-countrymen".

In 1916, a survey was made by the managing agents of seven mills in Garulia, Bhadreswar and Titaghur as to the composition of the workforce. It was found that only 10 per cent of the mill workers were Bengalis. Though the Bengalis were replaced by migrants from other

provinces over the years, they retained their position in some mills situated in a specific area. The Royal Commission on Labour reported this fact in 1931: "A few mills to the south of Calcutta employ Bengali labour; but to the north of the city in most of the mills the proportion of Bengalis is small, and there are large townships of immigrants."  

The preponderance of Bengali labour in the South mills was corroborated in a survey made by P.C. Mahalanobis in 1941. One sample was selected in the survey for the Budge-Budge jute-mill area to the south of Calcutta. It was found that the percentage of Bengalis was 79.5 against 12.8 per cent Biharis and 2.4 per cent U.P. men.  

Since most of the jute mills were situated in the northern side of Calcutta, the overall employment of Bengalis in the jute industry became marginal in the course of time. The Royal Commission on Labour gave a geographical classification of immigrant workers in the industry who supplied the bulk of the total workforce by the end of the 1920s:

The bulk of the jute mill labour comes from the west of Bihar and the east of the United Provinces, a tract lying from 300 to 500 miles away. Other important recruiting grounds are the equally distant districts in the north of the Madras Presidency and the east of the Central Provinces, while Orissa, which supplies labour of many kinds to Calcutta and its neighbourhood, is also represented in the factories. Of the jute mills it may be said that, if a circle of 250 miles' radius be drawn round Calcutta, the great majority of the workers come from outside that circle.  

The following table gives an idea of the region-wise composition

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4 Report: Royal Commission on Labour in India (Calcutta, 1931), p. 11.
6 Report: Royal Commission on Labour in India (1931), op. cit., p. 11.
of workers in the jute industry during the inter-war period.

Table - 4.1

Places of Origin of Jute Mill Workers in 1921 and 1929
(Percentage distribution of total workforce)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Bengal</th>
<th>Bihar</th>
<th>Orissa</th>
<th>United Provinces</th>
<th>Madras</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>60 (including Orissa)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4 (Central Provinces)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Though the figures for 1921 and 1929 cannot be compared in a strict quantitative sense, they do signify an important trend - marginalization of Bengali labour over time. This trend was substantiated in the Mahalanobis survey of the Jagatdal jute-mill area in 1941. Of the mill workers covered in the survey, the percentage contributions of Bengal, Bihar, United Provinces, Orissa, Madras and Central Provinces were 11.6, 43.1, 36.4, 3.4, 2.5 and 3.0 respectively.\(^7\)

In the middle of the first decade of the present century, the president of the Indian Jute Mills Association, J. Nicoll, found on the basis of 18,000 mill workers that the contributions of the Hindus and the Muslims to the total workforce were 68 per cent and 32 per cent.

\(^7\) K.P. Chattopadhyay (1952), op. cit., p. 10.
respectively. The relative contributions of the two religious communities to the mill labour force remained more or less the same in the following years. In 1911, the four Muslim groups Sheikhs, Saiyads, Pathans and Jolahas formed 32.8 per cent of the labour force in the Jute industry. Though the percentage of Muslims came down to 28.6 in 1921, they formed 37.8 per cent of the 'skilled' workers in the same year. In 1929, about 30 per cent of the jute workers were found to be Muslims.

As to the mode of employment of immigrant Muslim workers in the jute mills of Bengal, one well-known trade union leader, Indrajit Gupta, wrote in 1953:

A very large portion of the weavers in the jute mills have always been Muslims from Bihar and U.P. They are descendants of families which traditionally practised the rural handloom craft and were gradually uprooted by the advent of mechanised industry. The original highly-skilled tradition of weaving has been handed on from father to son, and we find generation after generation coming to the jute mills for employment in the weaving departmnet.

In 1911, among the Hindu castes, the Chamars were noted to be the largest group among jute mill workers, and contributed 10.4 per cent of the total labour force. Next came the Chasi Kaibartas (a cultivating caste), who contributed 5.8 per cent of the total. In fact, the lower castes like the Chamars, Muchis, Doms, Haris, Bagdis, Kewats, and the Namasudras formed a very high proportion, that is, about 25.4 per cent of the labour force in the Bengal jute industry in 1911. No significant

8 See B. Foley (1906), op. cit., p. X.
10 Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rethinking Working-Class History : Bengal, 1890-1940 (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989), p. 9.
11 Indrajit Gupta, Capital and Labour in the Jute Industry (Bombay, 1953); p. 43.
change in the proportion of lower castes as a group was noticed in 1921 and thereafter.\(^{12}\)

Thus, the Muslims and the lower castes in the Hindu caste hierarchy supplied the bulk of the workers in the jute industry during our period of study. It should be noted here that the Chamars, the most significant group among the lower castes, were traditionally leather-workers and most numerous in the United Provinces.\(^{13}\)

The immigrant jute mill workers had strong connections with their villages. D.F. Curjel found in the early 1920s that many 'imported' male workers in the jute mills of Bengal retained a share in their family land. She came to know from mill managers that the 'up-country workers', after making some money, returned to their homes for two or three months to look after their families and 'possessions', and used to come back to mill work when all their savings had been spent.\(^{14}\) In 1929, a sample survey of 58,293 non-Bengali mill workers was made to find out the extent to which non-Bengali workers had settled in the jute mill areas. The survey showed that only a small percentage of the total immigrant labour force had no village ties.\(^{15}\) As to the nature of village nexus of the jute mill workers, the Royal Commission on Labour noted:

> It is interesting to note, for example, that the holiday exodus from the Bengal jute mills is at its height during a slack season for agriculture in the workers' villages. The duration of the holiday is usually limited only by the money available; more rarely

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It is determined by the necessity of complying with the instructions of the employer in the city\textsuperscript{16}.

In fact, most of the mill workers were landless and land-poor. So their economic ties with agriculture were not very strong. But most of the marriages and religious and social festivals like Holi took place in North India during the summer season when the up-country workers in the jute mills insisted on returning back to their homes. These visits also gave them an opportunity for family reunion. Thus, social, religious and familial ties were important factors which prompted the immigrant workers to maintain their rural connection\textsuperscript{17}.

The proportion of women and children employed in the jute industry of Bengal came down during the inter-war period. Between 1918 and 1939, the percentage of women in the total labour force had fallen from 15.97 to 13.4 while that of children was drastically declined from 10.2 to 0.01. This marginalization of children was partly due to the passing of the Factories (Amendment) Act of 1922 in which the age of employable children was raised from 9 years to 12 years. But, still 11,646 children were employed in the industry in 1930. By 1939, the number came down to only 34. On the other hand, the employment of women showed a decline both in absolute and relative terms in the 1930s. A drastic reduction took place in their number in 1931\textsuperscript{18}. It should be noted here that a large number of workers (men and women) were dismissed by the employers

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{16} Report : Royal Commission on Labour in India (1931), op. cit., p. 14.
\item\textsuperscript{18} See S.R. Deshpande, Report on an Enquiry into Conditions of Labour in the Jute Mill Industry in India (Delhi, 1946), pp.6-7.
\end{itemize}
in 1931 to fight the crisis in the industry. On practically one day in February, 1931, about 60,000 workers were dismissed. This mass-scale eviction was a turning point in the displacement of women workers from the industry.

In the early 1930s, children were mainly employed for the shifting work on spinning frames and women were mainly found in the preparing, sewing, batching and winding departments of the industry as unskilled workers. In 1939, a small percentage of contract labour (2 per cent of the total workforce of 20 mills) was found to be employed in the Bengal jute industry.

The Coal Industry:

The labour in the coal industry were recruited from the local inhabitants from the very beginning. In the 1840s, it was found that the miners in the Raniganj coalfield and its neighbourhood were tribals from the surrounding villages belonging to the Santal and Bauri communities. In the first decade of the present century, B. Foley visited some collieries in the Raniganj field. He also found the preponderance of Santals and Bauris in the coalfield. Men from the United Provinces were found in only three collieries. But, except in one colliery, they were numerically insignificant. In the Jharia field,
Foley found, labour was 'not so local as in Raniganj'. In the words of Foley: "Besides Bauris and Santhals, many of whom were imported from the Raniganj mines, the labourers consist of many low castes and semi-aboriginal castes from the district and also from Hazaribagh, Monghyr, Gaya, and a few from Ranchi.....Men from the United Provinces were employed at various collieries."

Foley also visited the railway collieries in the Giridih field. A completely different composition of labour was noticed in this field:

According to the 1901 census it appears that in the East Indian Railway collieries Muhammadan shekhs and Jolahas formed the largest number of the labourers; next were Musahars, then Chamars, then Dusadhs, then Ghatwals......

In the all-India Census of 1911, it was found that the Santals and Bauris were still the dominant groups in the Indian coal industry accounting for over 50 per cent of the total labour force; the other important castes/communities were the Bhuiyas, Muchis, Koras, Kamars, Meahs, Rajwars, Dosadhya, Kols, Bagdis, Telis, and Ghatwals. It should be noted here that the Muslim workers in the coalfields were locally known as Meahs.

The Census of 1921 gave a classification in terms of 'skilled' and 'unskilled' workers. In the Raniganj field in Bengal, the Santals and

24 ibid., p. 32.
25 ibid., pp. 31-32.
26 ibid., p. 32.
28 Iftikhar-Ul-Awwal (1982), op. cit., p. 95.
Bauris together constituted about 38 per cent of the 'skilled' workers and 60 per cent of the 'unskilled' workers in 1921. The Muslims contributed 10.2 per cent of the 'skilled' and 2.9 per cent of the 'unskilled' workers. The other important castes found in the coalfield among the workers were the Chamars, Muchis and Goalas.

A change was noticed in the composition of workers in the Jharia coalfield by 1921. Though the Santals and Bauris continued to be important elements, they were found to be increasingly outnumbered by the Bhuiyas, Muslims and the Chamars for both 'skilled' and 'unskilled' categories of workers. An analysis of the Census-Survey of workers (1921) made in the Jharia coalfield revealed that 'tribals' and 'depressed classes' accounted for nearly 70 per cent of the total workforce.

As to the territorial origin of the workers in the coalfields, we find that most of the workers came from the coal districts themselves in 1911. The position, as reflected in the Census of 1911, was as follows:

In Manbhum (Jharia coalfield) nearly two-thirds of the labourers were born in the district itself while a further fifth came from contiguous Burdwan and nearby Murshidabad. Similarly, in Burdwan (Raniganj coalfield), slightly more than two-thirds of the miners had their place of birth in the same district and one-sixth came from the Sonthal Parganas and Chota Nagpur.

30 Simmons (1976), op. cit., p. 459.
In the Raniganj field, the district-born labourers still predominated in 1921; about two-thirds of the 'skilled' workers and just under half of the 'unskilled' workers came from the Burdwan district. A significant change in the district-wise contribution of workers took place in the Jharia field by 1921. This is evident in the following table:

Table - A.2

Places (Districts) of Birth of the Majority of Workers in the Jharia Coalfield in 1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Places (Districts) of Birth</th>
<th>Percentage of Workers (Total : 97,245)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manbhum</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazaribagh</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monghyr</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaya</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts of United Provinces and Central Provinces</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Thus, the relative contribution of Manbhum to the Jharia labour force came down during 1911-21. But the coal district, along with three other contiguous Bihar districts - Hazaribagh, Monghyr and Gaya - contributed about 80 per cent of the labour force in 1921. In the late 1930s, a survey of workers was made in the Jharia coalfield. One
thousand and thirty budgets were collected from the colliery workers on
the basis of representative samples. This sample survey showed that
while the Manbhum district contributed 21.8 per cent of the total labour
force, Hazaribagh contributed 23.7 per cent of the total. The total
contribution of the four Bihar districts (noted above) to the workforce
was found to be 76 per cent. The contribution of the districts of the
United Provinces and Central Provinces as a whole was 10.5 per cent
only\textsuperscript{34}. The above observations tell us that the colliery district and
three other contiguous districts supplied the majority of workers in the
Jharia coalfield during the inter-war period.

The Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee (BLEC) noted in 1940 that the
Muslims were 'the most important' class among the permanently settled
workers in the coalfields, and that they were 'mostly concentrated in
Giridih'\textsuperscript{35}. This concentration of Muslim workers in the Giridih
coalfield, noted by the BLEC, was congruent with Foley's observation in
1906.

No major change took place in the composition of workers in the
Indian coalfields during the inter-war period. During the decade
1911-1921, labourers from the United Provinces (U.P.) and the Central
Provinces (C.P.) were found to be migrating in increasing numbers to the
coalfields of Bengal and Bihar and their share in the total labour force
rose from 2 per cent to 11 per cent. This trend continued in the next
decade, and the number of Chamars employed, who migrated from these two
Provinces, increased in the coalfields. The increase was more in the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[35] ibid., p. 27.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Bihar coalfields. But, due to depression in the coal industry, the migration of labourers from U.P. and C.P. districts did not find encouragement in the 1930s. In spite of some changes in the composition of the workforce in the different coalfields during our period of study, the overall position remained more or less the same. The Deshpande Committee reported in 1946:

The essential aspects of the composition of the labour force in coal mines in India have remained the same during the last half a century or so, namely that the labour employed in the different coalfields mostly belongs to the surrounding villages and districts of the province in which the coal mines are situated.

The workers in the collieries retained strong connections with their villages and agriculture. B. Foley, in his visit to the Raniganj and Jharia coalfields in the beginning of this century, came to know about seasonal shortages of labour. The most acute scarcity of labour was noticed in the 'cultivating seasons'. He noted in this context that a good paddy crop meant scarcity of labour for coal mines. In the early 1920s, D.F. Curjel found that the workers in the Raniganj coalfield returned to their villages a number of times in the year. She noted: "It is specially difficult to get workers during the seasons when agricultural work requires attention". Even as late as 1946, the Indian Coalfields Committee included 'a sentimental attachment to land' and 'the higher profits of agriculture' among the causes of absenteeism.

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38 Foley (1906), op. cit., p. 31.
39 Curjel (1923), op. cit., p. 30.
Though the above observations amply bear out the agrarian connections of colliery workers, they do not speak about the landholding status of workers. In 1932, the Commissioner of Burdwan made the following observation relating to the behaviour of labour in the cultivating season:

In the mining area of the Asansol subdivision of the district of Burdwan the supply of labour was fairly good except during the cultivating season when the labourers generally migrate to other places in search of higher wages.

The above observation testifies that the miners deserted the collieries in the agricultural seasons to seek work as agricultural labourers, not to cultivate their own lands. The sample survey of workers in the Jharia coalfield made by the Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee (BLEC) in the late 1930s also revealed that about 40 per cent of the workers did not own any land. This evidence does not reflect 'a sentimental attachment to land', but the hard reality of life on the part of a large section of the workers.

Moreover, participation in agricultural operations were not the only reasons behind workers' connections with their villages. Foley noted in 1906 that the Santals and Bauris took holidays from the coal mines to observe 'numerous pujas'. In 1920, the President of the

41 Quoted in Iftikhar-Ul-Awwal (1982), op. cit., p. 77.
43 Foley (1906), op. cit., pp. 30, 33.
Association of Colliery Managers in India informed the Coalfields Committee that the managers gave 'suitable baksheesh [tips] for celebration of pujahs [religious festivities], births, weddings, and funerals' to the workers. In the sample survey of the colliery workers made in the late 1930s it was found that more than 60 per cent of the workers having village connections visited their homes to see 'friends, relatives and family members' and for 'negotiating and attending marriages'. Thus, social and cultural ties bound the workers with their villages.

Like the jute industry, children were eliminated from the Indian coalfields during the inter-war period. In 1911, the number of children (below 14 years of age) employed in the Bengal coal industry (Raniganj coalfield) was 3,288, which constituted 8.7 per cent of the labour force. The children (below the age of 13) accounted for less than five per cent of the workforce in the coal mines of British India in 1921. By 1926, the employment of children became insignificant in the industry. It is to be noted in this context that the Indian Mines Act, 1923 banned the employment of children below the age of 13 with effect from July 1924. But children often accompanied their mothers to work and helped in the process of mining without any pay.

The women constituted a large proportion of the labour force in the coal industry. Until the prohibition of children and women from underground employment in 1923 and 1929 respectively, a family system of

45 B.L.E.C. (1940), op. cit., p. 27.
46 See Simmons (1976), op. cit., pp. 463, 485 (Table III); Iftikhar-Ul-Awwal (1982), op. cit., p. 98.
production remained in vogue in the industry. The adult males would cut the coal at the pit face which was then loaded in baskets or tubs by the women and children and taken to the shaft bottom. A gradual elimination of women took place in the coalfields of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa during 1901-1931. This is evident in the table below:

**Table - 4.3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Women to the Total Workforce (male and female)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The drastic fall noticed in the proportion of women in 1931 was due to the mining regulation of 1929 which emphasized the elimination of women from underground work in the coalfields by 1939 with fixed reductions each year. It should be noted here that the power to make such regulation regarding prohibition of employment of women underground was given in the Mining Acts of 1901 and 1923, but it was not exercised.

47 Simmons (1976), ibid., p. 461.
The number of underground women workers in the coal mines of British India came down from 29,829 to only 35 between 1929 and 1938. The women constituted 11.4 per cent of the total workforce in the British Indian coalfields in 1939 and were found to be employed on the surface and in open workings.

A noteworthy feature of the coal industry was the use of contract labour. The Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee noted a large-scale use of contract labour in the coalfields, but found it difficult to compute the number of workers employed by the contractors. But in an enquiry made by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, in 1945-46 it was found that 'nearly 50 per cent of the labour employed in the coal mines at Jharia, Raniganj, Giridih and Bokaro were employed through contractors.'

Cotton Textile Industry (Bombay):

The workers in the Bombay cotton mills came from the surrounding regions. The Ratnagiri district of the Konkan region supplied the bulk of the labour force. The Indian Factory Commission (1890) collected evidence from workers of different Provinces. Out of 47 workers selected from Bombay, 34 were employed in the cotton textile industry. It was found that 22 out of 46 workers came from the Konkan. Among the workers

48 Report : Royal Commission on Labour in India (1931), op. cit., p. 127.
49 B.R. Seth (1940), op. cit., p. 140.
51 See B.L.E.C. (1940), op. cit., pp. 33, 40.
52 The Indian Labour Year Book (Simla, 1950), p. 22.
from Konkan, 16 came from the Ratnagiri district. Though no definite conclusion can be drawn from the above classification of workers, it is clear that the Konkan region contributed a large proportion of workers to the Bombay industries, particularly the cotton textile industry, in the late 19th century. The district-wise classification of Bombay mill workers during the period 1911-1931 is shown in the following table:

Table - 4.4

Places (Districts) of Origin of Bombay Millworkers (1911-1931)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Distance from Bombay (miles)</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ratnagiri (Konkan)</td>
<td>(101 - 200)</td>
<td>49.16</td>
<td>35.53</td>
<td>25.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satara (Deccan)</td>
<td>(101 - 200)</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>5.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolaba (Konkan)</td>
<td>(1 - 100)</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poona (Deccan)</td>
<td>(101 - 200)</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>5.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolhapur (Deccan)</td>
<td>(301 - 400)</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmednagar (Deccan)</td>
<td>(201 - 300)</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>(Over 750)</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>11.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of above districts</td>
<td></td>
<td>75.88</td>
<td>67.07</td>
<td>53.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, we find that the contribution of Ratnagiri to the total workforce had drastically fallen during 1911-1931. Another noticeable trend is the gradual fall in the total contribution of the six Konkan and Deccan districts to the workforce and the rise in the proportion of workers from the United Provinces. The reason behind the drastic fall in the proportion of workers from the Ratnagiri district, as noticed in 1931, has been attributed by Kunj Patel to the large-scale dismissal of Ratnagiri workers after the failure of the textile strike of 1929 in Bombay.

In 1932-33, a survey of the family budgets of the 'working class' in Bombay city was conducted by the Labour Office, Bombay. In this survey, the predominantly working-class localities were taken into consideration and the cotton mill workers accounted for 64.5 per cent of the total budgets. The area-wise origin of Bombay workers found in the survey is presented in Table 4.5.

The Family Budget Enquiry in 1932-33, which was mostly concerned with workers employed in the cotton mill industry, revealed the predominance of Konkan, particularly the Ratnagiri district, and Deccan as the labour-supplying regions. This observation is incongruent with Morris's estimates from Census data (1931) in terms of percentages.

As to the sources of labour in the Bombay cotton mill industry,


54 Kunj Patel, Rural Labour in Industrial Bombay (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1963), p. 5.

### Table 4.5

Places (Regions) of Origin of Bombay Workers in 1932-33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage of the total Workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Konkan -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratnagiri</td>
<td>49.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Places</td>
<td>12.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deccan</td>
<td>29.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnatak</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The industry in Bombay City draws its labour force mostly from the neighbouring districts of Konkan, Satara and Sholapur. A certain proportion of the workers also comes from the Deccan and the United Provinces.

It is to be noted here that the Ratnagiri and Kolaba districts belonged to the Konkan region. In 1940, the Bombay Millowners' Association made a survey of 37,577 mill hands in 19 mills. It was found that Ratnagiri constituted 38.4 per cent of the total workforce. The contributions of Satara, Kolaba, Poona, Kolhapur and Sholapur to the

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total were 13.2, 8.5, 6.5, 4.3 and 1.2 per cent respectively. The United Provinces contributed 13.6 per cent of the workers\textsuperscript{57}. Thus, only three districts - Ratnagiri, Kolaba and Satara (identified by the Deshpande Committee as the principal labour-supplying areas in the Bombay mill industry and situated within 200 miles from Bombay city) were found to contribute about 60 per cent of the labour force in many Bombay mills at the end of the 1930s.

The percentage of Muslim workers in Bombay mills came down from 10.6 per cent to 5.15 per cent of the total workforce during 1911-21\textsuperscript{58}. The proportion of Muslims did not show any significant variation in later years. In the Family Budget Enquiry of 1932-33, the Muslims constituted 4.8 per cent of the total\textsuperscript{59}. The proportion of Muslims was found to be 5.2 per cent of the total male labour force in the survey made by the Bombay Millowners' Association in 1940\textsuperscript{60}.

The employment of 'a small section of Konkani Mahomedans and Julhais (the Mahomedan weaver caste)' in the Bombay mill industry was reported by the Indian Industrial Commission in 1918\textsuperscript{61}. In the Census of 1921, the dominant Muslim group identified among mill workers in Bombay was Sheikh, who represented about 3.8 per cent of the total workforce\textsuperscript{62}. It should be noted here that the Muslim weavers belonging to the Julaha

\textsuperscript{57} See Morris (1965), op. cit., p. 229.
\textsuperscript{59} Family Budget Enquiry (1935), op. cit., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{60} Morris (1965), op. cit., p. 75.
\textsuperscript{61} Report : Indian Industrial Commission (1918), op. cit., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{62} Upadhyay (1990), op. cit., p. PE-88.
community had earned a bad reputation by the turn of the 19th century and were considered as 'uncompromising, fanatical and bigoted Muslims'. To avoid this social stigma, the Muslim weavers, along with other Muslims of 'low degree', were found to aspire to the status of Sheikhs by 1911. According to the survey made by the Bombay Millowners' Association (1940), about 52.2 per cent of the total Muslim male workers found employment in the weaving sheds of the Bombay mills.

The Indian Industrial Commission noted in 1918 that most of the labourers in the Bombay cotton mills were Marathas from the Deccan and Konkan who were 'usually cultivators of holdings too small to afford them a subsistence and heavily indebted to the village money-lender'. The details about the caste-composition of Hindu mill workers in Bombay during 1921-40 are shown in Table 4.6.

Though the different estimates of caste composition during the period 1921-40 are not based on homogeneous type of statistical data, they do give an idea of the caste backgrounds of the millworkers.

The Marathas and Kunbis are agricultural castes in the Bombay Presidency. In the Census of 1921, they were shown as separate categories. But they were shown together for Ratnagiri and Satara in the Census of 1931. It is to be noted here that the Census authorities of 1921 recommended that Marathas and Kunbis should be combined in order to

64 Morris (1965), op. cit., p. 75.
The Contributions of Major Hindu Castes to the Total Workforce in the Bombay Cotton Mill Industry in 1921, 1933 and 1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>1921 Percentage of total workers</th>
<th>1933 Percentage of total workers</th>
<th>1940 Percentage of total male workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maratha</td>
<td>44.16</td>
<td>Maratha</td>
<td>55.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunbi</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>Depressed Classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahar</td>
<td>8.79</td>
<td>Mahar</td>
<td>13.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chambhar</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>Chamar &amp; Muchi</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

avoid confusion. It was found that a Kunbi of the Deccan frequently assumed the title 'Maratha' on arrival in Bombay. The largest number of workers in the Bombay mill industry came from the 'Maratha' community during the inter-war period (see Table 4.6). In fact, the term 'Maratha', in a broad sense, included a number of castes.

The other dominant group of Bombay mill workers consisted of 'untouchable' castes ('Harijans'). In 1921, the Mahars contributed 8.79 per cent and the Chambhars 3.59 per cent of the total workforce. In 1933, the percentage of 'untouchable' castes to the total workers surveyed was about 21 per cent, with Mahars contributing the maximum number of workers of this caste-group (13.4 per cent). In spite of different statistical bases of the two estimates for 1921 and 1933, the circumstantial evidence supports the increase in the percentage of 'untouchables', particularly the Mahars, in the mill labour force during the 1920s. In 1922, the Provincial Superintendent of Census, Bombay Presidency, noted:

There appears to be a gradual drifting into Bombay of the great Mahar caste of all the Marathi-speaking districts.

Moreover, B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the 'untouchable' castes, undertook to supply several mills in Bombay with their entire requirements of labour during the general strike of 1929 exclusively.

68 See Omvedt (1973), op. cit., p. 1419; Morris (1965), op. cit., p. 77.
from the castes he represented. It is likely that many 'untouchable' workers, who were used as strike-breakers, were subsequently retrenched. This might have led to the comparatively low percentage of 'Harijans' among the mill workers noticed in the 1940 survey.

There were poor agricultural conditions in the regions which supplied the bulk of the labour force to the Bombay mill industry. In 1923, the Konkan Co-operative Inquiry Committee made the following observation on the Ratnagiri district:

Nearly one man in every family of the working and cultivating classes and that the most competent member of the family, is away mostly in Bombay, in some cases in Karachi or Africa, for six to eight months of the year. The soil is so poor and the holdings are so small and scattered that agriculture is really a subsidiary industry with most of the cultivators, providing for subsistence of the family for not more than four months of the year.

The conditions in the Deccan districts were no better. The Bombay Deccan became economically exhausted by the beginning of the twentieth century. By the end of the decade 1900-1910, it was found that 'Bombay compensated the Deccan cultivator to a large extent for his poor village economy.'

In spite of poor village economy in their home districts, the migrant workers retained strong ties with their villages. At the end of the 1920s, the Bombay Government found that the migrant workers in the city hailing from the neighbouring districts visited their villages

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71 Quoted in Burnett-Hurst (1925), op. cit., p. 9.
every year just before the monsoon to participate in cultivation and returned to Bombay after the rains. Thus, a regular exodus of workers took place in the months of April and May, mostly to the Konkan. Even those workers, who did not participate in agricultural operations, visited their villages once a year during different festivals like Holi, Diwali, etc. Only workers from the distant parts like the United Provinces visited their home districts once in two or three years and stayed there for three to four months at a time.

Thus, we find that the period of visit of many mill workers to their home districts converged with the agricultural cycle in the districts. In a recent study, it has been found that in all the major textile strikes in Bombay, like those in 1928, 1929 and 1934, the strike calls were given in the month of April, which happened to be the usual time of yearly visit of many mill workers to their villages to take part in cultivation.

Many migrants went to Bombay in search of job without their families. Therefore, the proportion of females was very low among the immigrant workers. In 1931, the number of females per thousand males among the immigrant textile workers from Ratnagiri, Satara, Kolaba and United Provinces were found to be 459, 274, 375 and 38 respectively.

There is evidence that a section of the immigrant workers were conscious

75 Ibid., p. 133.
of their family responsibilities. About the Ratnagiri migrants in Bombay, Burnett-Hurst noted: "From time to time some of the more thrifty migrants make remittances to their families to assist in maintaining them during their absence".\footnote{Burnett-Hurst (1925), op. cit., p. 9.}

We do not know the details about the landholding status of Bombay mill workers, during the inter-war period, in their home districts. But the statement made by the Collector of Ratnagiri to the Royal Commission on Labour throws some light on this question:

The district does not yield grains sufficient for the wants of the people. Some of the cultivators are very small landholders and the rest landless. The bulk of them therefore serve as field labourers on daily wages either in kind or cash and cultivate lands of others.\footnote{Royal Commission on Labour, Evidence, Vol. I, pt. I, p. 217.}

In the light of the above observations, it can be reasonably argued that many mill workers in Bombay used to visit their villages in the agricultural season to meet their families and helped them to draw a part of their subsistence from agriculture by cultivating 'small' family holdings or working as agricultural labourers. As to the village ties of Bombay mill workers, the Deshpande Committee noted in 1946: "The workers in the industry have still maintained a link with their village homes and repair to the villages once a year or once in two years during the marriage and harvesting seasons".\footnote{Deshpande Report (cotton mill industry), 1946, op. cit., p. 7.}

Thus, family ties and social ties, which took the forms of participation in different festivals, marriages and cultivation, called
back many mill workers in Bombay to their villages during our period of study.

The employment of children was never very high in the Bombay mill industry. In 1919, children constituted only 2.2 per cent of the total labour force. A drastic fall was noticed in 1922 in the employment of children and the percentage came down to as low as 0.82. The children were virtually eliminated from the industry by 1926, and only 55 children who found employment in that year constituted 0.04 per cent of the workforce

The women constituted about 20 per cent of the mill labour force in Bombay in 1918. The percentage of women rose to 22.6 by 1926. A drastic fall was noticed in the number of women employed in the industry in 1928-29. But this fall was not restricted to women. A sharp decline took place in the total number of mill workers (men and women) in Bombay in 1928-29, the years in which two major textile strikes took place in Bombay. In fact, the percentage of women slightly decreased in 1928-29. But a significant marginalization of women took place in the Bombay cotton mills in the 1930s, both in terms of number and percentage. In 1939, the percentage of women in the total workforce came down to 14.9

Most of the women employed in the Bombay cotton textile industry came from the Ratnagiri district. In 1921, Ratnagiri supplied 60.8 per cent of women mill workers in Bombay. According to the Bombay Millowners' Association Survey of 1940, as high as 76.8 per cent of

80 ibid.
women mill workers came from the Konkan region, the chief labour-supplying district of which was Ratnagiri. As to the caste-composition of women mill workers, it has been found that the 'large majority' of women workers from Ratnagiri were 'Marathas' or 'Kunbis'. The others mostly came from the 'untouchable' castes like the Mahar, Chamar and Dhed.

Thus, the dominant castes found among male mill workers in Bombay also represented the majority of women mill workers. The women found employment in some specific departments of the cotton mills. The survey by the Bombay Millowners' Association in 1940 revealed that about 86 per cent of the total number of women in the industry were employed in the reeling and winding departments.

Cotton Textile Industry (Ahmedabad):

The rapid growth of the cotton textile industry in Ahmedabad since the beginning of the 1880s attracted a large number of immigrants to the city. This disturbed the sex-ratio balance. And the number of females per 1000 males in the city got steadily reduced from 1010 in 1881 to 765 in 1921. The birth-place statistics of the city's population reflected the cosmopolitan character of Ahmedabad by the beginning of the 1920s. In 1921, per 1000 persons in the city, the numbers born in the Ahmedabad

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82 ibid., p. 146.
83 Morris (1965), op. cit., p. 75.
district, Baroda State, Rajputana and Kathiawar were found to be 603, 128, 73 and 54 respectively.

The regions which were found to be dominant in terms of their contribution to the City's population in 1921 were found to supply the majority of the textile labour force in Ahmedabad at the end of the 1920s. This is evident in the following table:

Table - 4.7

Places of Origin of Cotton Mill Workers in Ahmedabad in 1929

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahmedabad City</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmedabad District (excluding city)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baroda State</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajputana</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathiawar</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat (excluding above)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deccan and Konkan</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Places (including United Provinces, Central Provinces and Madras)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above table shows that Ahmedabad (city and district) itself
contributed 45 per cent of the total mill labour force and the neighbouring state of Baroda 20 per cent. In fact, most of the mill workers in Ahmedabad came from 'short distances'. This fact was emphasized by the Secretary of the Ahmedabad Millowners' Association in his testimony to the Royal Commission on Labour:

Eighty per cent of Ahmedabad mill labour has migrated from within the radius of 50 miles round about Ahmedabad, including villages and districts.

Statistical information regarding the geographical composition of the total mill workforce in Ahmedabad for later years has not come to our notice. But a picture of areas of origin of Ahmedabad mill workers was given in the Family Budget Survey conducted in Ahmedabad during 1933-35. In this survey, 82.75 per cent of the total number of budgets were collected from families of cotton mill workers. The findings of the Survey are shown in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8**

Regions of Origin of Ahmedabad Mill Workers in 1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahmedabad (City and District)</td>
<td>24.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baroda State</td>
<td>24.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Places in Gujarat</td>
<td>17.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajputana</td>
<td>11.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathiawar</td>
<td>5.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deccan</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Provinces</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td>5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most noticeable change found in the Survey was a drastic fall in the percentage contribution of Ahmedabad (city and district) to the total mill workforce in the 1930s. But Ahmedabad along with the neighbouring Baroda State still contributed about 50 per cent of the total\textsuperscript{88}. In the light of the above evidence, it can be inferred that though short-distance migrants to the Ahmedabad city contributed the bulk of the labour force in the mill industry during the inter-war years, Ahmedabad's own importance as the source of labour diminished over time.

By 1890, a distinct pattern emerged in the caste composition of the Ahmedabad workforce. The Indian Factory Commission (1890) selected 11 mill workers from Ahmedabad as witnesses. Out of these workers, six belonged to the Wagri caste and four were Muslims\textsuperscript{89}. The fact that this selection of workers was fairly representative was evident in the testimony of one of the leading millowners of Ahmedabad, Ranchhodlal Chhotalal, in 1890 itself. He found that most of the weavers in Ahmedabad mills were those 'who themselves or their fathers were handloom weavers'. A fair number of unskilled workers, he noted, came from a local landless low caste, the Wagri (who traditionally lived by begging)\textsuperscript{90}. It should be noted here that handloom weaving in the Gujarat

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\textsuperscript{87} Report on an Enquiry into Working Class Family Budgets in Ahmedabad (Bombay, 1937), pp. 1, 9.
\textsuperscript{88} It should be noted here that the Deshpande Committee accepted the findings of the Family Budget Survey as to the geographical composition of the Ahmedabad mill workers. See Deshpande Report (Cotton Mill Industry), 1946, op. cit., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{89} Baniprasanna Misra (1975), op. cit., pp. 205, 207.
villages was mostly done by Dheds and other 'depressed classes'. In
various parts of the Ahmedabad district, Khadi, an important product of
the handloom industry, was woven by Dheds and poorer class of Muslims.91

The Dheds, in spite of their traditional background as weavers,
did not find employment in the weaving sheds of the mills because of
their low social status. While discussing the social background of 20
per cent of the mill workers, who were residents of the Ahmedabad city,
at the end of the 1920s, the Government of Bombay noted:

This class consists mostly of landless Muhammadan weavers
and some Dhed spinners who have settled in Ahmedabad for many
generations.92

About the other immigrant workers in the Ahmedabad mill industry,
the Government found that 'landless labourers, such as Dheds, and
handloom weavers like Vankars, have come in large numbers to the city as
they could not earn their livelihood by the products of their handlooms,
owing to the competition of factories'. The Vankars, like the Dheds,
also did not find employment in the weaving departments because they
were 'regarded as untouchables'. The other important category found
among the mill workers by the Government was the Patidar weavers, who
came to the city 'to supplement their agricultural income'.93
Originally, the Patidars were from a community known as Kanbis (the term
signifies the peasant background of the caste). During the Mughal
period, some of the peasants organized themselves into village rulers

91 R.D. Choksey, Economic Life in the Bombay Gujarat, 1800-1939
92 Memorandum, The Govt. of Bombay, Royal Commission on Labour,
93 ibid., p. 7.
who were known as Patidars. In course of time, the members of the Patidar community consolidated their position in terms of landholding and power in the villages of Gujarat and opted for recognition as a separate caste. In 1931, the caste name in the Census was altered from Kanbi to Patidar. It was due to their high status in the caste hierarchy of Gujarat that the Patidars found employment in the weaving departments of the mills.

The castes thus identified by the Bombay Government among the mill workers in Ahmedabad were found to contribute the maximum number of workers to the industry in the Family Budget Survey (1933-35). Of the total number of budgets collected from cotton mill workers (which represented 82.75 per cent of the total budgets), 37 per cent were related to weavers. It was found in the Survey that 'depressed classes' constituted about 21 per cent of the total workforce. The two major constituents of the 'depressed classes' were 'Vankar and Dhed' and 'Mochi and Chamar', whose contributions to the total workforce were 11.75 per cent and 7.19 per cent respectively. Next came the Muslims, who constituted 18.4 per cent of the total number of workers. The Patidars came third, contributing 10 per cent of the total. The Wagri caste constituted only 3.8 per cent of the total workers.

Thus, we find that the traditional weaving castes supplied the maximum number of workers to the Ahmedabad mill industry during our period of study. But, due to social rigidity, the 'untouchable' castes like Vankars and Dheds could not get entry in the weaving sheds of the mills.

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94 For details about the Patidars, see David Hardiman, Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District, 1917-1934 (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1981), pp. 36-42.
95 Family Budget Survey (1937), op. cit., pp. 8-9.
A large part of the mill workforce in Ahmedabad earned their livelihood as agricultural labourers before joining the industry. Their migration to the city was often a permanent loss to agriculture. In 1921, the Report on South Daskrohi Taluka noted: "Village after village bears witness to the large number of individuals and families who have permanently migrated to the city, thereby depleting the labour resources....".

But many Ahmedabad workers retained their links with villages. In the big textile strike which took place in Ahmedabad in 1923, nearly 20,000 of the 45,000 mill workers left the city. By the end of the 1920s, it was found that 20 per cent of the workers, who came from the city itself, had no contact with villages, and two per cent of the workers, who were from villages within a radius of three miles, used to come daily to the city and returned to their villages. The workers from the nearby villages visited their homes 'almost on every holiday'. The visits to villages took place mostly during the sowing, harvesting and marriage seasons and many workers visited their village homes only once a year. The workers from Rajputana were found to visit their villages during the Holi festival. Even the long-distance migrants from the United Provinces, Central Provinces and Madras went to their homes once in two or three years and spent more than a month before coming back to the city. The village connection of Ahmedabad mill workers was not

96 Choksey (1968), op. cit., pp. 231-32.
97 Quoted in ibid., p. 232.
severed in the 1930s. The Deshpande Committee noted in 1946:

While it is true that the bulk of the labour force employed in the Ahmedabad mills comes from outside the city there has recently been a tendency for it to settle down in Ahmedabad, although contact is still maintained with the centres from which it comes by occasional visits to the villages.\(^{100}\)

In 1921, the children constituted about 13 per cent of the mill workers in Ahmedabad. After the passing of the Factories (Amendment) Act of 1922, a steady reduction took place in the employment of children. In 1928, the number of children employed was 1,226, which constituted about two per cent of the mill workforce. But, due to faulty method of certification, some children were found to obtain two certificates and work in two mills in the 1920s. The double employment of children in the mills was 'fairly common' up to 1923.\(^{101}\) The children were virtually eliminated from mill employment in Ahmedabad by 1939, when their number was found to be only eight.\(^{102}\)

In 1911, the women constituted 18.6 per cent of the mill workforce in Ahmedabad. During the decade 1911-21, the employment of women in the Ahmedabad textile industry rose at a faster rate than those of men. Thus, in 1921, 20.4 per cent of the mill workers were women. Even in 1931, the female work-force was 18.3 per cent, a substantial percentage of the total workforce.\(^{103}\) But a rapid marginalization of women took

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\(^{100}\) Deshpande Report (Cotton Mill Industry), 1946, op. cit., p. 17.


\(^{102}\) Deshpande Report (Cotton Mill Industry), 1946, op. cit., p. 17.

place in the mill industry of Ahmedabad in the 1930s. In 1939, the women mill workers represented about 8.6 per cent of the total workforce. It should be noted here that in the Delhi Agreement signed between the Textile Labour Association and Ahmedabad Millowners' Association in 1935, there was a clause relating to eviction of women. The Agreement stated in the context of the proposed 'rationalization' of the industry that, apart from workers of less than a year's duration, unemployment incidental to rationalization would be confined to women whose husbands were to be benefitted by the rationalization process. The women workers in Ahmedabad, like Bombay, were employed mostly in the winding and reeling departments of the mills.

A number of departments in Ahmedabad mills worked with contract labour. The Deshpande Committee estimated the number of mill workers employed through contractors in Ahmedabad, which came to 'about 10 to 12 thousand'. The method of getting work done through contractors, as stated by the Secretary of the Ahmedabad Millowners' Association, was to assign the charge of any departmental work to a 'headman' who usually engaged 'special workmen under him for that particular kind of work.

Thus, the millowners in Ahmedabad and the colliery owners in eastern India shunted their own responsibility of everyday management of labour to the few handpicked contractors in the respective industries.