Introduction

The study of the occupational caste groups and their activities in India in the early modern phase is an important theme of study. It is equally difficult to state with exactitude about the occupational caste groups because of this complexity and their changing states, especially in South India. To define ‘occupational caste groups’ is problematic. Generally, “Sudras”, untouchables, artisans, different caste groups (Left and Right Hand), who were engaged in different factories, agriculture fields as labourers, workers, slaves, servants etc., on the basis of their accumulated experience in hereditary works or different occupations or as set by the society, may be called ‘occupational caste group’. However, these occupational caste groups competed with each other to get the ‘noble’ and ‘clean’ professions. As such in this process, the occupational caste groups gradually gained new identity with the efflux of time. This work intended for studying the occupational caste groups, their activities and functions, their relationship with the English Company and conflicts between the left and right hand castes in Madras during the 17th century.

Inspiration of Research

From reliable sources, it has been known that hitherto very little research has been conducted on the Occupational Caste groups and their functions and positions in socio, economic and political-cultural system. Some good work done by, S.
Arasaratnam\(^1\) who has written many books on the merchant castes and some on occupational caste groups like the weavers. In his books: Merchants, Companies and Commerce in the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740 and Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century.\(^2\) He deals primarily with Merchant castes like Chetty and Comity. He also deals with their involvement with the English Company and their mutual dependence. He also describes in detail about the right and left hand castes and their role in the English Company’s rule over, and business in, India. He has also written many articles like:\(^3\) "Dutch Indian Commercial policy in Ceylon and its effects on the Indo-Ceylon Trade (1690-1750)", \(^4\) "Merchants and their Trading Methods, (circa. 1700)"; \(^5\) "Coromandel Revisited: Problems and Issues in Indian Maritime History"; \(^6\) and "The Politics of Commerce in the Coastal Kingdoms of Tamil Nadu, 1650-1700". These articles also deal with the commercial aspects of few Merchants Castes as well the English Company. However, he is not dealing with low castes workers and their role in the English Company.\(^7\) Sanjay Subramanyam, too, has done some significant work related to the Merchants and the English Company. His book, "The Political Economy of Commerce in Southern India: 1500-1650", throws some light on the Occupational

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\(^1\) S Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce in the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1986.


\(^3\) S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch Indian Commercial Policy in Ceylon and its effects on Indo-Ceylon trade (1690-1750)*.

\(^4\) S Arasaratnam, *Merchants and their Trading Methods (circa 1700)*.

\(^5\) S Arasaratnam, *Coromandel Revisited: Problems and Issues in Indian Maritime History*.


Caste Groups. But his work also ignores the specific study of the lower castes. Vijaya Ramaswamy’s work “Textiles and Weavers in Medieval South India” is a very important work and provides an overview of weaver castes and their role in south India, with particular reference to the textile industry. She has further contributed many an article in relation to the Occupational Castes. Her article, inter alia, “Artisans in Vijayanagar Society” is also a very important one. However, she, too, has not focused on the lower castes like Pariah Castes and grass-cutters, umbrella-bearers, Washermen etc. and Kanak Latha Mukund has also worked on the same topic but this is also related to the merchant castes. Recently, she has also dealt with the same issues but, interestingly enough, she has given the following title to her book, “View from below”. She has, however, not dealt with the castes like Halalkhore, Grass-cutters, Lamp-bearers, scavenger castes etc., framing the question as to how she can call her work a “View From Below”. Brenda, Beck in her book Peasant Society in Konku: A study of Right and Left hand-castes in South India, that there was a group of left and right in south India, but she has not mentioned the specific functions of the various castes that were very important in the considered opinion of the English Company. She has,

8 Vijaya, Ramaswamy, Textiles and Weavers in Medieval South India OUP, New Delhi, 1985.


11 Kanaklatha, Mukund, View from Below: indigenous society, temples and the early colonial State in Tamilnadu,1700-1835, Orient Longman.

nevertheless, done very good work on the issue of the left and right hand castes.\footnote{Arjun Appadurai, “Right and Left Hand Castes in South India,” \textit{Indian Economic and Social History Review (IESHR)}, 14.1,1974, pp.217-59.} Arjun Appadurai also deals with the left and right hand castes positions and their origins in south India and provides a lengthy description but he, too, ignores the emerging social awareness in the society that they had got from the English Company.\footnote{Edgar, Thurston, “The caste and tribe in southern India, Asian Educational Service (7 vo) Madras.} Edgar Thurston’s work, \textit{"The Caste and Tribe in Southern India"} is a kind of encyclopedia on the South Indian castes. He has also documented the various folklores which are good sources for the study of various castes. But his work studies a much later period.\footnote{Burton, Stein, \textit{Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India}, OUP, 1994. Delhi.} Burton Stein in his book, \textit{“Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India"}, wrote about the left and right hand castes, and castes dispute, but he is not specific on the English East India Company and role of the caste. In the English Company new occupations were emerging as castes constituted a very significant source of development.\footnote{K.N. Chaudhuri, \textit{The Trading World of Asia and the East India Company, 1660-1760}, S. Chand & Co. (New Delhi), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978, London .} K.N. Chaudhuri also documents about the various merchants castes including the weaver and dyer castes in Madras. K.N. Chaudhuri’s\footnote{K.N. Chaudhuri, \textit{Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the rise of Islam to 1750}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985. Cambridge.} book, \textit{The Trading World of Asia and the East India Company, 1660-1760}, is an important book to understand the trade and commerce politics of the English East India Company. \textit{Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the rise of Islam to 1750}, is also another important work authored by K.N.Chaudhuri. This book deals with the Boatmen, Seamen and Fishermen, which were also very important
Occupational Castes Groups. But he has not dealt with at great length about their role in the English Company.\textsuperscript{18} H.D. Love's *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800* makes extensive references to the documents which were achieved on the Records of Fort St. Gereoge, and all these references are very helpful to understand Madras under the English Company.

However, this article specially lays accent on the Weavers, Artisans, and some lower castes that played a very significant role in the English Company.

**The English Company in Madras**

The English East India Company was an organization founded to engage in commercial enterprise. Basically, they were merchants inspired by the Portuguese and the Dutch. As such, like the latter two nations the English also wanted to share in the riches of the Indian trade. This very motive had brought them, at last, in the Indian Ocean especially for cotton textiles and generally for spices, jewels, perfumes, essential oils, oleoresins (ginger), rice and other profitable commodities.\textsuperscript{19} By getting a grant from Venkatappa, the Naik of Chingleput, who controlled the Coromandel Coast from Pulicat to San Thome, Mr.Francis Day and Mr.Cogan (both of whom became Governor of Madras in later times), got an offer to erect a Fort at Madras in 1639.\textsuperscript{20} The English Company thereafter settled near the old village of Chinnapatnam and constructed the Fort St. George in 1640. Fort St.George later become the residence of their President


\textsuperscript{19} J.Talboys Wheelers, *Madras in the Olden Time*, in 3 volumes complete in one, AES, New Delhi, Madras, 1993, pp.1-4.

and Council which controlled all the trades of Bay of Bengal and the south East Asian Countries. Along with this grant, the English company had also got total exemption from custom duties on their imports and exports in the port town. They were allowed to exercise extra territorial power in Madras. Thus, the English Company since the beginning of their settlement in the town played significant roles in the trade and commerce of the region.

My study and particularly the third chapter deals with the commercial relations between the occupational castes and the English Company. It shows how they were dependent upon each other for the growth of trade and commerce in Madras. Of course, there was also tension between the two as both tried to bargain from the other for their vested commercial and financial interests. The English Company gave them new economic opportunities, without which these caste groups would never have got the chance to become rich. However, at the same time, the Company was not in a position to conduct its commerce without the help and support of the local caste groups. For instance, due to the new opportunities provided by the Company many sudras and untouchable caste groups could get opportunities to develop their economic conditions. Through these opportunities, these occupational groups became more focused on professional matters such as the question of bargaining of labour wage and fixation of salaries. They lived in a milieu which was free from the sharper prejudice in a traditional Indian town, and got close to the English Company and the dominant upper caste groups. This proximity gave them occupational mobility in the town.

21 Arasaratnam, Merchants, Companies and Commerce, p.21.
Regarding the English Company, my fourth chapter deals with their involvement in caste riots and disputes. The Company although called it as 'foolish' and 'madness,' but to secure their commercial interest, they got involved in the ensuing disputes. As the ruler of Madras, they tried to stop the riots as soon as possible and, therefore, they gave orders to the caste groups not to cross the limits set by the government. Various instances and examples show that the English Company tried all means to stop caste conflicts. Therefore, the role of the Company for the growth and development of Madras becomes very important during our period of study, which is under review.

The Geographical settings of Madras

Thomas Bowrey\textsuperscript{24} mentions its climatic conditions and its situation in the following words.\textsuperscript{25} "The beginning of my residence, or first part of my arrival was at Fort St. George,\textsuperscript{26} an English Garrison upon the coast of Coromandel. This coast begineth at Nagapatnam, formerly a place subject to the Kinge of Portugal, but some years since taken from them by the Dutch, who now possess it with great force and splendor. It extendeth itself to point Goodaware, on the south side of the bay Corango, which by computation is in length 400 English miles, containing many great and eminent places of traffic and commerce. This Fort and Towne which is very

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{23} Foster, \textit{English Factories in India}, 1651-1654, p.155.
\item\textsuperscript{24} Thomas Bowrey, \textit{A Geographical Account of the Countries round the Bay of Bengal, 1669-1679}, edited by R.C.Temple, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p.2.
\item\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p.2.
\end{footnotes}
considerable, is scituated very near the sea. This Fort length in latitude North 13° 10', and is not at any time very cold or on the contrary very hot, having the full benefit of all sea breezes of wind, but in these following months, May and June, although there be for the most part fresh Gales, yet is something sulphurous, which may most of all be alleged to the heat of the sun. It blowinge then for the most part at west and N.West, beinge hot and dry winds. The coldest season of the yeare is September, October, and November, yet not much colder then the middle of summer is in England, but affordeth raine in great abundance. But, in line, it is a very healthy and moderate climate, much exceedinge many places both in India and South Seas, and consisteth of as great traffick both by sea and land as any one place or more upon all this coast.  

Madras city was said to be a sandy place. The mouth of the river, which run through Madras opened into the sea. Fryer says that he landed wet but the sand was scalding hot, which made him recollect his steps. Despite the country being sandy, he commented that there were good gardens where pattage, stews, herbs for salad and some few flowers as jasmine for beauty and delight; flourish pleasant tops of plantains, cocoes, gavava, a kind of pear, jawks, mangoes, bananas, beetle, cane, green nuts and so on.  

Again, the outskirts of Madras were embellished with many gardens and fields. It had a river which gave freshness to the air by following in many canals and small

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27 Ibid., pp.2-5.
29 Ibid., p.191.
30 Ibid., pp.195-196.
channels through the large wood, round the village and in the neighbouring country, which had many palm trees and little woods, which round several villages. Here an infinite number of little streams which came through sea or river.\textsuperscript{31} Manucci\textsuperscript{32} also points out that Madras was a sandy city but after some time, it becomes very famous.\textsuperscript{33}

Francois Martin, a French employee stayed in Madras and described the environments as he crossed the river Kunimedu. During the rainy season river produced immense water. There were several small towns such as Alamporwa, Chingour, village Patenour, village Tirupaloor, village Velachery and so on. There were fruit bearing trees all along the roads. The most common among these were coconut trees and species of palm which yielded a substance called \textit{Toddy} which was sugar-like substance. There were also many sugar yielding palm trees. The countryside was full of these and other fruit bearing trees.\textsuperscript{34}

Speaking about the climatic conditions of Madras, all records of Fort St. George diary and consultation books referred rain, storm, and sea encroachment to the town. For instance, in 1682 the record mentioned that: \textquote{The sea having for about 10 days past incroacht upon this (town) and wee hoping as it is usuall that it would retreat again of itself forbore any remedys to keep it off ....}\textsuperscript{35} Therefore, Governor had ordered to

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} \textit{The travels of Abbe Carre in India and the Near East, 1672 to 1674}, vol. II, AES, new Delhi, Madras, 1990, p.376.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Niccolao Manucci, \textit{Storio do Magor}, edited by William Irvine, Oriental Book Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1981, Vol.III.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p.92.
\item \textsuperscript{34} \textit{Memoirs of Francois Martin, 1674-1681, India in the 17th Century}, Edited by Lotika Varadarajan, Manohar, 1983, Vol.I, Part 2, pp.736-740.
\item \textsuperscript{35} \textit{St.Fort George Records, Dairy and Consultations Books of 1682}, p.14. Hereafter referred to as \textit{Diary and Consultations}.
\end{itemize}}
workers to work day and night to save the Fort.\textsuperscript{36} As for the severe rainfall, the Records said that: "having this fornoone viewed the mudd points and walls about the black towne made by the late President Yule, they appeare to be so worne ruined, and wasted away by the raines..."\textsuperscript{37} Therefore, we found that, Monsoon was unpredictable as wind did not come according to season. But it was true that storm, high seas and floods of rain did make the changes from one monsoon to another and which on the Coromandel coast lasted from about the middle of October to the middle of December.\textsuperscript{38}

Abbe Carre mentioned that Madras had a pleasant river which name was probably Cooum. This pleasant river watered the walls of Madras. The river was passing between Fort St. George and the Island called formerly as the Elambore. It was flowing parallel to the fort along the West side of the city.\textsuperscript{39} Francois Martin also referred another river near Madras. He says river Kunimedu was dangerous in rainy seasons. Further, the river bed was very flat as a result of which the surrounding countryside was flooded during the rainy season.\textsuperscript{40} Records also mentioned that "Our River" broke and blown beyond recovery during rainy season\textsuperscript{41} but it was almost completely dry during the summer time.\textsuperscript{42} S.Arasaratnam points out that the Cooum

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p.14.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Dairy and Consultations, 1693, p.5.
\item \textsuperscript{39} The travels of Abbe Carre, vol.II, p.448n. In 1802, it was converted into Cochrane's canal, now forming part of the Buckingham canal.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Memoirs of Francois Martin, Vol.I, part 2, p.736.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Dairy and Consultations, 1684, pp.131-132.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Memoirs of Francois Martin, Vol.I, part 2, p.737.
\end{itemize}
river flowed into the sea which was so near the Fort. He said in most of the year it was useless. Not only this, it did not serve any useful commercial purpose.\footnote{S.Arasaratnam, \textit{Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740}, OUP, Delhi, 1986, p.21.}

\textbf{Population of Madras}

In its origin, it was just a sandy beach but through the effort of the English Government and granting the freedom of all merchants of all nations, it became very well populated town.\footnote{Manucci, \textit{Storio do Magor}, vol.III, p.92.} During the time of Thomas Bowrey, who lived in Madras in the 1670s, Madras was said to have been very populous, inhabited by the English, Portuguese, merchants who paid customs; servants and soldiers.\footnote{Bowrey, \textit{A Geographical Account of the Countries round the Bay of Bengal}, pp.3-4.} Fryer informed us that the different races who were staying in Masulipatnam were the same people staying in the Madras.\footnote{Fryer, \textit{Travels in India}, p.196.} That means, the Moors, Persians, Gentiles, Sojourners, Armenians, Portuguese, Dutch, English and some French who were staying in Masulipatnam, were also staying in Madras.\footnote{Ibid., p.175.} Fryer also had given number of people: English were probably 3000, Portuguese 1000, and so on.\footnote{Ibid., p.193.} He also pointed out that there were many distinguished tribes by their occupations such as goldsmiths, carpenters, refiners, etc.\footnote{Ibid., pp.175-176. H.D.Love computed the numbers of persons staying in Madras from different sources as 7000 in 1639; 11,900 in 1646; 15,000 in 1648, 40,000 in 1670; 33,300 in 1673; 50,000 in 1674, 200,000 in 1681; 300,000 in 1683; 400,000 in 1691; 100,000 in 1715 and 80,000 in 1720. See, Love, \textit{Vestiges of Old Madras}, vol. III, p.557.}
Points of Discussion

This work intends to study the occupational caste groups, their mercantile activities, and their relationship with the English Company in Madras during 17th and 18th centuries. The period chosen was especially important as most of the occupational caste groups' activities were seen to be well documented. Also that the growth of Madras town from its humble beginning in 1639 came to attain full fledged commercial port towns by 1720. So one can see the transformation of the city taking place all along, with changes in the social and political outlook of the people within this period. The work covers four important facets of changes in Madras such as the occupational caste groups; the rise of Madras; the relationship between the occupational caste groups and the English Company, caste conflicts, labouring Heads castes and role of English Company; and lastly I look into judiciary system of English Company and impact on the Occupational castes groups. These chapters were taken to give the holistic understanding of caste, commerce and culture in the port town of Madras.

In chapter one, definitions of occupational caste groups were taken up. This is very problematic as several records are commonly agreed that sudras in which various artisan castes, untouchable castes and some merchant groups were corresponding to the occupational caste groups. The right hand caste (valangai) and the left hand caste (idangai) were also referred to as the occupational castes. This chapter examines the definitional terms ‘caste’ in relation to occupations and most importantly to the occupational mobility. Different authors used the term “caste mobility”. I, however, understand that there was no such 'caste mobility' because caste remains static and
stagnant while occupation is like a class which has been changing throughout the history. Therefore, I use the term “caste occupational mobility”. Regarding this controversies, the first chapter also explores the relationship between occupation and power. The occupation decides what you are and what your positions in the society. Through occupation, one can change the power equation. The first chapter signified the role of occupations and power, the power-relation corresponds to all four chapters by various instances and examples. The chapter also sees that caste under The English Company was a process of making. The English company was confused on the issue of caste. The company, many a time, understands caste through the occupation. This chapter also deals with migration of labourer castes, caste violence, caste and power, advantage and prejudice of caste system, caste and social change under the English company.

Chapter two looks into the numbers of occupational caste groups, their functions and outlooks. It gives the broader understanding about their social status and economic position in society.

Chapter three deals with the commercial activities of the occupational caste groups in Madras. These groups played a very important role in commerce and were indispensable for the English Company. The new economic policy of the Company gave new impetus to the caste groups. The Komatis, Chettis and Weavers communities' role was very significant. Even artisan groups and services or skilled and unskilled labourer played important roles in the Company’s trade. Untouchable groups were also engaging in the Company’s services. More importantly, many castes were leaving their traditional caste occupations and took up for various other works available in the town.
For instance watchmen, washermen, barbers, some Komatis, Chettis were adopting the weaving jobs and so on. Not only this, they were engaged in textiles, shipping, as seala­bourers and so on. Therefore, my third chapter deals with the commercial aspects of the occupational caste groups and their relationships with the Company.

Chapter four deals with various instances of caste conflicts in Madras between the left hand and right hand castes. Pertaining to the caste conflicts, disputes and riots, the occupational caste groups played tremendous roles and disturbed the peaceful situations of the town. There were four major riots at Madras, which were in 1651-52; 1707-1708; 1716-1717, 1720, 1747, 1750, 1786, 1787, 1789 and 1795. This chapter also deals with the origin of the left-right hand castes, their numerical strength and differences between the right–left castes and also controversies regarding their origin and identity. It also deals that what were the responsible causes for the riots.

The fifth chapters deals with the labouring heads caste and their role in the English company. This chapter finds that The chief labourer of the English Company enjoyed certain privileges. First, the chief labourer directly participates in the Company trade and administration which far exceeds the trade of other brokers of the Company in Madras. Secondly, the chief labourer mediated between their own people and the Company. Thirdly, they were leaders of their own communities. The English Company pointed out their functions and responsibility towards their community indirectly.

The sixth chapter deals with the Judiciary system of the English company and her role towards the Occupational caste groups. The chapter establishes the fact the English company brought new Legal system in India which was very beneficial to the occupational caste groups and their society. However, there was no measure of standard
of punishment nor was there any principle behind its mode and quality. Often the punishment awarded bore no relation to the offence committed and depended on the personal whims, idiosyncrasies and prejudices of the Judges. Usually, the punishments were barbarous and inhuman, and were awarded with the idea of making them deterrent and preventive. The offender was made an example so that others might be deterred from committing the same crime again. The lash was the popular medium of punishment for minor offences, which was applied in public; it knew no distinction of sex and fell heavily on both males and females. Pillory also appears to be in vogue at this time. A technical principle of the English Ecclesiastical law, known as the benefit of clergy, was available to the Englishmen as a defence and was commonly invoked in cases of manslaughter; in such a case, the accused was branded on the hand and discharged.

The seventh chapter deals with the Madras Army and the occupational caste groups. The chapter will try to look what kind of social implication given by the English Company towards the lower caste? Which caste were getting much benefit from the army and which communities were inducted in the army?

A Note on Sources

For the primary source materials, I relied mainly upon the English factory records, reports, census, diaries, travelogues and some missionary’s accounts. Especially I have mainly depended on the Fort St. George Records located in the DSA Library, JNU, which are listed hereunder:
Dispatches: from England: 1670-1677 to 1711-17 (11 vols.) and to England: 1701-01 to 1710-1711 (1 vol) and 1712-1714 to 1727 (3 vols.).

Diaries and Consultation Books: 1672-78 to 1752 (73 vols.).

Letters from Fort St. George: 1689-1711 (11 vols.).

Letters to Fort St. George: 1681-82 to 1719 (14 vols.).

In particular, the Diary and Consultation books have been of tremendous help for me in the completion of my work, as most of the activities of the occupational caste groups and the minutes of the various meetings of the Council/ Board of the company are included in it. Apart from that, the daily activities of the Company's servants, merchants, the various caste groups who are working for the company were documented. These records pertaining to the Caste disputes, riots and other skirmishes in the town of Madras are documented very thoroughly. As such, the Diary and Consultations along with the dispatches and letters formed the bulks of the primary sources for this work.


Besides, extensive use has been made of many of the travelogues such as Abbe Carre, Bowrey, Manucci, Tavernier, Martin, Barbosa, Peter Floris, Peter Mundy and Buchanan. The accounts of these travellers are indispensable and extremely useful for
understanding the occupational caste groups in Madras. Although they give different numbers of caste groups, the fact that these travellers did give information extensively of their activities provides good sources of understanding about the caste groups. For instance, Bowrey talks about the functions of the various caste groups and pointed that caste occupational were limited to their traditional occupations. He had given that various caste groups had come for the shipping industries. Likewise, Buchanan had also given the numbers of caste inhabiting in the region and talks about at great length on the left and right hand castes with their functions and their positions in the society. He also recorded the conflicts of the various caste groups. Further, Abbe Carre mentioned about Kasi Virona and their flourishing trade in Madras and the Coromandel Coast. Likewise, most of these travellers had the accounts of the caste groups in Madras in one form or the other.

Abbe Dubois work was extremely helpful for the understanding of caste of south India and he covers almost all the important aspects of the South India and various dimensions of the caste in South India. His writing was very helpful for this thesis.

Regarding diaries, Sir William Hedges Diary and Sir Strynsham Master Diary are very helpful. William Hedges has written about the right and left hand divisions, the riots, and other conflicts in Madras and gave the reasons for the conflicts where he attributes religion. Master had also mentioned about his initiative on the Joint-stock company with the merchants of Madras and because of this, the merchants of Madras protest this. On the personal narratives, the work of Elijah Hoole “A mission to those Countries” is used. Hoole give the descriptions of the palanquin and palanquin bearer,
the catamaran caste, etc. The Census Reports of 1871 is also very informative for the various caste groups in Madras. Apart from these, Gazetteer of South India is consulted. The Private letter books of Joseph Collet had information about the right and left hand riots of 1716-1717, which he found it to be very dangerous.

Besides, the edited works of H.D.Love, Vestiges of old Madras and J.T.Wheelers, "Madras in Olden Days" are very informative, for many of the original documents which are not available at my disposal. Their citation of many of the original records, sometime in full length, remains a good source for the occupational caste groups and other activities of the town under various Governors.