CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In order to understand the occupational mobility it is important to be acquainted with the processes and the factors responsible for bringing about an occupational change or occupational mobility in a group.

In simplest way occupation may be understood as a relatively continuous patterns of activities that provide workers a livelihood and define their social status. Occupations emerge whenever division of labour is associated with a monetary economy and commodity markets. Occupations existed in ancient cities, medieval towns and estate societies. However only a section of the adult population in those societies participated in labour and community markets. In contemporary urban and industrial societies the great majority of adults at on one occasion or another hold occupations that tend to be distinct from their social status. Such societies usually have attained a high level of technological development; a highly developed exchange economy based on cash and relatively free labour market. These characteristics describe occupational structure (Form; 1964).

The occupational structure is a part of social stratification. It may be termed as a series of more or less permanently related occupational families that are hierarchically arranged according to complexity of skills. On the other hand, social structure is a term applied to the particular arrangement of the interrelated institutions.
agencies and social patterns, as usual as the statuses and roles which every person assumes in a group (Talcott, 1954). The components of social structure are human beings, the structure itself being an arrangement of persons in relationship institutionally defined and regulated (Radcliff Brown: 1952). Within the broad framework of social structure, persons always keep making choices between alternatives which have significant consequences. Societies where the social status of the person determines his work are called status society. The process by which individuals and groups are ranked in a more or less enduring hierarchy of status is known as stratification (Ogburn and NimKoff: 1950). Every community is socially stratified in various ways. Classification of the population into sex and age groups may be, as are often the case in primitive societies, predominant characteristics of the internal structure of the community. There are some functional necessity of stratification. Because a society must provide some rewards which it can use as inducements and have some ways of distributing these rewards differently according to position. The rewards and their distribution, as attached to social position, create social stratification. These rewards may be in the form of economic incentives, aesthetic incentives and symbolic incentives. The differentiation of rewards produces social inequality. (Kingsly Davis 1906). The division of labour is responsible for the inequality of reward.

But the principal type of social stratification especially in the more developed civilization, is seen in the phenomenon of class (MacIver and Page: 1950). Within a class system the various strata are called social classes. A social class consists of people who are similar usually in their income, wealth, educational background and
occupational prestige. People in a class society have a greater chance to improve upon their social position since they are engaged to move into new jobs, and take advantage of opportunities (Smith and Presten; 1965). Each particular social class has its own particular social behaviour, its standard and occupation. The relative position of the class in the society arises from the degree of prestige attached to the status. To classify occupation according to their general standing or prestige, a carefully drawn scale was prepared in 1947 by Caci L C. North and Paul. K. Hatt (Reiss et, al, 1961). They found that although the scale was unevenly representative of various occupations in the labour force, it was sensitive to socio-economic gradation among the occupational in the scale nor the general occupational structure constitutes a single ordinal scale. Undoubtedly, different segment of the population valued the income and education associated with various occupations differently (William H. Form 1964)

In a social class, there is firstly a feeling of equality, in relation to the members of one’s class, a consciousness that one’s mode of behaviour will harmonize with the behaviour of similar standards of life. An individual belonging to the particular social class is expected to maintain similar standards of life, and to choose his occupation within a limited range. There is realization of similarity of attitude and behaviour with members of one class. Secondly, there is a feeling of inferiority in relation to those who stand above in the social scale. Thirdly, there is a feeling of superiority in relation to those below the social hierarchy.

Two factors affecting the prestige of an occupation determine the relative ranks of different occupations. (1) The functional importance of an occupation and
relative demand and, (2) the scarcity of personal for the occupation (Davis, Kings 1960). On the other hand, various degrees of talent, knowledge and skill are often covered by the same occupational title. So the prestige should be explained in terms of an occupational quality rather than in terms of functional importance. There are many different jobs in the same occupations that are important in prestige. So while assessing the functional importance, one would have to take into account the different occupational positions of a particular occupation. The same position can be filled with varying degrees of success. Therefore, the prestige to be given to a role occupant should be judged in terms of role performance. The relative functional importance is usually easier to appreciate in a small social system than in a total society. Considerable variation is possible in "functional emphasis". The religious function in India has relatively higher prestige. Further, the relative importance of an activity varies from time to time, according to the internal structure of the social system (Johnson, M. 1960). The prestige attached to different kinds of occupation does not depend entirely on the functional importance a variable factor of an occupation or its scarcity or on the income they yield, but also on the skill involved in the training and education they presuppose (Sachdeva, 1989). Social class affects the lifestyle of its members. Those who belong to a superior class enjoy greater status, prestige and power. Occupation is rapidly becoming the key-determining index of status.

Max Weber (1946) offered very influential analysis regarding political status or power, economic status or wealth, and social status, or prestige. Though power, wealth and prestige are independent of each other, but in practice, however, they are usually very closely associated. The reason is that any one can often be 'converted' into
any of the others. This is particularly true of wealth, which can readily be used to acquire power or prestige. The prestige rating given by the public to various occupations have been studied since 1927 through opinion polls in the limited states and several other industrialized societies. These ratings have been very consistent over the years, both within the United States and among the various countries.

THEORIES REGARDING STRATIFICATION

The functionalist perspective, adopted mainly by theorists influenced by Talcott Parsons sees stratification as an inevitable and even necessary feature of society. The conflict perspective, taken by theorists under the direct or indirect influence of Karl Marx, sees stratification as avoidable, unnecessary and the source of most human injustices. More recently Gerhard-Lenski (1966) has offered a third prospective, an evolutionary approach that combines elements of the other two.

The functionalist analyses the elements in culture and social structure in terms of their effects or functions for other parts of the system. It is usually assumed that these functions constitute the stability of survival of society as a whole. Functionalists have argued that if stratification exists in all societies, it must have some useful functions in maintaining those societies. The classic statement of this position is that of Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945) who contend that some form of stratification is a functional necessity. According to them some social roles require scarce talents or prolonged training and this involves stress and considerable sacrifice and heavy responsibilities. Those who assume these important roles must therefore be rewarded
with wealth, power prestige, or some combination of the three or else they would have no motive for performing their tasks. Different societies value different social roles differently. This unequal valuation of social roles leads to social stratification. But some people whose roles do not have apparent value to society are often highly rewarded. On the other hand, many people have low rewards because their social status is ascribed on the basis of characteristics over which they have no control. But the functionalist argument is at its weakest in all cases where social status is inherited, not achieved by the individuals and to a large extent it is the situation in all class societies. Even in the most open class system, the rate of intergenerational mobility is very low. (Lipset and Bendix 1959). It is true that some people in some stratified societies can have high status through personal effects. But, practical social stratification ensures that people do not have equal access to social roles, so it hinders the allocation of roles on merit. All stratification systems offer entire categories of people different life chances because of the circumstances of their birth and therefore stratification does not make the best use of the talents of the population. And if the lower stratum comes to believe that the system is unjust, social conflict will result. In such cases stratification does not contribute to the maintenance of the social system. It can, and frequently does, lead to the disruption of the entire social orders.

Conflict theorists reject the functionalist theory society as a fairly harmonious well integrated system where various features contribute to overall social stability. Instead, they consider conflict over social values and group interests as intrinsic to any society. Karl Marx (1961) argued that history is essentially the story of class
conflict between the exploiters and the exploited. Social stratification is created and maintained by one group in order to protect and enhance its economic interests. So there is no opportunity for some people to become wealthier than others. But in horticultural and pastoral societies production of surplus is possible, and chieftainships emerge powerful to gain control over the surplus. These societies are not stratified, however, because inequalities exist only among specific individuals, and there are no distinct castes or classes. But with the development of advanced horticulture into agriculture the picture changes radically. Agriculture allows people to produce a considerable surplus, and elite makes claim to this wealth. The society becomes divided into strata according to their access to wealth and other rewards. Power becomes concentrated in the hands of monarch. This rigid division is undermined, however, when a society shifts to industrialism. Industrial production requires a skilled and mobile labour force and its efficiency is impaired if people are prevented from using their talents to the full. In the early stages of industrialization, there was a vast gap between the rich and the poor and the rural peasantry was transformed into an urban work force. This situation still prevails in the less industrialized nations of the world. In the more advanced industrial societies, the lower class expands rapidly, because the entire society shares, however unequally, the great wealth that produced. Stratification exists only because the rich and the powerful are determined to preserve their advantages. Marx saw class conflict as the key of historical change: every ruling class is eventually overthrown by the subordinate class, which becomes the ruling class.
The most promising attempt at a synthesis of the two positions is that Gerhard Lenski (1966) who emphasizes both conflict and functional elements in the evolution of stratification systems. According to him, people generally find it more rewarding to fulfill their own wants and ambitions than those of others. Most of the things that people want are scarce: the demand for them exceeds the supply. Inevitably, therefore, there will be some conflict over the distribution of their rewards in all societies. And because people are unequally equipped for the competitive struggle, social inequality will inevitably result. Sometimes these inequalities will be functional for society, but form of stratification will tend to persist long after they have ceased to be useful. A certain amount of inequality is inevitable and perhaps even necessary, but most societies are much more stratified than they need to be. Lenski (1966) traces the evolution of social stratification showing how the form it takes is related to the society's means of economic production. In hunting and gathering societies there is no stratification. Populations are small and intimate, and the members are essentially equal. There is no surplus wealth, and the rate of social mobility increases as a variety of new jobs are created. He also notes that independent factors, such as external threats or the role of particular leaders, may have an impact on the way in which stratification system evolves. In general, however, he believes that long-term trend in all industrial societies will be toward less social inequality. His theory explains why inequalities are so often far more extreme than could ever be necessary from a functional point of view. Once stratification is built into a society, privileged groups use their advantages to gain even more advantages. He accepts that some inequalities may be unavoidable and even useful.
Caste and classes are socially constructed men and women. Since social stratification is socially modifiable as well provided only that people are conscious of their own ability to change the systems they have built.

There is no universally accepted taxonomy of occupations. However, whenever there is rational, systematic and instrumental application of scientific knowledge to the production and distribution of goods and services, occupational structure that has distinctive features at different stages of economic development arises (Kerr et. al., 1960). There is a close relationship between occupational composition and industrial structures. Generally it has been found in countries experiencing an industrial revolution. A characteristic division of labour seems to be associated with the extent of industrialization (Form, 1964).

The historical shift in the west from status to occupational societies was largely the result of persistent application of scientific knowledge to production and other economic organization. The persistent pattern of change in technology of production was accompanied by equally persistent changes in the social organization of production, distribution and related economic activities. Since occupational routines are related to given technological processes and to given work organization, changes in the organization have impact on the structuring not only of occupations themselves but also of related activities of workers and their organizations. All societies have some degree of functional interdependence; hence basic changes in any one of their institutions produce change in other parts of the society. Thus the growth of scientific knowledge, the changes in technology and work organization, the growth of markets, the rise of industrial and
commercial centres, and other social changes affect the composition of the occupational structure and the behaviour of workers both within and outside the plant (Polongi, 1944).

The present study intends to explore the various aspects of occupational mobility among the Hiras, a pottery community living in the environs of Barpeta town. The Hiras are traditionally an occupational caste and they are placed in a very low stratum in the caste hierarchy. So the present study is also necessary to study about the social stratification founded by caste system in India.

A caste is an endogamous or a collection of endogamous groups, bearing a common name, a membership of which is hereditary, imposing on the members certain restrictions in the matter of social intercourse either following a common traditional occupation or claiming a common origin and generally regarded as forming a single homogeneous community according to Blunt. In theory there are for main castes or varnas, which were originally based on racial or ethnic distinctions between segments of the Indian population. The highest caste or Varna is the Brahmins, or priest and scholars, next are the Kshatriyas, or nobles and warriors; below them are the Vaishyas or merchants and skilled artisans; and finally there are Sudras, or common laborers. Beyond the actual castes are the Harijans or outcastes. The outcastes are often called "untouchable" because merely to touch an outcaste, or even to be touched by an outcaste's shadow, is a form of ritual pollution for members of the higher Varnas. In practice there are not only four castes in India, but also thousands of sub castes, or Jatis. The Jatis are sometimes confined to local areas, but their membership of some of them may spread all over India. A Jati is often linked to a particular occupation. No individual
can ever change his or her status, since status is determined by caste of one's parent's intermarriage between members of different Jatis. The Indian caste system is closely intertwined with the Hindu religion, which is explicitly concerned with maintaining the stratified social orders. Each of the Varnas and Jatis has rules of behaviour that every member must follow (Robertson, 1977).

But in modern time, the caste system has been breaking down fairly and rapidly in urban areas. There are various factors, which are responsible for bringing changes in caste system. Industrial revolution has also been a factor responsible for transforming the Hindu social structure. Caste system in India is very much related to village industries and hereditary occupations. But industrialization affects the social structure in a number of ways. The old occupation having been disappeared and new occupations have appeared wherein the Brahmin and the Sudra freely meet and mix. There is much more freedom of choice of occupation. Industrialization has caused many changes in the urban occupational structure, and it is no longer considered a sacred obligation to do the work traditionally done by the members of one's Jati (Sachdeva, Vidya Blusan, 1989). Industrial development has also brought about considerable social mobility, both upward and downward and there are now many poor Brahmins, many rich Sudras, and even wealthy outcastes. With the spread of communications personal contacts have multiplied which have changed the attitudes which separated caste from caste.

Occupational mobility can be termed as the phenomenon in which a people give up the whole or part of their traditional occupation and takes up a new one in
the phase of charge in the surrounding affecting the economic pattern. Mobility may involve change in location, function, income prestige, power, independence or other occupational attributes. As shown by Chinoy (1955), occupation is related with production, and occupational mobility is roughly the same as social mobility. So, occupations are classified on the basis of their relation to the means of production.

Occupational mobility has been widely expanded and distribution in the modern societies. This problem accepted by the advanced society is most important and a part and parcel of the present social situation. In this connection, Sorokin (1933) explains that individuals or groups movement from one social position to another and the circulation of cultural objects, values and traits among individuals and groups may also be termed as social mobility.

In the explanation of Milton and Gordon (1933), the general and the principal condition that favours or prevents mobility is the rate of social change. Conditions of rapid social change such as Industrial revolution or territorial expansion make for social mobility, while a very little technological or territorial change provides little opportunity for the individual to rise out of the status, which is ascribed to him. Social mobility thus means as movement from one class to another and also movement up or down the various stratification diversions. It is assumed that status achievement is directly or indirectly related to occupational position. The little of the occupation is itself a status symbol on the income derived from the occupation that permits the purchase of status symbols (Litwak, 1960). So social mobility is not merely a shift from one occupation to another or movement from one stratum to another. It also involves certain
structural change in the social system and psychological change in the personality system (Chauhan, 1980).

On the other hand, social mobility has a number of dimensions. One such dimension is the time phase of mobility. Another dimension refers to its direction. In the first category, inter-generational and intra-generational mobility is included and in the second category vertical, horizontal and spatial direction of mobility is included (Richard, 1969). So social mobility is related with concepts of social class or status. Social mobility is meant the movement from one class to another between generations.

Mobility has been classified by Bhattacharya (1972) into two broad types: 1) horizontal and 2) vertical. The horizontal mobility refers to occupational change in residence and such other phenomenon, and vertical mobility points towards the achieved status of an individual as against his ascribed status. But the Indian caste system does not permit any vertical mobility because an individual’s rank and its associated rights and obligations are solely ascribed to his birth. Professor Cooley (1909) calls a caste as hereditary class. There is another type of mobility, which is called intergenerational mobility. This mobility means change in the status of family members from one generation to next. Intergenerational mobility is the most important of three forms, because the amount of this mobility in a society tells us to what extent inequalities are being passed from one generation to the next generation. If there is a good deal of intergenerational mobility, people will be able to achieve new statuses through their own efforts, regardless of the circumstances of their births.
In the case of vertical dimension of mobility, Sorokin (1959) formulated some criterions, which are later summarized by Dutta (1991) is presented below:

i) There has hardly been any society where (a) vertical mobility is totally absent and (b) where channels of vertical are totally open.

ii) There exists a variation from society to society with regard to the generality and intensiveness of the vertical social mobility.

iii) The generality and intensiveness of vertical social mobility tend to fluctuate from time to time even in the same society, and finally

iv) In the field of vertical social mobility, there seems to be no definite, perpetual trend towards either an increase or a decrease of intensiveness and generality of mobility.

Thus, social change is a natural phenomenon and the moment there is a social change, there is also social mobility. Probably no society absolutely forbids social mobility and no society is immobile.

According to Lipset & Bendix (1959), the extent of social mobility in a particular society is generally determined by two factors: one is the total amount of mobility in a society which can support and conditions under which people are allowed to move. The amount of mobility that a society can support depends on how many different statuses are there in the society. More statuses generate greater opportunities to a person to move from one status to another. In traditional agrarian societies, there occurs limited number of statuses and one can see downward mobility. But in industrial societies, there are greater opportunities for mobility as it provides very large number different statuses.
In such societies, the level of development and conditions of the economy influences social mobility. In times of economic depression, the proportion of high statuses decreases and the proportion of lower statuses increases. This results in a downward trend in mobility as people lose their jobs and as new entrants to the labour market are unable to find employment of the kind that commensurate to their family background and education make them to expect. But in a rapidly expanding economy on the other hand, new high positions constantly become available. The demand for workers to fill these positions causes a general upward trend in social mobility. The trend in industrial societies has been towards an increase both in wealth and in the proportion of upper position leading to the growth of large middle class members drawn from the lower strata.

The second factor affecting social mobility is the conditions under which people are allowed to be mobile. Some societies place greater restrictions on changes in status than other societies. If most statuses in a society are ascribed, the rate of mobility is likely to be much lower than if the society emphasizes individual achievement. On the other hand Robertson (1977) points out that in pre-industrial societies, there was very little upward mobility, because legal and traditional restrictions made it almost impossible.

On the theoretical background, the present study intends to explore the various aspects of occupational mobility among the Hiras, a potter community living in the environs of Barpeta town. In Northeast India especially in Assam no in-depth study on occupational mobility and its impact of economic development on the scheduled caste
people have been done so far. So, this empirical as well as analytical study will help to understand the mobility of the Hira community in relation to their socio-economic problems.