1.1 INTRODUCTION

The present work is entitled “Truck Drivers in Solapur District : A Sociological Study”. The truck drivers (including the drivers of lorries, oil-tankers and container trucks) are employed by both the organized and unorganized sectors of economy. Under the present work, the goods truck drivers in both the sectors have been studied. In the organized sectors, these drivers are employed by large fleet-owners and inter-State road transport operators, while in the unorganized sector, they are found both as owner-drivers and employed-drivers.

1.2 GOODS ROAD TRANSPORT INDUSTRY IN INDIA

1.2.1 A Historic Overview

Mechanized road transport has a more than century-old history in India. The first-ever motor vehicle was imported into the country in 1898. In latter years, the number of imported vehicles grew steadily. During the initial decades, goods transport vehicles were mostly owned by the Government and the military. The exigencies of the World War-I forced the British Government of India to convert India’s indigenous resources into war supplies most expeditiously. This involved massive movement of raw materials from their places of origin to production centres and from there, to staging areas for being shipped off to various war theatres. Since Railways could offer only a minuscule relief in this behalf, the Government imported goods vehicles in large numbers. After the conclusion of war in 1918, the military disposed of several thousand surplus vehicles to private individuals, which came to be used for transporting goods and passengers. This marked the beginning of commercial road transport in India. The present-day fragmented, dispersed and disorganized pattern of ownership of goods vehicles thus could be traced to this initial ownership pattern.

The Motor Vehicles Act, 1939, created a machinery for the administration and control of road transport. It set out an elaborate system of permits and created the State and Regional Transport Authorities.

On the eve of country’s Independence in 1947, there were 40,107 trucks plying on the roads of Undivided India. After the adoption of the planned economy, the country’s industrialization gathered momentum. As its cascading effect, the demand for the goods vehicles began gathering momentum.
The Motor Vehicles Act of 1939 was amended in 1956, 1969 and 1988, with the main objectives of increasing the period of regular permits to 5 years; constituting an Intra-State Transport Commission, introducing an Inter-State Permit system on the basis of counter signatures of reciprocating States; inserting a chapter to facilitate the operation of State Road Transport Undertakings, providing rules to facilitate the fixing of fares and rates by the Road Transport Authority; introducing a national permit scheme; providing stringent punishment to curb drunkenness among drivers; laying down minimum educational qualifications for drivers and for reservation in regard to grant of permits to individual operators firm for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Even before the Government adopted the policy of liberalization in 1991, within a short span of six years between 1984-85 and 1990-91, the number of trucks on road almost doubled from 7,82,000 to 14,45,990. As at the end of 2000, their nationwide number stood at 18,44,628, out of which, 1,95,216 were registered in Maharashtra. Now, each truck plying on the road generates direct employment for about 4 to 5 persons and indirect employment for another 4 to 5 persons. It may thus be safely assumed that the goods road transport industry provides gainful employment to nearly two crore people.

1.2.2 Nature of Goods Road Transport Industry

In India, the truck ownership in goods road transport industry is vertically segregated into two distinct groupings, namely, large fleet operators (the organized sector) and small operators (unorganized sector).

The large fleet operators (in the organized sector) account, at best, for about 15 per cent of the truck ownership. These are the operators who accept, store, transport and deliver goods, both in bulk and in small quantities. They own about 40 to 50 trucks in their fleet. The volume of business handled by them may, however, be several times more than the carrying capacity of their own fleet, as most of them hire trucks of the small operators, either directly or through brokers and other truck suppliers. Some fleet operators encourage their own employees to become owners of trucks by providing financial assistance, but with the condition that the vehicles should be permanently attached to their companies.

An overwhelming majority of 85% of the goods road transporters in India are small operators (in the unorganized sector), owning one truck (and in all probability, driving it himself). In some instances, a small operator may own between 5 and 10 trucks, but not in his name, to avoid income tax, labour legislation, etc. These small operators are involved only in the physical movement of the goods and depend on the booking agents and other fleet operators for obtaining business. Their profitability and viability must be reasonable, because otherwise, they would not stay in business.

The small operators’ relations with others, such as enforcement agencies, financial institutions, industry associations, unions, agents, brokers, etc., appear to be influenced
by the expediency of each situation. For instance, in their relations with enforcement agencies such as Regional Transport Officers, Police, etc., native wisdom and common sense force them to ‘pay the way through’ in the interest of reaching the destination in time, rather than insisting on their right of movement by establishing bonafides. In their relations with unions and associations, it is apparent that they have no direct contact with these as they are mostly away from their operating base. Further, owing to their generally low educational background, they may not perhaps be able to appreciate and articulate their real problems in an effective manner before the unions and associations. Similarly, their interactions with the financial institutions, banks, etc., are usually of the nature of those small businessmen willing to meet the various requirements of the financiers in order to somehow obtain the loans.

1.2.3 Truck Drivers

So, this is the normal environment in which the truck driver, the cynosure of the present study, functions, day in and day out, year after year. His presence is taken so much for granted that anyone hardly bothers to find out what kind of social organism he is - how and why he has got into this occupation? What family he has back home? How he eats, sleeps or relaxes enroute? How he enjoys the company of his kith, kin and friends? and what makes him tick?

In the organized sector, the ‘company drivers’ (as they are known) are well protected through various rules and regulations relating to perquisites, provident fund and gratuity, leave, retirement provisions, etc. But in the unorganized sector, the rule of thumb is ‘survival of the fittest’, both literally and metaphorically.

A survey conducted by the Central Institute of Road Transport, Pune, (1994) has brought out that 85 per cent truck drivers work in the unorganized sector of economy. It is also termed as the ‘informal sector’. The unorganized sector workers are found in all the sectors of economy - manufacturing, agriculture and services. Majority of the truck drivers are the unorganized workers in the services sector.

1.2.4 Truck Drivers as Occupation-holders

The term ‘occupation’ is widely used, but with diverse meanings. From the point of view of occupational sociology, a specific conceptual formulation is needed. Arthur Salz has suggested that the notion of occupation must cover three sets of conditions, namely, technological, economic and social. Accordingly, he defined ‘occupation’ as “that specific activity with a market value which an individually continually pursues for the purpose of obtaining a steady flow of income; this activity also determines the social position of the individual”.

Occupation, sociologically speaking, involves a degree of corporateness, a degree of consciousness of kind, and a reciprocity between the acting individuals in the occupation and the recognition of these individual occupation-holders by the larger society. The sociological concept of occupation may be defined as a patterned set of human relations
having to do with specific work experiences. An occupation is a complex normative system within which people act for production (of goods or services), economic sustenance, status and the fulfillment of the meaning of that particular occupation. Since the truck drivers, whether in organized or unorganized sector, sufficiently fit this description, for the purpose of the present work, they are being treated as occupation-holders.

1.3 SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND TRUCK DRIVERS

One of the reasons that the truck drivers have escaped serious sociological research attention is the very nature of their occupation - heterogeneity of the cargo vehicles they drive, their mobility, their odd working hours, language barriers while travelling outside own State, and their own apprehensions about the officialdom and their tendency to keep an arm’s distance from it.

The present researcher is an official with the Maharashtra Government’s Motor Vehicle Department and routinely interacts with the truck drivers on daily basis. In this official capacity, he has first-hand witnessed the various facets of their life. Also, being academically-inclined, the researcher sensed a sociological research problem into the truck drivers’ collective milieu. Accordingly, the present work is entitled “TRUCK DRIVERS IN SOLAPUR DISTRICT : A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY”.

1.4 SOLAPUR DISTRICT : THE STUDY AREA

The district of Solapur is one of the south-eastern districts of Maharashtra State and is situated on the Deccan Plateau in the rain-shadow region of the Sahyadrian mountain ranges. Solapur district is located between 17°10’ and 18°32’ North latitude and 74°42’ and 76°15’ East longitude, at a mean sea level of 550 metres. It is bound on the north by Ahmednagar and Osmanabad districts, on the east by Osmanabad district, on the south by Sangli district and Karnataka State and on the west by Satara and Pune districts. The district is roughly squarish in shape, 200 km east-west and 150 km north-south. The physical features of the district are of varied nature, consisting of plains, plateaus and hill ranges. For administrative purposes, the district is divided into three administrative divisions and 11 talukas.

According to 2001Census, the district has a population of 38,55,383 inhabiting in one city (Solapur), 41 towns and 1142 villages. The urban:rural ratio of the population is around 30%:70%. Sex ratio of the population is 934 females :1000 males and the average literacy is 56.39% (70.08% males, 41.73% females).

The district is serviced by a good network of intra- and inter-district roads and rail and is connected to the nearby Urban Conglomerates in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka States. Solapur City is the headquarters of the District.
Solapur City is a reputed centre of cotton textile manufature. Besides, there were nearly 3,500 industrial units producing food products, beverages, tobacco products, rubber and plastic goods, basic and alloy metal products, industrial machinery and spareparts, agricultural products, wood, paper and leather products, edible oils, sugar mills and cement factories. In addition, three large oil companies (IOC, BPCL and HPCL) also have their bulk delivery yards on the fringe of Solapur City.

In view of the well-developed commercial and industrial bases in the district, there is a considerable inward and outward movement of raw materials, goods-in-process and the finished products across the district. A substantially major portion of this movement is handled by the motor transport - trucks, utility vehicles and delivery vans. At a rough estimate, more than 5,000 goods vehicles daily ply over the district’s roads. Some trucks also carry a second driver.

1.5 **Truck Drivers in Solapur District: the Study Universe**

As on 31.3.2004, there were 5,912 trucks and 289 tankers registered with the Regional Transport Authority at Solapur, out of which around 10% were owner-cum-drivers. Thus, there were approximately 5,000 truck drivers, residing in Solapur district and employed in both the organized and unorganized sectors. This population of the truck drivers in the district constitutes the universe of the present study. However, atleast half of these trucks are declared non-use vehicles, or registered in the district but plying elsewhere, e.g. vehicles owned by cement companies and sugar factories, fleet carriers, etc. As such, the drivers also go out with the vehicle. Hence, the actual study universe has been estimated as 2,500 truck drivers.

1.6 **Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives were formulated for the present study:

1. To explore the personal and family profiles of the truck drivers in Solapur district;
2. To evaluate the working profile of the truck drivers in the study area;
3. To assess the life-style of the truck drivers in the study area;
4. To submit suggestions.

1.7 **Exploratory Study**

The present study is exploratory in nature. In the absence of prior research on the topic in the study area, the overall character of the present study had to be maintained at a 'formulative-exploratory' level, with the hope that the findings returned on analyzing the empirical data under this work would be sensitive enough to bring forth promising hypotheses for subsequent research. Since the present work is a maiden venture in the topic of investigation against the backdrop of sociological research’s perspective, no hypotheses have been taken up for testing.
1.8 Methodology Adopted for the Study

For accomplishing the above objectives, both primary and secondary data were collected. For collecting the primary data, Survey Method was used. Survey data was collected from the sample respondent-truck drivers.

Also, 24 case studies were collected from amongst the respondents.

Non-participatory Observation Method was used for recording the researcher’s impressions about the problems encountered by the truck drivers.

Secondary data were collected through Library.

1.9 Sample Design

For collecting the primary data, an interview schedule was administered to the respondent-truck drivers. For this purpose, the researcher first visited the Regional Transport Office at Solapur and obtained a list showing the taluka-wise names and addresses of the large fleet operators (transport companies, petroleum companies, milk carriers, bulk carriers, sand transporters, road construction companies having sizeable fleets, etc.) in the district, where the truck drivers (in both organized and unorganized sectors) are certain to be found. On the basis of this list, the researcher before hand determined the taluka-wise quotas of the respondent-truck drivers to be interviewed for collecting the primary data.

Armed with this list, the researcher then set out to locate and interview the predetermined number of truck drivers in each taluka. The exercise was continued till the quota for that particular taluka was completed. Thus, out of the total population of 2500 truck drivers in the taluka, 20% truck drivers, that is, a total of 500 truck drivers from the entire district, were selected through purposive random sample technique for the present study.
For the purpose of this investigation, sample respondent-truck drivers were selected as shown in the following Table 1.1.

Table 1.1
Truck Drivers’ Population in Solapur District and Taluka & Solapur City-wise Sample Size of Truck Drivers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Taluka</th>
<th>Truck Drivers’ Universe*</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Solapur City</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>North Solapur</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Barshi</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Pandharpur</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Malshiras</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>South Solapur</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Madha</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Mohol</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Mangalwedha</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Karmala</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Akkalkot</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Sangola</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2500</strong></td>
<td><strong>500</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Derived from: (i) Records of the Regional Transport Office, Solapur, and (ii) fleet operators’ records as on 31.3.2004.

The above table shows that Solapur City has the largest population of truck drivers, because the City is a substantial-size industrial and commercial centre and there are at least 30 large fleet operators and bulk carriers in the City. Next comes the taluka of North Solapur, which is a host to the petroleum products depots of all the four national oil companies at village Pakani employing nearly 400 truck/tanker drivers. In the taluka of Barshi, the Barshi town is a large commercial centre. Malshiras taluka is a home for four, out of the districts’ 12, sugar factories, who need services of a substantial number of truck drivers for the inward transport of sugarcane and outward transport of processed sugar. In Pandharpur taluka, Pandharpur town is a year-round pilgrimage centre with crores of devotees visiting it annually, and trucks are at a premium to haul in their requirements. Although Solapur City straddles both the North Solapur and South Solapur
Map 1.1
India and Location of Maharashtra State
Map 1.2
Maharashtra State and Location of Solapur District
Map 1.3
Solapur District of Maharashtra State
talukas, most of the industrial and commercial development in the recent times has taken place in its South Solapur taluka part of the City and hence, the need for truck drivers. Madha is another industrially and commercially exuberant taluka in the district. Hence, these seven locations are the big league players in the above sample selection. There also is a significant presence of the truck drivers in the remaining five talukas of the district, namely, Mangalwedha, Karmala, North Solapur, Akkalkot and Sangola, which has been adequately reflected in the sample described above.

Some respondents, especially those in Solapur City and large towns, were interviewed at the market yards, large warehouses, oil-depots, truck drivers’ favourite Dhabas on the highways, and large transport companies offices (The photographs are in subsequent pages).

1.10 DATA COLLECTION

1.10.1 Primary Sources

(a) Interview Schedules

The first set of the primary data was collected through an interview schedule administered to the respondent-truck drivers as regards their socio-economic background, working conditions, vehicle and employer information, accidents, life-style, aspirations and expectations, etc.

(b) Informal Interviews

The second set of primary data for ascertaining the intricacies of the topic under investigation was collected through informal interviews with the government officials, persons knowledgeable in the subject and the academicians.

1.10.2 Secondary Sources

(a) Libraries, Archives and Collections

For discussing the topic under investigation, published sources available in various libraries were used. Particularly useful were the following:

1. Barr. Khardekar Library, Shivaji University, Kolhapur;
2. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Library, Mumbai University, Mumbai;
3. Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai;
4. Central Institute of Road Transport, Pune;
5. Automotive Research Association of India, Pune.

(b) Internet Searches

A tentative search on the Internet revealed that there is not a single website wholly dedicated to the ‘occupation of truck drivers’ in English language. The powerful
American trade union AFL/CIO has spared a few pages for its truck driver-members, but the information is in the American context and not useful here. The mighty British trade union TUC has not even bothered with it.

The search for ‘truck drivers’ locates scores of pages referring to the high incidence of HIV/AIDS among the truck drivers worldwide.

1.11 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The primary data collected from the respondent-truck drivers were processed on a computer by developing an application-specific software and under expert supervision. The findings were interpreted by juxtaposing them against the available data.

1.12 Scope of the Study

The geographical scope of the study is limited to the revenue boundaries of Solapur district; the topical scope has covered sociological aspects of the truck drivers as occupation-holders; the analytical scope has covered the fulfillment of the study objectives; and the functional scope is confined to offering a set of meaningful suggestions for improving the mundane lot of the truck drivers, especially in the unorganized sector.

1.13 Significance of the Study

The fundamental drive of the sociological research is sustained by Sociology’s quest for the acquisition of new knowledge useful for the better functioning of the society. To that extent, the present work has made its contribution to the knowledge base of Sociology.

1.14 Limitations of the Study

The following are the limitations of the present study:

1. Apart from holding informal discussions to collect the relevant information, the researcher was unable to conduct a survey of other constituent elements of the occupation of truck drivers, i.e. owners/managers of large truck fleet companies and officials of the enforcement agencies (Police and RTO) for the reason of their unwillingness to be put on record formally.

2. The study is conducted in a mixed urban:rural setting, where personal spatio:temporal perceptions differ very widely from those obtaining either in a purely urban or a purely rural setting. Hence, generalization is inevitable while deriving inferences from a particular set of data. The findings of the study, therefore, may have to be read against this backdrop, where necessary.
1.15 **Chapter Scheme**

The Thesis has been divided into Eight Chapters as under:

- Chapter-1 : Introduction,
- Chapter-2 : Review of Literature,
- Chapter-3 : Profile of the Study Area: Solapur District,
- Chapter-4 : Personal and Family Profiles of Truck Drivers,
- Chapter-5 : Vehicles of Truck Drivers,
- Chapter-6 : Working Profile of Truck Drivers,
- Chapter-7 : Life-style of Truck Drivers
- Chapter-8 : Case Studies
- Chapter-9 : Conclusions and Suggestions.

The case studies (24) collected and the interview schedule used for collecting the primary data are in the Appendices and a Bibliography concludes the thesis.

**References**

7. Ibid., p.10.