

Indian Industry and Ethnicity:¹

A Study of Two Organizations in Mumbai

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With the process of globalization becoming all pervasive, mobilization on the basis of class seems to not only recede but is also being replaced by ethnicity. It was thus decided to conduct a study to look into this phenomenon. The study was conducted in Mumbai: one unit from the traditional sector and the other from a more recently established industry—a chemical—factory were chosen. In-depth interviews were carried out over a period of seven months with 163 employees in two units. The findings reveal that the competing groups in Mumbai Port Trust (MBPT) were the Maharashtrians on one hand, and the migrants from other states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu on the other. The Maharashtrians cornered the better jobs in MBPT and the 'dirty' jobs were left for the migrants. The issue of reservation also figured prominently during the interviews, especially amongst the MBPT workers. As compared to the MBPT workers, the Company C workers were more educated and urban in orientation. The issue of the sons of the soil was a noticeable problem as the Company C stood on the land once owned by the agri community in the Thane-Belapur belt. This led to a clash between the locals (agri community called gaonwallas) and the outsiders who came to work from the city. There was no transparency in the promotion policy, leading the workers to believe that the person to be promoted was first identified and qualifications then fixed.

Introduction

The industrial revolution completely changed the way people earned their living.

The introduction of machinery resulted in the proletariat coming into existence. They were drawn from the villages and since they did not spontaneously take to this new work,

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they were forced by work discipline, fines and master-servant laws, which threatened them with jail for breach of contract (Hammond and Hammond 1966: 196–247). Besides this, there was an absence of good sanitary arrangements and good working conditions. Workers were reduced to a commodity like any other article of consumption. Class conflict was seen as the only way by which the workers could alter their situation (Engels 1975: 309–583).

Classical social theorists also believed that class would supersede ethnicity, and other status-based identities would be eroded in the course of industrialization (Hector 1978: 311). The structural changes which sought to bring this about were separation of workplace and residence; increase in the scale of production; urbanization leading to the phenomenon of the melting pot; the break up of extended families; the establishment of universal education; and the greater efficiency of the labour and commodity markets. Jobs would be assigned on universalistic criteria and the web of rules would decide workplace conduct. Since ethnicity would have little impact on life itself, its force would diminish (Kerr et al. 1962; Moore 1965). The emphasis in fact was on the assimilation approach, which stressed that with industrialization the various ethnic groups would lose their own identity over a period of time.

In contrast to this, Nagel and Olzak (1982: 130) state that the development process emphasizes linguistic, religious and cultural differences and encourages mobilization on the basis of ethnicity. This has recently been reaffirmed by Amin (1997: 55) who states that in the era of globalization people, rather than asserting their class identities across

boundaries, are identifying themselves with race, ethnic group or religion.

Objectives of the study and Selection of the Organization

Given this background the present study, therefore, tries to examine the relevance of ethnic factors within industry. It examines how ethnic tendencies among industrial workers are operating within industry and explores its interface with industrial relations. It tries to probe the role of the management and the union in these dynamics, especially when workers are recruited or promoted. The study has been limited to two units in the geographical area of Mumbai.

The Indian industry was categorized into traditional industrial units like textiles, port and docks, jute or sugar units; and the other, large scale modern units with automation and mechanization. One unit each from these two sectors was chosen to make a comparative analysis. The selection of specific organizations was not intentional; rather it was a matter of getting the necessary cooperation both from the management and the workers, whilst maintaining the objectives of the research design.

Consequently, one of the prominent organizations in Mumbai, which fitted the traditional sector, is the Mumbai Port Trust (MBPT), which is governed by the rules applicable to Central Government employees. It was decided to focus on the cargo-handling workers of MBPT related to the Docks Department and the erstwhile Bombay Dock Labour Board (ex-BDLB), which was merged with the MBPT in 1994. The other organization was a modern chemical

unit, which permitted the researcher to collect the field data from its precincts.

Background of the Companies

After the transfer of the Port and Island of Bombay (now Mumbai) to the East India Company by Royal Charter in 1868, the Mumbai Port Trust Act of 1873 was passed and the administration and the properties of the company were vested in a public trust. In 1858, Mumbai was passed under the direct rule of the British Crown, and in 1873 the present statutory autonomous Port Trust was set up for administering the affairs of the Mumbai Port. The Port is now administered by a statutory body constituted under the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963. It is composed of 21 Trustees headed by the Chairman who is appointed by the Government. In 1997 there were 16 departments, which looked after the day-to-day administration of the Port.

The multifarious activities in a major port make the port a huge and complex organization unlike other industries. However, the main function of major ports is cargo-handling; loading into vessels the cargo intended for export and unloading from the vessels the cargo brought for import. There are two main groups of workers working on the docks. One, the principal dock labourers and the other, labourers working on other activities. The first group directly handles the cargo while the labourers in the other group only attend to the work other than handling the cargo. The cargo-handling labour can be further divided into two groups. One is the stevedores labour on board, and the other is the shore worker 'alongside' a vessel employed by the MBPT.

The former group is employed to work on board the ship by the stevedores, and the other group of workers belonging to Port Trust handle cargo from the landing point to the stacking point or vice versa. For cargoes handled in lighters, generally the lighter crew performs the duties of loading and unloading. As on 1997, there were 25,187 employees working in MBPT. Of these, about 8,930 workers were shore labourers, which included Shed Superintendents (SS), Assistant Shed Superintendents (ASS), Labour Inspectors (LI), Labour Supervisors, Clerk Grades I&II, Tally Clerks (TC), Sorters, *Morpia*², *Baroot*³, Cart Unloaders, Shoreworkers, etc. In addition, there were 6,006 stevedore workers, which included categories like Supervisors, Assistant Supervisors, Chargeman, Foreman, Dock Clerks and On Board workers.

In comparison with MBPT, the other organization chosen for the study, Company C (actual name withheld) is recent in origin and was promoted in 1965. It is located in the Thane-Belapur industrial belt of Mumbai and went on stream on 18 February 1968. Its initial product range covered Cymene, Phenol, Acetone, Phthalic Anhydride, Phthalate Plasticizers and Diacetone Alcohol. These lines were commissioned in 1967-68 using technology from internationally known Licensors like UOP, Scientific Design and BP Chemicals. These technologies have been fully absorbed and adapted to local conditions. Over the years, virtually every one of these plants has been de-bottlenecked and modernized to about double its original capacity.

Company C is a sophisticated petrochemical plant. It has the unique position of holding 'letters of intent' and licenses for a wide array of specialty chemicals. The

Company received the ICMA Award for Process Design and Process Engineering, through pioneering efforts in in-house research and development. It has been responsible for a number of new products, plants and product improvements. The total number of employees in Company C as in 1997 was 532. They were employed in three main departments, viz., Production, Maintenance and Technical. They are further divided into Six Groups from I to VI. The number of workers in the production unit is 229, in the maintenance 136, and in the technical section 60. These employees have various designations such as chargehand, senior plant operator, plant operator, boiler operator, mechanic, lab assistant, flaker, sub-plant operators, general labour, etc. The type of work these employees do differs from department to department even though the designations are similar. For instance, the work of the chargehand at the offsite would be different from that at the plant.

Methodology

In MBPT, the researcher initially focused on rapport building. This did help in allaying the fears of the respondents, tuning up the interview schedule and gaining knowledge of the lingua franca which helped in the interviews. Besides, as the workers were less educated and some of them even illiterate, there were problems of distances to be travelled, no fixed points of work and problems of language with a few workers. Nonetheless, most of the interviews, for the shore workers, were conducted at the 'gear branch' or container points at which they were posted. With regard to the 'on board' workers, interviews were held on board the ship,

sometimes on motorbikes, sometimes at their place of posting or at their place of residence. The final sample selected from the MBPT, therefore, broadly represented major categories of the offshore and onshore workers. Within these categories, the sample was chosen based on snowball technique rather than through the muster roll with random sampling.

The researcher began collecting the data in Company C only after the data collection was more or less finished at the MBPT. The first hurdle that the researcher came across in Company C was that interviews were to be conducted only in the office area and not in the plant premises. This robbed the researcher of a chance of having a free hand in choosing a random sample from the shop floor workers. The workers to be interviewed were introduced to the researcher by clerks at the time office. But after a few interviews, several other respondents were introduced to the researcher through their friends interviewed earlier. Four or five interviews were held during the day but sometimes several workers came together. A cabin was allotted to the researcher but it was to be shared with a management trainee. This made the interviewing difficult in the cabin because workers would not feel free to talk. Therefore, at times, the canteen or entrance steps of the personnel building or a chair and table just near there, or even the cloakroom were used for conducting interviews.

Another reason why one found it hard to adhere to a proportionate sample size was that, given the method of data collection, i.e., in-depth interviews, the researcher needed to listen to and answer various questions raised by the workers instead of only extracting data from them. Besides this, the notes were taken down only after the interview

was over and often some questions seemed to have been left out for which the respondent had once again to be contacted. As a result, it became necessary to contact the workers several times. Thus, several hours were spent with the respondent but not at one stretch. Further, the respondents wouldn't have opened up if a barrage of questions were hurled at them, as the objectives of the study were too sensitive. This would also mean hurrying up the process and not losing on the depth of the data. The difficulties encountered during the selection of representative samples in both the organizations led to a 'lesser representative' sample. The final sample sizes of workers from the MBPT and Company C were 95 and 68 respectively. This weakness was overcome, to some extent, through in-depth informal discussions with respondents. The total time spent in both the organizations was seven months. The generalization in the present study has to be taken within the above constraints.

Findings

Most workers (more than 90 per cent) interviewed in both the companies were above 30 years of age. This is because of a ban on recruitment in both the companies. The more specific reasons in MBPT is the introduction of new technology and containerization which reduced the chances of fresh recruitment, while Company C only recruited experienced hands. Those with more than 15 years of experience constituted more than 50 per cent of the respondents. In both the organizations, Maharashtrians formed nearly two-thirds of the workforce. The rest of the workforce came from other states.

While the work force in the ex-BDLB came from various regions of the country, that of the MBPT was largely Maharashtrians (91.1 per cent). With regard to ex-BDLB workforce, Bogaert (1970: 11) stated that the Muslims from Uttar Pradesh constituted a large number of stevedoring workers while Pathans from the North West Frontier Province were mainly winch drivers. During the 1965 hostilities between India and Pakistan, the Pathans lost their jobs and were repatriated to Pakistan. The tally clerks and supervisors were traditionally from Maharashtra, Goa or Mangalore. The baggers were Tamil speaking, loaders were Maharashtrians and stitchers were Gujaratis. This has largely remained the composition of the ex-BDLB workforce with the only addition being of workers from Madhya Pradesh who were decasualized in 1983. In MBPT, the Maharashtrian workers were mainly from the Deccan region of Maharashtra, i.e., from the districts of Ahmednagar, Nasik, Pune and Satara. The reason for this could be that about 80 per cent of the labourers employed in the docks were engaged in gangs recruited through the headmen or enterprising and intelligent coolies called *tolliwallas*⁴ from their villages (Royal Commission of Labour 1931).

However, the reason for the migrants being concentrated on jobs on board the ship may be because the workers from Maharashtra chose jobs which were less hazardous while those from other states had to take the jobs left over for them, which were hazardous and dangerous. The MBPT report of 1928-29 states that the police records show that the majority of fatal accidents occur on board the vessels and are caused by falling into open holds. The Chaudhari Committee Report (1957: 230) states that the Industrial Tribunals and other competent authorities

consistently stated that the requirements of stevedoring work were of a higher order than those of shore work. Since the space on board a ship is limited, the number of stevedore labour working simultaneously was restricted. As a result of this the strength of members of a gang working on ships is also smaller in number (eight) than those engaged on the quay and shed (13). The stevedore labour had also to work in hatches which were stuffy and cooped up. However, the labour representatives in 1956 did not accept such reasons and stated that both the jobs were equally tough. The arguments against this proposition were that the shore workers are exposed to other types of risks such as being run over by vehicular traffic, breaking down of gear, etc. Nonetheless, the researcher's observation was that the ex-BDLB workers worked in unhygienic conditions without much ventilation, and handled bulk cargo such as sulphur and phosphate, which the shore workers do not touch. There were no canteen facilities available in mid-stream where only ex-BDLB workers worked. Board workers could also get injured mid-stream. The ex-BDLB did not have an ambulance until 15 October 1981, when a fatal accident at 12-B ID occurred, leading to the death of a foreman.

Even the all India figures for reportable accidents for the years 1988 to 1998 confirm that the number of accidents and the frequency rate of these accidents on board were higher than those on shore. However, this was not true of the number of accidents taking place in MBPT, but the frequency rates except for the years 1992 and 1993 were certainly higher for the on board than for the on shore workers (Appendix 1). Moreover, all the workers interviewed stated that the

work at ex-BDLB was more hazardous than MBPT work.

The lower wages of on board workers may be a reason that could partly explain the concentration of non-Maharashtrians in on board jobs. According to the Labour Appellate Tribunal (1956: 57), a shore gang worker was getting Rs 3-8-0 a day as against Rs 3-6-0, the wage of the junior stevedore gang worker till 13 November 1948. Even the sample shows that the MBPT workers were paid higher than the ex-BDLB workers. The average pay of ex-BDLB workers was Rs 6,000 while that of MBPT workers was Rs 6,202. Official figures for the MBPT also show that the ex-BDLB workers on an average earned Rs 7,860.82 while the MBPT workers earned Rs 8,715.27.

Thus migrants picked up work which the dominant regional community, whether Hindu or Muslim, were not interested in. Even the Maharashtrian loaders in ex-BDLB worked on shore like their MBPT counterparts. They also were from the same region as the shore workers. However, recently, due to few jobs available to them, they were being posted on board the ship. Another instance of this was prior to 1974 when the MBPT gang workers refused to work on dirty cargo and there were special *bone meal* gangs who were Scheduled Caste (SC) workers from Maharashtra and Scheduled Castes and Muslims from Andhra Pradesh.

One Morpia interviewed stated:

Previously our supervisors used to ask whether we would work in 'Haddi' or leather products. If we said no, they would give us any other work. There were special *bone meal* gangs who used to handle this cargo. I had not worked with such 'dirty'

cargo for any day in my 25 years of service, but a few days ago I had to work because two gang members were not ready to work on such cargo and I had to cover up for them. I then went home, did *Puja path* and had a bath. Previously when I knew that this cargo was being handled I used to withdraw my card. Today we have to do all kinds of work.

Subsequently, the special gangs disappeared when the Port Trust insisted that MBPT workers had to do all kind of work from 1974 onwards, though even today some gangs refuse to touch such cargo. This was also true of ex-BDLB workers who after securing a job in the Dock Labour Board refused to touch dirty cargo and the General Purpose Mazdoor (GPM) gangs came into existence.

The majority of the MBPT workforce were mainly Marathas from the Deccan region. According to the management, they were sturdy men who were fit for a tough job like lifting cargo and pushing the handcart, especially in earlier times when the wharf was not tarred. On the other hand, the people from Konkan region were perceived by the management as being unfit to do the job of a shore worker and dominated the clerical cadre. This differentiation in terms of the region was also reflected in the membership of trade unions. The Transport and Dock Workers Union was supposed to be dominated by the workers from the Deccan region while the workers from the Konkan region got greater representation in the Bombay Port Trust Employees Union. This distribution of the workers between the two unions was probably due to their initial focus of organizing the dock worker. In the early 1930s, the Bombay Port Trust Employees Union had focused its attention on organ-

izing clerical workers of the MBPT while the Transport and Dock Workers Union (TDWUB) laid stress on decasualization of dock workers. Nonetheless, workers stated that the two unions were led by leaders from two different regions. Thus there seems to be some clustering of communities performing particular tasks in MBPT.

Similarly, in Company C, the Agree community who were included under the OBC list was mainly concentrated in the engineering department which was more of manual work, while the higher caste controlled the more sophisticated technical and production departments. There were very few Scheduled Caste persons employed in Company C as compared to the MBPT, the reason for this being the reservation of jobs in public undertakings. Thus, overall the social hierarchy seems to have been maintained in Company C, though one did see a few lower castes penetrating these bastions.

A comparative analysis of the sample workers shows that in the case of Company C, over 90 per cent of the workers were Hindus, Muslims being almost absent, while in the MBPT Hindus constituted two-thirds of the sample, the rest being from other communities. Muslims were strongly represented amongst the ex-BDLB workers. However, with regard to the Muslim workers, non-Muslim workers in both the companies perceived them as living a low quality of life and not worth having as neighbours. Muslim workers were considered pro-Pakistan and were believed to have large families. Muslim workers also had their own prejudices against the workers from other communities. The same was the case with regard to the prejudices between Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST), and non-SC/ST workers. There were only a few workers who

did not believe in the distinction of caste or creed and had no reservation even when it came to the institution of marriage. The only festival officially celebrated in Company C was Dussehra. *Satyanarayan Poojas* were held once in a while. Besides religious activities, workers were linked to cricket clubs, participated in poetry competitions, were members of an astronomy club, belonged to a group called *Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti* (Blind Faith Eradication Committee), organized inoculation camps, were actively associated with earthquake and flood relief works, organized blood donation and medical camps, and so on. On the other hand, many MBPT workers helped their own community members by providing them a place to stay when they first came to Mumbai. They joined institutions, associations, and religious groups that linked them to their communities. Workers helped their own community members by assigning them some place to stay when the latter came to Mumbai, and it was followed by looking out jobs for them. Some of them lived in their own identified communities and joined banks, cooperative societies, and institutions run by their communities. For instance, the workers from Madhya Pradesh formed the *Rewa Sahbhagi Sangh* while the Tamilians formed the Bombay Youth Welfare Association, which holds various functions for Tamilians. Some Christian workers hold masses in the communities where they live. The Satara and Sangli workers run a *Pathpedhi* among themselves, which is a type of a credit society. A few other workers joined political outfits like DMK, Dalit Panthers, Shiv Sena, and so on. Another common religious activity practised by the Port workers was that the workers visited the *Mumbadevi* temple on the 10th or 11th of every month. They offered *prasad* at *Mumbadevi*, the

goddess of Mumbai. These offerings were a request to *Mumbadevi* to keep them secure during their dangerous work. Besides, they chose their friends from amongst their own community. One could observe Maharashtrians with Maharashtrians and Tamils with Tamilians walking to work or playing cards together.

As regards the type of family, more than 60 per cent of the workers lived in nuclear households. Most of the workers did not have more than three children. The Company C workers were more educated, earned more, had better educated fathers, had even working wives, and were more attached to the city than the MBPT workers. For instance, the average wages that Company C workers earned were Rs 11,382 (approx.) while the MBPT workers averaged about Rs 6,601 (approx.). Three quarters of the work-force in the MBPT had studied only upto SSC or below, while the graduates and post-graduates were managers (46 per cent) in Company C. Fifty per cent of the workers in MBPT had illiterate fathers while this was only 25 per cent in case of Company C. Workers originating from villages were higher in the MBPT than those in Company C. The workers belonging to urban areas was more than half in Company C while in MBPT, the workers belonging to rural areas was around 60 per cent. About 45 per cent of the MBPT workers lived in slums while more than 80 per cent of the respondents in Company C owned flats. With regards to working wives, about two-thirds were wives of the employees of Company C, while the rest belonged to the employees of MBPT. With regard to the commitment to the 'urban way of life', more than 70 per cent of the MBPT workers were sure of migrating to their places of origin while this attitude was much less amongst

the Company C workers. There was a strong tendency among the Port workers to frequently visit their villages. In contrast, in Company C, the workforce was quite committed and the management did not even have to maintain absenteeism records. Thus, the family backgrounds of Company C workers distinctly differed from those of the MBPT workers.

There emerged a new breed of workers (in Company C) who are urban based, and highly educated with a consumerist culture. This certainly had an impact on the industrial relations climate in the organization. Their overall relationship with the management was cordial. Some of the workers emphasized on cooperation and a safe distance from political parties in order to maintain peace at the workplace. The management also tended to neutralize the influence of the militant union workers by promoting them or by subcontracting work to them.

On the other hand, the two main unions in MBPT, the Transport and Dock Workers Union (TDWU), Bombay and the Bombay Port Trust Employees Union (BPTEU), have a long history of militancy. Since the 1980s, two all-India strikes were held due to the breakdown in wage negotiations, the most recent being in the year 2000. In MBPT, strikes lasting for a day or two were considered normal and most of the annual reports mentioned that the industrial relations situation in the Port was peaceful in spite of such occurrences. However, the power of trade unions has recently been declining. Venkata Ratnam (1997: 464) states that modern cargo handling technology has eroded the numerical strength among the dock workers. The role of physical labour has declined and modern ports are becoming white-collared. This has resulted in a shift of

control from labour to management. Besides this, the voluntary retirement scheme, ban on recruitment, movement towards a single cargo handling agency, and the construction of Nhava Sheva have resulted in a decline of the union power.

The ethnic factors also depleted the power of unions, especially in the MBPT. The workforce stood more divided on Maharashtrian and non-Maharashtrian lines. The decasualization of GPM workers also brought to the fore the competition for jobs amongst the Maharashtrian and non-Maharashtrian workers. In fact, North Indian identity was the principal identity for mobilizing the workforce mainly from Madhya Pradesh in 1983. This division between them widened further when the scrap levy was to be distributed and the GPM workers were to be transferred to the senior workers pool. In the opinion of the GPM workers, it was a Maharashtrian Union leader who stalled the disbursement of this levy due to the GPM workers and their transfer to the senior workers pool was also stalled due to ethnic divisions within the union. In 1989, when the TDWU made another plea for the decasualization of 800 workers involved in the handling of bulk cargo, one of the union members known to espouse the 'Maharashtrian cause' was said to have left out all the Tamilian workers from the list put forward for the decasualization. Interestingly, even the Maharashtrian workers themselves were divided between the workers from the 'ghats' and those from the Konkan region. The dearth of jobs in Mumbai and especially in the organized sector often led to snide remarks being passed between members of different communities. There seemed to be a lot of rivalry between the Maharashtrians on one side and the non-Maharashtrians,

especially Tamilians and migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, on the other. In the process, these ethnic groups developed a number of prejudices against each other. One South Indian Tally clerk stated:

When we go to the shed for our bookings, one of the Shed Superintendents said *Yeh Kaliye Aa Gaye. Ye Madrasi ne humari naukari chheen li hai*. They go on using the word *Madrasi* (people from Madras—now called Chennai—the capital of Tamil Nadu) in their conversation and irritate us.

On the other hand a Maharashtra worker stated:

The officers are mostly South Indians. None of them know anything. I wonder how they are recruited. I do not know from where they were picked up and brought here. They do not know how to talk. I wonder whether they have any qualifications for the jobs they have been engaged in.

Likewise, the Maharashtra dock workers called the worker from Uttar Pradesh 'Bhayas', the non-Maharashtrian groups called the Maharashtra *ghatis* who cannot understand English and were 'good for nothing'. Interestingly, even the Maharashtra workers themselves were divided between the workers from the 'ghats' and those from the Konkan region.

The process of decasualization had enabled various ethnic groups to enter into permanent employment, and the policy of recruiting 'sons of employees' enabled these ethnic groups to control these jobs. For in-

stance, in the case of ex-BDLB, many workers declared themselves medically unfit at 59 years and six months. Further, the sons of employees recruited were not required to be registered by the employment exchange. Thus the employment of 'sons of employees' enabled the migrant workers to beat the system of recruitment through the employment exchange. On the other hand since 1979, the Shiv Sena had been agitating for the recruitment of local persons in the Docks by organizing *morchas* and publishing articles in their weekly *Marmik*. Recently, it had set up several points at the Manganese Ore Depot (MOD) and Sewri Timber Point (STP) from where it supplied the local labour. It insisted that the workers be recruited through the employment exchange. However, the general feeling in the docks is that the Shiva Sena was not effective in the docks and only had a say in the state government offices, the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), banks, etc. The merger of ex-BDLB with the MBPT accentuated the ethnic divide. The MBPT union leaders insisted that the promotion channels of existing employees (mainly Maharashtra) of the then MBPT should not be affected. They stated that by the merger, their tally clerks should not suffer and, therefore, the merger should not allow promotion into their channel allowed to ex-BDLB tally clerks (mainly immigrants from other states of India), even though the work done was the same. They also stated that some of these tally clerks did not have the minimum qualification (SSC) and, therefore, no common channel for promotions was possible. For the MBPT tally clerks, promotions were faster and the ex-BDLB tally clerks stated that the MBPT tally clerks who joined in the same year as they did have been granted four to five promotions, while

the former did not get promotions for years. Besides this, they did not get bookings on points where the 'speed money'⁵ could be made. The SC/ST workers alleged that they were being discriminated against by the caste Hindus, as they were not given the 'Wet' or 'Dubai' postings.

Reservations played almost no significant role in ex-BDLB. Many senior workers who were SCs did not show much awareness to the term. On the other hand, in MBPT, due care was taken to apply the reservations whilst recruiting and promoting SC/STs. All these efforts, especially granting of promotions, created a rift and led to several prejudices between the general category workers and the SC/STs. The general candidates despised the reserved candidates because of the reservations. They felt that by promoting young SC/ST candidates, their chances of promotion were blocked. They also stated that the SC/ST got promotions faster than the general candidates did. A Non-SC/ST Association was formed to protest against the implementation of the reservations. On the other hand, the SC/ST workers stated that the reservations were absolutely necessary without which it would not have been possible for them to get a job in the Port.

Such has been the animosity between the two groups that a case against the reservations for SC/STs was filed in the Bombay High Court by the Bombay Port Trust Non-Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes Employees Association. The SC/ST Association came into existence because the influential trade unions were alleged to be lethargic when it came to the issue of the reservations. However, even the SC/ST Association showed no enthusiasm when it came to the issues related to the STs, especially that pertaining to the identity of H.M. Kolis as a

tribal group. This gave an impression that the Association was only interested in representing the SCs. In fact, the SCs, like the general category workers, appeared to despise the STs who got promotions faster as the reserved posts for them exceeded the availability of suitable candidates.

As regards the work conditions in Company C, the personnel manual for non-covenanted staff lays down certain rules for recruitment in the Company. Permanent vacancies are generally filled by promotion from within the company whenever possible. If a suitable candidate is not available, a candidate from outside is appointed. Everything else being equal, preference may be given to a worker's son or daughter as per the agreement with the union. Besides this, other issues also confronted the management at Company C. For instance, before the Thane-Belapur belt of industries came into existence, CIDCO and MIDC acquired land in the area and developed it to provide space for the industries and in the process displaced a large number of farmers in the area. These farmers, who belonged to the *agri* community, then pressurized the units through political pressure or agitation for providing them jobs. The villagers (*gaonwallas*) stated that since their land had been taken away at a meagre price and they were not adequately compensated by the government for this loss, they had lost their traditional source of livelihood and, therefore, should be given jobs. These locals who got jobs in Company C were not sympathetic to other workers whom they termed 'outsiders'. The outsiders alleged that the latter were very harsh and they were scared of them. There were also occasions when they attacked the management because they wanted jobs and the company did not relent.

Since Company C was built on their land, they thought the land still belonged to them. The management of Company C did provide jobs to local workers, and this policy also helped them in times of difficulty such as the labour unrest. For instance, the management had also cultivated the *gaonwallas* by subcontracting out certain work to their organization called the *Shramik Kamgar Sangathan*. This organization later helped the management during a strike. This had further alienated the locals from those whom they termed the outsiders. Nonetheless, subcontracting to the local workers not only placated them but also gave legitimacy to the Shiv Sena leader of the area who espoused the cause of the 'sons of the soil'.

One of the Shiv Sainik leaders working with the company stated:

The company has given jobs to those recommended by me. The company has also taken people when our leader Mr X had recommended them. I have good relations with the company and often meet the top management.

However, one of the managers stated:

Where a Bengali was the Head of a Department, all Bengalis were recruited. Likewise, when a senior chemist was from Karnataka in the laboratory, all Kannadigas were recruited. This is the usual practice and it occurs in all the industries. Company C is no exception.

This way, Bengalis used to dominate the production, the South Indians the accounts, and the *gaonwallas* (local Maharashtrians) were employed as the general labour. The

villagers are concentrated in the maintenance section because they were previously not educated and the only jobs available to them were those of the helpers. The management stated that, previously, Maharashtra did not have trained personnel so recruitment was from all the corners of the country. The dominance of Bengalis in the beginning may have been because earlier the synthetic and chemical factories were situated in the east and the company required experienced and trained human power. The management also stated that they did not believe in one caste or creed. The most important factor was whether the person was suitable for the post.

Besides this, the management faced a lot of pressure from different quarters like the Provident Fund Commissioner's Office, Labour Commissioner's Office, local leaders, ministers and corporatists to give employment to their people. If employment is not provided, money is demanded. So far the management had refused to pay money, even though many companies in the area had been paying such money under pressure. The management stated that even Mr X and Mr Y, who are Shiv Sena leaders, are told that if a candidate was not suitable enough, the management would not recruit the person.

The sons of employees were also employed out of the way by the company and sometimes, with inadequate qualifications. Employees believed that by virtue of their working in the company for several years, it became their right to have their sons employed there. However, the management was not very favourable to such 'in breeding' which, for them, affected the production as only those who did not find jobs approached

them. It was also true that a few workers whose children received better education aspired for better avenues for them.

With regard to the promotion, workers stated that the management did not have any policy and it favoured people who were loyal to them. Even workers who worked hard and sincerely were not necessarily promoted. There was no transparency in the system; at the same time there were few posts. At times, seniority in the Company was considered while at other times it was the plant seniority. Being a union leader or 'closeness' to the management was seen as an important factor for inducing promotion. Workers tried to get involved in various programmes in the company so that they could get closer to the management and prove their worth. Others stated that there was a strong South Indian lobby and only if one belonged to the same caste to which the boss belonged, did he have better chances for promotion. One of the respondents thus stated:

A person from UP has not been promoted even though he is a Ph.D. This is because he is from UP. People from Karwar are quickly promoted. Promotion takes place on the basis of caste; for instance, a Brahmin promotes a Brahmin.

They stated that prerequisite qualifications are molded to suit the prospective candidate. However, the management stated that those employees who worked well and honestly were called *chamchas* by their colleagues. The company could not have a fixed criterion for promotions as the technical skills, and levels of education of recruited workers have changed over a period of time. There was no bias or favouritism.

Conclusion and Discussion

Thus we can see from the above discussion that ethnicity, far from receding and being displaced by class, seems to be replacing it. Job clustering (see Morris 1965: 82–133) observed in the pre-independence period seems to be very much in place, though the jobber was no more. However, observations made by a few workers in Company C clearly showed that jobbers were replaced by officers who recruited from their own communities. Clustering were also due to the employer's specific notions about the adaptability of special groups—not necessarily caste groups—to specific types of work. In this case, workers from Konkan region mainly worked in the clerical cadre while those from Satara, Pune, Kohlapur, etc., worked as shore labour. The National Commission of Labour (1969: 77) made similar observations. Persons who handle some types of cargo come from a geographical area that is quite different from those who handle others. The evidence suggests that because some groups have been identified as suited to particular types of work, employers have shown a preference for them.

Of the several reasons given for the Maharashtrians clustering in MBPT and non-Maharashtrians in ex-BDLB, the reason that jobs were less hazardous and dangerous and 'clean' in MBPT seems to be the most plausible one. Piore's (1979: 35–43) theory of labour market segmentation neatly explains this labour composition in MBPT. According to the theory, the dominant group grabs well-paid jobs with decent working conditions and opportunities for advancement. In this case, the Maharashtrians in MBPT cornered

the good jobs while jobs in the informal sector, which were time and again decasualized to make up the ex-BDLB, were occupied by the in-migrants from other states. Besides this, the jobs on board the ship which were finally occupied by migrants were not only more dangerous than those on the wharf, but the facilities provided in MBPT were far more superior to those provided at ex-BDLB. Another instance of this was even within the shore workers, where certain gangs were employed to do the dirty work, i.e., handle manganese ore and *bone meal*. These gang members belonged to the SC groups from AP or Maharashtra or were Muslims from Andhra Pradesh. This practice continued officially till 1974. Often, acquiring formal employment resulted in the refusal to perform 'dirty' tasks which went to migrants. A case in point is the GPM category from MP. In Coimbatore, Ramaswamy (1979: 308) makes a similar comment and states that though the mill workers came from a wide variety of castes, there were very few Brahmins as they rated mill jobs poorly.

Bonachich's (1972: 547-59) split labour market theory further helps in explaining the dynamics of ethnic relations in the MBPT. The split labour market develops when two ethnically different groups of workers compete for the same jobs at different costs to employers. Since the employer is interested in increasing profits, they substitute the low priced worker with the higher priced labour. The higher priced group, in order to counter the threat to its interest, could use two strategies: one, exclusion of the lower priced groups through legal restrictions on immigration or second, the creation of a caste system which limits lower priced labour to jobs which are undesirable. The Maharashtrians used both these strategies. For in-

stance, the Shiv Sena had been agitating for the recruitment of local persons in the Docks by organizing *morchas* and publishing articles in their weekly *Marmik*. They also emphasised on recruiting through the employment exchange, as this policy would leave out in-migrants with less than 15 years domicile. Thus, legal restrictions were placed on immigrants in an indirect manner. Moreover, the stand of the Shiv Sena chief with regard to in-migration to Mumbai is too well-known. Recently, this phenomenon has also been extended to the informal sector. The Kamgar Sena itself supplied labour at several points viz., MOD, STP, etc., on a day-to-day basis. Nonetheless, such practices of local unions resulted in caste restrictions. Another strategy used not only by the MBPT workers but also the decasualized ex-BDLB workers, was the recruitment of sons of employees. The policy of recruiting 'sons of employees' only strengthened the present incumbents' hold over the jobs. Many workers took advantage of their advanced age and got themselves declared medically unfit on the eve of retirement so that their sons could be employed in their place. Further, the sons of employees recruited were not necessarily expected to be registered in an employment exchange—otherwise the rule in the labour market. Thus, the employment of 'sons of employees', besides being an ethnic strategy, enabled the migrants of ex-BDLB to beat the system of employing through the employment exchange, which was often proposed by the Shiv Sena. Thus, this was a case when the most disadvantaged group takes work which no one else does. These people, over time, develop partial monopoly over jobs which contemporaneously have become attractive due to the surplus labour market and ever swelling

number of in-migrants (Holmstrom 1985: 38).

In contrast to the MBPT, in Company C there existed a cultural division of labour. Here, Hector's (1979: 311) observation becomes relevant—according to him, individuals with different cultural markers are distributed through an occupation. The higher caste workers in Company C occupied the jobs of operators, which were considered to be as good as white collar jobs (see Blauner 1967: 179–82), while the Other Backward Communities (OBC) occupied jobs of mechanics which they had acquired through the 'sons of the soil' movement. Thus, the observation of Holmstrom (1978: 54) finds relevance here—that a factory hierarchy can be termed as a modern equivalent to the traditional caste hierarchy. In the present case, the OBCs took up jobs as mechanics as compared to the outsiders who worked as operators.

The management of Company C also used ethnicity, nepotism and favouritism in the employment and promotions as a way of gaining control over the workers. In the Thane-Belapur industrial belt where Company C is located, government corporations acquired land in the area and developed it to provide space for the industries. In the process, they displaced a large number of farmers in the area. These farmers, who belonged to the *agri* community, then pressurized the units (through political pressure or agitation) to provide them jobs. The villagers stated that since their land had been taken away at a meagre price and they were not adequately compensated by the government for this loss, they had lost their traditional source of livelihood and, therefore, should be given jobs. These workers who got jobs in Company C were not sympathetic to

other workers whom they termed 'outsiders'. Some of the workers who were not *gaonwallas* (locals) alleged that the *gaonwallas* were very harsh and employers were scared of them. There were also occasions when they attacked the management because they wanted jobs and the company did not relent. Since the company was built on their land, they thought the land still belonged to them. The management of Company C, in this regard, stated that they had provided jobs to local workers out of a sense of social responsibility. This policy also placated the Shiv Sena leaders of the area and also helped the management in times of difficulty, such as the labour unrest. The management of Company C had cultivated these locals by subcontracting certain activities to their organization called the *Shramik Kamgar Sangathan*. This organization later helped the management during strikes. This had further alienated the *gaonwallas* from those whom they termed the 'outsiders'.

Further, with the growing unemployment, workers of Company C, like those of the MBPT, insisted that the sons of the employees should be recruited. However, the workers whose children did well aspired for better avenues for them. Such cases were very few. Thus a worker on a job also tries to give it a hereditary character because of the growing competition (Morris 1960: 185).

The competition was also seen at the place of work. In order to earn 'speed money', there was a tussle over the postings between the general category workers and the SC/STs. The general candidates also despised the reserved candidates because of the reservations in jobs. They formed the Non-SC/ST Association. The SC/ST Association on the other hand came into existence because the operating trade unions were alleged to

be lethargic when it came to the issue of the reservations. This situation similar to Bains' (1994: 181–89) observation that the non-SC/ST respondents revealed unfavourable attitudes to the statutory privileges. Those who were directly affected by the reservation policy showed more unfavourable attitudes than those not affected by it. This resulted in the mobilization of a socially affected group, i.e., the non-SC/ST workers. The reservation policy, instead of narrowing the gap between SC/ST and the general categories, only widened it. It led to a distasteful relationship between the employees, but the resentment was primarily against the government rather than against their SC/ST colleagues. Most of them were willing to concede the reservation in jobs for SC/STs, but not in the matter of promotions. In a society where jobs are scarce and unemployment high, preferential treatment is likely to create deep resentment. This was true of SC workers who appeared to despise the STs who got promotions faster as the reserved

posts for them exceeded the availability of suitable candidates. The same was the case in Company C, where the jealousy between the outsiders and *gaonwallas* was high.

The process of globalization will accentuate these tendencies as the jobber will once again have a say in recruitment, and the tendency of workers to be concentrated in particular sections of a factory on the basis of relationship and place of origin will get accentuated. In MBPT Port authorities, in the name of shortage of regular dock workers, freely give 'No Objection Certificates' to consignees of cargo to employ contract labour for loading/unloading their cargo while in Company C the *Shramik Kamgar Sangathan* had already bagged a few contracts. Thus, according to Heuze (1996: 246), with the increasing scarcity of jobs, exacerbated by massive unemployment, the allocation of even casual jobs has become a stake for all communities. There is a decreasing number of cases of competition 'based on merit' in the labour market.

NOTES

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1. Ethnicity is broadly defined 'as a group of people (whether majority or minority) with cross-cutting class membership, sharing a consciousness which could be based on caste, religion, regional identity, language, etc. Such a group is formed to act cohesively and to differentiate it from other collectivities in a social system in order to compete for wealth, power and prestige' (Noronha 1996).

2. After decasualization the *Morpias* became head of the gang in MBPT that loads or unloads cargo. He supervises the gang. He is the Head of the gang.
3. The *Baroot* category stacks the cargo unloaded from the ship in the shed.
4. Prior to decasualization the contractors were called upon to supply the necessary amount of labour as each vessel got ready for loading or unloading. They were known as *Tolliwallas* or *Serangs*.
5. Speed Money is an amount demanded to release the cargo from the Sheds, to unload cargo from the hatch, etc. In short, it means money to be paid to get work done faster. The Sheds are divided into Dry, Wet and Dubai postings from low to high premiums to be paid in that order.

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