

THE DARZIS OF METIABURJ

(A STUDY IN THE ORGANIZATION OF TAILORING
AS AN OCCUPATION)

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INTRODUCTION

Tailoring as an occupation is known to be pursued in India for centuries. Though the stitched pieces of garments appeared as early as 11th century and sewn military uniform has been in vogue even earlier since the third century B. C., it is only since the 13th century¹ A. D. that tailored garments became widespread enough to make tailoring to be pursued as one of the occupations in India (Fabri, 21 : 1960). It has largely been an urban occupation drawing people from various castes and communities, including Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims. The Muslims are in overwhelmingly large number and predominate in the occupation. In Calcutta, tailors belonging to various regions and drawn from many castes and communities, can be observed but a very large majority of those pursuing the occupation are Muslims, largely concentrated in the suburbs of the city namely Metiaburj and Santoshpur. In these areas it operates by and large as traditional occupation or an occupation that has been traditionalised since several generations and the group that pursues it has a degree of cohesiveness within a social structural framework.

The object of the study : The object of the study is to have some idea of the entire social organization of tailoring trade carried on by a group of people pursuing it as a traditional occupation. It was also of interest to observe how the urban complex of Calcutta acts and reacts on the tailoring community of Metiaburj and how far the groups identified as tailors continue to be wedded to the occupation or in other words is there any significant evidence of diversification in their occupational pursuits.

METHODS OF FIELDWORK

After an initial reconnoitre visit to the various settlements of Darzis (tailors) in Metiaburj during Nov. 1971, it appeared to us that there

1. "There is a true milestone with the arrival of the Iranian and central Asian fashions. Not only do women now accept sewn garments, which they had never worn before, and not only do they henceforth cover their upper bodies, which they never did before, but the dress of the men is totally changed" observes Charles Fabri in 'A History of the Indian Dress' 1960, p-24.
