

***Bhosale Balkrishna*** Professor at University of Mumbai, India;

bvbhosale@hotmail.com

***Khanderao Prasenjeet*** Research Assistant at University of Mumbai, India;

prasenjeetsocio@sociology.mu.ac.in

***Veselov Yury*** Professor at St-Petersburg State University, Russia;

yurivitalievichveselov@yahoo.com

***Karapetyan Ruben*** Associate Professor at St-Petersburg State University, Russia;

ruben.v.karapetyan@gmail.com

***Sinyutin Mikhail*** Professor at St-Petersburg State University, Russia;

sinewtin@yandex.ru

**A comparative study on craft (as exemplified by shoemaking businesses in Saint-Petersburg and Mumbai).<sup>1</sup>**

**Annotation.**

The actual paper elaborates on analytical model of the comparative sociological study on shoemaking craft in two big modern metropolises – Mumbai (India) and Saint-Petersburg (Russia). The authors take as a premise an idea that similarity of shoemakers' objectives and algorithms of their professional strategies represent commonality of two shoemaking practices under study, their social context and structure. The analysis covers the nature of capitalistic development in both countries and reveals points of similarity and difference. The acquired data provides further grounds for comparative study on institutional structures of Saint-Petersburg and Mumbai. The authors explore peculiarities of historical development and social roles of cities in Russia and India. They suggest a multilevel system of comparison of key social parameters of metropolitan

---

<sup>1</sup> The materials are prepared within the scope of project “Institutionalization of shoe craft in the setting of a modern metropolis as exemplified by Saint-Petersburg (Russia) and Mumbai (India) and supported by grant from “Khamovniky”, social researches support fund.

institutional environment. The research ends up in systemic comparison of social contexts of shoemaking representatives' communicative practices obtained in both cities. As a result of the study, it has been revealed that shoemaking practices of two cities under study exist in conditions of different levels of consumer demand and different cultural attitudes. The predominant number of shoemakers in the streets of both cities is represented by comers migrated from other countries using local ethnic communities as a means for fulfilling their working practice. A model of analysis developed by the authors of the article forms the basis for empirical study of artisans from different kinds of social environment.

**Key words:** comparative social studies, analytical model, metropolis, craft.

### **Introduction**

Sociology frequently applies comparison as a method of learning the objective reality. It partially resembles the comparative analysis and generally presupposes defining similarities and differences of objects under research. In the course of the comparison, it is important to work out subjects' qualities bearing the traits of comparability and a number of criteria that provide overall grounds for comparison. While looking for methodological basis for using instruments of research on shoemaking (undoubtedly, a method of comparison is actually an instrument for unbiased scrutiny of these practices), we were guided by E. Durkheim's statement that comparative sociology is, essentially, sociology itself [Durkheim, 1995, p. 115]] and, consequently, the method of comparison is an obligatory tool for getting to the heart of subjects and phenomena. In the process of developing our research strategy we also followed the idea that "in sociology method of comparison performs the part of the indirect experiment and sets a goal similar to the experimental method's one – checking cause-effect relationship postulated in theory, that is, giving the explanation" [Rezayev, Tregubova, 2012, p. 49].

Maxim Kovalevsky used the comparative study to determine similarities of different societies [Kovalevsky, 2007, p. 13]. However, distinctive features also may be revealed through this method. Therefore, a modern sociological study having comparative approach in its basis presupposes an analytical model, which enables distinguishing the common and the specific alongside with their complex interconnection. In the course of developing our comparative study, we were basing our assumptions on an idea that similarity of shoemakers' objectives and algorithms of their professional strategies represent commonality of two shoemaking practices under study, their social context and structure. The comparative historical approach offered us an opportunity to define the changes dynamics of institution of craft and, at the same time, monitor its well-established characteristics. In this case, we managed to get an answer to the question "what were the things? – what are the things now?" For instance, the domination of manual labour still remains a common circumstance, while the difference lies in the fact that shoemaking craft mostly used to be the production business, but now it has turned into the service.

The comparative cross-country method was applied to discover socio-cultural peculiarities of craft in Russia and India. It enabled us to define the stereotypes of shoemaking craft existing in these cultures, value parameters providing its reproduction and economic expedience of artisanal labour. For example, in Russia shoemaker's craft comprises the distinct national component, while in India it is specifically characterized by the caste continuity. Moreover, the present comparative study was conducted with the purpose of revealing similarities and differences between Saint-Petersburg and Mumbai and also explore principles that would be occasionally and crucially necessary for relations underlying regular processes of shoemaking craft's institutionalization. Sociological studies on cities done by many prominent scholars (take M. Weber [Weber, 1994] or Castels [Castels, 1989]) have always been based on comparison of various urban social environments. In recent years there have been done a number of high-quality comparative sociological researches of Russian and Indian metropolises (see:

[Bombay, 2003; Bombay and, 2003], [de Wit, 2017]). Without getting into specifics, we would like to make reference to the fact that while choosing Mumbai as an Indian city to compare with Saint-Petersburg, we tried to emphasize a different aspect. Hence, we considered metropolitan social structures as a mere background for life activity of a small professional group – artisanal shoemakers who represent population of both cities. The given study must be regarded as unique, predominantly based on the authors' experience in the field of economic sociology [Economicheskaya, 2012].

### **Comparison of social patterns**

A study on the dynamics of social patterns' development offered us the possibility of defining the priorities of shoemaking craft, its basic features and integration into the cultural field of social environments. Besides, it gave us the chance to conduct a comparative analysis on forms of shoemaking craft in its modern state. In case with Russia, we have a specific household system, which was borrowed from Soviet times. Its key features, unity and centralization, have always brought to naught any possible chances of developing a heterogeneous system [Veselov, Sinyutin, etc., 2016]. Even in spite of all dramatic changes introduced into the former soviet economic system, its resource and technology-based fundamentals still exist. Alongside with that, mining and manufacturing industries, coupled with military-industrial complex, keep their leading positions. The historical heritage of Indian economy comprises several things – a colonial status of the country, removed only 70 years ago, and multiple forms of economic life (from manual waste processing and out to state-of-the-art software). An absence of economic dominant gives rise to coexistence of various forms of economic management and property relations. In Russia, on the contrary, the government continues to regulate the economy, while in India after 1991 deregulation of the economy and withdrawal of State from some of the important sectors which has affected the sections of populations. Moreover, Russian state apparatus (in other words, bureaucratic system) continues to be an integral part of structuring social

environment, whereas Indian society is under a strong influence of traditional social hierarchy (the caste-varna system). Professional division of labour and distribution of human resources over professions and kinds of activity are under its considerable control. Following Thorstein Veblen's words [Veblen, 1898-9], in spite of all the innate conservatism, institutional forms contribute to provision of continuity and integrity of social ties. They survive for this very reason, despite being of archaic character. Modern technologies, challenging both systems, find in their institutional forms a great deal of resistance. However, at the same time they possess potential for development and replacement of old institutions. That is why it is of the utmost importance for us to keep track of their interaction and opposition.

### **Comparison of metropolitan institutional structures (as exemplified by Saint-Petersburg and Mumbai)**

In the structure of modern societies, including Russia and India, cities continue to hold a specific place. A modern metropolis is an extremely complex social system of interacting structures and social groups. What is peculiar, both cities in our focus, Saint-Petersburg and Mumbai, are immediate products of infiltration of western capitalism. Both cities are almost contemporary – their creators belonged to the same generation in the world history. A colonial seaport, built in place of Indian villages assumed the shape of city Bombay (and changed its name for Mumbai in 1995) at the end of XVII century, while Saint-Petersburg was built in the beginning of XVII century. Under the dominion of the British Crown, the city began to develop after being loaned to East India Company. Hence, Bombay evolved practically without being directly affected by Indian institutions of power. The system of power was adopted from the most progressive country of the day, however, it was aimed at forcing all India to act in the interests of the mother country. Saint-Petersburg, on the contrary, was built on the orders of Russian sovereign (as patterned after European cities) in place of Finnish villages. It became the center of reforming institutions of state power which were to help

Russia become a leading figure in the world arena. The Mumbai of today is located in the area the landscape of which used to be represented by seven islands in the mouth of the Ulhas river. This marshy land was barely habitable, hence it was decided to cover it with earth and make it a solid dwelling area. The history of Saint-Petersburg resembles the one of Mumbai in a peculiar way – following Peter the Great’s decree every newcomer had to bring stones for building roads and covering swamps (similar to modern practice of creating “made lands”). Another interesting fact - just like the first railroad in Russia led to Saint-Petersburg, the first railroad in India led to Bombay. In Russia it was used for transportation of metal and timber, while the Indian rail track served to haul cotton. Both cities were not just “windows on Europe”, but gates *for* Europe (in Mumbai they even have a historical document “Gates into Europe” preserved).

Historically, Saint-Petersburg and Mumbai evolved as cosmopolitan, multicultural and multi-faith centres. Population size of both cities reproduced with the help of never-ceasing inflow of migrants coming in search of a job. Imperial background of Saint-Petersburg led to development of the prosperous city centre and working outskirts. Meanwhile, the contrast between levels of wealth and poverty in Bombay is inconceivably sharper than in its Russian counterpart. The climate and natural conditions of India enable to make consumption levels there incomparably lower than in the city on the Neva. Over period of three centuries Saint-Petersburg has enlarged its population up to five million citizens, while Mumbai made it almost four times bigger. At the same time, people of Mumbai are significantly younger than citizens of Saint-Petersburg, with its population mostly represented by men rather than women in case with Saint-Petersburg. It is also worth mentioning that level of education in Mumbai is incomparably lower than in Saint-Petersburg. Economically, Mumbai has more value for India than Saint-Petersburg does for Russia. It may be partially explained by the fact that Indian economy is mainly agriculture-based and that is where Mumbai’s role in it becomes highly discriminable. For many years, Mumbai’s leading industries were cotton manufacture, oil-refining and chemical industries and mechanical engineering,

however, recently their domination has been thrown into the background by new fast-growing sectors, such as jewelry and leather manufacture, gem working, information technology, tourism and entertainment industry. In Saint-Petersburg leading positions are held by mechanical engineering, metal working, food industry, electrical power engineering and metal manufacture. Nevertheless, the industry of both cities is unlikely to provide all capable citizens with employment, whereas non-manual workers occupy the biggest share of the employed. In Mumbai low-skilled and unskilled workers represent the majority of working citizens. In Saint-Petersburg, on the contrary, their number is rather small. It is amazing how Mumbai left Saint-Petersburg behind in terms of number of people involved in the industry of services in spite of the fact that this field has been actively developing in “northern capital” of Russia over last decades. Regarding its financial importance, Mumbai has significantly outrun Saint-Petersburg on a nationwide scale not only owing to a great number of British financial institutions in its streets but also due to the rundown state of Russian economy in Soviet period.

To make a conclusion, the existence of similarities and differences in institutional structures of the metropolises under study may be taken for substantial evidence of shoemaking craft to have its own peculiar features in both cities.

### **Comparison of social context of shoemakers’ communicative practices in Saint-Petersburg and Mumbai**

Shoemakers’ communicative practices are characterized by a big number of directly or indirectly involved actors. Those include not only customers or colleagues, directors or lessors, but also state and social organizations. Besides, culture and craft traditions are considered as equally important parts of communicative practices as actors themselves. Moreover, the interpretation of actors’ involvement into the context of communicative events and, what is more important, the interpretation of meanings of communicative events themselves are crucial for building up the analytical model of craftsmen’s daily practices.

The first considerable thing to mention is the fact that shoemaking practices of both cities exist in the conditions of different levels of consumer demand – Saint-Petersburg citizens of today, unlike people of Mumbai, simply cannot do without footwear (and it has to be footwear of high quality). Furthermore, model range of Indian shoes is not as diverse as the one of Petersburgers' who have their special requirements for foot protection dictated by weather and climate conditions. Thus, cobblers' business gained a significant boost because of the market spreading. Nevertheless, even such beneficial state of things did not motivate shoemakers' workshops to provide any other kinds of service apart from mending. According to Petrostat's recent data, independent leather shoes manufacture business involves only about a hundred people. As provided by various information sources, the number of cobblers' outlets amounts to around several hundreds. Out of general number of private services, they make up 3-4% and for a total of costs they number 183 roubles per capita (according to 2014 data). Cobblers' services in Saint-Petersburg are targeted at particular social groups. Alongside with affordable services provided by some street artisans one may find cobblers' outlets, advertised at special web-sites, which offer costly repair of upmarket shoes. Cobblers' market and the level of shoemaking industry's development are tightly connected and, as everybody may be perfectly aware, like many other industrial spheres shoe manufacturers have no interest in producing durable products. Following the trend of reducing the cost prices in mass production, there has been laid a course for dropping some of quality parameters, especially the service life. In Saint-Petersburg many thrifty customers, who prefer to save their money on purchasing new shoes (and judging by recent Petersburgers' income data, there are many of them), sooner or later face the problem of throwing their old pair of boots away or taking it to a cobbler's outlet. The amount of damage and the subsequent cost of repair usually force the shoes' owner make their choice.

According to the results of a thorough research on all cobblers' outlets, located in one of the municipal districts of Saint-Petersburg, workshops are mainly situated

next to big shops and busy thoroughfares. Those are principally the areas crowded with streams of people daily making their way to work and back and also doing some shopping. Consequently, the more intensive such streams are, the bigger the density of such workshops is. As the research has shown, the distribution of outlets by their location is made in such a way that all neighborhoods of the municipal district are covered. Through conversations with shoemaking masters, we learned about their awareness of their counterparts. Sometimes they are united by means of informal communication, specifically if they represent the same diaspora (for instance, Armenians).

As a matter of fact, cobblers' positions are practically always taken by men, usually aged between 30 and 60. For many people the start of artisanal practice is connected with losing previous job, migration or importance to settle down in a new place of living. According to the study by Sergei Damberg [Damberg, Chikadze, 2000], the rise of a cobbler's career for Armenians is guaranteed by ethnic connections.

The social context of a shoemaker's or cobbler's craft in Mumbai is different in its essence due to the long-living caste-varna system lying in its basis. According to this system, only representatives of the lowest religious groups, so-called untouchables, are permitted to work with leather. It is considered that flaying, furriery, tanning, hardening and even purchasing leather lead to fouling and allusive impurity. In Maharashtra, a state that includes Mumbai, these kinds of activities are usually done by people from the caste of Dhor, located predominantly in districts of Kolhapur and Solapur. In recent years, many members of this caste have been leaving their traditional profession for a number of reasons – reluctance to do a dirty job, desire to rid of the caste stigma or striving for better education and job. Only several families in Kolhapur are still keeping to their trade, while in Mumbai (except for a small outlet in Dharavi district) traditional and industrial tanning do not exist anymore [Bhosale, Prasenjeet, 2012].

In Mumbai the local caste of Charmakar (or Chambhar) and representatives of Charmakar tanners' caste from other states (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and

Bihar) are involved in production and mending of shoes. Their workplaces are set right in the streets of Mumbai where they sit on pavements, near railway and bus stations, by crossroads and next to crowded areas, especially close to office buildings. They always work as a single network and never alone. Their daily income makes up 300-400 rupees, a part of which they have to spend on rent, food, family support and other needs. Such migrants experience serious problems with survival in a big city where they are constantly viewed as strangers having no institutional support, especially on the part of the authorities. Representatives of the local caste of Charmakar try to get their license for work in specific parts of the city at a charge, in order to receive recognition and be provided with special kiosks.

The level of technical equipment used by shoemakers in Mumbai (both for mending old shoes and making new ones) is rather rudimentary with a minimal set of tools, which makes them substantially different from their counterparts from Saint-Petersburg who apply automatic instruments and machinery. We may account this fact for poverty, lack of investments and the current system of social institutions. The majority of cobblers in Mumbai are undereducated and culturally backward in comparison with shoemakers from Saint-Petersburg. However, representatives of the new generation become more politically conscious, look for new ways of cooperation with local authorities and form professional associations. Their problems arouse interest of authorities, political parties and social organizations of Maharashtra state.<sup>2</sup> Cobblers of Saint-Petersburg generally have specially equipped sites (kiosks, basements) where they can work, while in Mumbai cobblers usually have their workplaces right in the street.

Another important factor must be mentioned in consideration of social context of shoemaking craft in India. The ethics of frugality occupy considerable place in the culture of this ancient country even though sometimes it may fly in the face of social status. That is why citizens of Mumbai tend to preserve their worn-

---

<sup>2</sup> The materials about shoemakers in Mumbai and Maharashtra state were collected in the course of field study conducted by Professor Balkrishna Bhosale in 2016.

out or even damaged shoes. We may view it as a kind of elaboration on the philosophy of eternal revival of the universe and all the objects that belong to it. Every thing (for instance, shoes) just waits for its turn when somebody comes to pick it up. Be it a cobbler, who will mend it, or a dustman, who will take this thing to a different place where it will start a new life. As opposed to this idea, a work by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello [Boltanski, Chiapello, 2011, pp 276-281] on deviation of modern capitalism from traditional ethics of frugality is particularly interesting for study. Nevertheless, one cannot be confident while claiming that a Saint-Petersburg cobbler have better understanding of modern world than his colleague from Mumbai does.

### **Conclusion**

In the course of working on analytical model for a comparative research, the authors of the paper drew attention to importance of having multilevel and phased study of similar practices taken from distant social contexts. For the purpose of efficiency, the work was divided into three parts. In the first part, we were focused on comparison of Russian and Indian societies, their social structures and trends of development. In the second part, we passed over to considering specific institutional forms and processes typical of Saint-Petersburg and Mumbai. Finally, only after that we were able to adequately compare the very social practices of shoemaking craft. Owing to this structure of study, our work was taken to the level of systemic comparison, which allowed us to single out common and specific features in shoemaking craft of the two metropolises.

### **References.**

Bhosale B. V., and Prasenjeet K. Kolahapur: Paramparik Charmaudvog Airanvivar. Mumbai: Dr. Babasahaeb Ambedkar Centre of Social Justice. 2012. (in Marathi)

- Bombay and Mumbai: The City in Transition. // eds. Patel S., Masselos J., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India. // eds. Patel S., Thorner A., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Castels M. The Informational City. Information Technology, Economic Restructuring. and the Urban-Regional Process. Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell. 1989.
- De Wit J. Urban Poverty, Local Governance and Everyday Politics in Mumbai. London: Routledge India, 2017.
- Interrogating India's Modernity: Democracy Identity and Citizenship. // Ed. Jodhka S. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Jodhka S. Caste in Contemporary India. New Delhi: Routledge. 2015.
- Veblen T. The Beginning of Ownership. // *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 4 (1898-9).
- Veselov Y., Sinyutin M., and Kapustkina E. Trust, Morality, and Markets Rethinking Economy and Society via the Russian Case. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016.
- Boltanski L., Chiapello E. Novyj duh kapitalizma. M.: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2011.
- Veber M. Gorod. // Izbrannoe. Obraz obshchestva. M.: YUrist, 1994.
- Veselov, Y. V. Ekonomicheskaya sociologiya odnogo goroda: prostranstvo Peterburga // *Zhurnal sociologii i social'noj antropologii*. 2009, Tom XII, № 2, ss. 153–185.
- Damberg S., Chikadze E. Armyane v obuvnom biznese Peterburga. // *Etnichnost' i ekonomika*. Sb. statej po materialam mezhdunarodnogo seminara (Sankt-Peterburg, 9-12 sentyabrya 1999), Pod red. O. Brednikovoj, V. Voronkova, E. Chikadze. SPb.: CNSI, 2000.
- Dumont L. Homo hierarchicus: opyt opisaniya sistemy kast. SPb.: Evraziya, 2001.
- Durkheim E. Metod sociologii // *Sociologiya*. Ee predmet, metod, prednaznachenie. M.: Kanon, 1995.

Kapitalizm v Rossii: v poiskah novyh institucional'nyh osnovanij. // red. M. V. Sinyutin, SPb.: Renome, 2013

Kovalevskij M. M. Ocherk proiskhozhdeniya i razvitiya sem'i i sobstvennosti. M.: KomKniga, 2007.

Obraz zhizni naseleniya krupnogo goroda. Opyt kompleksnogo social'nogo issledovaniya. // CHelovek i obshchestvo. Red. A. S. Pashkov. Vyp. XXIII. L.: Izd-vo LGU, 1988.

Rezaev A.V., Tregubova N.D. Sravnitel'nyj analiz v sociologii: urovni primeneniya i konceptual'nye problemy. // Zhurnal sociologii i social'noj antropologii. 2012. T. 15. № 4.

Rossiyanе i kitajcy v ehpoхu peremen: Sravnitel'noe issledovanie v Sankt-Peterburge i Shanhae nachala XXI veka. // Pod obshch. red. E.N. Danilovoj, V.A. Yadova, Pan Davehya. M.: Logos, 2012.

Ekonomicheskaya sociologiya: teoriya i istoriya. // Pod red. Y. V. Veselova, A. L. Kashina. Kollektiv avtorov. SPb.: Izd-vo «Nestor-Istoriya», 2012.