

ASTUDY ON SOCIAL MOBILITY IN INDIAWITH FOCUS ON THE QSR INDUSTRY.

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Abstract

My interest in the power of workplaces & social mobility opportunities started when I got an opportunity to visit and interact with employees of a QSR restaurant in India last year. There were many things that I found fascinating, the organization of the kitchen, the work-flow processes, the way the teams were organized & many such things but what I really found most fascinating was the people I met. I meet a truly diverse set of people from different age groups & backgrounds working to make a living. People with fascinating life stories & dreams like Rashi, who started as a temporary staff & is now manager in a restaurant. Rashi's story inspired me to study this industry & this space more. This Project is an attempt to understand the journey of Rashi & similar people like her from a larger perspective.

Social mobility, the ability for individuals or families to move between socioeconomic strata, plays an important role in shaping an equitable society. This study explores the impact of the Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) industry on social mobility in India, focusing on its contribution to employment generation and upward economic mobility.

By analyzing data, case studies, quantitative & qualitative research methods, the research tries to highlight how the QSR industry serves as a stepping stone for individuals, especially those from marginalized communities, to gain formal employment, skill development, and career growth.

With over 40% of the Indian workforce engaged in the informal sector, the QSR industry stands out as a significant source of organized job opportunities. The also delves into challenges like job stability, wage gaps, and gender inequality within the sector.

This paper aims to shed light on the role of this dynamic sector in fostering inclusive growth and inspiring further studies on its economic impact.

Introduction

Witnessing the diverse workforce at an Indian Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) ignited my interest in understanding the transformative power of workplaces in fostering social mobility. In a country where opportunities are often limited for many, establishments like QSRs hold the potential to serve as stepping stones, providing employment, skill development, and a chance for individuals to improve their socioeconomic standing. This research seeks to explore the extent to which the QSR industry in India facilitates social mobility, with a particular focus on its contributions to employment generation, skill enhancement, and upward economic movement for individuals from diverse and marginalized backgrounds. Understanding the role of the QSR sector in enabling social mobility is vital for policymakers, industry leaders, and researchers working to create more inclusive and equitable employment opportunities in India.

Social mobility, at its core, refers to the ability of individuals or families to ascend the socioeconomic ladder, often measured by improvements in income, education, and occupational status. This study examines how the QSR industry contributes to this upward movement, particularly for those from disadvantaged communities. By analyzing data, conducting case studies, and employing qualitative research methods, this research will explore the lived experiences of QSR employees, shedding light on their career trajectories, the skills they acquire, and the challenges they encounter while navigating the industry. These insights will provide a comprehensive understanding of the sector's role in shaping opportunities for economic and social advancement.

The study delves into several key areas to assess the impact of QSRs on social mobility. One aspect is the role of structured training programs in enhancing employability, equipping employees with valuable skills that extend beyond the industry itself. Another focus is on how flexible work arrangements in the QSR sector can foster greater participation among women, enabling them to balance work and personal responsibilities. Additionally, the research investigates the potential for career growth within the industry, from entry-level roles to managerial positions, and the systemic barriers that may hinder such progress. Through these lenses, the study aims to highlight the QSR industry's potential as a catalyst for positive change, advancing social equity and inclusivity within the workforce.

The findings of this research hold significant implications. They can inform policymakers seeking to design targeted employment initiatives, guide industry stakeholders in developing practices that enhance workplace inclusivity, and offer academic researchers' valuable insights into the intersection of social mobility and labor market dynamics in India. By identifying the opportunities and obstacles within the QSR sector, this study aspires to contribute to the broader goal of creating a more equitable and accessible pathway to economic advancement for individuals across the country.

2. Literature Works

Social Mobility

Social mobility refers to the movement of individuals or groups within or between social strata in a society, typically measured by income, education, occupation, or wealth.

"Social mobility refers to movement of individuals or group from one position to another, of a society's stratification system." - Richard T. Schaefer

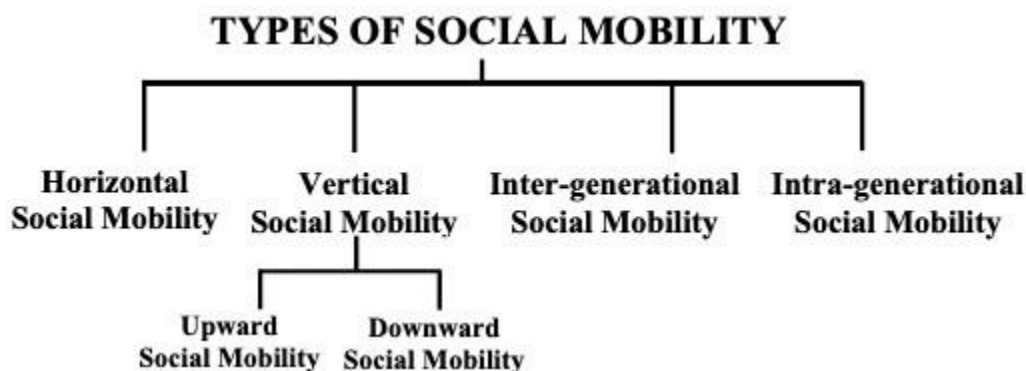
It is an indicator of how economic and social resources are distributed in a society, reflecting opportunities for individuals to improve their socioeconomic status over time. Vertical mobility (upward or downward) is the most relevant form in India, as it indicates the potential for people to move to higher socioeconomic levels.

Low social mobility not only erodes the foundation of growth, it also reduces well-being and puts social cohesion and democratic participation at risk.[1] In societies with high social mobility, individual life chances are not strongly determined by where you come from or who your parents are.[2] In high-mobility societies, children from less well-off backgrounds will have the same chances of achieving their aspirations as those from more advantaged upbringings. Measures of social mobility capture the persistence of individual positions over time, and the extent to which people can escape those positions.

The concept of social mobility is important to the study of societies because it is suggestive of equality of opportunity: the idea that while everyone will not have the same outcomes, they should have the same opportunities. Increasing equality of opportunity means addressing the many layers of disadvantage faced by different groups within a population. Increasing social mobility is not only an argument for equality; it is an economic case as well: promoting equality of opportunity is essential for economic efficiency as it enhances the use of individual talents.

Types of Social Mobility

Social mobility is typically classified into:



1. Vertical Mobility

It refers to any change in the occupational, economic or political status of an individual or a group which leads to a change of their position. In the words of Sorokin, vertical social mobility is meant the relations involved in the transition of an individual (or a social object) from one social stratum to another.

For example, the manager of the meat department who is promoted to general manager of the supermarket has achieved upward vertical mobility. The promotion is accompanied by an increase in income and overall responsibility. On the other hand, the major league, a baseball player who is sent back to the minor leagues has suffered downward vertical mobility. Vertical mobility stands for a change of social position either upward or downward, which can be labelled as ascending or descending type of mobility. When a big businessman meets with losses in his business and is declared bankrupt, he occupies a low status. On the other hand, if a small businessman with occupational skills of money and manipulation becomes an industrialist he occupies a higher position on the social ladder. Hence his position improves in the hierarchical order.

According to the direction of transition, there are two types of vertical social mobility –

a. Upward Social Mobility:

If a person of inferior status in society moves towards a superior social position, he is moving upward or has upward mobility.

For example, a teacher after doing M.Phil becomes a professor in a college or a lawyer becomes a judge.

b. Downward Social Mobility:

If a person of higher or superior social position moves towards an inferior social position, it is called downward mobility. For example, a big businessman because of a great loss in business becomes a beggar or an officer is dismissed because of his serious offence and is deprived of all privileges.

2. Horizontal Mobility

Horizontal mobility one of the types of mobility is the straight change from left to right or right to left. In horizontal mobility, if the place is changed but the social position of an individual remains on the same level.

For example; when a lecture is transferred from one government college to another with the same grade or pay scale and as a teacher is horizontal mobility.

In other words, horizontal mobility is the transition of an individual or social object from one social group to another situated on the same level. While explaining horizontal mobility we are mainly referring to the movement of individuals from one position to another of more or less equal prestige. Sorokin explains the concept of horizontal mobility still more broadly.

According to Sorokin, “Horizontal mobility refers to territorial, religious, political party, family, occupational and other horizontal shifting without any noticeable change in vertical position.” The individuals are no more attached to their place of birth. The individuals move from one place to another in search of jobs which may be of the same prestige. The modern means of transportation have brought in more territorial movement of individuals.

3. Intergenerational Mobility

When changes occur from one generation to another, it is known as inter-generational mobility. This type of mobility involves changes in the social position of children relative to their parents.

For example, a son of a carpenter becomes a doctor or an engineer or the son of a police officer adopts a profession of a shopkeeper. It is called intergenerational mobility. We see this commonly occur in India in the last few decades driven by strong economic growth in the country.

4. Intragenerational Mobility:

Mobility within an individual's lifetime, such as career advancement or increased income. This also is a fairly common type of mobility particularly amongst people who do white collar jobs in India. Traditional areas of occupation like Agriculture do not see much intragenerational movement, particular amongst small & subsistence farmers.

Sociologists gave this type of mobility great importance while analyzing such cases for a research study. Downward intra-generational mobility is not much common.

5. Structural Mobility:

Driven by economic growth and shifts in the job market, affecting entire groups rather than individual achievements. Example: The IT boom in India created new job opportunities, enabling a large segment of the population to move into the middle class.

An Analysis of Social Mobility in India – Key Findings.

Intergenerational Income Mobility

There are various methodological approaches to the study of intergenerational income mobility. A study published in 2013 in the Journal of Human Resources assessed income mobility in India. The study draws on five successive rounds of the National Sample Survey (NSS). The authors use three different established measures of income mobility. They compute, for example, transition probabilities of child (i.e., son) incomes based on the income quintile of their parents (i.e., fathers).

Table 1 summarizes the transition probabilities for each of the income quintiles for the most recent cohort. This is done for both Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST), and Non-SC/ST.

Table 1: Intergenerational Income Transition Probabilities 2004-05

| Parent/ Offspring | Non-SC/ST | | | | | SC/ST | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | q1 | q2 | q3 | q4 | q5 | q1 | q2 | q3 | q4 | q5 |
| q1 | 0.52 (0.03) | 0.33 (0.03) | 0.08 (0.02) | 0.04 (0.01) | 0.03 (0.01) | 0.58 (0.04) | 0.33 (0.04) | 0.03 (0.01) | 0.04 (0.01) | 0.02 (0.02) |
| q2 | 0.15 (0.03) | 0.40 (0.04) | 0.34 (0.05) | 0.06 (0.02) | 0.05 (0.01) | 0.15 (0.03) | 0.32 (0.05) | 0.42 (0.05) | 0.05 (0.01) | 0.06 (0.03) |
| q3 | 0.07 (0.01) | 0.15 (0.03) | 0.35 (0.05) | 0.35 (0.05) | 0.08 (0.02) | 0.07 (0.02) | 0.08 (0.02) | 0.34 (0.05) | 0.45 (0.05) | 0.06 (0.02) |
| q4 | 0.09 (0.02) | 0.12 (0.02) | 0.11 (0.02) | 0.35 (0.04) | 0.32 (0.03) | 0.09 (0.02) | 0.05 (0.02) | 0.11 (0.02) | 0.34 (0.04) | 0.41 (0.04) |
| q5 | 0.11 (0.02) | 0.08 (0.02) | 0.09 (0.01) | 0.18 (0.03) | 0.54 (0.03) | 0.11 (0.03) | 0.11 (0.03) | 0.10 (0.02) | 0.16 (0.02) | 0.52 (0.04) |

Source: Hnatkovska et al. 2012. P.25. Note: Each cell reports the probability (for the 2004-2005 NSS survey round) of a household head with income in quintile 1 having his child earning income in quintile 5: q1-q5 refer to the quintile of the generational income distribution (fathers in the columns; kids in the rows). Bootstrapped standard errors are in parenthesis.

For a child whose parent's income is in the bottom quintile (20 percent), the probability of reaching the top quintile is a low three percent. That means children of the poorest 20 percent of households have a three-percent chance of ending up in the highest income quintile themselves. Meanwhile, 52 percent of children born to parents in the bottom income quintile will also likely not be able to move up the ladder and will end up in the lowest quintile. At the same time, 54 percent of children born to parents in the top income quintile will end up in the highest income quintile themselves.

Another common measure of mobility is intergenerational wage elasticities, which reveal how much children's incomes correlate with those of their parents. The higher the estimate, the greater the association between incomes, and the less social mobility there is. Between the earliest cohort (1983) and the latest cohort (2004-5) there have been patterns of declining intergenerational wage elasticities, implying more social mobility. The SCs/STs saw a decline from 0.90 to 0.55 between 1983 and 2004-5, and for non-SCs/STs, the drop was from 0.73 to 0.61 during the same period. While this decline is significant, intergenerational income persistence remains high compared to other countries. The average income elasticity in India's South Asian neighborhood is 0.49, and in China it is 0.50. The intergenerational wage elasticity in the United States, a country widely acknowledged as having low social mobility is 0.4. Among high-income countries overall, the average income elasticity is 0.35.

Intergenerational Occupation Mobility

Occupation mobility is the relationship between occupation origins (or parents' occupation) and destinations (individual occupation outcomes). Occupation mobility is particularly relevant in India because the caste system has strong occupation affiliations. How likely is it that the child of a manual laborer could end up in a white-collar profession? Conversely, what are the chances that children born to white-collar professionals end up in manual labor? These questions help us to understand the ways in which occupation, class and caste positions are passed from one generation to another.

In a study, Iverson and colleagues drew on the IDHS to construct an occupational classification scheme based on the skill intensity of different occupations in India. (See Table 3.)[e]

Table 3: Occupational Categories

| | |
|------------|---|
| Category 6 | Professional (Codes 00-29) |
| Category 5 | Clerical and other (Codes 30-39, 40-42, 44-48) |
| Category 4 | Farmers (Codes 60-62) |
| Category 3 | Higher status vocational occupations (Codes 43, 49, 50-52, 56-59, 79, 84-87) |
| Category 2 | Lower status vocational occupations (Codes 53-55, 68, 71-78, 80-83, 88-93, 96-98) |
| Category 1 | Agricultural and other manual laborers including construction workers (Codes 63-67, 94, 95, 99) |

The authors found that 58.6 percent of individuals born to agricultural workers also ended up in agricultural and manual labour occupations. Similarly, 37.6 percent of those born to professionals, also ended up in professional occupations. Notably, however, there is significantly higher mobility in urban areas than rural areas. For instance, just 10.5 percent of sons born to an agricultural worker in rural areas ended up in clerical and other occupations, compared to 26.8 percent in urban areas.

Table 4: Occupational Mobility Matrices

| | Agricultural and other Laborers | Lower Skilled Occupations | Higher Skilled Occupations | Farmers | Clerical and Other Workers | Professionals |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Agricultural and other laborers | 58.6 | 13.6 | 8.0 | 5.3 | 10.1 | 4.5 |
| Lower Skilled Occupations | 14.6 | 50.0 | 11.3 | 2.5 | 12.8 | 8.8 |
| Higher Skilled occupations | 11.5 | 15.4 | 42.5 | 4.0 | 15.3 | 11.3 |
| Farmers | 32.2 | 9.7 | 7.7 | 3.4 | 10.7 | 7.4 |
| Clerical and Other Workers | 7.4 | 12.0 | 14.7 | 3.8 | 48.1 | 14.0 |
| Professionals | 8.9 | 9.0 | 14.1 | 6.5 | 23.9 | 37.6 |

Source: Iversen et al. 2016, P. 10. Note: All India, rural and urban are combined.

Importance Of Social Mobility – Indian Context

Social mobility plays a vital role enabling individuals and communities to rise beyond the limitations of their socioeconomic backgrounds. It drives economic growth, reduces inequality, and fosters social harmony.

Below are some of the key aspects that increased social mobility has a direct impact on:

1. Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Social mobility enables individuals and families to break free from generational poverty. For millions of Indians, poverty often limits access to education, healthcare, and jobs, trapping them in a vicious cycle. When individuals are given opportunities to improve their skills and access better employment, they can achieve financial stability and improve their living standards.

For example, a child from a rural village gaining access to quality education through scholarships can secure a high-paying job in an urban area. This not only uplifts the individual but also provides financial support for the entire family, creating a ripple effect of economic growth across generations.

2. Reducing Income Inequality

India's economic growth has created significant disparities between the rich and the poor. Social mobility addresses this gap by providing opportunities for disadvantaged groups to climb the economic ladder. By bridging this divide, it helps reduce income inequality and creates a more balanced society.

For instance, skill-development programs and vocational training initiatives by the government have enabled youth from economically weaker sections to gain employment in high-growth sectors like IT and manufacturing. These efforts help create a more equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities across the population.

3. Promoting Social Harmony

Social mobility fosters social cohesion by reducing tensions between different groups in society. In India, caste-based discrimination, gender inequality, and regional disparities have historically caused divisions. When individuals from all backgrounds have a fair chance to succeed, it reduces resentment and fosters unity.

For example, when a Dalit student becomes a successful doctor or engineer, it challenges entrenched biases and demonstrates that talent and hard work can overcome systemic barriers. This promotes a more inclusive mindset and encourages others to break similar barriers.

4. Empowering Women

Social mobility plays a key role in advancing gender equality. Women in India often face societal restrictions, limited access to education, and lower labor force participation. By providing women with opportunities for education and employment, social mobility allows them to challenge traditional roles and achieve financial independence.

Programs like the "Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)" have empowered women from informal sectors to gain skills, start small businesses, and support their families. Empowered women not only improve their own lives but also inspire others in their communities to pursue their aspirations.

5. Creating Intergenerational Progress

Social mobility ensures that future generations benefit from improved opportunities. Children from underprivileged backgrounds can achieve better lives than their parents through access to quality education, healthcare, and jobs. This intergenerational progress helps build a society where everyone has the chance to succeed.

For instance, when a farmer's child becomes an entrepreneur or a teacher, it uplifts the family and sets a benchmark for others in the community. The next generation starts at a higher baseline, creating a cycle of improvement and progress.

6. Boosting Economic Growth

Social mobility directly contributes to India's economic growth by unlocking the potential of its population. It allows individuals to move from low-productivity jobs, such as agricultural labor, to high-productivity sectors like technology, healthcare, and manufacturing. This transition strengthens the economy and boosts GDP growth.

For example, rural youth gaining access to vocational training and employment in urban industries not only improves their financial stability but also enhances the productivity of the workforce. This creates a stronger and more resilient economy.

7. Encouraging Innovation and Meritocracy

A society with high social mobility promotes a culture of meritocracy, where individuals succeed based on talent, hard work, and innovation rather than privilege or connections. This encourages people to innovate, take risks, and contribute to India's growth.

Many of India's leading entrepreneurs and business leaders, such as Narayana Murthy of Infosys, rose from modest backgrounds. Their success stories demonstrate how social mobility creates an environment where talent and perseverance are rewarded.

8. Addressing Historical Inequities

India's caste system and historical inequities have created significant barriers to social mobility for marginalized communities. Social mobility helps address these disadvantages by providing pathways to education, jobs, and social inclusion.

Policies such as reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) in education and government jobs have enabled individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve upward mobility. These measures ensure that systemic barriers are broken, creating a more inclusive society.

9. Supporting Sustainable Development

Social mobility aligns with India's goals for sustainable and inclusive development. It ensures equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, reducing disparities between urban and rural areas and among different social groups.

For example, initiatives like Digital India have enabled rural youth to access e-learning platforms and remote job opportunities, bridging the urban-rural divide. This supports long-term, sustainable progress by uplifting communities across the nation.

10. Enhancing Global Competitiveness

By fostering social mobility, India can strengthen its human capital and position itself as a global economic leader. A skilled and inclusive workforce ensures that the country remains competitive in industries like technology, healthcare, and manufacturing.

For instance, India's IT sector has thrived due to the upward mobility of individuals who accessed affordable technical education and joined the global workforce. This has positioned India as a hub for innovation and technology services.

Factors Affecting Social Mobility

1. Economic Structural Changes

The changes taking place in the structure of a society can impact social mobility of people. If the economy of a society is based on agriculture and that changes into an industrial society then many people get the chances of employment, income increases and standard of life rises. As a result, the social stratification of an individual improves or if traditional pattern of agriculture is changed into mechanical agriculture the production is increased and results in a better position social stratification: The progress of technology also opens new economic fields which raise the social status of skilled people.

2. Modernization:

The modernity and innovatory level divert the attention of the individuals of society towards new, discoveries and inventions which create a passion for better social life and efforts to increase income, become fast. There is rapid advancement in economic activities, new employments are created and the social position of individuals becomes a source of upward political mobility.

3. Improvement in Communication Means:

All means of communications are a course of social interaction, connections are increased, information is increased, new economic sources take place, new business is started, running a business is improved and production is increased. Rapid means of communications help in sending goods to the market and an increase in income affects social mobility.

5. Education and Social Awareness:

In such societies, where education is common and every individual has equal chances of getting an education, there is a facility of moving from inferior position to superior position. C. Heller based on his study has observed, that education is an important effective element in the inter over intra-generational mobility.

In addition, the level towards social progress and consciousness of making life better is the important functions of social mobility increase the chances of vertical mobility.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR SOCIAL MOBILITY

The following factors facilitate Social Mobility:

1. Motivation:

Each individual has a desire not only to have a better way of living but also wants to improve upon his social stand. In an open system, it is possible to achieve any status. This openness motivates people to work hard and improve upon their skills so that they can attain higher social status. Without such motivation and efforts on the part of the individual social mobility is impossible.

2. Achievements and Failures:

The achievement here refers to extraordinary, usually unexpected performance, which attracts the attention of a wider public to the abilities of a person. Not all achievements will result in social mobility. Achievements affect status only if they are remarkable. For example, a poor man who has acquired wealth or an unknown writer who has won a literary prize will improve his status.

Failures and misdeeds have a similar effect on downward mobility. Fraudulent bankruptcy will remove a member of the upper classes from blue books; he will receive no dinner invitations from his peers and he will become ineligible as a marriage partner. If he is already married, his wife may divorce him. He will have to resign from his clubs and all positions he holds. But he will not become a member of the lowest stratum, although it will be difficult for him to find a new association.

3. Education:

Education not only helps an individual to acquire knowledge but is also a passport for occupational positions for higher prestige. To become a doctor, one has to have an education in science subjects. Similarly, to appear in a competitive examination of I.A.S., one has to be at least graduate.

It is only after acquiring minimum formal education that individuals can aspire to occupy higher positions. It is through education that in modern India the members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are not only able to change their traditional occupation but have also started occupying jobs of higher prestige. In the modern industrial society in which statuses can be achieved, education is a basic requirement.

4. Skills and Training:

Each society makes provision to impart skill and training to the younger generation. To acquire skill and training one has to spend a lot of time as well as money. Why do these people spend money and time? The reason is that society gives incentives to such persons. When they complete their training, they are entitled to high positions, which are far better than those positions which they might have taken without such training.

Society not only assigns higher social status but also gives higher economic rewards and other privileges to those persons who have this training. Keeping in view these incentives people undergo these training with a hope to move up in the social ladder. In other words, skills and training facilities in improvement of the position, this leading to social mobility.

5. Migration:

Migration also facilitates social mobility. People migrate from one place to another either due to pull or push factors. A particular place may not have opportunities and facilities to improve upon. Hence, people are forced to migrate to other places to earn their livelihood. New places, where they migrate, may have different openings and opportunities.

These persons avail of these opportunities and improve upon their social position. We can take the example of people belonging to the Scheduled Castes of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, who migrate to the States of Punjab and Haryana to earn their livelihood. Here they become farm labourers.

After acquiring accumulating money, they go back to their villages and buy land. They till their own land and become owner cultivators. Hence, from the traditional work of Chamars or scavengers, they improve their status and become owner cultivators. Similar is the situation with regard to Asians who migrate to various European countries and the United State of America.

The pull factors attract the people because they do not have those facilities at their place of residence and the new place attracts them by providing these facilities so that after acquiring new skills and knowledge, they could occupy better positions.

People migrate from villages to cities because urban centres have institutions of higher status as well as opportunities for jobs. People come to urban areas to acquire education and skills and occupy higher positions than their parents and brothers who continue to live in villages. In this way, we find that both push and pull factors lead to migration which subsequently facilitates social mobility.

6. Industrialization:

Industrial Revolution ushered in a new social system in which people are given status according to their ability and training. No importance was given to their caste, race, religion and ethnicity. Industrialization resulted in mass production at a cheaper rate. This forced the artisans out of their work. In search of jobs, they migrated to industrial towns.

They acquired new vocational training and got jobs in industries. With experience and training, they moved up the social ladder. In the industrial society, the statuses are achieved, whereas, in the traditional society like India, the statuses are ascribed according to birth. Hence industrialization facilitates greater social mobility.

7. Urbanization:

In the cities there are more people, they have formal relations. People do not know each other intimately. Urban centres are marked by anonymity. People are close to their friends and relatives only. Urban settlements provide secrecy to an individual's caste and background. An Individual's position is largely dependent upon his education, occupation and income rather than his background.

If an individual has higher education, income and is engaged in occupation of higher prestige, he occupies high social status irrespective of his caste. Urbanization facilitates social mobility by removing those factors which hinder social mobility.

8. Legislation:

The enactment of new laws can also facilitate social mobility. When Zamindari Abolition Act was passed, most of the tenant cultivators became owner cultivators which indicate improvement in their status i.e., from tenants to owner cultivators. Similarly, the legal provision for reservation of jobs and promotion for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has also helped in social mobility.

Reservation with regard to admission in professional colleges, job reservation and promotions have a large number of individuals from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to improve upon their status. When **V.R. Singh** Government accepted the Mandal Commission report it provided job reservations for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) also.

Similarly, the judicial system by passing certain judgments may also facilitate social mobility. **Hindu Marriage Act** in different ways has enhanced the status of women. Similarly, **Hindu Succession Act** has given equal rights to the daughter in the family property. In this way, we find that legal provisions also facilitate social mobility.

9. Politicization:

Education and greater exposure to mass media of communication as well as greater contacts have made people aware of their rights. The political parties also educate the people about their rights. To achieve their rights people, unite and force the authority in power to accept their demands. These persons may use agitations, strikes etc. as methods of attaining the desired goals.

The political party to get votes provides several concessions. With the help of these new concessions and provisions, they improve upon their social status. A few persons may become political leaders, Ministers, Cabinet Ministers or Chief Ministers of a State.

Many such examples can be found in the present-day Indian polity. This has resulted into upward social mobility for them. Similarly, with greater political awareness with representatives in State assembly and Parliament they can (once the government to enact certain laws helping the lower segments of the society).

10. Modernization:

The process of modernization involves the use of scientific knowledge and modern technology. It also refers to rationality and secular way of life. With the improvement in technology, people engaged in occupations of low prestige like scavengers discard their traditional occupations and take up occupations which are not dirty and have no polluting effects. In this way, they change their position upward. Similarly, the level of development of a country also facilitates or hinders social mobility. In other words, modernization facilitates social mobility.

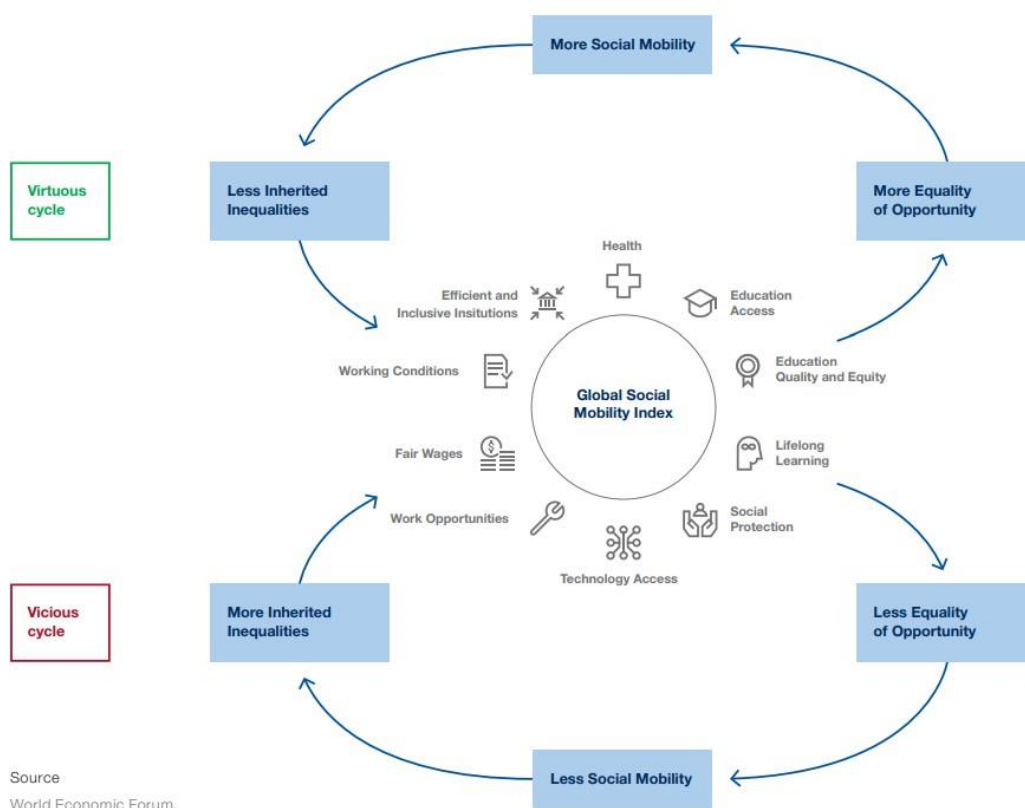
Aspirations for moving upward also results in frustration and different mental and psychological problems. An individual is given to understand that he can achieve any status. But in reality, this does not happen, his social background, birth in a race, ethnicity, facilitate or hinder his chances of social mobility. Similarly, the nations which do not have avenues for social mobility also suffer from stagnation and lack of development. In short, social mobility has both positive and negative consequences.

3. Research Methodology

Global Social Mobility index – World Economic Forum – Key Findings

Conceptual Framework Low social mobility is both a cause and a consequence of rising inequalities (Figure 5) and has adverse consequences for social cohesion and inclusive growth. Inequality of opportunity and inequality of outcomes appear to be causally and circularly correlated.

Figure 5 The World Economic Forum's Global Social Mobility Index Framework



Source:
World Economic Forum.

Source: World Economic Forum Global Mobility Study (2020)

Leading experts on social mobility have noted that the circular nature of this relationship has far-reaching consequences for future generations: "today's outcomes shape tomorrow's opportunities: large income gaps between today's parents are likely to imply bigger gaps in the quality of education, or access to labour market opportunities, among tomorrow's children and today's circumstances will clearly affect tomorrow's outcomes". If nothing is done, economies risk getting locked into a vicious cycle that combines rising inequality and low social mobility (Figure 5).

The central tenet of this index is to focus on drivers of relative social mobility. Using the conceptual framework outlined in this section, the Global Social Mobility Index benchmarks progress on social mobility based on “conversion factors” and enablers of social mobility rather than intergenerational outcomes. It applies the latest theory and evidence about the factors currently influencing future social mobility across economies and societies.

The index provides effective comparisons across regions as well as across generations. Accordingly, this index is organized around 10 distinct pillars, which can be broken down in four crucial determinants of social mobility. The section below delves deeper in the relationship between these determinants and social mobility.

The Key Pillars of Social Mobility:

Figure 6 Pillars of the Global Social Mobility Index



Source: World Economic Forum Global Mobility Study (2020)

Pillar 1 - Health:

The Health pillar measures the ability of countries to provide high-quality healthcare to their populations. Access to high-quality healthcare is a crucial factor which has a lifelong impact on the ability to experience social mobility. The determinants of health throughout and individual's life cycle start during the early years but can have lifelong consequences. Within countries, the availability of health services can differ widely, and health inequalities can have a direct impact on the ability to access employment. Those inequalities can also be witnessed in the difference in healthy life expectancy between different wealth quintiles. Low-quality healthcare disproportionately impacts the most disadvantaged and has a lifelong impact on the ability for people to achieve social mobility.

Pillars 2–4 Education (Access, Quality and Equity and Lifelong Learning):

These three pillars—Education Access, Education Quality & Equity, and Lifelong Learning—measure the ability of countries to give access to education and ensure that high-quality education is available throughout life to all its citizens, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. Education and human capital development strategies have traditionally been considered central factors favouring social mobility.

The lifelong development and deployment of human capital is a critical element of economic growth and social inclusion. Multiple structural problems (such as inadequate school funding in poor areas, low-quality teaching, high student teacher ratios, etc.) currently prevent children from disadvantaged backgrounds from achieving their educational potential.

The first 1,000 days of a child's life represent an enormous opportunity as parental capital represents the bedrock of the development of children's educational attainment and future employment.

Since low- and medium-skilled occupations are the most affected by technological changes and prone to automation, it is crucial for economies to look at methods of delivering and incentivizing learning across the lifespan.

Quality and access to lifelong learning, through measures of the extent of staff training, the availability of training for the unemployed, and the percentage of firms offering formal training.

Pillar 5 Technology Access

The Technology Access pillar measures the level of technology access and adoption among the population. As highlighted in the previous section, enhancing access to education throughout life is crucial to foster social mobility. But the ability to access those opportunities can often be unequal and perpetuate historical inequalities.

Access to technology has the potential to act as a further equalizer, by providing information to everyone irrespective of their socioeconomic background. Technology has the potential to ignore such distinctions and provide unrestricted access to knowledge.

The emergence of online learning has lowered the barriers to learning resources. Alongside formal education structures, online learning is instrumental in providing access to lifelong learning. This is particularly imperative in the new economy because of the virtuous cycle between adoption of technology and upskilling.

New technology adoption drives business growth, new job creation and augmentation of existing jobs, provided it can fully leverage the talents of a motivated and agile workforce who are equipped with future-proof skills to take advantage of new opportunities through continuous retraining and upskilling.

Pillars 6–8 Fair Work Opportunities, Fair Wages, and Working Conditions

These three pillars—Work Opportunities, Fair Wages, and Working Conditions—measure the ability for economies to provide access to work opportunities, ensure good working conditions and provide fair wages to its citizens regardless, of their education level and socioeconomic background. Social mobility outcomes are heavily dependent on education, but they are also directly related to labour market factors.

The occupations of lower- and middle-income individuals are most at risk of automation and adoption of new technologies across various industries will eventually also result in a widespread transformation of almost all currently established job roles.

Pillars 9–10 Social Protection & Inclusive Institutions

These two pillars—Social Protection and Inclusive Institutions—measure the ability of economies to provide social protection, and inclusive institutions and efficient public services to their population. Evidence suggests that job volatility is poised to increase with shifts in skill needs and might increase the frequency of job changes in one's career. These social resilience mechanisms measured in these pillars are crucial to help transition from one job to another. They level the playing field between those with high expandable income and those whose lives might be heavily impacted by a change of circumstance.

Such mechanisms moderate the changes that those who are already most vulnerable and might be experiencing downward social mobility during times of economic transition. Social protection alongside fair and efficient institutions can mitigate the impact of career transitions on individual's lives. These social safety nets contribute to lowering disparities in living standards across specific regions or groups and provide support for job transition to be less damaging to people's long-term prospects.

Many of the most vulnerable workers—those who are self-employed or out of formal labour markets—are currently excluded from social protections.

Key findings from the Global Social Mobility Index – an Indian Perspective:

The notion of relative social mobility is more closely related to the social and economic status of an individual relative to their parents. In a country with a society with perfect relative mobility, a child born in a low-income family would have as much chance to earn a high income as a child born to parents who earn a high income. Relative social mobility focuses on the social and economic standing of individuals at any one point in time. In economic terms, it is often approximated by looking at the measure of intergenerational income elasticity.

If the intergenerational income elasticity is equal to zero there is no relationship between family background and the adult income outcomes of children. A child born into poverty would have exactly the same likelihood of earning a high income in adulthood as a child born into a rich family. At the other extreme, if intergenerational income elasticity is equal to 1, all poor children would become poor adults and all rich children would become rich adults.

Empirically, in countries with high levels of relative income mobility, there is still an advantage to being born into a high-income family; however, its impact on children's future income is relatively small. In Denmark or Finland, for example, if one's parent earns 100% more than another, it is estimated that the impact on a child's future income is around 15%, compared to about 50% in the United States, and 60% in China.¹⁰ In high-income countries, since the 1990s, research has shown stagnation at both the bottom and the top end of the income distribution—a phenomenon which social mobility experts describe as 'sticky floors' and 'sticky ceilings'

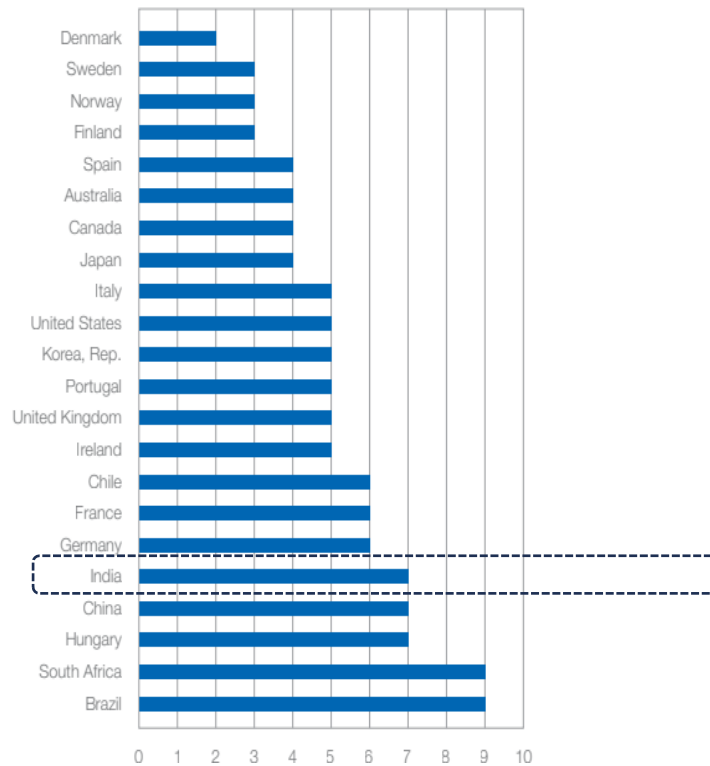
1. Income Mobility in India is low when compared to more developed countries.

Number of generations refers to the number of generations needed for those born in low-income families (bottom 10% of the income distribution) to approach mean income in their society.

There is a strong linear relationship in which countries with high levels of relative social mobility—such as Finland, Norway or Denmark—also exhibit lower levels of income inequality. Conversely, countries with low relative social mobility—such as China or Brazil—also exhibit high levels of economic inequality. As highlighted by thinkers such as John Rawls and Amartya Sen, in an ideal world, individuals would have equal opportunities & capabilities to prosper, irrespective of their background or personal characteristics.

Figure 1 Income Mobility Across Generations

Number of generations it would take for those born in a low-income family to approach mean income



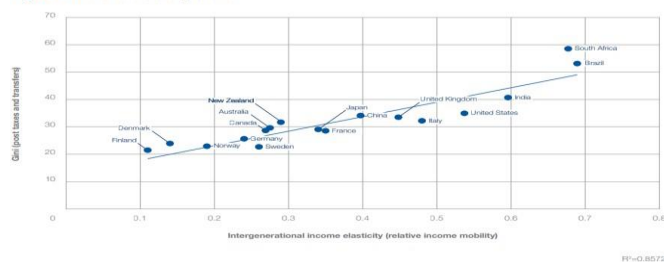
Source: World Economic Forum Global Mobility Study (2020)

It would take 8 generations for a person born in a low-income family to approach mean income. While it is amongst the highest in the world, it is relatively in the same ball park as higher GDP countries like China which shows the significant progress India has made in recent decades in bringing this element down. Clearly, there is a long way to go.

1. The Great Gatsby Curve:

The graphic below, also known as “The Great Gatsby Curve”, reveals a strong linear relationship in which countries with high levels of relative social mobility—such as Finland, Norway or Denmark—also exhibit lower levels of income inequality. Conversely, countries with low relative social mobility—such as China or Brazil—also exhibit high levels of economic inequality.

Figure 2 The Great Gatsby Curve



Source

ISE from 1970's cohort based on Global Database on Intergenerational Mobility, World Bank.

Notes

Average Gini 1990-1995 from Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID).

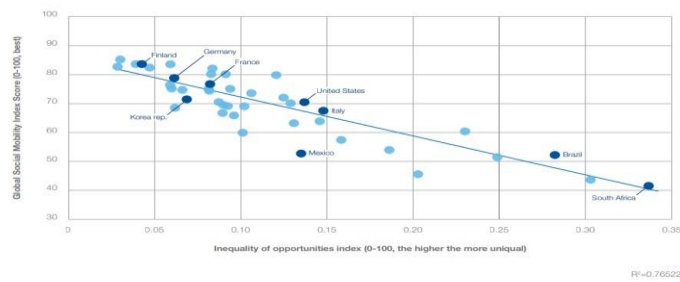
Source: World Economic Forum Global Mobility Study (2020)

Across economies, children born in less affluent families tend to experience greater barriers to success than those born in more affluent families. These inequalities of opportunity may become entrenched and foster long-term economic inequalities as well as deep economic and social cleavages. The Figure above illustrates the relationship between a leading measure of economic inequality (the Gini coefficient and the degree to which one's parents' income predicts one's own

income (i.e. intergenerational income elasticity). This graphic, also known as “The Great Gatsby Curve”, reveals the linkage starkly.

2. Correlation between inequality of opportunity & Global Social Mobility Index:

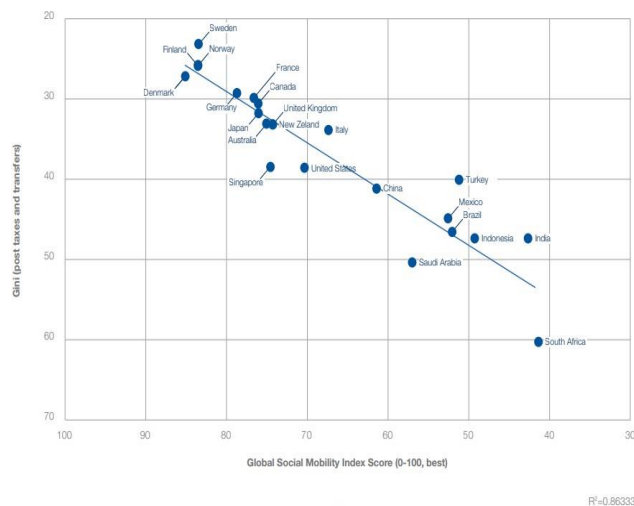
Figure 9 Correlation between Inequality of Opportunity and Global Social Mobility Index



Source: World Economic Forum Global Mobility Study (2020)

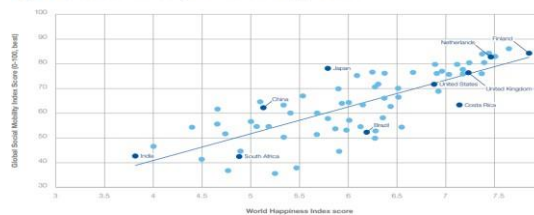
3. Global Social Mobility Index vs Gini Coefficient.

Figure 10 Global Social Mobility Index results vs Gini for G20 countries



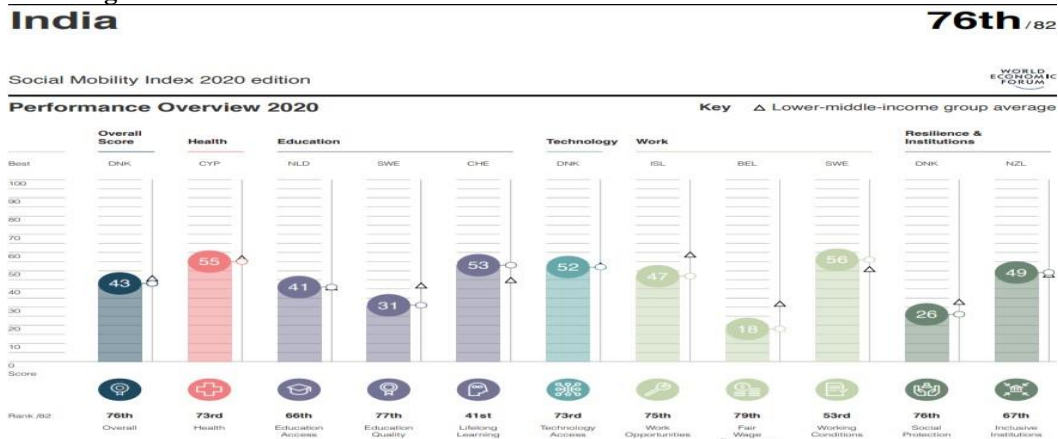
4. Global Security Index vs World Happiness Index

Figure 11 Global Social Mobility Index vs World Happiness Index



Source: World Economic Forum Global Mobility Study (2020)

1. India's Ranking in the Global Social Index:



Source: World Economic Forum Global Mobility Study (2020)

India ranks 76th on the index with a score of 42.7. Despite a significant decrease in the percentage of people living in absolute poverty, there are several areas for improvement for India to provide more equally shared opportunity to its population.

First, because of low life expectancy and a low health access and quality performance, it scores 54.6 on the Health pillar. On the education front, it scores 41.1 on the Education Access pillar and 31.3 on Education Quality and Equity, due to its pupil-to-teacher ratios, which are still very high across pre-primary, primary and secondary levels, among other factors. In terms of work opportunities,

India has the second-highest level of workers in vulnerable employment in the ranking (76.2%), behind Saudi Arabia and a low female labour participation rate (29.8% of the male labour participation). Another area where real structural reform needs to take place is in terms of fair wages. Social protection coverage is also very low in comparison with its regional peers, and overall social protection expenditure is very low (2.68% of GDP). The combination of these factors is detrimental to the social mobility of its population.

The QSR Industry in India

The Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) industry refers to a segment of the food service industry that specializes in fast food and quick turnaround times. QSRs are designed to cater to customers who want meals prepared and served rapidly, often in a casual or semi-casual dining setting, with an emphasis on convenience and affordability.

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Major Players and Market Dynamics:

QSRs Players in the Indian Market



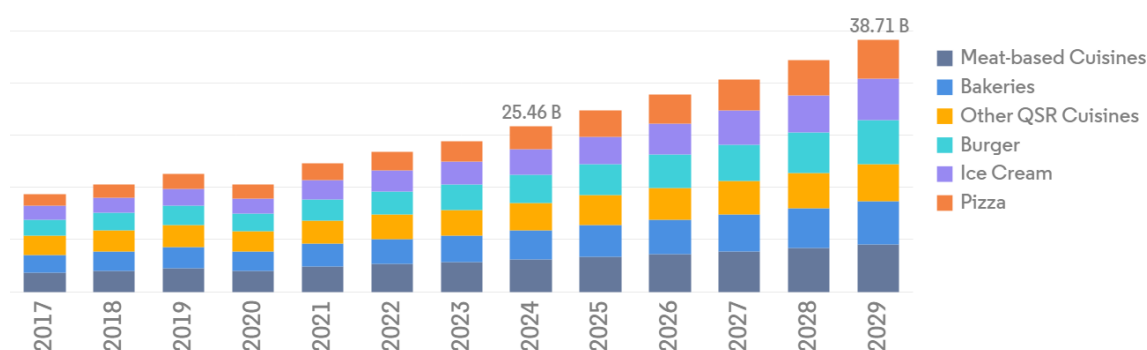
Major global chains like McDonald's, Domino's, and KFC, along with domestic chains, are expanding their reach, creating thousands of job opportunities.

The Indian QSR market comprises several types of players:

- **Global Chains:** Brands like McDonald's, Subway, Domino's, and KFC dominate urban markets with standardized, high-volume offerings.
 - **Domestic Chains:** Brands such as Haldiram's, Goli Vada Pav, and Chai Point have carved out a niche with local flavours and cater to both urban and semi-urban customers.
 - **Cloud Kitchens:** New entrants in the QSR space, cloud kitchens (e.g., Rebel Foods) focus solely on delivery models, enabling rapid scalability and lower overheads.
- The QSR industry's low entry barriers and franchising models make it easier for new players to enter, adding dynamism to the market and further expanding employment potential.

Growth in the QSR industry:

Value of Quick Service Restaurants Foodservice Market by cuisine, USD, India, 2017 - 2029



Source: Mordor Intelligence



The Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) industry in India has seen significant growth over the past two decades, driven by changing consumer lifestyles, increased urbanization, and rising disposable incomes. The industry's rapid expansion, estimated to grow at a CAGR of over 20% from 2023-2030, has created a massive demand for both skilled and unskilled labor across the country.

Employment Landscape in QSRs:

The QSR sector is labour-intensive, employing a mix of entry-level staff (often with minimal education requirements), mid-level managers, and skilled chefs. Entry-level positions offer access to work with limited qualifications, making QSRs one of the few industries where people can begin without advanced education and potentially advance through practical experience and skill acquisition.

Key roles include:

- **Entry-Level Staff:** Kitchen helpers, cashiers, service attendants
- **Mid-Level Staff:** Shift supervisors, managers, trainers
- **Corporate Roles:** Marketing, supply chain, HR, and technology roles in QSR headquarters

The QSR industry's employment structure allows for relatively high job accessibility, which contributes to social mobility for lower-income groups. Workers often begin with hourly or part-time positions but can transition into full-time roles with benefits, especially in large chains.

According to The Economic Times, India's quick service restaurants (QSRs) and restaurants are planning to hire around 500,000 people in 2024 alone.

Summarising the finding from the FSSAI, an Industry Regulatory body, nearly 75% of the workforce in the QSR industry in India has a work tenure of less than 3 years. A major chunk of the workforce, 41.8% have less than 2 years of experience. This relatively short tenure is often due to employees gaining experience and skills, prompting them to seek better opportunities elsewhere.

The dynamic nature of the QSR industry drives relatively higher employee turnover, as employees pursue positions that offer greater stability. About 24.3% of the workforce serve for more than 3 years. The Monthly Average Attrition of the workforce in the QSR industry is between 10-40%.

In QSRs, most of the workforce (88%) receive an average salary between Rs.15,000 -20,000 per month, closer to the minimum wage proscribed by the government. Incentive programs are widely used across industries to boost productivity, achieve goals, and enhance employee satisfaction.

Typically, QSRs follow reasonably employee friendly practices but it is far from ideal. 24% do not provide any leaves beyond standard weekly offs, 4 in a month. Most QSRs provide leaves between 20 and 30 days, and some between 15

and 20 days a year. Amidst this variance, a few standout QSRs prioritise employee satisfaction by allowing leave carry-forwards and accommodating extended leaves for personal reasons. By integrating these solutions into their operations, QSRs can enhance operational efficiency, minimise compliance risks, and deliver a safer and more compliant dining experience.

QSR's Contribution to the Economy

The QSR industry contributes significantly to the Indian economy by:

- **Providing Jobs:** The industry supports millions of jobs, especially among youth and semi-skilled laborers. Many employees in this sector are first-time jobholders, offering a stepping stone toward upward economic mobility.
- **Expanding Regional Development:** QSR chains opening in smaller cities and towns stimulate local economies by creating jobs and establishing a supply chain involving local vendors and logistics providers.
- **Tax Revenue:** QSRs contribute to state and federal tax revenues, aiding infrastructure and public service funding.

As the QSR industry grows, it also has the potential to impact social mobility directly by offering structured career paths, training programs, and benefits. Understanding these roles and economic contributions will be central to examining how QSRs serve as engines of mobility for many Indian workers.

4. Results

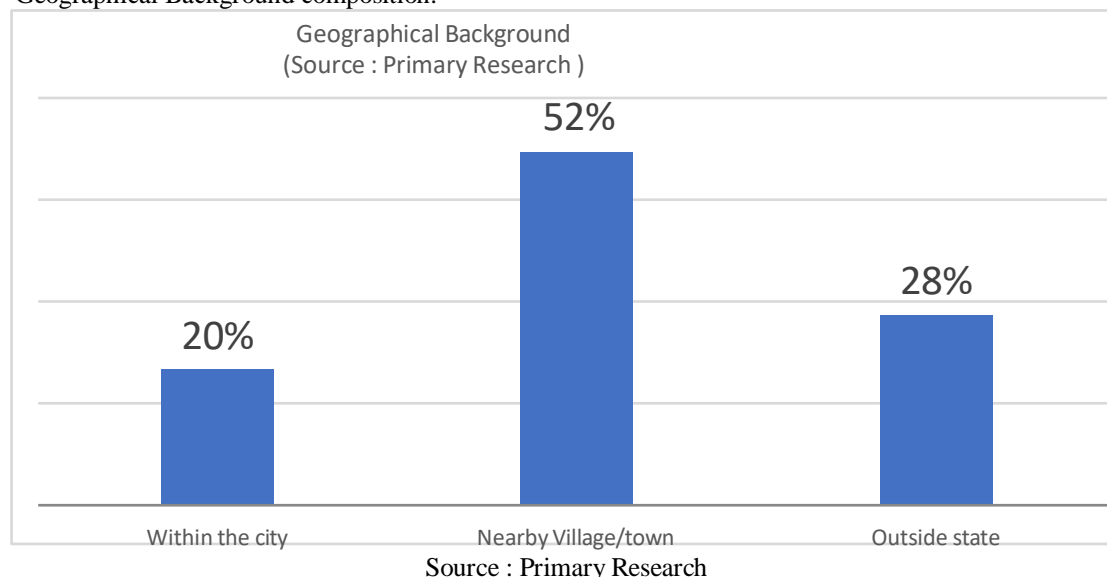
I used In-depth interviews methodology with a target group of QSR industry employees in Domino's stores including Store Manager, Kitchen Staff, Riders and Housekeeping staff. The number of respondents I interviewed was 22 across 9 stores in Delhi – NCR region of India.

I am summarizing the key findings from the study below.

1. Personal Background

A majority of the workers I met were from nearby towns & villages. They use local transportation, primarily buses to commute to the city. Only 20% of the workers were from the city where they are working currently. 28% of them were from a different state who had come here for jobs.

Graph – Geographical Background composition:



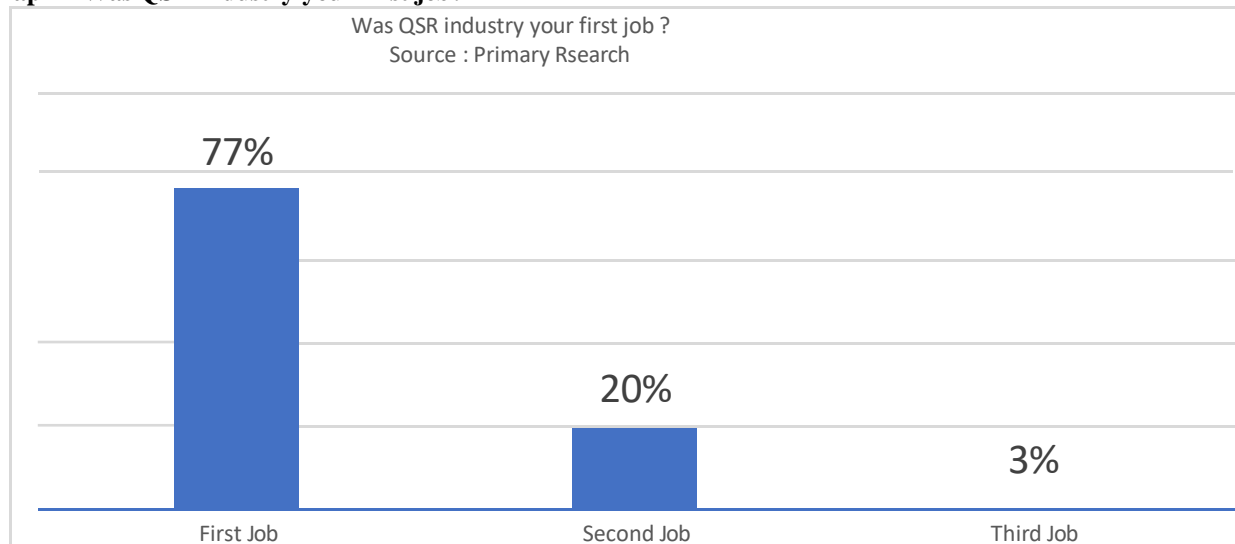
About half of them were from blue collar family backgrounds & the other half from traditional agricultural households. The composition above shows a representative picture of mobility within the QSR industry. It is enabling jobs that people from nearby towns & villages find viable enough to move for – either temporarily or permanently. On discussion, some of the key enabling factors for this was the availability of low-cost housing like PG accommodation/Hostels, the emergence of areas within the city that were pockets of lower rents with minimal services, what we could call semi-urban ghettos. The difficulties around quality & easy availability of public transportation are a sore point. Many used to use Motorbikes to commute to work, particularly the locals.

75% of the interviewed respondents have passed 10th standard & 42% had passed 12th standard. 25% of the respondents, mostly engaged in housekeeping & maintenance jobs has not passed 10th standard.

The 'stepping stone' industry:

For a majority of the respondents, the QSR industry was the first job. 77% people found their first steps into professional life through the QSR industry.

Graph – Was QSR industry your first job?



Source : Primary Research

The availability of low-skill jobs, the possibility of quickly training people to perform jobs and the growth of the industry leading to the demand for low-cost workforce are some of the driving forces of this trend.

It is indeed heartening to see that there is an industry that allows people to come in without prior work experience & work their way up. One of the important factors of mobility in the industry is also the availability & access to job opportunities that are not privileged or opaque to a common man.

On further discussions on typical recruitment models that stores use to recruit their employees, particularly, the early-stage jobs, I learnt that nearly 25% of the recruitment today in the industry is through Walk-in interviews and the majority is through reference. Job agents & organised employee portals are also used to source employees.

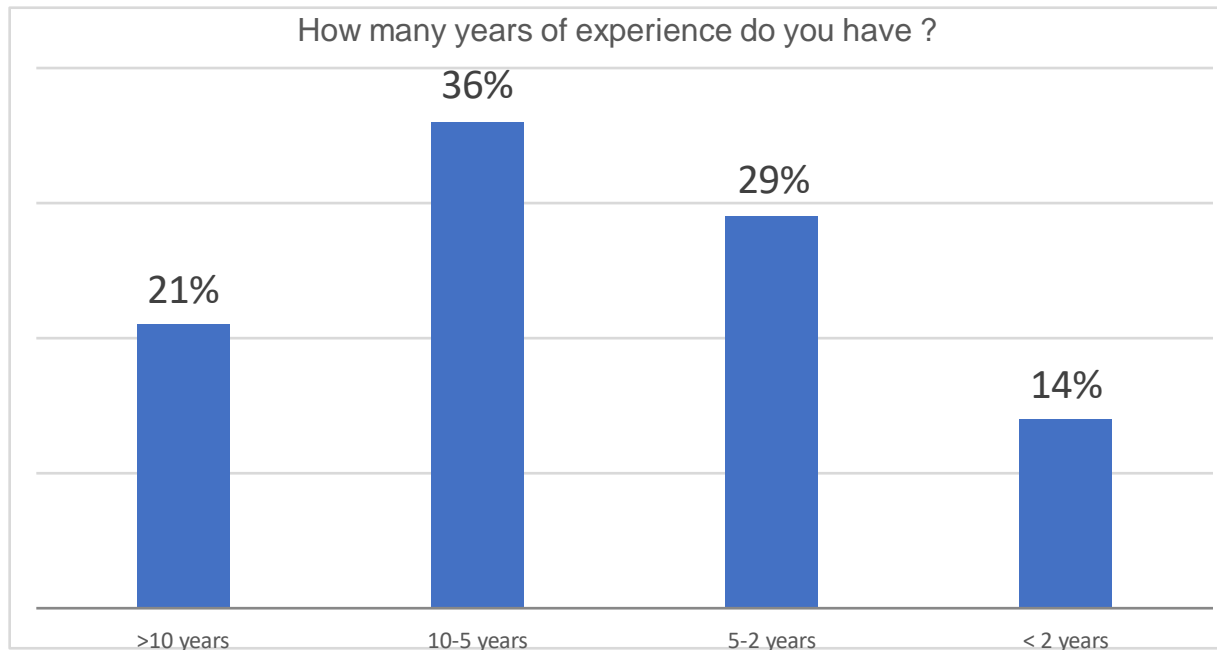
Another feature in the QSR industry is the relatively higher movement between the different competitors & players. The prevalence of the referrals is a big factor in enabling this mobility amongst different companies. Also, the preference amongst companies to hire people with prior knowledge, skills & understanding of QSR work culture. The relatively lower jumps in salary when people make the movement is also a big enabler of this mobility.

I learnt that the very availability & ease of this option to potentially move out to a competitor works well from an employee perspective. There is a sense of optionality & choice amongst workers which drives their self-confidence at work.

Not just a young person's industry

I learnt through the research that the industry has a wide profile of experience bands – both at a manager & the work er level.

Graph – Experience Profiles :



Source: Primary Research

57% of the respondents had experience greater than 5 years & 14% had experience less than 2 years. There are employees who are in their late 40's that I had the opportunity to meet on the job as well.

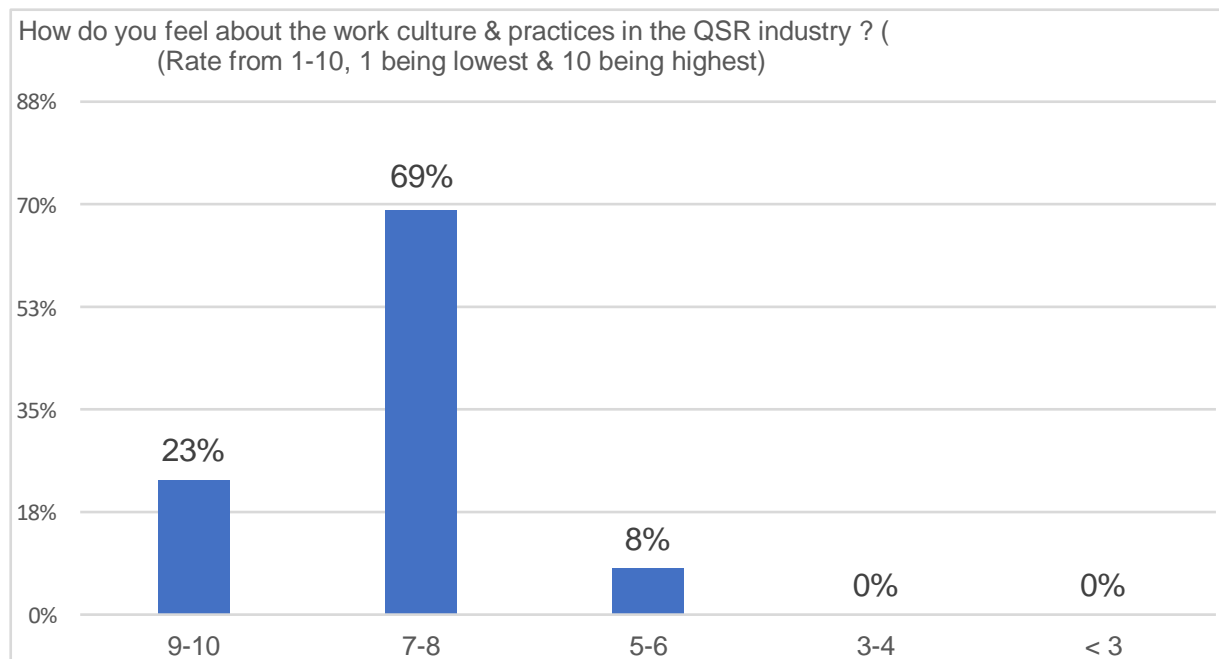
One of the most fascinating stories I encountered was of Lakshmi Rani who joined as house-keeping staff in the store nearly 7 years back. She works even today as a house keeping worker in a school as her primary day job & comes to work at the store for 4 hours shift from 4-8pm after her job the school gets over. She has risen up the value chain in the store & today works in the Kitchen making Pizzas. She is big force in the store and has personally taught & mentored many young employees including many who are working in the store currently. She displays the energy & enthusiasm of a person much younger & is a calming influence in the team during frequently chaotic moments that come with the industry.

During the interview with Lakshmi, she shared some fascinating perspectives about what the works means for her & her family. She likes to work here because she feels like it makes her belong to a strong cultural environment that values her. She values the sense of organisation safety that this place brings her & she feels safe & valued in the space. She said there are other industries she can work like the manufacturing sector in jobs like packaging but prefers to this job because of the softer aspects of how she feels in this environment.

The culture is seen as aspirational

A large majority of the respondents rated the work culture & practices highly. There is clear expectation that they are aligned to and largely the work setting & culture they encounter seems to align with people's expectations.

Graph – Experience Profiles :



Source: Primary Research

On probing on the specifics of what they liked about the culture, the key factors that emerged were as below:

1. There are clear operating guidelines & rules
2. The workers are professional
3. The company policies are clear
4. Compensation is provided on time & as agreed
5. Their relationship with their co-workers is good

While the scores do seem high for a mostly minimum wage industry, the deeper reasons for this perception & feeling emerged quite clearly in the conversations. Most of them compare this culture & industry against other un-organized industries. The large prevalence of people who work in those industries in their lives in quite real has built a good understanding of work practices in the unorganized industries & small businesses, which they believe are not well governed

Even the very basic expectation of getting their salary on time is not something that the respondents take for granted because of the prevalence of stories of delayed salaries & other unscrupulous practices in other more unorganized industries.

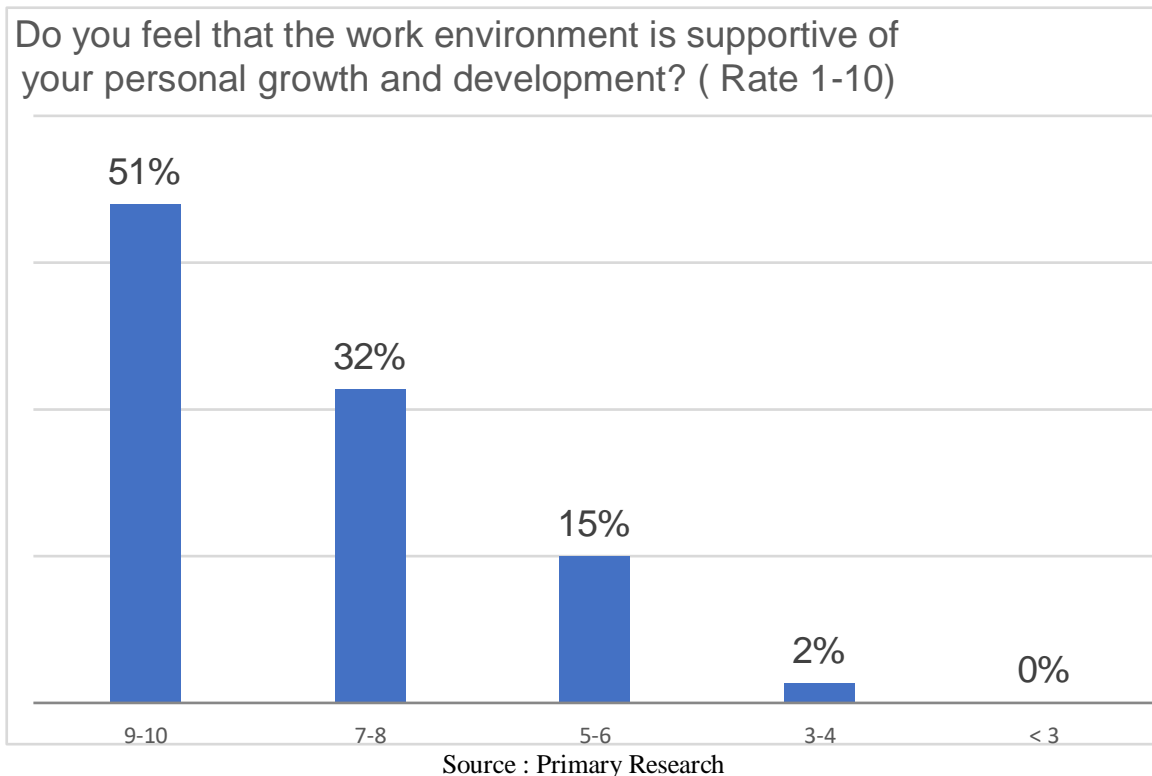
Also, the presence of a competent managerial layer is a big factor cited by the respondents. They feel that they can bring up issues when they arise & also the oversight & visibility drives accountability & a sense of order

Another conversation went to the presence of a uniform at work. Many felt that they feel equal & professional when they changed to a uniform at work. There is a sense of pride & belonging that the uniform makes them feel. It was indeed a revelation to get exposed to these different perspectives & what constitutes a good work environment.

The potential for upward mobility

On the question of whether the workers felt that the environment was supportive of their personal growth & development, large majority felt positive.

Graph – Supportive of personal growth & development ?



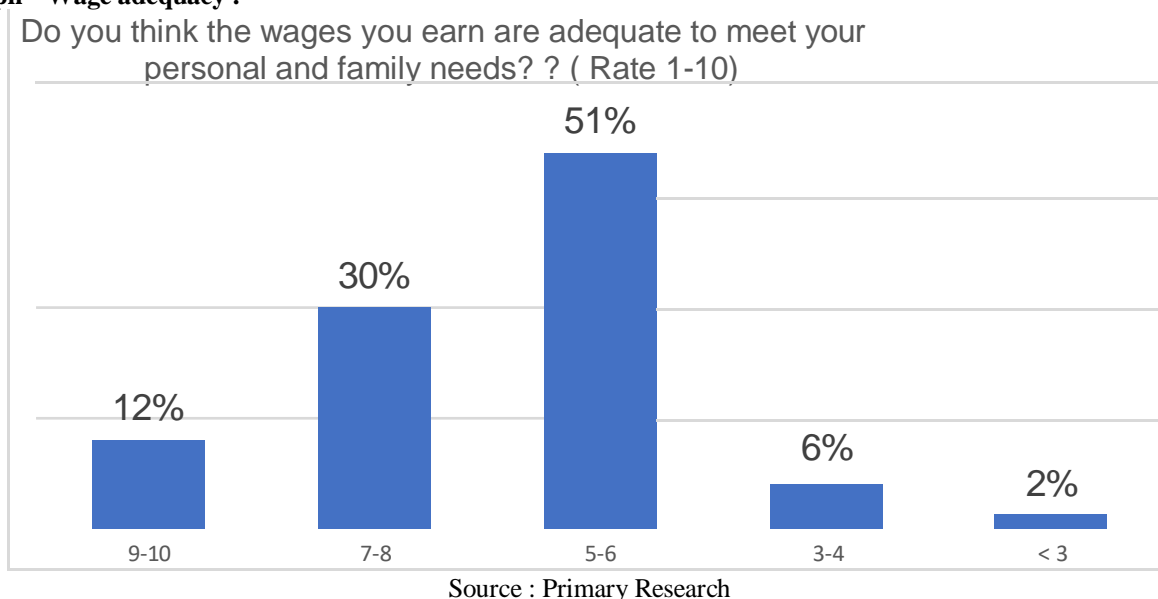
50% of the respondents feel highly positive about the environment & 32% felt largely positive. There is a direct influence of their relative standing at work and the way they feel about their own prospects for growth. Many young people rated it very highly in general. There are also people who feel neutral or somewhat negatively about the growth prospects and this is mostly driven by their own growth or the lack thereof in their own careers.

The fact that more than 70% feel positively about their potential & possibility for upward movement & growth in their careers is a really positive sign. This combined with the fact that there are potential available opportunities in competitor companies for people who feel otherwise is a very important consideration from a mobility perspective.

The reality of money

On the very important question of wages & wage adequacy, there is clearly a mixed bag response. Most workers are near minimum wages in the industry & they are feeling the pinch.

Graph – Wage adequacy :



Only 12% rated wage adequacy greater than 9 & there is fair distribution across the spectrum in this domain. Close to 60% of the respondents have rated it less than 6 clearly pointing out to this being an area of concern for many. The realities of living in a large urban city, particularly for those who have migrated to the city for the job is very real. They said their

salaries increase every year but it is very low according to them. Many cited the growing prices of essentials, rent & fuel and how it is directly impacting their life.

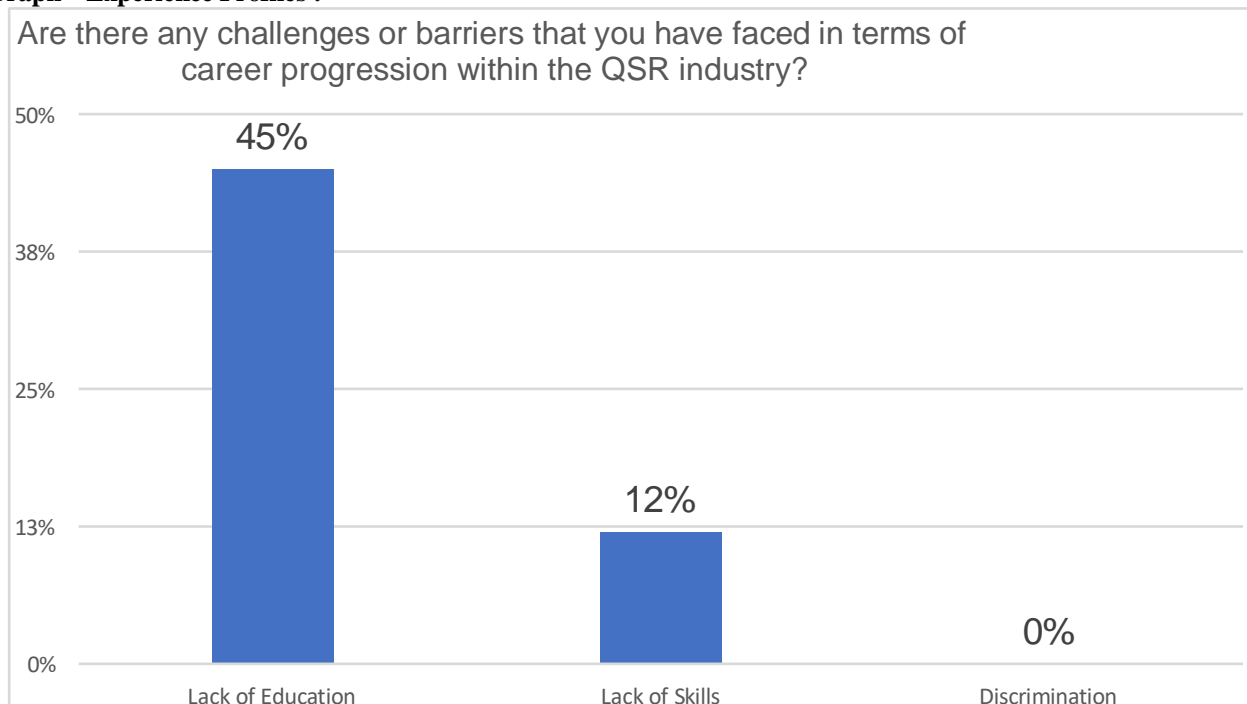
While many accepted that work culture & policies are good in the place they work currently, they would move if there is a reasonable hike in their wages. One of the features of the industry – which is providing stepping stones to early jobbers is also a challenge for people who have walked that path & but are forced to look for opportunities elsewhere due to their life needs.

While some of them grow into supervisory & managerial roles, many of them continue to be at minimum wage levels, this drives this need & dynamics.

5. Future Works

The challenges to upward career mobility

Graph – Experience Profiles :

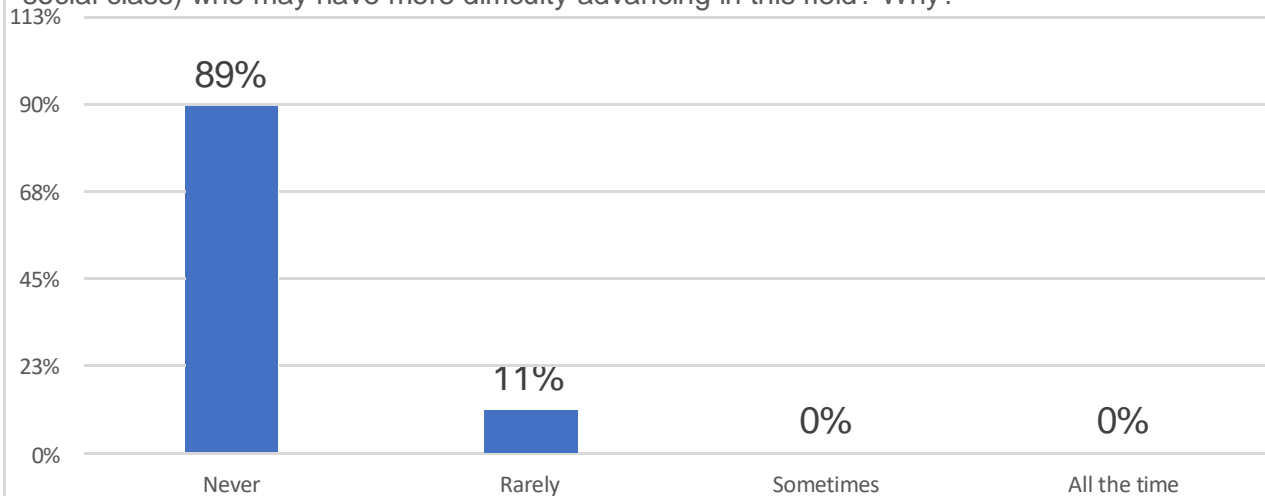


Source: Primary Research

Most of the employees cite lack of education as the primary reasons for lack of career progression followed by lack of skills. Higher supervisory & managerial position need higher order of communication & managerial skills & this is a hard ceiling for many to break.

Graph – Experience Profiles :

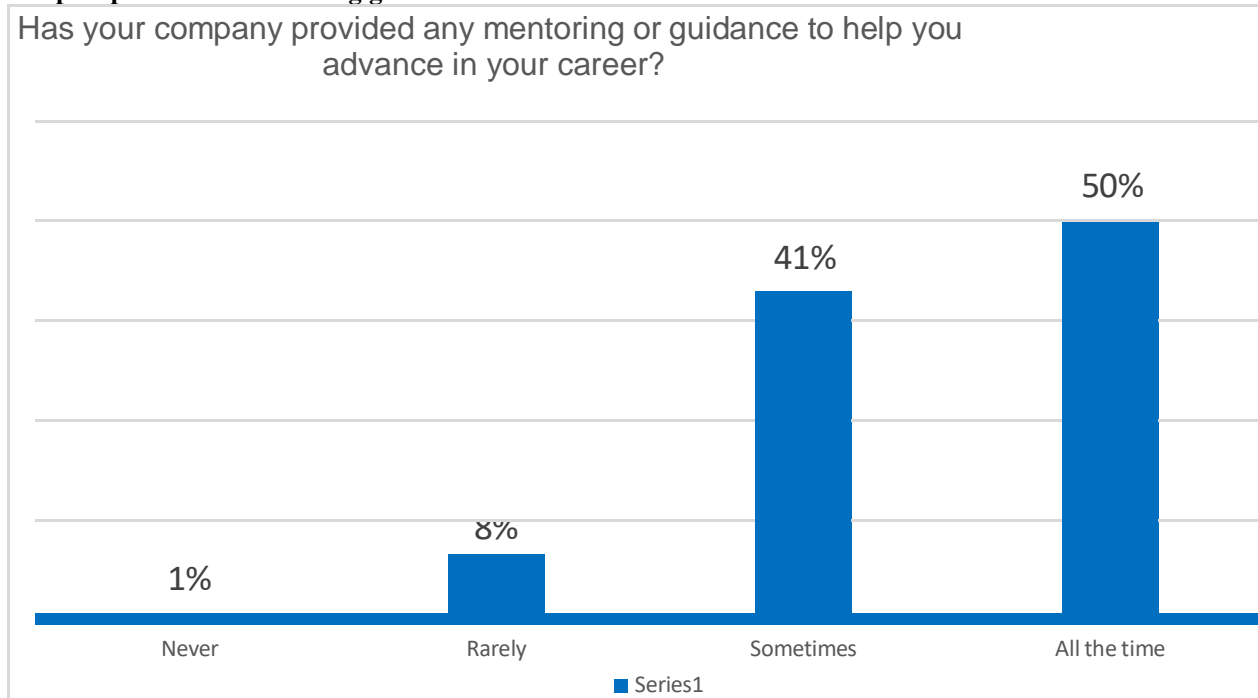
Do you feel that there are certain groups (e.g., based on gender, caste, or social class) who may have more difficulty advancing in this field? Why?



Source: Primary Research

There is a support for upward mobility.

Graph – presence of mentoring/guidance :

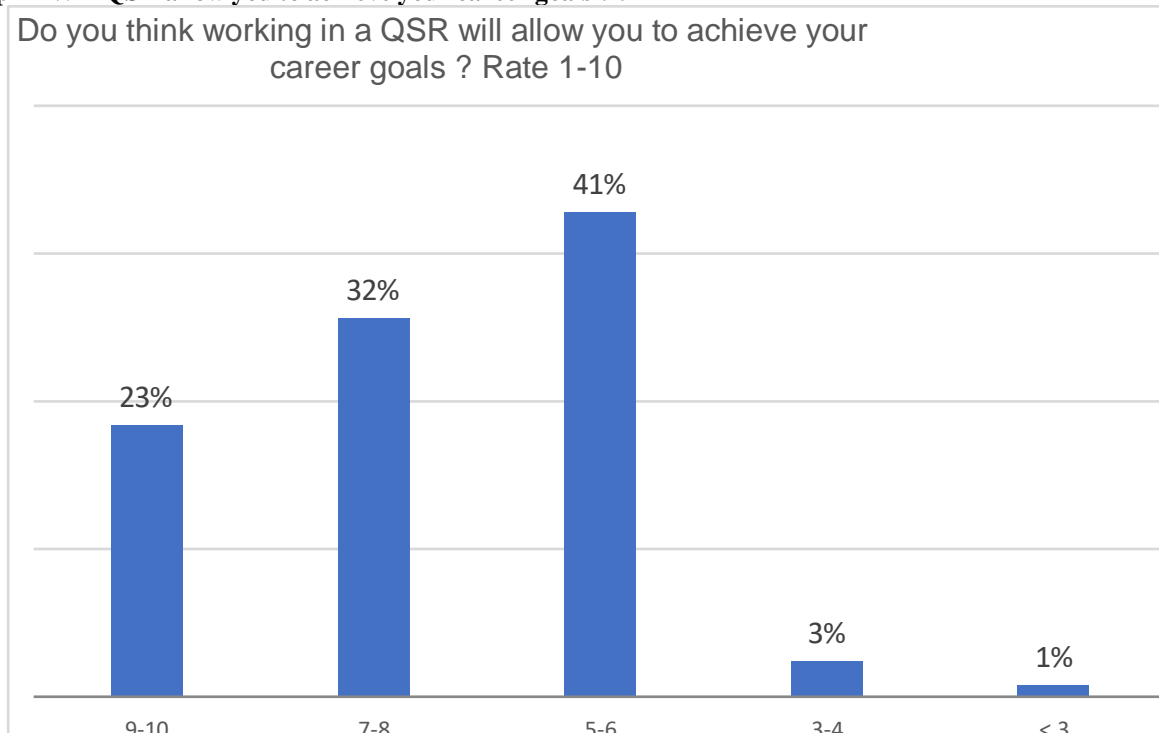


Source: Primary Research

Majority of the employees acknowledge the presence of career progression inputs & mentorship in their daily work – which is a heartening sign.

The prospects & limits of the industry

Graph – Will QSR allow you to achieve your career goals ? :



Source: Primary Research

More than 96% acknowledge they feel they can grow & achieve their career goals in the industry. This speaks to the mobility aspect of the industry & the wide spread belief around it that exists with employees.

The India Social Mobility Study 2020-21 – Key findings:

A study conducted by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and RTI International delves deeper into the structural barriers and enablers of social mobility in India, identifying key areas where intervention is needed to improve socio-economic outcomes across the population.

The below are some of the study's significant insights:

1. Education as a Foundational Driver of Social Mobility

Quality and Accessibility:

Education remains a fundamental driver of social mobility, but its quality and accessibility are uneven, particularly across rural and urban areas. The study notes that while primary education coverage has improved, there are significant disparities in secondary and higher education access. Rural regions, in particular, face shortages in quality educational infrastructure, impacting the career aspirations and earning potential of young people from these areas.

Skill Development:

There is a strong call for alignment between education curricula and industry requirements. The report advocates for expanding skill development programs tailored to regional job markets, especially in sectors like manufacturing, technology, and services, to create employable graduates and reduce the skills mismatch that limits job opportunities for many young Indians.

2. Employment Landscape and Economic Opportunities

Sectoral Mobility and Informal Employment:

India's labor market is characterized by stark contrasts, with the organized sector providing structured growth paths, while the informal sector (which employs a majority of India's workforce) offers limited job security and low wages. This disparity reinforces social stagnation for those who cannot access formal employment. Sectors such as IT, finance, and services tend to provide upward mobility, while industries like agriculture, construction, and informal retail offer fewer growth prospects.

Vocational Training and Apprenticeships:

The report suggests expanding vocational training and apprenticeship opportunities, especially for youth from low-income backgrounds, as these can serve as viable pathways to formal employment. By equipping young people with market-relevant skills, the study posits that India can bridge employment gaps and support upward mobility, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas.

3. Role of Social and Gender Inequalities

Caste and Social Hierarchies:

The caste system remains a barrier to social mobility for many. Historical disadvantages linked to caste affiliations still affect access to education, employment, and economic opportunities for marginalized communities. The study highlights the need for affirmative actions and awareness programs aimed at reducing caste-based discrimination in hiring and education.

Gender Gaps:

Women face significant obstacles in achieving social mobility due to lower workforce participation rates, cultural expectations, and limited access to high-paying jobs. The report calls for increased gender inclusivity in workplaces, along with policies supporting women's professional growth, including flexible working hours, childcare support, and skills training initiatives that empower women to participate actively in the economy.

4. Impact of Policy and Social Welfare Programs

Public Policy Support:

Government policies and social welfare programs can be instrumental in supporting social mobility, but there are challenges in implementation and reach, particularly in remote and underserved regions. The study highlights existing social programs like the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) initiatives and labor reforms, which aim to improve job prospects and economic security for low-income groups. However, it emphasizes the need for more targeted efforts that directly address the gaps in access to these programs for marginalized communities.

Entrepreneurship and SME Support:

The report encourages policy support for entrepreneurship and small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which can generate jobs and promote economic growth. By providing access to finance, mentorship, and market linkages, policies can help individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to start and grow businesses, contributing to social mobility and regional economic development.

5. Regional Inequality and Urban-Rural Divide

Infrastructure and Access Disparities:

India's urban-rural divide is a significant factor in social mobility. Urban areas have greater access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, which positions residents for upward mobility. In contrast, rural regions struggle with limited infrastructure, poor access to resources, and fewer high-paying job opportunities. The report suggests that investment in rural education, healthcare, and infrastructure development could play a pivotal role in balancing opportunities across regions and fostering social mobility on a national scale

6. Recommendations for a Roadmap Forward

Cross-sector Collaboration:

The report advocates for collaboration among the government, private sector, and non-profit organizations to create a cohesive strategy for improving social mobility. This includes partnerships that facilitate affordable access to quality education, promote gender and caste inclusivity, and create sustainable job opportunities in rural areas.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Programs:

Continuous assessment of social programs and policies is crucial to ensure they meet intended outcomes. The study suggests setting up frameworks for monitoring the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at social mobility and adjusting them based on measurable results.

In summary, the India Social Mobility Study 2020-21 emphasizes the critical need for targeted, sustained efforts across education, employment, social equity, and regional development. It recommends systemic changes that align educational and employment pathways with market needs, while addressing deep-rooted social inequalities, to foster a more inclusive and upwardly mobile society. This comprehensive approach is aimed at unlocking potential across demographics and creating a resilient, growth-oriented India

QSRs as Catalysts of Social Mobility

Quick-Service Restaurants have a prominent place in India's economic landscape, generating employment, driving consumption, and supporting the growth of diverse socio-economic groups.

In recent years, the sector has evolved beyond serving convenience foods to acting as a catalyst for social mobility. By creating a range of employment opportunities, enhancing skill development, and providing upward mobility pathways, QSRs are helping reshape economic mobility in India.

Some of the ways QSRs contribute to social mobility and their broader impact on India's market and society are as below:

1. Employment Generation and Entry-Level Opportunities

The QSR industry in India has experienced exponential growth and according to a report by the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI), the foodservice industry generated over 7.3 million jobs in 2021 alone, a significant portion of which came from QSRs.

By hiring individuals with minimal educational qualifications and providing them with on-the-job training, QSRs offer immediate employment opportunities for India's vast youth population, which frequently faces barriers to entry in other sectors due to lack of formal education or experience

For young adults from low-income backgrounds, QSRs serve as an accessible entry point into the workforce. These jobs, though often entry-level, allow individuals to earn an income, gain workplace skills, and contribute financially to their families. In a country where youth unemployment remains a concern, QSRs provide steady employment options that don't demand advanced qualifications, thus fostering economic stability for millions.

2. Skill Development and Training

Beyond mere employment, QSRs contribute to skill development, which is another key driver of social mobility. QSR jobs often require employees to work in teams, handle customer interactions, and maintain quality and service standards, helping individuals develop skills in communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Many QSRs offer structured training programs to equip employees with these skills, which are transferable to other industries, including retail, hospitality, and customer service.

For example, Domino's India runs a comprehensive training program for entry-level employees, focusing on customer interaction, quality control, and operational efficiency. Similarly, McDonald's India offers development programs that train employees in areas like customer service, leadership, and financial literacy. Such programs enable workers to transition from entry-level roles to supervisory or managerial positions within the QSR or related sectors, thereby fostering upward mobility

3. Pathways to Upward Mobility and Career Progression

QSRs offer unique career growth opportunities within the sector itself. Many employees start in entry-level positions and gradually ascend to higher roles such as shift managers, assistant managers, and store managers. This internal career ladder enables individuals to achieve financial stability and professional growth. A study by McKinsey & Company highlights that the QSR sector often emphasizes promoting from within, recognizing that trained, experienced employees bring significant value to operations.

For instance, KFC India has adopted a “promote from within” policy that encourages employees to rise through the ranks based on performance and experience. This approach not only motivates employees but also supports long-term career aspirations, allowing individuals to gain supervisory roles that pay significantly more than entry-level positions. For many employees, these career advancements represent a significant improvement in social and economic status, helping break the cycle of poverty and limited opportunity often faced by individuals from underprivileged backgrounds.

4. Empowering Women and Marginalized Groups

The QSR industry has emerged as an inclusive sector that often hires from diverse backgrounds, providing opportunities for women, individuals from marginalized communities, and those with disabilities. Many QSR chains actively support diversity in their hiring practices, recognizing the social and economic benefits of an inclusive workforce. By providing flexible work options and fostering an environment of equality, QSRs enable women to gain financial independence and participate in the workforce. This inclusion is especially important in a country where gender-based employment disparities are prevalent.

Brands like Café Coffee Day and Domino’s India have specifically focused on hiring women in both urban and rural settings, recognizing the potential for these jobs to empower women economically and socially. By employing women in customer-facing roles and supervisory positions, QSRs contribute to gender equity and support women’s upward mobility, empowering them to become financially independent and build valuable work experience.

5. Economic Impact and Community Development

QSRs also have a broader impact on community development and local economies, especially in semi-urban and rural areas. By expanding into these regions, QSR chains create employment opportunities in areas that often lack formal job options, spurring local economic activity. Additionally, QSR outlets in such areas stimulate local supply chains, benefitting farmers, suppliers, and small vendors. The presence of QSRs often encourages infrastructure improvements, such as better roads and utilities, thus benefiting the community as a whole.

For example, when McDonald’s expanded into smaller cities in India, it required a consistent supply of high-quality produce. This demand led to partnerships with local farmers and suppliers, who then benefitted from steady business and income growth. Consequently, QSRs not only generate direct employment but also create ripple effects throughout local economies, which can enhance the social and economic mobility of people within these communities.

6. Fostering Entrepreneurship and Small Business Growth

QSRs have also spurred entrepreneurial growth by promoting franchise models. Franchise ownership offers a pathway for individuals to engage in business operations and benefit from a proven business model. For those who might not have access to large capital or extensive business experience, owning a franchise can be a viable way to enter the business world with lower risk.

In India, QSR brands like Subway and Baskin Robbins have adopted franchise models that allow aspiring entrepreneurs to invest in a business with established brand recognition, training, and support. This opportunity is particularly appealing for young entrepreneurs who lack extensive industry experience but are keen to participate in the fast-growing food service sector. Such franchises provide entrepreneurs with the opportunity to achieve economic self-sufficiency and, in many cases, contribute to the social mobility of their families and communities.

In conclusion, The QSR industry in India has evolved far beyond simply providing convenient food options; it has become a potent engine of social mobility. Through entry-level job creation, skill development, career progression, and support for marginalized groups, QSRs offer multiple pathways for individuals to improve their socio-economic standing. By promoting diversity, fostering entrepreneurship, and contributing to local economies, the QSR sector plays a transformative role in India’s social and economic landscape.

While challenges remain, such as addressing low entry-level wages and ensuring job security, the QSR industry’s commitment to inclusivity and skill-building provides a model for other sectors aiming to enhance social mobility. As the industry continues to expand, it has the potential to uplift even more individuals and communities across India, making a significant impact on the nation’s journey towards economic equity and inclusive growth.

Challenges Faced by Workers in the Quick-Service Restaurant (QSR) Industry

We have seen how the Quick-Service Restaurant (QSR) industry is one of the key pillars of social mobility & the economy providing affordable food and essential employment opportunities to millions.

However, while these jobs offer a foot in the door for many young, low-skilled, and economically disadvantaged workers, they come with significant challenges. QSR employees face issues such as low wages, job insecurity, limited opportunities for career advancement, high job stress, and exposure to health risks. This essay explores these challenges in detail, shedding light on the often-overlooked difficulties faced by workers in this sector.

Low Wages and Limited Benefits

One of the most persistent challenges for QSR workers is low pay. The majority of QSR jobs are entry-level positions with hourly wages that are often at or barely above minimum wage. For many QSR workers, the income generated from these jobs is insufficient to meet basic living expenses, leading to financial instability and dependence on additional employment or government assistance. QSR jobs often lack comprehensive benefits. Unlike other industries where employees may receive health insurance, paid leave, and retirement benefits, QSR workers frequently rely on part-time

hours and temporary contracts that do not include these perks. This lack of benefits exacerbates financial strain and places workers in a precarious situation, particularly in countries without universal healthcare.

High Job Insecurity and Turnover Rates

Job insecurity is a notable challenge in the QSR industry, which is known for high turnover rates. This means that QSR companies are constantly recruiting, training, and replacing workers. The high turnover rate is fueled by several factors, including the low wages, limited career growth, and challenging working conditions that drive workers to seek alternative employment when possible.

In addition, many QSRs rely on part-time and casual contracts to reduce costs, which contributes to job insecurity among workers. The unpredictable nature of these positions, with irregular hours and few guarantees of stable employment, leaves workers without financial or job stability. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this insecurity, as many QSR workers were laid off or had their hours reduced due to reduced business and health restrictions.

Limited Opportunities for Career Advancement

While QSRs provide employment to millions, the potential for upward mobility within the industry is often limited. Many employees begin in entry-level roles, such as cashiers or kitchen staff, and find that there are few opportunities to progress into supervisory or managerial positions. This lack of career progression is due in part to the flat organizational structures common in QSR chains, where a limited number of management roles are available compared to the large number of entry-level positions.

Moreover, QSRs are sometimes seen as "dead-end jobs," where skills learned are often specific to the fast-food environment and may not be easily transferable to other sectors. Even when promotion opportunities exist, the additional responsibilities and stress may not come with proportional increases in pay, which can deter workers from pursuing advancement. This limitation in career growth can leave workers feeling undervalued and stuck, prompting many to exit the industry altogether in search of more fulfilling and financially rewarding opportunities.

4. Job Stress and Pressure

Working in a QSR is physically and mentally demanding. Employees are often expected to work quickly and efficiently in a high-pressure environment, managing customer orders, preparing food, and maintaining cleanliness, often with minimal breaks. The fast-paced nature of the job, combined with customer-facing responsibilities, can lead to significant job stress. Workers are frequently required to handle complaints, manage long queues, and ensure the speed and accuracy of service, all of which contribute to a challenging work atmosphere.

Additionally, long hours and erratic shifts—often early in the morning or late at night—can lead to fatigue and burnout. According to studies, fast-food employees report high levels of job-related stress, which is often exacerbated by understaffing and the pressure to meet performance targets. This stress can negatively impact workers' mental health, leading to high rates of anxiety, depression, and turnover within the industry.

5. Health and Safety Risks

QSR employees are exposed to various health and safety risks due to the nature of their work. In kitchen environments, workers handle hot equipment, sharp tools, and cleaning chemicals, which increases the risk of burns, cuts, and other injuries. Despite safety protocols, the high-paced environment can make accidents more likely. In fact, studies have shown that food service workers have one of the highest rates of workplace injuries compared to other sectors.

Furthermore, the repetitive tasks and long hours often lead to musculoskeletal issues such as joint pain, back pain, and repetitive strain injuries. Standing for long periods, carrying heavy loads, and repetitive motions all contribute to these physical stresses, which can lead to chronic health issues over time. The COVID-19 pandemic added another layer of risk, as many QSR workers were on the front lines, interacting with the public and handling potentially contaminated items, increasing their risk of exposure to the virus.

venience and familiarity, there is a risk that their expansion may overshadow traditional food businesses, particularly small, family-owned eateries. To mitigate this, some QSR chains have introduced locally-inspired menu items and incorporated regional flavors to align with Indian tastes, thereby supporting culinary diversity.

6. Conclusion

The Quick-Service Restaurant industry in India plays a significant role in fostering local economic growth and community development. Through job creation, support for local entrepreneurship, the strengthening of supply chains, infrastructure development, and consumer spending, the QSR industry contributes to economic inclusion and social mobility. By empowering women, supporting agriculture, and investing in rural areas, QSRs have a profound and wide-reaching impact on the economic fabric of India.

To fully realize the potential of the QSR industry's positive impact on local communities, it is essential for industry stakeholders to address challenges related to wages, sustainability, and cultural preservation. A commitment to fair employment practices, environmental responsibility, and community engagement will ensure that the QSR industry continues to be a force for economic growth and social progress in India's diverse and evolving economy. As the sector expands, its influence will likely extend to even more communities, playing an increasingly vital role in India's journey toward economic resilience and social equity.

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