

THE CHOICE OF RESIDENTIAL SPACE: AS PERCEIVED BY THE STUDENTS OF THE GUJARAT UNIVERSITY.

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ABSTRACT : The process of developing preference for a particular space is a complex one. An individual chooses a place as perceived by the process of relative evaluation and relative images of various areas.

In the choice of residential space, the post-graduate students of the Gujarat University have shown a distinct preference for Gujarat. The reasons for such a bias are related to social and cultural ties, followed by economic opportunities and environmental factors. The students have shown preference to live in cities, followed by villages. The preference for small towns is negligible. The preference of the students to live in their home state can have dual implications. Social stability and cultural heritage will develop in one hand, while restriction to home state may lead to limited job and educational opportunities and lack of interest for other parts of the country.

A simple model of probability for residential choice of destination has been built. The expected values are found to be close to the actual values of the desired destinations of the students.

I. Introduction to spatial perception

The geographer's concern over spatial perception is rather a new trend in the discipline. The spatial perception or the mental image of a particular space that people want to live in, can be an important step in understanding the structure and process of human activity. Any planning on space is meaningful if we have the knowledge regarding people's perception of that area,

The process of developing preference for a particular space is a complex one. Man, space and environment are very much interdependent. Any space, as such, has no meaning unless it is identified with the location of an individual or a particular human activity which the space is used for. On the other hand, an individual gets his/her identity by the space which he/she belongs to. A person becomes a part of an environment - both

socially and physically and develops preference for an area over a period of time. The image or the perception of an area is a compound process of personal experience and judgement, the individual's social and cultural background and the information that is stored in the person's memory with certain positive aspirations and negative constraints. An individual thus chooses a place as perceived by the process of relative evaluation and relative images of various areas, which are stored in the memory.

Peter Gould (1966) was the first geographer who methodically studied the individual's perception of space. With a controlled sample of student-community in the U. S. A., England, Ghana and Nigeria, Gould showed the distinct preference and bias of students for their home areas. An attempt has been made in this paper to

understand and throw some light on the residential preference of a section of the post graduate students of the Gujarat University, Ahmedabad.

II. The residential preference of the students of the Gujarat University

(a) Data aspect

A sample of 240 students of 1978-79, of the School of Social Sciences in Ahmedabad, was taken to collect information on their spatial preferences of residential areas. This study is restricted to the data of student community. The findings can be different if the sample is taken from a mixed community. It is difficult to draw conclusions from a mixed community as opposed to a community with some homogeneity of background. The residential preference can change along with the life-style and life-cycle of the students over time. Since the image of a particular space is dependent on many factors, the findings on residential preference may vary in different situations. This study is based on a questionnaire which again, as with all such methods, suffers from subjective channelization of thought. However, the data give an overall idea of spatial perception of students at a particular point of time.

(b) The socio-economic background of the students

Nearly 92% of the students were born in Gujarat, 30% of which were born in Ahmedabad district. The proportion of male and female students is almost the same. Most of them are in the age group of 20 to 24 years. Nearly 50% of them were born in cities, 40% in villages and 10% in small towns. A large proportion of them (that is 69%) are from "caste" families. Many of them are from families with low income (that is 41%). Most of the students have college education in Gujarat - many of them had it in their birth place, within Gujarat (Table I).

(c) Findings

In terms of residential preference of space, the first choice is made to eleven states of which Gujarat stands out by far as the most preferred state (Table II). The distribution is highly skewed with 84% of students who want to live in Gujarat, followed by Maharashtra (6%) and Jammu and Kashmir (3%). The second choice is given to sixteen states of which Maharashtra is preferred most (again with a skewed distribution) (Table III). The distribution is not so skewed, as in the first one, in the list of third choice (Table IV) the distribution pattern is rather horizontal with somewhat similar preference for Maharashtra, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh.

About 56% of the students believe that they would be able to live in the place where they want to (Table V), with a probability of 75-100%, while 27% students think that their probability of living in the preferred place is not so high, i.e. ranging between 50-74%.

As discussed earlier, the preference for a particular space depends on many factors social and cultural, economic and other opportunities, environmental qualities, background of an individual and available information of a place and the ability to use the information. From the survey results, it appears that the students of the Gujarat University have shown a strong preference for Gujarat. This may be related to social and cultural reasons (Table VI). This includes the nearness to friends and relatives, being born and brought up in the state and the preference for the language. Economic reasons come next in the list, e.g. job opportunity, ownership of property and business opportunity. Environmental reasons related to physical beauty and climatic factor can be included as the third group of variables which have affected the residential choice of the students.

Other than the state of Gujarat as a whole, the students have a distinct bias to

Table I	
Socio-economic characteristics of the students	
	Percentage
1. Age : 20-24 years	91.25
25-30 years	8.75
2. Sex : Male	53.33
Female	46.67
3. College Education at :	
Birth place	37.08
Within Gujarat	59.58
Outside Gujarat	3.34
4. Caste : High	69.17
Low	23.75
Scheduled	07.8
5. Father's Occupation :	
Non-Government Service	11.66
Government Service	34.58
Farming	21.26
Own Business	14.58
Others	17.92
6. Annual Family Income :	
Less than Rs. 6,000/-	41.25
6,000 to 12,000/-	30.00
12,000 to 18,000	15.42
More than 18,000	13.33
7. Birth place :	
Village	39.58
Town	10.00
City	50.42
Within Ahmedabad district	30.00
Other district (within Gujarat)	70.00
Within the State of Gujarat	92.00
Outside the State of Gujarat	8.00
Sample Size :	240

Table II
First preference of states for residential purpose

States	Percentage
1. Gujarat	83.76
2. Maharashtra	5.84
3. Jammu & Kashmir	3.34
4. Uttar Pradesh	2.09
5. Assam	.83
6. Andhra Pradesh	.83
7. Delhi	.83
8. Tamil Nadu	.83
9. West Bengal	.83
10. Kerala	.41
11. Himachal Pradesh	.41
	<u>100.00</u>

Sample Size : 240

Table III
Second preference of states for residential purpose

States	Percentage
1. Maharashtra	58.60
2. Jammu & Kashmir	8.36
3. Gujarat	7.90
4. Uttar Pradesh	5.12
5. Punjab	4.18
6. Tamil Nadu	3.26
7. Kerala	2.39
8. Mysore	2.32
9. Madhya Pradesh	1.86
10. Delhi	1.40
11. Rajasthan	1.40
12. West Bengal	.93
13. Andhra Pradesh	.47
14. Assam	.47
15. Bihar	.47
16. Himachal Pradesh	.47
	<u>100.00</u>

Sample Size : 215

Table IV**Third preference of states for residential purpose**

States	Percentage
1. Maharastra	15.75
2. Jammu & Kashmir	15.28
3. Uttar Pradesh	13.89
4. Madhya Pradesh	9.72
5. Tamil Nadu	9.26
6. Gujarat	6.48
7. West Bengal	5.09
8. Kerala	4.63
9. Rajasthan	4.63
10. Mysore	4.17
11. Punjab	3.70
12. Andhra Pradesh	2.77
13. Delhi	1.85
14. Haryana	1.39
15. Himachal Pradesh	.93
16. Bihar	.46
	<u>100.00</u>

Sample Size : 216

Table V**Estimated percentage of living in the state of first choice - as perceived by the students**

Estimated probability of living in the selected state of first choice	Percentage of students
Less than 25%	3.39
25-49%	12.71
50-74%	27.54
75-100%	56.36
	<u>100.00</u>

Table VI**Reasons for the first preference of states**

Reasons	Percentage
1. Proximity to relatives	14.81
2. Language preference	14.64
3. Birth place	12.72
4. Being brought up	10.54
5. Proximity to friends	10.38
6. Job opportunity	10.38
7. Owing property	8.54
8. Education facility	5.36
9. Climatic reason	4.85
10. Business opportunity	4.10
11. Physical beauty of landscape	3.68
	<u>100.00</u>

live in urban areas (Table VII). Nearly 75% of the students have shown preference for city-life, 20% for villages and 5% for small towns. Of the total students, 50% were born in cities, 40% in villages and 10% in towns. It is worth noting that, of the total number of students who were born in villages, nearly 34% of them want to live in villages. However, of those who were born in cities, nearly 91% of them want to live in cities and have not much attraction for the village life.

(d) Analysis

This study presents a similar type of results as found by Peter Gould for students in England, U.S.A. and Africa. As in these cases, here also the students have shown a high preference for their home state, Gujarat, the preference is even stronger than that of students of other countries. The reasons for such attachment have been discussed earlier. Other than social and cultural factors, since the students are spatially restricted - being born and brought up, educated within Gujarat, often at their birth place - it is natural to have such strong ties towards their home state particularly in a country composed of distinct linguistic provinces. As discussed earlier, the economic

Table VII

A. Residential preference in terms of birth place of the students

Choice of Place →	Village	Town	City	Total	%
Birth Place – Village	35	5	55	95	39
„ „ Town	4	5	15	24	11
„ „ City	9	3	109	121	50
Total	48	13	179	240	
%	20%	5%	75%		100%

B. Expected : Based on joint probability* (independence of flow)

Choice of Place →	Village	Town	City	Total
Birth Place – Village	19	5	71	95
„ „ Town	5	1	18	24
„ „ City	24	7	90	121
Total	48	13	179	240

$$* \text{ Expected value} = \frac{\text{Row sum} \times \text{Column sum}}{\text{Grand Total}}$$

viability of Gujarat may also be playing a role in the process of decision making for students to choose Gujarat as their preferred state of residence. The ownership of property and relatively higher family income, from the job and the business, compared to those from other parts of India, could also be the reasons for the students to have such a strong preference for Gujarat. Had the sample been from an economically depressed state, students might conceivably not have shown such a strong preference for their home state. For this reason, it would be interesting and worth while to conduct a survey in an economically depressed area of India.

It is noteworthy that the students have preferred Maharashtra next to Gujarat, although Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are also neighbouring states. In Maharashtra, the glamour of Bombay could be the attractive force, whereas Rajasthan with its deserts landscape and Madhya Pradesh with its rugged, forested hills and plateaux have failed to produce such an urban attraction with services and job opportunity. Moreover, people of Gujarat have more socio-economic ties with Maharashtra than with Rajasthan or Madhya Pradesh. The low preference for long distance states can be due to many reasons. This could be related to lack of information, factors of uncertainty and un-

familiarity of the environment. The question of geographic distance is an important constraint, especially in a spatially restricted society as that of India. Over and above, the problem of communication in terms of various languages and the low mobility of the students, may have resulted into lack of information and interaction. This could be

be examined by sex, caste and annual family (Table VIII). Though the overall preference is for the city-life, the village and small towns are mainly preferred by male students whereas female students have shown interest for city-life – perhaps for the cultural attractions. Nearly seventy percent of the students are from the families with

Table VIII Residential preference by sex, caste and income of the students

Choice of residence	Sex			Caste			Annual Family Income in Rs.				Total	
	Male	Female	Total	High Schedule H. L. S.	Low Schedule H. L. S.	Total	Less than 6000	6000 to 12000	12000 to 18000	18000 and above		
Village	41	12	53	30	11	4	45	25	13	6	2	46
Town	10	4	14	7	5	1	13	8	4	--	2	14
City	77	96	173	129	41	12	182	66	55	33	26	180
Total	128	112	240	166	57	17	240	99	72	39	30	240

the reason as to why the students have not preferred states other than their home state of Gujarat.

Within Gujarat the students have shown preference to live in cities, followed by villages. The linking for small towns is negligible. Familiarity, personal identity and environmental quality could be the reasons why 34% of the students who are born in villages want to live in villages. Other than the factor of familiarity for the city-born students, urban centres have attraction both for the people from villages and cities for their glamour, services and opportunities.

The choice of residence can further

high caste and the two-thirds of them have shown interest in city-life. But among those who have preferred the village and small towns, more than fifty percent of them are from families of low caste or scheduled caste. It can be inferred that since the overall level of education and income in the family of low caste is rather poor, the students of such background could be having more attachment to families in rural areas and are unable to take risk in choosing urban areas for residential purpose. The preference for village is mostly the students of low-income group. The percentage of high income group increases for the preference of city-life. It is not surprising

that the risk of higher cost of living at cities can be borne by people with high income. In general, the preference of village and town life is given by male students with low caste and low income, whereas the female students and students with high caste and high income have preference for city-life.

(c) Model of residential preference

A simple model of probability for the residential choice of destination (urban or rural) can be built. The net probability of choosing a destination, urban or rural, is the sum of the two main factors- (1) Familiarity factor and (2) Urban facility factor.

Since the total probability is 1, each factor may be assigned a maximum probability of .50. Based on the actual data, the following probabilities have been found suitable.

1. Probability of choosing a familiar type of destination (of a type where a student is born) is .43
2. Probability of choosing an unfamiliar type of destination (of a type other than birth place) is .07
3. Probability of choosing an urban destination is .50
4. Probability of choosing a rural destination is .00

The net probabilities of choosing a destination by a student are as follows :

Net probability of choosing destinations

Birth place	Destination	Factor-1 (Familiarity)	Factor-2 (Urban)	Net Probability
City	City	.43	.50	.93
City	Village	.07	.00	.07
Village	City	.07	.50	.57
Village	Village	.43	.00	.43

Table IX (a)

Actual, desired flow to destination

Desired Destination →	Village City Total		
	Birth Place - Village	35	55
„ „ City	9	109	118

Table IX (b)

Expected flow based on the model

Destination →	Village City	
	Birth Place - Village	$90 \times .43$ 39
„ „ City	$118 \times .07$ 8	$118 \times .93$ 110

The hypothesis that, the students have chosen their destinations (village or city) according to the factors of familiarity and urban facility, has been tested with the whole sample as well as a sub-set from the sample. At 99% significant level X^2 is smaller than the table value, i.e. the expected value is fairly close to the actual value of the desired destination. So the hypothesis based on the model is accepted.

The expected flow based on the probability model of familiarity/urban facility, is closer to the actual desired flow. This model is better than the model by which ordinarily expected flows are often calculated, which assumes the independence of flow. But this model may not work so well in predicting the desired flow of destination in a heterogeneous sample, rather than a homogeneous group of sample, say, student community.

III. Implications of the findings

The preference of the students to live in their home state has certain implications. In terms of family structure and social stability, the base will be strong and remain intact with close social interaction. The students will be able to develop certain cultural heritage. A sense of belonging and identification will develop within certain regional cultural trend. But by staying in Gujarat the students will be limiting themselves in terms of job opportunities and educational facilities that are available in other parts of the country. Moreover, restriction to space may lead to lack of knowledge and interest for other states of India. With more interaction over space, there will be a better understanding among the residents of various linguistic, social and cultural background. Mobility can bring people of various background closer to each other; can create healthier atmosphere of unity in a country like India where there is so much variety. Mobility does not mean that one

should lose the sense of belonging to a particular place – but it can provide a broader sense of perspective in terms of territoriality.

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