

Research Article

Schooling and Marginalization: An Unending Vicious Cycle for the Disadvantaged

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ABSTRACT

The hierarchical education system of the country gets synced with stratified Indian society. Different social groups have different kind of schools for their communities based on their socioeconomic locations and identities, with permeability to shift based on economic mobility. In this stratified distribution of schools, socially, especially economically poor sections of the society get lowest rung schools i.e., government and low fee private schools sections of the society and its impact on their future life prospects. Simultaneously, it also locates the nexus between socioeconomic status and education credential of children, especially those coming from marginalized section of the society. The major objective of the paper is, to understand, how educational credentials developed in elementary classes affect the educational and economic mobility of the children coming from the marginalized sections of the society, in the life ahead. The analysis is based on the reflection of the author as a former elementary school teacher in the government school in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Major concepts used for analysis are borrowed from Bourdieusian framework i.e., cultural capital, educational reproduction, and educational credentials. The analysis indicates that educational credentials of children coming from socio economically poor background, going to lower strata elementary schools are questionably lower in quality. The poor academic achievement, inefficiency in use of English language and ill-equipped in use of digital technology, resultant of socioeconomic position of the family of the child and the teaching-learning conditions in school, affect the mobility of child in multiple ways. Two immediate and near future visible impacts include; educational exclusion and elimination from secondary and higher secondary education; and, negative impact on job profile which ultimately affects economic mobility and pushing them back to live in same socioeconomic strata, of which, they basically belong.

Keywords: Schooling, Marginalization, Disadvantaged groups, Economic mobility

INTRODUCTION

Indian society is highly stratified based on the factors like class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc. These socio-economic variables lead to formation of different social groups with differential location in the hierarchical arrangement of the society. Many times these factors interplay among themselves to form unique social group with different identities and positions in the society. Similarly, Indian education system is also stratified; and there exists a systemic hierarchy among the schools. Vasavi (2019) identifies nine different kind of schools operating in India “which vary by the cost of schooling, medium of instruction, type of board exams, and management structure. These include (i) Ashramshalas (for Adivasi/tribal regions); (ii) state-run government schools (including municipal, corporation and panchayat schools); (iii) state-aided but privately managed schools; (iv) centrally aided special schools such as the Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas and “Military Schools”; (v) low-fee paying, state-syllabus private schools; (vi) expensive private schools including the “Public School” chains; (vii) religious schools (Pathshalas and Madrassas run by religious institutions and trusts); (viii) alternative schools run by independent or non-profit organizations; and (ix) international schools”. Hence, different social groups have access to different kind of schools based on their socio-economic location in the society. This shows sync between social fabric and educational system of the country. In this unequal distribution of schools, top ranking schools are for wealthy people of the country and bottom level schools are for the poor (socio-economically marginalized) of the country (Velaskar, 2010). She further asserts that bottom level schools include lowest rung diminished state run schools and new private schools (low fee private schools) just above the bottom line.

Now the question rises, what role education plays in a stratified society with differential access to schooling for different groups? How socio-economic background affects the ‘educational credential’, which conversely affects the mobility of the individuals?

In this paper, author tries, to explore the nexus between socio-economic background and educational credential of the children coming from deprived sections of the society. And how educational credential developed in the elementary classes affect the educational and economic mobility of the children in the life ahead?¹ Analysis in the paper is based on the author’s experience as a government school teacher in a village school for many years, being aware of grass root realities, what children learn in the rural schools and what happen after coming out of the schools. Data available in various reports on the condition of public schools, children’s performance, condition of children come out

¹Instances/experiences discussed in the paper are from rural part of Hindi speaking region, other regions may have some differences.

from such schools is also used to develop the arguments in the paper. Specific data from state of Uttar Pradesh and a case of a village is used to substantiate the discussion. Paper is broadly divided into two sections; the first part delve upon the educational credentials of children and second part deals with probable impact of poor educational credential on the future prospect of children belongs to disadvantaged background of the society.

Education performs both progressive as well as inhibitory function in the society. On one side, it ensures the upward mobility of individuals; on the other, it reproduces existing social structure. According to Bourdieu, the education systems of industrialized societies function in such a way as to legitimate class inequalities. Success in the education system is facilitated by the possession of cultural capital and of higher-class habitus. Cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, and especially the ability to understand and use 'educated' language, while habitus is related with construction of attitude and values'. He further asserts that cultural capital of family and social group leads to construction of particular educational credentials, which is an important mechanism through which wealth and power are transmitted. Lower-class pupils do not in general possess these traits, so the failure of the majority of these pupils is inevitable. This explains class inequalities in educational attainment. However, success and failure in the education system is seen as being due to individual gifts (or the lack of them). Therefore, for Bourdieu, educational credentials help to reproduce and legitimate social inequalities, as higher-class individuals are seen to deserve their place in the social structure (Sullivan, 2002).

Before discussing the impact of educational credential of elementary schools on future life of children, let us look into socio-economic and cultural capital of children coming from a disadvantaged background and development of their educational credential in the schools. These children are either from first generation learners or parents with mostly less than secondary education (studied in vernacular medium schools). Economically, they are not in position to invest much in education, barely school fees of local schools or send children for free education in state run schools. Ultimately, children go to lowest rung schools, exclusively meant for the poor. According to DISE Analytical data of rural India (NIEPA, 2016-17), in government managed schools the national average of Scheduled Caste students is 79.07% (primary schools) and 75.60 % (upper primary schools), while for Scheduled Tribe students this number is 83.81% (primary level) and 80.05% (upper primary level)².

²Data obtained from 10 primary schools of Amethi district, (U.P.) from teachers in informal conversation (2017) shows that more than 95% students in government primary schools are from SC and OBC categories.

I- Educational Credential of the children belongs to deprived social group

Educational credentials are basically attributes learnt in the schools, which include cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities. Here, for the purpose of discussion we have identified some attributes (like academic *achievements*, *proficiency in English and acquaintance on use of modern technology (digital technology)*) developed in the schools. These attributes are some among multiple abilities developed in the schools, but these are dominant, visible and measurable attributes of schooling which affect the mobility children in later part of their life. These expected learning outcomes are cumulative product of socio-economic position and schooling and; have relational impact from and on other variables of schooling.

Academic achievements

Academic activities performed in the schools meant for children of poor background are questionable. Poor teaching learning environment affects the academic achievement³ of children severely. According to ASER 2018 report (national average) in the government schools the number of students (5th standard) who could read the text meant for 2nd standard was 44.2%, while for 8th standard for similar difficulty level text it was 69%. In case of mathematics, only 27.8% students of 5th grade and 43.9% students of 8th grade could perform division. Though, in case of foundational skills private schools might perform little better than government schools, but the process of curricular transaction is a matter of serious concern. These schools are having less qualified (mostly untrained graduates), low paid teachers, with insufficient infrastructure. These are some of the reasons why majority of rural small low fee private schools remains unrecognized by the state. Above characteristics of low fee private schools affect the comprehensive academic achievement⁴ of children in elementary classes.

Proficiency in English

In modern India, English is not just a language, rather an instrument opening path for socio-economic upward mobility. Proficiency in English language is not independent factor, rather composite of many socio-economic indicators (Kumar, 2004). He further writes proficiency in English developed in private schools leads assertion of identity, positive psychological self-concept, confidence and open path for diverse knowledge.

³Academic achievement is used here in context of knowledge and skills learnt through curricular activities in the school.

⁴Majority of students from private schools go for the tuition, which ultimately help in memorizing the content through rote learning and practice (based on my experience in village schools), rather understanding to construct knowledge.

But the condition of government schools is different, where English is taught as a subject and hardly develops reading-writing abilities. Case of low fee private schools in rural part (Hindi speaking region) is not much different than state owned schools. Most of the teachers teaching English medium schools have not completed their schooling English. Though books are written in English, teachers mostly explain the content in Hindi and mostly text-book based teaching is followed. In most of the cases, children mug up the readymade answers without understanding⁵. They are doubly deprived as their understanding in subject is affected relying on mugging, disconnecting school knowledge from the outside world, and inability to use English efficiently apart from preparing content for examination and texts. Fluency in speaking is also limited to a few selected, practices and crammed sentences. As children from poor background do not have scope for exposure or guidance for English (even educated parents alien to English, leaving to exceptional cases) and proficiency in the language limited it affect the mobility of individuals attending such schools.

Acquaintance in use of digital technology

In the modern global economic world ‘digital divide’ is another instrument of social division. Digital technology opens new path of information, knowledge and learning. Now it is widely used in the field of education. Accessibility of this crucial tool is limited to schools which are higher in hierarchy. For the state run schools, this technology is absent (except, some cases of demonstration and little work done with the help of NGO’s and philanthropic organizations). But limited access for some (no access for majority) in schools and unavailability at home due to economic conditions do not provide exposure to the use of technology. For low fee private schools in majority of cases (though they claim to provide facility) enough access is hardly available for all children. Many children from private schools may get access to smart-phones at their home (not for all), but mostly that is not for productive work, rather substitute of television through youtube.

Impact of poor ‘educational credential’ on children from marginal groups

Poor educational credential has multiple irreparable impacts on children’s life coming from a disadvantaged background. Here, we are going to discuss two visible impact of it i.e. (1) Educational transition and (2) future economic prospects.

⁵This narration is collected through conversation of children going to private schools. An educated mother of a child told in conversation that once checking work of her child, asked her child to read some part of text and explain from science textbook (class 6),he could not explain it (just read the content fluently). Next day when student asked to teacher for explanation of science content, she told to prepare the answer from notebook not to get disturbed from textbook.

Educational transition to secondary /higher secondary level

Secondary education is not only an important intermediary stage between elementary and higher education, also strengthen and mature the knowledge/skills learned in lower classes; and prepare for higher education. Tilak (2007) highlights benefits of post-elementary education which help in enhancing individuals' economic development, reduction in poverty, negatively impacting infant mortality and increasing life expectancy. But abysmal low academic attainment⁶ in lower classes affect the mobility to post-elementary stage, leads to exclusion and elimination from mainstream education.

Non-participation/dropout (exclusion)

Total number of students transitioned to the next level of schooling from primary to higher secondary stage decreases consistently. It means a large number of students are dropped out is secondary and higher secondary classes or do not participate in schooling in post-elementary stage.

According to U-DISE (2016-17) data 'the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in 2016-17 for Grades 1-5 was at 95.1%. However, the data for later grades indicates some serious issues in retaining children in the schooling system. The GER for Grades 6-8 was 90.7%, while for Grades 9-10 and 11-12 it was only 79.3% and 51.3%, respectively. In absolute numbers, an estimated 6.2 crore children of school age (between 6 and 18 years) were out of school in 2015 (draft National Education Policy 2019:65). There is continuous decline in enrolment of students coming from marginalized sections from grade 1 to 12. 'According to U-DISE 2016-17 data, about 19.6% of students belong to SC at the primary school level, but this fraction falls to 17.3% at the higher secondary level. These enrolment drop-offs are even more severe for ST students (10.6% to 6.8%), Muslim students (15% to 7.9%), and differently-abled children (1.1% to 0.25%), with even greater declines for female students within each of these Under Represented Groups (NEP 2019: 138)'.

ASER 2018 (rural) report shows percentage of 'out of school' children increased in successive stages of schooling and percentage of girls are quite high. At primary level percentage of children out of school was 1.6% of total enrolment (including both girls and boys equally), in upper primary stage (6-8) total dropout is 3.7% (boys 1.6% and girls 4.1%), in the secondary classes out of school children increased to 13.5% of total enrolment (boys 12.6% and girls⁷ 13.5%).

⁶In the popular discourse in the society, No Detention Policy is considered as important factor for poor academic performance and being promoted to higher classes which ultimately leads to drop out and mass failure. This notion also made union government to erase this policy. But unfortunately, system could not recognize the structural constraints that cause poor learning.

⁷In the state of Uttar Pradesh percentage of girls out of school in age group (7-14) was 7.4%, while in age group (15-16) was 22.20% (ASER 2018)

There can be many reasons for high dropouts, but poor achievement is an important factor for the dropout from both secondary and higher-secondary classes. Another negative impact of poor performance is mass failure in secondary and higher secondary school board examinations.

Mass failure in 10th and 12th grade board examination

Here, we look into specific examples from the state of UP. It is observed that lakhs of students fail in board examinations every year. There can be many reasons for mass failure, but poor background of home and weak initial schooling is also decisive here. It was reported that in year 2018-19 board examination in UP, a total of 10.48 lakh students failed in both 10th and 12th examination together⁸. However, it is also important to note that another 6.52 lakh students either did not appear or partially appeared for the board examination (“UP Board Exam”, 2019). Government schools perform poorly parallel to many private schools. A total of 388 schools have pass percentage less than 20%, including government and private schools and a total of 165 have zero result (John, 2019 April 28).

Dropouts and mass failures result in educational exclusion which in turn is a result of socio-political dynamics of society and socio-economic circumstances of the family. Aina *et al.* (2018) writes that ‘educational exclusion that relates not only to social exclusion but above all to specific educational policies, dynamics, and practices, a kind of educational exclusion that is produced by educational actors and processes and that, as such, can be transformed – though not solely – through educational interventions.

Impact on economic mobility

Educational credentials of the child obtained in the elementary level affect their economic prospects as an adult in later stage. It may not be having causal effect on employability but most probably it would have relational effect. Abysmal educational attainment have two major impacts, one it promotes government for devising of separate vocational program for children with low performance in school subjects and other, it affects the employability of child in later period of life. This becomes more serious in case of deprived children because, away from mainstream education, they hardly have the opportunity to develop capabilities which enhances employability in later stage.

⁸Total students registered for board examination were 58,06, 922. There were 165 zero result schools in the state from which not a single student could pass the examination while there were 388 schools which has pass percent less than 20% (Kenneth, 2019).

Policy on vocational education

Government proposes vocational education (skill training) for those who could not do better in elementary classes. This initiative (emphasis on vocational education at the secondary level) may give short term benefit to come out of extreme poverty, but affects their socio-economic mobility in the long term. NITI Ayog suggests vocational education as an alternative pathway that takes shape from high school itself, and with the school as a site for nurturing the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes through specific career-oriented courses. It suggests the opening up of a parallel track of vocational education post the elementary stage (NITI Ayog, 2018:115). It further suggests that a separate track of regular vs. advanced be developed within the general education stream, to be decided on the basis of aptitude tests.

Saraf (2016) writes critically about such initiatives and warns that ‘skills training particularly for the informal sector will help perpetuate inequalities. The provided skills will relegate the target population—children in government schools belonging to the poorest of families who hope that an education will enable them to transcend the accident of birth—into work that by its very nature is much lower in the hierarchy of employment. ‘Such policies target the children having poor academic score, which is basically outcome of failure of the educational system. So, in place of correcting educational system, it is directed towards segregating children based on their academic score, which is problematic in itself. This kind of approach may lead to further social exclusion of the marginalized. Klasen (1998) writes ‘educational policies can (instrumentally) promote (or fail to stem) social exclusion as adults. This can happen through educational policies that promote social exclusion among children which then translates to social exclusion as adults, or policies that are not necessarily exclusionary but fail to prepare some disadvantaged children adequately to be well-integrated in the economic and social life of adult society’.

Participation in job market

Academic performance, proficiency in English and expertise in the use of digital technology (computer), along with social and economic capital play role in deciding one’s participation in the job market. For the children from deprived section, educational credential is the ultimate source for participation in the modern globalized economy. But academic performance⁹ of children coming out of lower strata schools is severely

⁹*A case analysis of children studied from dysfunctional elementary school (2017)* In our own village (in UP state), there is a government primary school (in last few years many new private schools opened in the periphery of 5 kilometer and private school vehicles ply to receive and escort the children from home) and an unaided recognized private low fee higher secondary school (from class 6 to 12, Hindi medium, arts stream at higher secondary level, until recently it started science and agriculture) run in

damaged which affect their job profile as an adult in highly competitive and they are pushed towards lower category jobs. OECD (1997) has shown that poor literacy and numeracy leads to higher unemployment rates, longer spells of unemployment, and greater risks of permanent detachment from the labor force.

Proficiency in English is one of the most decisive factors in deciding the job profile of an individual. This might be one of the reasons why English medium schools are getting more preference for admission. According to Kumar (2004) proficiency in English negotiate with opportunity structure in the modern economy and those who lacks, limited the scope moving into high income, higher status jobs. He further asserts English improves confidence in interviews and develops closeness with interviewer as he/she is also a frequent user of the language. It also opens avenues for learning new skills needed for efficient performance. Proficiency in English increases chances to get lucrative jobs. Expertness in use of technology is also affects the future job profile in the time of globalized world, where the internet has reduced the distance. Children from poor backgrounds do not have efficient access to English and technology at home and school. It negatively affects their chances to get a good paying job in the market.

Thus, the educational system fails a large portion of its students. It not only leads to social exclusion through denying them this basic right of citizenship, but also through fostering social exclusion as adults. Hence, failures of bottom level elementary schools along with poor socio-economic condition of children from marginalized groups enforces

the nearby region. Majority population in the village is Other Backward Classes (OBCs) (Yadavs, Vermas and Kumhars etc.) with small to very small land holdings to landless daily wage laborers. Most of the children from this background were registered in government and private (low fees) school primary school. Either they did not attend the school, or dropped out, though name of them remained in enrolment register due to compulsory schooling norms (government school). Those who dropped out of school were seen roaming here-there in village and grazing animals, taking bath in the river (girls are worst affected as they were involved in daily wages/ agriculture work in the field/ household work with parents). Few of them made way for secondary and higher secondary, some failed in board examination, while few completed the higher secondary education from the private school (of similar stature and functional style as government schools) in the village. Most of the students were having education less than secondary level. Most of the girls and some of the boys were married at the age of 14-18 years (higher secondary or more). Boys (nearly level to illiterate and unskilled, though pass in mark sheet) had no option for job in the village, moved to cities mostly Delhi. They mostly got Rs. 5000 to 8000 in the private companies. Pollution of Delhi, Plight condition of slums, severe drinking water problem, effort to save money for family (avoiding taking meal properly) and working overtime (more than 12 hours), made them ill (sometimes severe diseases like tuberculosis) (analysis of last four years 2013-17) and come back home with diseased body in one or two years. Those who are from little better economic conditions studied from private schools, get help from tuitions made the way for secondary and higher education, but job profile and socio-economic mobility remained questionable.

forces *status quo*, and inhibits socio-economic mobility of the children in later period of life.

CONCLUSION

Stratified social structure of society juxtaposed with hierarchical schooling system leading to develop a sync between social system and educational system of the country. Educational inequalities reproduce social inequalities and leads to cultural reproduction of social groups (Bourdieu, 1974). Cultural, social and economic capital of individuals leads to formation of educational credentials mediated through education. Educational credential developed through schooling, decides the future trajectory of stagnation and mobility in the socio-economic ladder. Academic achievement, proficiency in English and expertness in English are some important learnt attributes through schooling or home education directs economic and educational future of the child. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds lack the effective educational credentials, due to their socio-economic conditions and access to lowest quality education in the country. Hence, their chances of socio-economic mobility through education are false hope. For the children of deprived community, present educational system is a tool and mechanism which legitimize their existing condition on the name of merit, and throw them in a vicious cycle of poverty, exclusion and deprivation. Common schooling with provisions of equity for children from marginalized community is the most probable path, which would ensure the socio-economic mobility and facilitate in establishing equitable society.

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