

Inclusive Secondary Education in India: Challenges and Future Directions¹

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Abstract

The focus of this article is on secondary education in India as the transition phase from school to higher education, as an instrument of promoting education as a right and as the pathway to higher education and through that to social mobility and equality. The dimensions selected for detailed analysis are: participation of the SCs and STs, the gap between the education of boys and girls and the regional variations with a focus on the northeast. I am revisiting this composite focus on marginal social groups after a long hiatus (Chanana, 1993). The dimensions of caste, tribe, region and gender are selected because students from these social groups, region and women continue to negotiate inequitable cultural barriers, a theme I have been exploring consistently in the context of gender (Chanana, 1998, 2006). This is followed by a discussion of the contribution that schools can make to help students move into colleges by providing the soft skills and cultural capital thereby making secondary education inclusive. Last section focuses on the future areas and directions of research.

Overview

In the first two decades after independence there was rapid growth of education mainly in the government or public sector. The stance of the government was that education had to be inclusive to which end a policy of positive discrimination was evolved on the basis of the provision made in the Indian Constitution. Until 1990 higher education was mainly in the public domain while private schools coexisted along with the public schools. However, the private schools were limited and were mostly aided, with some exceptions, by the government funds thereby following the rules and regulations which governed government run schools.

Post economic liberalization in 1991, growth of education has been somewhat rapid but mainly in the private sector. Moreover, there are disparities in educational progress between rural and urban areas, between different sections of the population, namely, between the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) which are governed by the

¹ This is a modified version of the key note address at the conference on 'Universalisation of secondary education: prospects and challenges with special reference to northeast India in view of RMSA, organized by Department of Education, NEHU, Tura campus, 25-26 July, 2011.

policy of reservation or affirmative action², on the one hand, and non-Scheduled Castes, on the other, among religious communities, regions or province, socio economic strata and between the sexes. It has also raised the individual cost of education for the students and their parents. Unequal development and higher cost has put a question mark on the inclusive impact of education. Simultaneously, the quality of government schools has been questioned. These developments divert from the commitment of the Indian government to make "generally available and accessible secondary education in various forms (including technical and vocational training)... Parties must also develop a school system (though it may be public, private, or mixed), encourage or provide scholarships for disadvantaged groups." This is as per Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to which India is a signatory and which it ratified on 10 April, 1979.

The focus of this article is on secondary education³ (i.e., from IX-XII) as the transition phase from school to higher education. (See Ahmad, 1984) It is an instrument of promoting education as a right and as the pathway to higher education and through that to social mobility and equality. The dimensions selected for detailed analysis are: the SCs and STs in secondary education, the gap between the education of boys and girls and the regional variations with a focus on the northeast. This is followed by a discussion of the contribution that schools can make to help students move into colleges and while doing this it would in fact be focusing on the areas of research that future researchers can undertake in India.

Heterogeneity and Hierarchy in Indian Society

Indian society is characterised by hierarchies or divisions of caste, class, religion, region and sex. Caste is most pervasive and divides the Hindus who form a majority of the population. Other non-Hindu groups are also characterised by several features of the caste system. Tribe is another parameter which is of significance. There are different tribes in central India in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh and in the North-Eastern hill states. While tribes in both the regions are characterised by geographical isolation and low economic status, they are also distinct in several ways. The tribes in central India are the most backward. The tribes in the North-Eastern Hill states are distinctly different since they are in a majority and are not as poor or oppressed

² SCs and STs are provided Constitutional protection. Scheduled Castes, now referred to in the academic discourse as the Dalits or the oppressed, included the untouchable castes. This has been translated into a policy of positive discrimination in educational institutions and is popularly known as the reservation policy. More recently, Other Backward Castes (OBCs) have also been provided reservation but the educational statistics have yet to incorporate the last category.

³ In the official documents, secondary education or high school/ post basic education refers to ninth and tenth classes individually or severally to X alone. I will be referring to it as lower secondary. Senior secondary will refer to XI-XII classes individually or severally. Further, secondary education will refer to all the four classes, i.e., from IX classes up to XII.

as those in central India. They have had more education due to a longer exposure of missionary activity and have converted to Christianity.⁴ The oppression of untouchability, too, did not affect them. Moreover, these societies are not characterized by extremely hierarchical social divisions of Hinduism and, therefore, are not as unequal as the 'mainstream' Indian society. However, they share marginalisation with other tribes.⁵

Class has also become an important dimension of social divisions, especially in the urban areas yet it tends to overlap with caste. Regional variation is also very critical and overlaps with cultural differences in social practices and attitudes to education. In fact, regional variations as well as responses of religious communities are culturally determined. Thus, caste, religion and region together shape the cultural identity of an Indian. Gender crosscuts all these dimensions.

Although Indian women as a category are heterogeneous yet nowhere do they enjoy a status which is higher than or equal with men. In other words, women derive a commonality from the interaction of diversities and the unifying Indian culture. The dimensions of caste, class, and others provide cumulative disadvantages and they bear a multiple burden of inequality. Moreover, the socio-cultural practices and attitudes of parents towards the education of their daughters also impact on women's access to secondary education. Secondary education phase comes at a stage of girls' lives when crucial decisions are taken about their future. For instance, are they going to get married during or soon after completing secondary education or are they going to college to take up jobs thereafter? The answers to these questions are linked to expected social roles and role socialization. Therefore, the gap or disparity between the education of men and women and the regional variation in educational growth can be explained in terms of socio-cultural context. It is paradoxical that girls perform better than boys in the secondary examinations in almost all the provinces and yet they do not exceed the boys in enrolment in schools or in colleges.

Why Secondary Education?

Secondary education is not constitutionally compulsory yet it is critical and vital because it is the bridge between elementary and higher education. The importance of secondary education has been highlighted by scholars time and again. It has been viewed as critical for employment and for getting out of the cycle of poverty. While eight years of schooling is a fundamental right, retention of learning is more likely after 10 or 12 years of education. Its individual and social benefits have been highlighted in the educational discourse. Notable individual benefits are empowerment, especially for women, and

⁴ For a detailed discussion, see Richard D.N. Dickinson. *The Christian College in Developing India: A Sociological Inquiry* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1971). In addition refer to India, 1983. *op. cit.*, p.15.

⁵ The tribal communities of both categories are included in the category of Scheduled Tribes and form 7.5 per cent of the Indian population.

employment.

The social benefits focus more on women's education, for example, secondary education delays marriage, the late age at marriage leads to lower fertility, better birth and child rearing practices, better nutrition for the family, lower child and maternal mortality, improved education of children, etc. These, in turn, result in slower population growth and also improve the education of the next generation. These are substantiated by the National Family Health Survey III of 2007.

World Bank prepared a report on universalization of secondary education in 2009. The primary justification for undertaking this project was the contribution of secondary education to economic growth and poverty reduction. It also impacts on the earning capacity. It mentions the extraordinarily high rates of return for girls compared to boys looking at the size of the earning differentials between males and females at different levels of education (2009, p.17). It observes that while it is true that females earn lower than males with all levels of education, yet those with secondary education are less disadvantaged than those with elementary education levels. The differential in the level of education also indicates that girls who receive secondary education come from better social economic backgrounds. Nonetheless, it observes that the higher private and social returns from girls' education are mediated by cultural perceptions. It also emphasizes the importance of secondary education in breaking the cycle of inter-generational cycle of poverty by giving skill oriented education which would lead to direct employment after schooling especially for those students who come from lower social economic strata.

Therefore, secondary education is linked very closely to vocational education. In fact, a separate stream of vocational education at the secondary stage was implemented in 1988, as a follow up of National Policy of Education 1986, further revised in early nineties but there have not been many takers for this because it isolated the vocational education or skill oriented education from general education thereby segregating the students from lower social economic strata from those from the higher economic backgrounds. The alternative to this is the integration of general education with vocational education because the importance of skill oriented education or applied subjects cannot be overstated for an expanding economy.⁶

Amartya Sen bemoaned the lack of attention paid to skill oriented secondary education⁷. He highlighted this aspect when he said that China was doing far better in production because it had trained a labour force at the school level. He said that the fact that almost everything requiring lower level technical know-how comes from China means that India is not focusing on those skills at the secondary level.

⁶ The Indian Government has also constituted a National Skill Development Council to oversee the expansion of vocational skills while providing links with general education

⁷ He stated this in the special convocation address at the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, on 4 July 2011.

Secondary Education and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan (RMSA)

In spite of its importance, secondary education has received very little attention in our country while primary and elementary education and higher education have received fair degree of attention at least in the official educational discourse. Secondary Education Commission report 1959 and the report of the Education Commission 1964-66 focused on secondary education. The Committee on Women's Education headed by Durgabai Deshmukh highlighted the link of secondary education with higher education (1975). Recently secondary education has received the attention of the government as is reflected in the RMSA.

RMSA was launched in 2009 and mentions the link between secondary education and higher education right in the beginning but does not dwell on it much after that. Similarly, while the regional differences receive a fair share of attention yet the northeast is neglected.

The emphasis is on access, quality and equity in addition to institutional reform and strengthening of the resource institutions. Moreover, it is noted that there is gross shortage of secondary schools. Therefore, the number of secondary schools has to increase. An important suggestion is that upper primary schools be upgraded to secondary schools. It is also noted that due to the shortage of secondary schools in the vicinity of homes the dropout of girls was very high after the elementary schooling especially in the northern states. Since distance was critical in deciding whether girls will go to school or not, provision of transport such as bicycles for girls as in Jharkhand, free State transport or pass facility, hostels for girls (India, 2009, pp.40-41) were also recommended. However, disregarding this reality it accepts the norm of the 5 kilometres distance for lower secondary and 7-10 kilometres for higher secondary schools from the residence of the students. *The question remains: why should there be uniform norms for distance when local contexts vary and these norms do not fit? For instance, five and eight kilometres for children, especially girls, in a hilly terrain, or a forest or a deserted uninhabited stretch may not be feasible (emphasis added).*

Secondary Education in India

There were 7,416 recognized secondary education institutions or schools in 1950-51. These will be referred to as schools though they are referred to as junior colleges, intermediate or pre-degree colleges etc. in different states⁸. Their number in 2007-08 was 172,990. The increase in the number of recognized schools from 1990-91 has been phenomenal which may have something to do with the entry of the private unaided for-

⁸ This was so because school education was for ten years in several states and even for eleven years till 1986 when the New Education Policy introduced the 10+2 or twelve year of schooling. Before that classes XI-XII were taught in junior colleges etc. These were also referred to as intermediate or pre-degree courses.

profit schools⁹ in India. In 1990-91 there were 79,796 schools which increased to 126,047 schools in 2000-01. These include high schools up to X class, higher secondary up to XII, Junior colleges and institutions offering intermediate and pre-degree certificates. The number of high schools was 113,824 of which 34.6% were private unaided schools while the remaining were government and local bodies and aided schools. The private aided schools receive a major grant from the government and follow the regulations stipulated for the schools run with public funds i.e. the government run schools. The number of higher secondary schools was 59,166 of which again 34.41 were private unaided schools; the remaining were either aided or run by the government and local bodies. (India 2010, pp.D2-3)¹⁰ In 2007-08, the proportion of private unaided secondary schools was nearly 35.6 percent.

World Bank report estimated that between 1993-2002, 72% of total increase in lower secondary enrollments in the urban areas was through private unaided schools (2009, p.13). In fact, the private schools have increased in all the states and more so in UP and Andhra Pradesh. In 2006-07, the proportion of private schools at the all India level was 33.4 %. In the north eastern states, only two states had more than this proportion (Manipur 56.8; Mizoram 36.7). But the proportion of private aided schools was fairly high in Meghalaya (67.8) and Nagaland (68.6) while 84% schools in Sikkim, 55.2 in Assam, 93.6 in Tripura and 73.1 % schools in Arunachal Pradesh are government run (India, 2009, p.SE2). The implication of this has to be explored for students from disadvantaged homes. For example, there is a gap of 40 percentage points in enrolment rates of students from the highest and lowest expenditure quintile groups: 70% of students were enrolled from the highest and 30% from the lowest expenditure quintile group; 20% point difference between urban and rural secondary enrolment rates; 10% between boys and girls enrolment. SC, ST and Muslims were well below them (World Bank 2009, p.17).

It also indicates that richer students are getting access to secondary education leading to inequality. [2009:13]. Sujatha and Geetha Rani also underscore the fact that the growth of government and aided schools is stagnating while the private schools are increasing (2011). A corresponding development is that there is decrease in enrolment of SC/ST students in government schools in the urban areas and increase in the private unaided schools even of the SC/ST students' enrolment. This is an indication of the changed scenario where aspirations have gone up with or without better incomes. There is also greater access and also increased awareness of the choices. They suggest that the students in these schools are more likely to be second generation learners (2011a, p.91). Thus, a combination of factors leads to greater investment in education even by the disadvantaged groups.

⁹ These schools do not receive government aid but get land at subsidized price from the government.

¹⁰ India 2010, Statement one, page C-1; table 2, page

Enrolment

In 1950-51 there were 1.5 million students enrolled in secondary schools of which 1.3 million [86.7%] were boys and 0.2 million [13.3%] were girls. In 1980-81, there were 11 million students: 7.6 million [69.1%] boys and 3.4 million [30.9%] girls. In 2007-08 the enrolment had increased to 44.5 million: 56.7% boys and 43.3% girls indicating a substantial increase of girls in secondary education. The percentage of girls' enrolment increased consistently from 1950s onwards from 13% to 43 percent. The big increase was in the two decades from 1990 onwards, that is, from 32.9% in 90-91 to 38.6% in 2000-01 and 43.4% in 2007-08 (India, 2010, pp.C4 and pp.7-11).¹¹

Table 1: Proportions of boys and girls enrolled in classes 9-12 (2007-08)

	All		SC		ST	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
IX	56.3	43.7	56.2	43.8	58.3	41.7
X	56.2	43.8	52.3	47.7	59.3	40.7
XI	56.9	43.1	58.1	41.9	60.3	39.7
XII	56.9	43.1	58.7	41.3	67.5	32.5

Source: India 2010, table 3, pages D-13, 23, 33.

The number of students in most of the north eastern states is very small. Except for Assam (64,151), Manipur (13,681) and Sikkim (17,345) the number in each of the remaining states is less than 10,000 students. *It may have to do with the specific demographic and geographical situation and, therefore, the secondary education expansion plan and strategies will have to be prepared keeping the local contexts in perspective. Before that the proportions of the relevant age group which accesses and can but does not access secondary education have also to be worked out (emphasis added).*

Enrolment of SC and ST

In 1980-81, the enrolment of scheduled caste students¹² in secondary education was 1,152,000: boys 78.6%, girls 21.4%. In 2007-08, the number had gone up to 6,372,000: 57.3% boys and 42.7% girls. The corresponding enrolment for the scheduled Tribes was 329,000 in 1980-81: [70.4% boys, 29.6% girls). In 2007-08 the enrolment had increased to 2,524,000: 59.6% boys, 40.5% girls.

Enrolment in open schools was 366,903: 63.3% boys and 36.7 girls of all categories. The SC students were 12.0 (43,902) and ST were 7.3 percent (26,645) (India 2010, pp.D80-81).

¹¹ India 2010: Statementa 4, 8, 12.

¹² These statistics for scheduled castes and scheduled tribe enrollment is given only from 1980-81

The proportion of ST students in the northeast varies from high to very high (table 2) in the states where tribes are in a majority and is quite unlike central India (see India, 2010, p.D53).

Table 2: ST students to total enrolment in classes XI-XII-2007-08

State	Boys	Girls	Total
India	5.2	4.3	4.8
Arunachal Pradesh	65.8	68.2	66.8
Assam	15.8	15.5	15.7
Manipur	19.4	20.0	19.7
Meghalaya	75.6	81.4	78.7
Mizoram	94.6	94.0	94.3
Nagaland	91.9	97.6	94.5
Sikkim	34.7	37.9	36.3
Tripura	23.1	20.0	21.8

Source: India 2010, table 4, page D-53.

Dropout

Dropout and retention have attracted a lot of attention of the educational policy makers. Reasons for dropout and low retention are discussed time and again and highlighted.

The dropout rates given in the MHRD report on school education are composite, i.e., from classes I-X classes. The dropout rate in 1980-81 for all categories of students was 82.5%; 71.3% in 1990-91 and it decreased to 56.7% in 2007-08. The corresponding figures for boys were 79.8%; 67.5% and 56.55%; for girls 86.6%; 71.3% and 57 percent (India, 2010, p.C14)

The dropout rates for SCs and STs are given from 1990-91. These are 77.7% for SCs [74.3% boys; 83.4% girls]. It decreased to 68.4% in 2007-08 [68.1% boys; 68.9% girls]. The corresponding figures for STs were 85% in 1990-91 [83.3% boys; 87.7% girls] and 76.9% in 2007-08 [76.0% boys; 78% girls]. The gap in the dropout rates of boys and girls seems to have been bridged. It may be noted, however, that the dropout scores are alarmingly high for all students and especially so for the students from the disadvantaged or excluded groups or those covered by affirmative action policies. *Moreover, students drop out not just because of low academic scores but there are socio economic reasons. In addition, cultural perceptions especially for girls are also critical (emphasis added).*

Transition¹³ from high school to senior secondary

In the absence of statistics on the transition from high school to senior secondary stage, comparison has been made of enrolments in class ninth in 2004-05; in class Xth in 2005-06; in class XIth in 2006-07; and in class XIIth in 2007-08 to see what proportion of students from IX onwards move to higher classes. It gives some idea of the proportions by which the enrolment drops even though it is not the same cohort.¹⁴ The enrolment in X class is about 90% of the enrolment in ninth class. It is also same in class XII, i.e., and 90 % of class XI. Treating the enrolment figures for successive years as apparent cohorts, 63.9% students moved from X to XI: a dropout of 36.1%. Comparing the enrolment in the ninth class to the enrolment in 11th class, only 58% of those enrolled in IX progressed to XI increasing the dropout to 42 percent.

The factors that affect transition are: the policy of detention or not promoting to next class due to poor performance or due to lack of attendance, etc., absence of schools and lack of access to them, lack of suitable transport or free transport facility, poor quality of schooling, curriculum not related to life, and absence of a composite school from I-XII classes (Sujatha and Geetha Rani, 2011). If the transition rates are so low what is the proportion of the population in the age group 14 to 17 that enrolls in schools?

Number of teachers and pupil-teacher ratio

One of the critical factors in retention is the quality of teachers and teaching. This refers to the attitudes of teachers and their indifference in the government schools. Lack of training is another aspect. Another issue has been the lack of women teachers in areas where female seclusion is practiced and girls are not sent to school in their absence. The quality of teaching is also impacted if the classrooms are crowded. Let us take a view of the last parameter, namely, the women teachers and pupil teacher ratio.

There were 2,127,000 teachers in 2007-08. The pupil teacher ratio was 1:35 (India, 2010, pp.C 18-19). The number of women teachers per hundred men teachers increased from 19 in 1950-51 to 60 in 2007-08. In the lower secondary, the ratios vary from 60 each in U.P. and Jharkhand, 52 in Bihar to 33 each in Delhi and Andhra Pradesh and 34 in Madhya Pradesh. In senior secondary education the highest ratios are in U.P.-65; West Bengal-51; Karnataka 50; and 38 each in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

In comparison, in most of the north eastern states, the teacher pupil ratio is less than the all India average and seems favourable. Yet it would require looking closely at the local contexts to explain as to why it is so low in some of them. Is it because of the

¹³ Transition refers to the total number of students passing from one level to the next level out of the total pass outs and the figures are given in percentages.

¹⁴ There is need for longitudinal studies to look at the same cohort. Such studies are not undertaken in India.

hilly terrain children do not go to schools, or are there no schools in some areas, or there are no habitations? Do the children perform better in examinations? The educational policy, programme and strategy will have to move from a macro perspective to a micro perspective (emphasis added).

Table 3: Pupil - teacher ratio-2007-08

State	Secondary/high school	Senior secondary
India	33	37
Arunachal Pradesh	24	25
Assam	52	28
Manipur	27	23
Meghalaya	34	34
Mizoram	11	14
Nagaland	24	31
Sikkim	8	8
Tripura	26	26

Source: India 2010, table 7, p. D 75.

Access of Girls to Secondary Education

India lags behind in the enrolment of girls at all stages of school education. The dropout rate of girls is also higher than that of boys. Here three parameters are taken into consideration to see how they fare in enrolment, gender parity index and in achievement or in examinations.

The number of girls per hundred boys

The number of girls increased from 16 per hundred boys in 1950-51 to 77 in 2007-08. (India 2010, p.C11) Most of the north eastern states have more girls or almost as many as the all India average (see table 4). Assam is an exception because of its different demographic, cultural and geographical situation.

Table4: No. of Girls per 100 boys-2007-08

State	IX-X		XI-XII	
	All	ST	all	ST
Arunachal Pradesh	86	88	74	76
Assam	85	50	71	37
Manipur	105	84	110	81
Meghalaya	100	113	93	118
Mizoram	99	100	85	92

Nagaland	89	99	79	90
Sikkim	102	116	107	116
Tripura	93	81	78	79
India	92	70	76	63

Source: India, 2010, Table 13, p.D-95.

The Gender Parity Index (GPI)

Most of the states in the north east also have a higher gender parity index than the all India average. Most of them have achieved gender parity. These are Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. Others are close to it.

The proportion of girls and the gender parity index demonstrate that women have better access to secondary education compared to their counterparts in the rest of India though they still lag behind men in their states.

Table 5: Gender Parity Index in the North Eastern states-2007-08

State	IX-X		XI-XII	
	All	ST	All	ST
Arunachal Pradesh	0.93	0.92	0.80	0.76
Assam	0.90	0.82	0.76	0.68
Manipur	1.01	0.91	0.80	0.84
Meghalaya	1.09	1.16	1.13	1.20
Mizoram	1.05	1.05	0.93	0.91
Nagaland	1.10	1.08	0.92	0.97
Sikkim	1.02	1.14	1.07	1.09
Tripura	1.00	0.92	0.84	0.72
India	0.85	0.76	0.84	0.67

Source: India, 2010, table14, p.D97. Note: GPI is the ratio of female to male values of a given indicator. A GPI of one indicates parity between the sexes.

Results of secondary and senior secondary examinations-2008

The pass percentages of girls is much higher than that of boys in both the X and XII examinations but especially in XII with a difference of 11 percentage points. This is reflected in the results of the students from the reserved categories with the exception of the lower secondary school examinations in which the pass percentage of ST boys and girls is the same. *While social constraints, especially those related to the socialization and expected social roles of girls may prevent them from accessing education, the norms and values inculcated in the same socialization process make them better students (emphasis added).*

Table 6: Results of lower secondary and senior secondary examinations: 2008

		Appeared			Passed (number and %)		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
High school, secondary	All	82,21,187	63,00,457	1,45,21,644	54,272,254 [66.0]	44,947,777 [71.3]	99,220,031 [68.3]
	SC	12,76,147	9,28,153	22,043,00	7,13,952 [56.0]	5,77,936 [62.3]	12,91,888 [58.6]
	ST	53,5830	3,81,314	9,17,144	3,19,356 [59.6]	2,27,224 [59.6]	5,46,580 [59.6]
Senior/higher secondary	All	54,26,506	40,04,625	94,31,131	3,783,500 [69.7]	32,29,812 [80.7]	70,13,312 [74.4]
	SC	7,86,547	5,30,473	13,17,020	483,663 [61.5]	3,74, 298 [70.6]	8,57,961 [65.1]
	ST	3,02,987	1,88,735	4,91,722	187,949 [62.0]	1,26,251 [66.9] bracket	3,14,200 [63.9]

Note 1. Figures in brackets are percentages. 2. Results include regular and private students who appeared for annual and supplementary examinations. Private students or candidates are those who do not attend a regular school but enrol only for examinations.

(Source: Collated from India, 2010a. Table 9, p.18 and 74-75; table 18, pp.35-36, 93; table 27, pp.53-54 and 111)

To sum up, the statistics on tribes show a positive trend in the north eastern states. Here the enrolment of STs is high and so is that of the girls. Assam is an exception as it is on other parameters. Again, dropout is very high for all students but more so for students from the reserved categories or socially disadvantaged groups. The dropout of girls is much higher since they suffer from multiple handicaps of gender and caste.

School Effects on College Access

So far a brief overview of the secondary education in India with a focus on the disadvantaged groups, gender differences and the north eastern region has been provided. It is seen that in the North east, the enrolment of STs and girls is favourable so is the gender parity index and student teacher ratio. Private schools which cater mainly to the well-off sections of the population are also not increasing in this region. All these indicators have to be looked at within the local contexts. But what we need to ask is how do these apparent advantages, in the context of the North east, and disadvantages in the context of the SCs, STs and women, get translated or do not get translated into better access, participation and outcomes at higher education level? Are the students able to convert some of the seeming advantages into realising their long term educational outcomes?

In order to answer these questions there is need to focus on the role of secondary schools in improving access to higher education especially for the students from low

socioeconomic strata. Researches conducted elsewhere, especially in the US, refer to school effects on college access or the college going climate of high schools for the students from low social economic and minority backgrounds which is relevant to India as well. There are hardly any researches in this direction in India.

It is well known that students from good quality schools have higher chances of going to college in comparison to those from low quality schools even if their scores are the same. Therefore, researches on the influence of high school practices in shaping the college plans and entry of students from low income and minority homes highlight the 'college going climate' of high schools. Students from lower socio economic backgrounds with similar qualifications as their more advantaged peers are less likely to apply to the best colleges and programmes (Pallais & Turner, 2006). Additionally, high school college going patterns are strongly associated with the likelihood of individual students applying for college admission and subsequent enrolment and the quality of college they attend (Alexander & Eckland, 1977; Manski & Wise, 1983).

Moreover, recent researches highlight the effects of concrete practices within high schools on college plans. In other words, high schools can influence post-secondary outcomes of their students by preparing them for enrolling in a selective college and by influencing their choice among the colleges. This is not denying the fact that the primary influence on college plans of students is exerted by the parents and larger social networks (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). But in low-income and minority or government school systems with students who do not have college or school going history may have less access to the supports and information which is required to effectively manage the college search and application process. Therefore, first-generation students are especially dependent upon their teachers, counsellors and other non-familial adults in making educational plans and decisions.

What is required is an academic environment created within the school which focuses on preparing all students through rigorous coursework and setting norms for performance. In addition, teachers and staff should also develop shared goals such as "all students can go to college and it is their personal responsibility to try and make that happen" (Schneider, 2007, p.183). Accordingly the basis of effective high school practice, particularly in urban areas with many first generation learners, lies in creating academic climates and college going cultures that fill knowledge gaps and create strong norms for college attendance. These gaps are also known as 'College knowledge' (Conley, 2007, p.183). It is also emphasized that these practices should not be isolated in the counselling and guidance departments but be embedded in the academic program (Schneider, 2007; Conley, 2007).

A recent study in the U.S. has identified two mechanisms by which 'differential access to guidance, information and norms for four-year college attendance is likely to contribute to observed differences by race/ethnicity and income in college enrolment among similarly qualified students. First, whether seniors take effective steps to apply and enrol in four year college and, second, whether students undertake a broad college search

which does not limit their college choice. (Rodrick, 2011, p.180).

In India we are familiar with students in the private unaided schools, popularly referred to as public schools, who are well-prepared to join the higher education system and search for the courses, academic programs and institutions of their choice. They would be familiar with the entrance tests that they have to undertake and most of them would start preparations two or three years before they finish secondary school. The schools would also be providing inputs and supports in this preparation. Some schools have also started private coaching classes after school hours to prepare the senior secondary students for entry into higher education. Of late, more and more students are also applying for admission abroad, sitting for SAT and other tests such as TOEFL, and by the time they complete schooling they are ready to join a foreign college or university. The whole environment of the school and at home in the last two years in school revolves around the future educational plans of the students.

Low-income and minority students with high aspirations and achievements lack, not only the means, but also this 'college knowledge'. In India there are quite a few good universities and colleges where merit matters and tuition fees are not very high yet the students from disadvantaged homes and first generation learners have to struggle with the college application system because few parents understand the requirements of college admission process. This results in lower participation in college application (Avery & Kane, 2004, p.180). Such students study mainly in the government schools where they do not receive concrete guidance from their schools about what to do, how to prepare, what, and where to apply for and how to apply. Neither is an environment created in the school which will encourage students to explore the possibilities long before finishing school. These students only consider a limited set of options for pursuing higher education, if they do at all. They do not know how to identify a range of college options that best meets their needs. They generally rely on their friends and family networks who also have limited college information. This college knowledge gap explains a large part of differences by socio economic status, irrespective of scores, in whether students join a regular college or not, whether they go for distance education or drop out of the system.

Hill (2008) has divided schools into three types depending on how well they prepare their students for moving into college. He calls them: traditional, clearinghouse and brokering. Traditional high schools encourage college visits and assist with college applications with limited outreach to parents. Clearinghouse invests substantial resources in college planning, provides support for college applications, reach out to college representatives but with limited outreach to parents. Brokering schools had all the characteristics of clearinghouse schools in addition to outreach to parents. Hill controlled for student characteristics and found that students from brokering schools were more likely to join a four-year college, i.e., a regular college but these schools were also less likely to serve students from low social economic and minority backgrounds. In the words of Bourdieu (1973) the academic qualifications of students from low social economic strata, thus, become "a weak currency" when they have to compete for college admissions.

Bourdieu has related academic performance in French schools to the cultural background of students while working out the possibility of students from low social economic backgrounds entering higher education. According to him, unequal performance [and unequal access] both are related to the unequal distribution of cultural capital. He argued that the families, especially the parents, endow the children with a cultural capital which is reinforced in the school system. It also converts the inherited cultural capital, e.g., linguistic and cultural competence, attitudes to education, etc. into academic traits and thus the educational system reproduces the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among classes. Heckman (2012) refers to soft skills that are critical along with cognitive skills such as achievement and IQ scores to succeed in education. He identifies these as sociability, communication, language, self-control, punctuality and personal habits. Although he says that these should be inculcated in the first five years of schooling, these soft skills remain pertinent even in the secondary stage and can be equated to 'cultural capital'.

According to Bourdieu (1973), it was unrealistic to expect education to neutralize or undermine hereditary transmission of power and privileges. He visualized a powerful link between level of education and cultural practice and argued that education was effective only when students learnt the latter from within the family. He envisages this as a circular process in which the cultural capital received from the family is enhanced by receiving the cultural capital from the school.

According to Beteille, 'education does not eliminate social inequality. It has not done so in any country, and it will be unrealistic to expect it to do so in India. But it can and should eliminate the more extreme forms of it and reduce its rigours by enlarging the possibilities of individual mobility. A society that encourages and promotes individual mobility is not a society that has done away with social stratification, but it is closer to the ideals of democracy....' (2010, p. 64)

Research: Future Directions for Inclusive Secondary Education

There are several areas for research five of which have been earmarked. These are: composite schools from I- XII classes, integration of skill based education with general education, the expanding private sector in education, and the comparison of outcomes for students with similar scores from government and private schools. Lastly, the college going climate of secondary schools about which hardly any information is available. The researches may be longitudinal or cross-sectional and include gender as a parameter.

In the absence of any focus on the northeast region and its specificities an analysis of policy documents, programmes, strategies and schemes from the perspective of the northeast ought to be undertaken so that gaps may be discovered and policy and programmes may be reoriented. Studies based in the Northeast will have to look at the local contexts keeping in view the demographic, geographic and cultural contours of the region.

It is imperative that all schools become composite because separate schools for different classes leading to longer distances have a positive correlation with dropouts, especially of girls. Therefore, compare dropout, retention and performance between composite schools i.e. which enrol students from I-XII classes and those which are split in two or three schools. Sujatha and Rani's study observes that upgrading primary to upper primary schools works as a push factor for secondary education (2011, p34). Gender-based transition rates should also be worked out and barriers identified.

The private unaided secondary schools are increasing all across India except in the northeast. Why not in the northeast? Has this increase negatively impacted access and participation and for whom? Comparison here across states and across type of schools is imperative along with a focus on the disadvantaged groups and women.

Given similar scores, comparison of outcomes of students from government and private schools is also a worthwhile area for research. Taking the example of Delhi, the capital of India, every year the results of Board examinations are compared between the government and private schools. The government schools are being praised for improved outcomes or results and individual students who do well are compared with those from private schools. The students with similar scores can be tracked after senior secondary to see which courses and colleges they join or do they drop out?

Skill-based subjects such as computers and secretarial practice and several other skill oriented subjects have been introduced in some Delhi government schools. Thus, work skills are integrated with general education instead of separating vocational education. These are much in demand. The demand can be assessed for existing and new skill based subjects and the outcomes for students who study general education with or without skill based subjects may be compared.

Secondary education is a transition phase or step to higher education. Can the secondary schools become instrumental in supporting the transition of students, especially those from the disadvantaged groups, to higher education thereby becoming inclusive? Therefore, policy initiatives aiming to increase access to higher education for low income students have to look at the schools they attend and the college going climate therein for inclusive secondary education. Along with the socio economic status of the families, the schools they attend influence their response to policy initiative and whether or not qualified students will apply to the top tier institutions and achieve social mobility. Will they continue to face inclusive exclusion (Wiemann, 2013) in the absence of "soft skills", "cultural capital" and "college knowledge"?

Rising aspirations for better education, earnings and social mobility reflect the shift in economic landscape which is facing today's students. But students from the low social economic strata are lagging in translating their aspirations into college enrolment. Since government schools serve a majority of these students, women and minorities, closing the gaps in college enrolment is imperative. Therefore, efforts to increase college access has to be linked to high school reform especially in publicly funded schools -- not only on better performance inputs but also on developing environments in which students and their

families have access to the information, resources and supports along with the ‘cultural capital’ required to translate aspirations into enrolment and effective college choice and eventually to inclusive inclusion

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