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ACCESS TO AND OUTCOMES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR THE URBAN POOR: FINDINGS FROM A STUDY IN MUMBAI CITY

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Abstract

Secondary education has received much less attention than it deserves in the state's educational policies and investments in independent India. A similar lack of interest is also observed in social science research on this segment of schooling. Quality mass secondary education is important for India as one of the ways of addressing social inequalities by expanding educational and employment opportunities for its vast population of youth. Based on a study conducted in Mumbai city, the paper examines the nature of state provision of secondary education and the outcomes of government schooling for the urban poor. It argues that by curtailing direct investments in the schooling of the poor and indirectly subsidising private schooling of the middle classes, the state deprives the poor of schooling and contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities through schooling. The paper also discusses how specific curricular subjects such as English and mathematics act as gate keepers in this process.

Introduction

The focus of social science research on education in India in the last decade has been almost exclusively on the issue of universalising primary education. The enormity of the problem of access, retention and learning outcomes at this basic level of schooling, despite the constitutional commitment and the involvement of government and non-government agencies over the years, justifies this concern. While there are some studies on higher education the general neglect of research on secondary education in the country is rather surprising.

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This may be due partly to the fact that education in India is perceived exclusively within a developmentalist framework wherein primary education is seen as a functional requirement of modern societies and as having pay offs in other social sectors by way of preventing child labour, inducing population control and so on. Higher education is important in this framework as development is crucially dependent on the use of science and technology. These two assumptions of the developmentalist approach have guided educational policies and investments in post-independence India. In this framework, the function of secondary education is that of a mere link between primary and higher education. Besides, there are no compelling political reasons or demands from the economic and intellectual elites that draw attention to secondary education.

Apart from the view that secondary education is an essential requirement in pursuing higher education, the educational policies have not been very clear on the nature and relevance of secondary education for India, a country with a large population of youth. The Secondary Education Commission of 1955, the Mudaliar committee and the various educational policies have not defined clear objectives for secondary education although its structural link to higher education is acknowledged and the discussions in the above documents assume its link with labour market. The suggested operationalisation of these links, although resulted in the formation of an additional vocational stream at the secondary level of schooling, has not been very successful. The ambiguity and lack of enthusiasm about the vocational stream have resulted in its low esteem and underutilisation. At present only about 5 per cent of its 25 per cent capacity is used (NIEPA 2001). Thus the state policy towards secondary education has been ambiguous and in recent years this sector has been left to the machinations of private agencies which have resulted in the escalation of costs of schooling, commoditisation of education and hierarchies of certification including international ones.

In a large number of countries secondary education is widespread. For instance in the United States, Canada and many European countries enrolment of the students of the relevant age group is almost 100 per cent. In India at present, only 27 per cent of the relevant age cohort (15-18 years) is enrolled in secondary schools

constituting a total of 7.8 million children (NIEPA 2001).[1] Besides non-enrolment, the drop-out rate is very high at this level of schooling. Out of the 100 children who enrol in standard I, about 63 drop out before they complete standard X. Of the remaining, more than one third fail in standard X (the average success percentage at the standard X examination in most of the Indian states is not more than 60). Thus a large proportion of the students in India cannot dream of joining a college and the poor, both rural and urban, constitute an overwhelming majority of this group.

Although the number of secondary schools in India is steadily growing, the rate of growth is grossly inadequate to meet the current demands. For instance, during 1990-1999, more than 37,000 secondary and higher secondary schools were opened (Mehta 2003) and yet this expansion is far below the current requirements. According to the NSSO report (1998), the gross enrolment ratio (GER) at the secondary level (standard IX and X) was 51 per cent and at the higher secondary level 32 per cent. But more importantly, the net enrolment ratio (NER), which is a more reliable indicator, was only 26 per cent and 15 per cent at the secondary and higher secondary level respectively, indicating that half of the children enrolled are either not attending school or in lower classes, or both.[2] The aggregate expenditure of the centre and state governments on secondary education has increased from Rs.6,552.36 crore in 1991 to Rs.12,371.16 crore by 1997-98. But this expenditure in relation to the overall expenditure in education has declined in the 1990s and now has the third place after higher education (NIEPA 2001).

The growing demand for education among all sections of society, the intensified efforts at universalising primary education, and the employment uncertainties brought in by changes in the labour markets are likely to place greater demands on secondary education in India in the years to come. The facts that the growth in secondary education is the result of private investments and that the state's share of expenditure in secondary education is gradually declining indicate the distress that the poor experience with regard to secondary schooling in India. There are as yet no clear policies to strengthen this sector or any programmes to support the poor who may be forced to stay out of secondary education mainly on account of their inability to have access

to and afford private secondary schooling. The opportunities for occupational and economic mobility through education will therefore be available only to the middle classes and to the rich as the gates of secondary schools are closed for the vast majority of the poor, a trend that has as yet not been acknowledged seriously.

In this paper an attempt is made to examine some of these broad observations on secondary education and their implications for the poor on the basis of the empirical data gathered from a study of the alumni of government secondary schools in the city of Mumbai during 2003-04. The study was designed to explore the outcomes of government secondary schooling in terms of higher educational and employment career tracks.

Data

The data for the study were gathered through interviews of alumni of government schools and their parents in the year 2003-04. A total of 576 men and women who were enrolled in standard X in the year 1998 (five years prior to the study) and in the year 2000 (three years prior to the study) were randomly selected for the study from the municipal school records. Individuals were enlisted from a data base generated from the records of 13 schools. These schools were selected on the basis of their student performance at the SSC examination in the year 2003. Based on the SSC results, the municipal secondary schools were grouped into three categories of better (above 60 per cent success), average (30-60 per cent success) and poor (less than 30 per cent success) performance. Schools were randomly selected from each category and students were randomly selected from the school records to get a sample of 500. In addition, 100 students were over sampled as the addresses on school records seemed incomplete and our experience from an earlier study showed that students who lived in slums often had to shift their residence, making it difficult to track them. In addition to the final sample of 576, 12 students were interviewed in-depth to understand some of the difficulties they encountered in completing secondary schooling, pursuing higher education and gaining employment.

The sample consisted of about equal number of men and women of the age of 19-22 years. They completed the entire schooling in the city as they grew up here. Some were first generation learners (11%) with illiterate parents. More than 80 per cent had illiterate grandparents and fathers with primary education. Mothers were generally illiterate and worked only at home. In general, fathers had migrated to the city in search of a job. The sample mainly consisted of Hindus (61%), Muslims (23.8%) and Buddhists (13.4%). More than half of the respondents were dalits or belonged to Other Backward Castes (OBCs). The average monthly family income was around Rs.5000 (US$ 105) and they lived in slums or low income *chawls*. The fathers were employed as semi-skilled or unskilled labourers except a few who were unemployed at the time of data collection.

Some of the important findings of the study include the efforts that the urban poor make in order to educate their wards by investing in additional coaching beyond their means to pass the highly coveted SSC examination and the accumulation of credentials that have low or no market value. The urban poor engage in this struggle out of an acute awareness of their lack of what may be considered the 'cultural capital' and 'habitus', to apply Bourdieu's concepts, and to compensate for this lack. However, inadequacy of the state provisioned secondary education and the growing credential markets not only enhance the vulnerability of the poor in the labour markets but also produce a situation whereby the urban poor are actively engaged in reproducing themselves (Abraham 2004). This paper will specifically focus on the role of the state and the educational system in depriving the poor of secondary schooling and how the compensatory strategies adopted by the poor are inadequate to overcome this deprivation.

State Provision of Secondary Schooling in Mumbai City

While issues of equity and equality are central to universalising primary education, these objectives are not discernible in the state's approach to secondary education. By interpreting the constitutional commitment to providing free and compulsory elementary education as state's *primary* responsibility, provision of secondary education has largely been left to the private sector. The state support for secondary education is mainly through the grant-in-aid provided to the private

agencies that run these schools. Through its grant-in-aid scheme, the state exercised some control over the curricular contents and the operational aspects of private schools. In recent years, however, even this provision is being curtailed as new schools are not eligible for grant-in-aid. This has effectively resulted in an uncontrolled expansion of private secondary schools within the city[3] with little or no state control. While this expansion may have improved the transition rate from upper primary to secondary level, not much is known about how the state's low participation in this sector affects the transition specifically of children from poor families.

Mumbai, considered the financial capital of India, also has the richest municipal corporation. The population of Mumbai is around 12 million and is steadily growing with the large scale migration of persons from different parts of the country in search of employment. The overall literacy rate of Mumbai is 77.45 per cent with the female literacy rate of 81 per cent (2001 census). The literacy rates are

Table 1
Management-wise Distribution of Schools in Mumbai (2001-2002)

Category	Central/State Government	Municipal Council	Private Aided	Private Unaided	Total
Primary Schools	None	1184	399	525	2108*
Secondary Schools	17	51	784	411	1263

* Consists of 1208 lower primary and 900 upper primary schools.
Source: Government of Maharashtra 2002

influenced by the large scale male migration into city from some of the backward districts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

There is a hierarchy of educational facilities in Mumbai city that range from exclusive elite schools to cramped poor quality schools. There are private and government schools, and government aided private schools (grant-in-aid schools). The status and quality of schools

vary with the most preferred being the private English medium schools and the least preferred being the municipal schools. As table 1 shows the state is directly involved in the provision of primary education through the large number of municipal primary schools and indirectly in secondary education through the aided private schools. The state thus provides relatively 'free' primary education to a large section of the city's poor as these schools are availed exclusively by them. It is now known that even among the poor the effort is to send their children to private schools. The data also show that the number of secondary schools available to the poor in the city is negligible as compared to the number of primary schools. The few other central and state run secondary schools such as *Kendriya Vidyalayas* are not aimed at providing schooling for the poor as they mainly cater to the children of government employees or professionals. Further, as table 2 shows, the total number of higher secondary educational institutions in the city is small with much lower student enrolments in proportion to the number of primary and secondary schools and their student enrolments.

Table 2
Number of Schools and Enrolment at the Higher Secondary Level in Mumbai (2001-02)

Type of Schools	No. of Schools	Enrolment		
		Standard XI	Standard XII	Total (XI + XII)
Attached to Secondary Schools	189	106757	93771	200538
Attached to Degree Colleges*	76	64853	61468	126,321
Total	265	171620	155239	326859

* Known as junior colleges
Source: Government of Maharashtra 2002

As against the popular notions, the physical conditions of all the government secondary schools were not dismal. Although much is desired by way of infrastructure in these schools, the crowding of students one observes in many private schools was absent in many of the schools that were covered under the study. Further, the teacher–student ratio of 1:34 in the government secondary schools (Government of Maharashtra 2002) is perhaps far better than in several private schools including the aided schools. It is also better than that of the government primary schools (1:42).

Deprivation of Secondary Education for the Poor: Role of the State

Although the private schools vary in their 'status', 'quality' and costs, they are generally seen as providing better quality education than government schools. This view about the government schools is further strengthened by the poor performance of their students in the SSC examination[4]. Since the 1970s there has been a steady growth of aided and unaided private schools in the city. Children of the middle classes have moved to these private schools, which has contributed to the devaluation of municipal schools. The municipal schools have become the 'residual schools', abandoned by the middle classes and neglected by the state, and availed by the poorest segment of the city population.

While the number of municipal primary schools has grown several folds, the number of municipal secondary schools has declined from 61 in 1960 to 51 at present. In Mumbai the government primary schools are financed and administered completely by the municipal corporation, the government secondary schools are fully financed by the state education department and administered partly by the state education department and partly by the municipal corporation[5]. This dual system of management has created a situation in which two wings of the state, the municipal corporation and the state education department, do not own full responsibility and accountability for secondary education in the city, which reinforces the 'residual status' of these schools.

The disparity in the state provision of primary and secondary levels of schooling in the city (tables 1and 3.) contributes to the high

rate of drop-out at the end of the primary level as transition into private secondary schools is almost impossible for children schooled in municipal schools and is beyond the means of their families. The sheer lack of schools, producing the 'blocked chimney' effect (Juneja 2005), is the first hurdle experienced by the poor in Mumbai city. The routinely used measures, such as 'non-enrolment' and 'drop-out', of the absence of children from schools, do not fully capture the extent of educational deprivation experienced by the poor due to the non-existence of schools for them. These terminologies tend to disguise educational deprivation as poor families' apathy towards schooling. For instance, while there are many municipal primary and some upper primary schools (103 in total) in the 'M ward' of the city which houses a large population of the poor, there are no government secondary schools.[6]

Table 3
School Enrolment by Management of Schools in Mumbai (2001-02)

School Level	Central/State Government		Municipal		Private Aided		Private Un-aided		Total	
	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls
Primary	-	-	582331	295168	204063	112046	253606	111064	1040000	518278
Secondary	19413	8653	64694	31100	727267	332155	210689	85675	1022063	457583

Source: Government of Maharashtra 2002

The study shows that parents' choice of municipal school for their children was made primarily on economic considerations. Among the multiple reasons given, 74 per cent of the parents stated their inability to afford private schooling as one of the determining factors for choosing the municipal school for their children. For 47 per cent of them, proximity of the school was an important consideration. Thus access in terms of cost and distance, the main reasons for the dependence of the poor on state provision of schooling, an already well known fact, is reiterated by the poor in Mumbai city.

The state's policy with regard to medium of instruction in schools has further compounded the issue of access to secondary schooling. In order to cater to the needs of migrant population in Mumbai, the state

and various community organisations have been running schools in different regional languages for several decades now[7]. While the municipal corporation runs primary schools in several languages, such as Marathi, Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu, the state run secondary schools are limited to Marathi, Urdu and Hindi medium. There is thus an acute shortage of secondary schools in regional languages in the city (table 4). Further, most of these schools are run by private agencies which place them beyond the reach of those who availed municipal primary schooling in regional languages. There are no bridge programmes for those children who avail primary education in one language to transit to secondary education in another language. What happens to them? Do they drop out or are they sent back to their villages for further studies?[8]

Table 4
Medium-wise Distribution of Schools in Mumbai in 2000- 01 and 2001-02

		Marathi	Urdu	Gujarati	Hindi	English	Kannada	Tamil	Telugu	Total
Primary Schools	2000 - 01	703	238	185	286	535	51	48	44	2090
	2001 - 02	693	247	203	288	534	50	49	44	2108
Secondary Schools	2000- 01	403	91	122	117	482	22	-	03	1240
	2001- 02	319	92	123	130	575	21	-	03	1263

Source: Government of Maharashtra 2002

Thus the reluctance to invest directly in secondary schools, the policy towards medium of instruction in schools and leaving secondary education to private agencies, and the lack of administrative accountability make the state responsible for depriving the poor of secondary education in Mumbai city. However, access is not the only issue in secondary education, the inability to stay on and high failure rates at the end of standard X are important issues for those who succeed in enrolling themselves in a government secondary school. Among the several academic, cultural and economic constraints they encounter, learning mathematics and English play a crucial role in producing educational disadvantages for the poor.

English and Mathematics as Gate Keepers

Studies have shown how various curricular, pedagogical and institutional practices act as processes of social exclusion and inclusion in schools (Subramanian *et al.* 2003; Chopra and Jeffery 2005), but how specific curricular subjects get implicated in this process is not studied in detail. It is well known that the first level of elimination from higher education takes place at the public examination in standard X (the SSC or SSLC examination). This examination is the most important one in the students' career because it not only decides the range of future possibilities for them but more importantly it operationalises the ideology of meritocracy institutionalised through schooling and its examination system in discriminating against those who fail. The drop-out through the ten years of schooling is due to a host of economic and social factors as well as cultural practices that are discriminatory but seldom due to an explicit policy of segregation based on 'merit'. This first terminal examination is thus important as it legitimises social segregation between 'learners' and 'non-learners', 'successfuls' and 'failures', 'capables' and 'non-capables' (pass/*na* pass, '*dasvi* pass/*dasvi* fail) through the 'impartial' institutional process of examination that upholds the single criterion of 'merit' and merit alone. Although the moral values of 'impartiality' and 'justice' are purportedly behind such discrimination based on merit, the empirical results show that the poor and the socially disadvantaged get unduly discriminated in this system. While corruption, malpractices and support systems such as specially designed coaching etc., tilt the balance in favour of the economically and politically powerful groups, they are insufficient to explain the sustained and the structural nature of the discriminatory results that meritocratic principles and procedures produce for economically and socially disadvantaged groups.

As most other studies in India, our study too shows that the schooling of children from poor families occurs in an ambience that is hostile to learning (PROBE 1999; Jha and Jhingran 2002) whether it is genuine learning (understanding concepts, their significance and application) or instrumental learning (gaining credits without understanding). However, as our study shows, specific structural arrangements of current schooling convert generic influences into specific discriminatory outcomes in the SSC examination for these children.

The two 'subjects' with the highest potential for producing discriminatory effects are English and mathematics. It is generally observed that a disproportionately large per cent of children from poor families fail in these subjects at the SSC level. About 51 per cent of the students in our study failed in the SSC examination in the first attempt. Of these, 80 per cent failed in mathematics, 70 per cent in English and 27.5 per cent in science. About 32 per cent failed in one subject, 45 per cent in two subjects, 16 per cent in three and the remaining 7 per cent in four or more subjects. Failure only in English or mathematics, or both accounted for 62 per cent of the total failure. Together, these two subjects have thus produced the maximum discriminatory outcome in the SSC examination for our respondents.

Proficiency in these two subjects is considered to be crucial for clearing competitive admission tests and these subjects are seen as having market value as they are equated with communication and analytical skills or as desired by employers irrespective of whether such knowledge is a specific job requirement. They stand as proxy for skills that employers who are themselves not very sure of what they are looking for, or for jobs that are not specified or loosely defined. The performance in these two subjects may be used in eliminating applicants where there is a surplus. These are also the two subjects that the poor fear, consider most difficult and for which they believe they have 'no brains' (*iske liye dimag nahi, dimag kam hai*). Ideological constructions such as these are used by the schools and the teachers in disengaging from teaching these subjects, thereby legitimising and reinforcing such constructions. The state authorities are aware that the high rate of failure in the SSC examination among the children of their schools is on account of failure in mainly these two subjects as they routinely and regularly publish this information in their brochures and bulletins. By not acting on this information, the state not only institutionalises unaccountability on the part of the school administration and the teachers but tacitly supports those ideological constructions of the need for special talents for these subjects which the poor, especially the lower castes and girls lack.

Both mathematics and English become significant in this process as some features intrinsic to their learning help operationalise what constitutes merit on the one hand and ideological constructions such as mentioned above on the other. Mathematics is 'abstract' and

English is 'alien' and therefore one requires 'extra brains' (*zyada dimag*) to learn them. High rates of failure in these subjects among poor students generate fear for these subjects and at the same time reverence for those who learn them, both contributing to the special status already accorded to them in Indian schooling[9]. The cumulative nature of mathematics learning in school also exacerbates the cumulative disadvantage of not learning the prescribed levels, over the years. Thus when our respondents reported specifically that they were not taught mathematics and English properly throughout their schooling, it indicates how specific subjects get implicated in the gate keeping function in education.

Many of the respondents in the study were multilingual, who knew how to speak, read and write at least two languages other than their mother tongue. Very few students failed in languages other than English, even when they were different from their mother tongue. Then why is it that learning of English is so difficult for the city's poor? The difficulties encountered by the poor in mastering English even in a metropolitan city like Mumbai where its use is quite widespread, need to be located within the larger historical and political context of English education in the city.

After independence, although the focus was on schooling in local and other regional languages (vernacular, mother tongue), the English medium schools were not discouraged. The regional language schools were important in Mumbai to meet the needs of migrants from various parts of the country. By the 1970s, in Mumbai there were many English medium schools and the state's grant-in-aid programme helped their further expansion. Through this programme, effectively, the state subsidised English education of the middle classes while the state policy for its own schools continued to be focused on local and regional languages. The state policies thus helped a large section of the middle class acquire the language skill that subsequently became a form of shared 'cultural capital' of the middle classes. This capital had the potential to multiply in a metropolitan city through the various services and employment opportunities. It is only a couple of years ago that the state brought in a policy to teach English from standard I in their schools instead of the earlier practice of introducing it in standard V. This discriminatory policy prevented the poor from learning English, while it was being 'freely' distributed for the middle classes.

Proficiency in English is no longer an acquired cultural capital for the middle classes as it defines their 'habitus', to use Bourdieu's concept, by having embodied the associated communication skills, gestures and body languages, access to art and literature and the ability to use technology, especially computer and the internet. These also aid them in their access to higher education, entry into professional colleges and employment in the expanding service sectors. The discriminatory policy is justified on principles of equity (that more children from poor families will benefit from regional language schools) and educational wisdom (learning is best accomplished when taught in one's own language).

The present concern for the lack of English proficiency among the poor can only be seen as emerging from its requirement among the lowest rungs of occupational and service jobs in an increasingly globalising labour market and also as a strategy to expand the consumer base for global products. While a large proportion of the students in the study stated that they could read (507) and write (512) English, about half of them stated they could not speak English. While the study did not measure the level of proficiency in the use of English, the self perceived levels are grossly inadequate as compared to what is expected at the SSC examination. Further, their regret is not in their inability to master English, but their experience of the lack of communication skills in English as a major impediment to securing jobs in the current labour market.

This historical lack of accumulation of cultural capital compounded by raising its value in the labour market by emphasising its requirements even where it is not necessary has greatly increased the significance of English. These constructions, although based on certain trends in market, have widened the divide between the middle classes and the poor. One wonders whether the accumulation and circulation of English proficiency among the middle classes has also played a significant role in transforming the city from a manufacturing centre to a service oriented one.

We found that the respondents and their families are aware of the fact that their schools failed them by abstaining from the teaching responsibilities, and they are politically powerless to demand what was due to them from the schools or protest against the injustice. Instead they hoped to overcome this deficiency generated by the school

and the state through investing in private coaching. However, the investments in inconsistent low quality coaching proved inadequate to overcome these historical and institutional deficits. Although the success rate was a little higher among those who availed additional coaching in the form of private tuitions, the coaching did not result in significantly higher marks in the SSC examination.

Prospects of Higher Education and Employment

The significance of passing the SSC examination is evident from the fact that the poor garner all resources to cross this hurdle. The families invest in private coaching disproportionate to their incomes (Abraham 2004) and as the detailed interviews showed, the students themselves make enormous adjustments so that they have minimum privacy and space to study in their single room homes and evolve mechanisms and learning strategies such as 'learning by teaching others', 'studying together' and 'writing down all answers in one's own words' towards preparation for the examination. For those who have struggled to stay on in school, clearing the SSC examination itself is seen as a lifetime achievement. This is reflected in the pride with which the respondents and their parents reported this fact and the pessimism in others' statements such as '*dasvi* fail *hogaya, woh aage kya kar sakta hai*.[10]

Our findings however did not substantiate either the optimism or the pessimism associated with the passed/failed status in the SSC examination, in terms of its influence on their prospects of higher education or employment. Although many of those who passed the SSC attempted to pursue higher education, only a handful of them succeeded without a break or dropping out. Even among those who secured higher marks (above 65 per cent) at the SSC, only a few have been able to pursue professional courses. If the five year group (276) had continued their studies without a break, they would have secured a graduate degree at the time of the interview. However, out of the 160 who passed the SSC only 102 completed higher secondary and finally only 21 completed their graduation. Further, there was no significant difference between the SSC passed or failed in terms of the number of jobs, nature of work or the amount of pay. More focused studies at the sites of employment are required to establish clearer links between secondary education and employment and how employers evaluate the skills and knowledge gathered at this level of education.

On the one hand they realise that the 'system' is unfair to them (*hamara yeh* system *theek nahi hai*), but they largely attribute their failure to their personal and intellectual deficits (facilities *kam, dimag kam*). Thus the structural inequality is internalised through the ideological constructions of the individual deficit, ensconced in and reinforced by the ideology of meritocracy. In a complex manner thus the cumulative effects of social disadvantages and schooling deficits are transformed into individual intellectual deficit for these respondents who were dalits, Muslims or girls from poor families.

Despite the high premium placed on the SSC examination, students who passed the examination were more likely to have sought additional credentials. A large number of them have collected certificates of having acquired skills in computers, to be a beautician and so on. However, those who were employed as well as those seeking employment were of the view that the added credentials were of low market value and therefore of no help in securing employment. Nevertheless they thought that it was better to have 'some' skill based certification rather than having none. A majority of those who were employed found employment through social networks rather than open competition in the labour market. Very few respondents had registered their names with the employment exchange or followed up vacancies announced in newspapers and none mentioned internet as a source of information on jobs.

What emerges from the responses is that through their schooling or college education the respondents have not acquired any marketable skills, and even the additional credentials that they have secured do not equip them with any useful skills. While the middle class children acquire typing skills, basic computer knowledge, internet browsing skills casually, the respondents in our study had to pay for courses in order to gain even some elementary exposure to computers. Those few who were critical of the school for denying them the learning opportunity and an SSC certificate despite the individual efforts that they had made, were justified in holding their school and their teachers responsible for deliberately deskilling them by not providing English language skills or basic knowledge of computers that were quite easily available to their middle class counterparts both in their homes as well as in their schools. Under these circumstances, while the current discussion about India becoming a knowledge society and the

expanding employment opportunities based on knowledge of English and computers will become a reality for the middle classes, it may remain just rhetoric for children from poor families in the city of Mumbai. By deskilling the poor through schooling, even the weak link between secondary education and employment is severed. The manner in which the quantity and quality of secondary education is apportioned among the various social classes in the city of Mumbai shows how the current system of education widens the gap between the poor and the middle classes.

An intergenerational comparison of educational status and employment between the respondents and their fathers shows that the latter were able to secure more regular employment with just primary education. The income and employment between parents and their children show no mobility in terms of either the security of their jobs or better income despite much higher levels of education and increased credentials among the children[11]. As Collins (1979) has argued, in modern capitalist societies the intergenerational educational attainment and credential accumulation by lower social classes mainly result in reproducing social inequality at higher levels of education.

The weak association between schooling and employment for the poor observed in this study may also be the result of the fast changing labour market situation in Mumbai and elsewhere. In the last two decades, the city has transformed from a manufacturing centre to a servicing centre. The job market has become more flexible and volatile with increasing privatisation and its resultant informalisation and casualisation of labour. This is evident from the finding that parents of respondents who reported more secure income in 1980 reported irregular employment and income in the year 2000. For example, the mill workers who earned a steady income have now joined private security agencies as casual workers. During this period some others lost their jobs and became footpath vendors. There is a need to study more closely the labour market trends and how education, skill acquisition and credentials influence these trends and are in turn influenced by the market, and their consequences especially for the urban poor.

Conclusion

While the objectives of primary education and higher education are well acknowledged in the developmentalist framework of the post-independence India, the objective of secondary education has been merely assumed as a link between the two. The state has paid scant attention to this sector of schooling and has largely followed a path of indirect investment by supporting private agencies. The private sector expansion in secondary education in Mumbai began prior to the era of privatisation, way back in the 1970s supported by the state through its expanded grant-in-aid scheme. Over the years state provisioning of primary education expanded several folds but instead of a corresponding expansion in secondary education, a decline is what is observed. Further, while the state supported English education of the middle classes, it remained committed to regional language education for the poor. As the paper shows some of these historical and political factors created conditions that devalued government schooling and produced excessive failure of poor students in the SSC examination. Ideological constructions around English and mathematics become justification for teachers' disengagement with teaching these subjects and the state's inaction despite their routine publication of the poor results of state run schools in Mumbai. Although the poor realise the injustice of the system they are swayed by the power of the ideological constructions as they tend to believe that the failure to educate themselves is primarily due to their intellectual deficit and inability to pay for high quality compensatory coaching which may help them overcome this deficit.

The concepts of 'cultural capital' and 'habitus' advanced by Bourdieu (1973,1985) are partly useful in understanding the cumulative and debilitating effect of social, economic and cultural deprivation on student performances and the now widely used concepts of social exclusion and inclusion provide analytical categories that capture a range of discriminatory practices and processes that schools embody. In the Indian context, the gender, caste, class and ethnic discriminatory practices, insults, techniques of discipline and devaluation in the everyday practices of schooling experienced especially by the poor and the disadvantaged social groups have both direct and indirect psychological impact on learning. Sociological theories of education have shown that unequal schooling and

discriminatory practices result either directly in the reproduction of social groups (Bourdieu 1973), or indirectly, by students and their families rejecting the educational system as a form of resistance (Willis 1993). Both these views, direct reproduction of social inequality through schooling and indirect reproduction of it through the active involvement of the disadvantaged themselves by employing their agency of resistance and rejection, are critiqued for being deterministic and foreclosing the possibility of social change. In response, Giroux (1997) highlights the subversive radical possibilities available to students and also to enlightened teachers within the very oppressive schooling system that can produce emancipatory results.

Although Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital evolved in the context of the high value assigned to art, literature, etc. in France, we have extended this concept to the 'knowing and learning of English language' for its specific colonial historic significance as well as for its market value in the Indian context. As our study shows, the state has played a crucial role in preventing the acquisition of this cultural capital by the poor through its structuring and policies of schooling for the poor. While Giroux's arguments have liberatory prospects for the disadvantaged, the severity of the structural constraints experienced by the poor in India in educating themselves, albeit living in the richest metropolitan city in the country, as indicated by this study, may remain only as theoretical propositions. The individual efforts to compensate educational deficits arising from structural inequalities are futile efforts of the poor which only reiterates the significance of the welfare responsibilities of the state in a capitalist society. The current trends of commoditisation and privatisation of secondary education under globalisation on the one hand and the receding role of state in this sector on the other hand may have severe consequences for the education of the poor in India.

Notes

[1] There is some ambiguity about the figures available on secondary education in India because of the lack of consensus on what constitutes secondary education. It is defined and used in different ways. Strictly speaking it is supposed to refer to only the standards IX and X. However, often it refers to post-primary to pre-collegiate, i.e., standards VI through XII (NIEPA 2001). Some of the state governments include middle and

high schools, some others standards VIII, IX and X, and still some others standards IX through XII. In this paper we refer to standards VIII, IX and X as constituting secondary schooling and standards XI and XII as higher secondary education, the pattern followed in Maharashtra.

[2] GER is defined as the total enrolment, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population for a given level. GER can be over 100 per cent due to the inclusion of over-aged and under-aged students. NER is defined as the enrolment of the official age-group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the population from the same age group. NER does not exceed 100 per cent.

[3] There is no complete official list of all secondary schools in Mumbai - government, and private aided and unaided - available with the education department of either the municipal corporation or the state government. The lists collected from various sources were found to be incomplete. The separate administrative structures for elementary, secondary, higher and professional education and the complex regulatory system of affiliation and recognition have made a complete enlisting of all categories of secondary schools in Mumbai difficult.

[4] The success percentage in these schools in Mumbai is only 35-45. Some schools show 0-5 per cent success results.

[5] The buildings and premises are provided and maintained by the municipal corporation but the state education department pays the salaries and administers the schools.

[6] We do observe young children travelling long distances by local train and bus to have access to government secondary schools. Distance is a major constraint not only for the rural population but also for the urban poor, a factor that is overlooked.

[7] Some of these are run under the special provision given to linguistic minority communities.

[8] In a few cases known to us, the children dropped out.

[9] This is in addition to the distinctions of mental and manual labour and their consequences on the learning of mathematics for women, dalits and other manual workers in a caste stratified and patriarchal society.

[10] "He/she has failed in standard X; what will he/she be able to do further!"

[11] As far as mothers' employment was concerned, there was a small increase in the number of mothers employed in the year 2003 as compared to 1985. This could be due to the fact that they had to complete child bearing and rearing responsibilities before taking up regular employment and/ or due

to the employment distress experienced by their spouses in the recent years.

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