



SOCIAL INEQUITIES IN SCHOOL CHOICE AT HIGHER SECONDARY LEVEL IN HARYANA

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Abstract

The paper, drawing on a comprehensive field survey, investigates the magnitude of social inequities at higher secondary level (class IX and X) in Haryana (India). The analysis establishes the parental school preferences for school choice are largely discerned on caste/social group basis, whereby the privileged groups i.e. upper category households prefer to send their wards in private schools and their counterparts i.e. lower strata of the society prefer government schools. Further, the study investigates the gender discrimination across the social groups.

Key words: higher secondary level, school choice, social category, gender.

Introduction

The demand for secondary education has increased across the world due to globalization, and transformations in economic structure and patterns in employment opportunities. According to Reddy (2020), secondary education comprises two sub-levels, viz. higher secondary (Classes IX and X, age group: 15-16 years) and intermediate levels (Classes XI and XII, age group: 17-18) and both of these sub-levels are pivotal phases in the educational hierarchy as the students at these levels are prepared for tertiary education and for labour market. Right from the years of independence, the policy makers have envisioned to develop secondary education (along with elementary and higher level), and provide equal educational opportunities across all population segments, irrespective of gender, caste, class and religion. As per NSSO data (75th Round), the gross enrolment ratio for these two levels were 86.4 percent (male: 87.4 percent, female: 85.1 percent) and 68.3 percent (male: 70.3 percent, female: 65.9 percent) respectively. Thus, the objective of universalization of secondary education largely remains elusive.

It is imperative to underscore that India introduced neo-liberal reforms in 1991, which profoundly impacted social sector in the country. The budgetary resources for education (specifically for secondary education) were frozen by the government (Gill and Brar, 2009), at the same time, private schools of huge variety entered into country's school education marketplace. Social stratification in educational attainment based on the caste, ethnicity and

religion is reflected with a vast quantity of literature around the globe (Lee et.al., 1994; Glazerman, 1998; Archbald, 2000; Kerckhoff, 2001; Govinda 2002; Thorat and Newman 2009; Willms, 2018). These inequalities have been a cause of concern to both the government and society. Besides, there is another bigger issue: due to interplay between several socio-cultural norms and economic hardships, the female child in India does not have equal access to schools providing better quality of secondary education (Tilak, 2020). Given the aforesaid background, the present study examines magnitude of social inequalities in school choice at higher secondary level in the state of Haryana. As a matter of fact, the upper caste households prefer private schools for their wards (Drèze and Kingdon, 2001). In this study we are particularly concerned about knowing whether caste/social category is an important variable while parents make choice of school for their wards at higher secondary level. It is important to emphasize that there exist huge variabilities in type of institutions within the overall domain of private schools in the state, which ranges from elite private schools to low cost private schools. The present study takes into account the categorization of private schools into two parts only, viz. private aided and unaided, and presents a comparative picture vis-à-vis government schools.

In the rest of the paper, while section II focuses on rationale of the study, section III precisely deals with data sources and methodology. Moreover, Section IV focuses on school choice and social inequalities. The final

section presents the summary and conclusions of the study

Rationale of the Study

Although, the issues of social inequalities in educational attainments and school choice have vastly been examined in previous studies, most of these studies focused on either primary or higher level of education. There is gap in literature examining the impact of such inequalities at higher secondary level of school education. Besides, most of the previous studies have merely used quantitative data for examining the dynamics of social inequalities, there is gap in literature to examine these phenomena by combining quantitative statistics with qualitative data. The present study intends to fill such gaps in literature.

Objectives, Data Sources and Methodology

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the magnitude and patterns social inequalities at higher secondary level in Haryana (India) across the government vis-a-vis private schools.
2. To examine the magnitude and patterns social inequalities by gender at higher secondary level in Haryana (India) across the government vis-a-vis private schools.

The study is primarily based on the primary data collected from the 300 sampled households (180 Rural and 120 Urban) through a semi-structured interview schedule (i.e. comprising of quantitative and qualitative dimensions). The sampled households were chosen using the Multistage Stratified Random Sampling from three districts of Haryana, viz. Fatehabad, Kurukshetra and Rohtak. These districts were selected using literacy rate as a criterion (i.e. dividing all the districts in the state into lower, medium and higher literacy rates strata). The data has been collected for 428 students studied

in secondary education. The study examines the data in absolute and relative terms using the methods of percentages and ratios, and makes the analysis in comparative-descriptive manner for the 240 students studied in the higher secondary level. Moreover, qualitative information pertaining to various important aspects related to secondary education, its commercialization and inequity has also been collected from various school teachers, principals and other administrators using personal interview method as well as focus group discussion (FGD) method.

Social Inequalities and School Choice

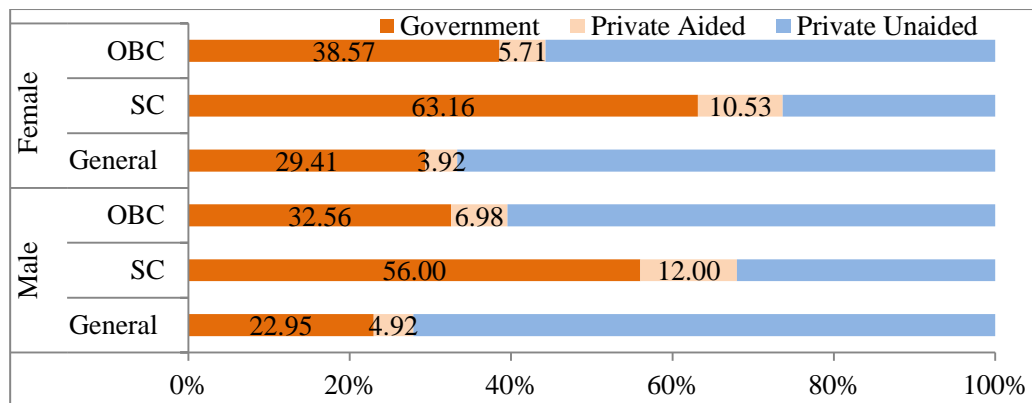
The socially disadvantaged groups prefer government or low cost schools for their wards (Härmä, 2011; Nambissan, 2012; Karopady, 2014; Muralidharan and Sundararaman, 2015; Gill, 2015; Kumar and Choudhury, 2021; Singh et. al., 2022). Table 1 establishes that the private education providers, specifically unaided sub-sector have become predominant service providers of secondary education at higher secondary level in the state. Thus, while 56.25 per cent of the students were attending private unaided schools in the state in 2018-19, 36.67 per cent of their counterparts were attending government schools. Moreover, the data also exhibit that the equalities in access of higher secondary education in terms of school choice by the social category. Thus, the majority of SC students (59.09 per cent) were attending government schools while the corresponding figure for the general category students is only 25.89 per cent. And, the rest of the students were either attending private unaided or aided schools. Besides, it has been found that the extent of social inequalities is comparatively more at rural level vis-à-vis urban areas.

Table 1: Distribution of higher secondary school students in Haryana by region, social category and type of school

Region	Social category	Type of School			
		Government	Private Aided	Private Unaided	Total
Rural	General	33.33	4.35	62.32	100.00
	SC	72.00	12.00	16.00	100.00
	OBC	47.92	8.33	43.75	100.00
	Total	45.07	7.04	47.89	100.00
Urban	General	13.95	4.65	81.40	100.00
	SC	42.11	10.53	47.37	100.00
	OBC	27.78	8.33	63.89	100.00
	Total	24.49	7.14	68.37	100.00
Total	General	25.89	4.46	69.64	100.00
	SC	59.09	11.36	29.55	100.00
	OBC	35.26	6.41	58.33	100.00
	Total	36.67	7.08	56.25	100.00

Source: Author's calculations based on the field survey

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Source: Author's calculations based on the field survey

Figure 1: Distribution of higher secondary school students in Haryana by gender, region and type of school

Further, the pro-male gender discrimination exists in rural as well as urban areas across the social categories. Figure 1 shows the extent of gender discrimination across the social categories, the proportion of SC category male students, studying in the government schools was 56 per cent while the corresponding figures for their counterparts female students was 63.16 per cent and similar patterns also present across the other two social categories viz OBC and general.

Conclusions

The study establishes that the social stratification is widely prevailed in the state of Haryana, specifically in access of private schools at higher secondary level of school education. Nevertheless, an examination of parental perceptions brought to the fore that the privileged groups in the society prefer private schools for their offspring, although are costly, deliver better quality of education vis-à-vis their government counterparts. The evidence related to pro-male gender discrimination is a matter of concern from the point of view the female gender's overall future prospects because these inequalities result in lack of opportunity and freedom of choice for females. As such, in order to bring equality of opportunity in secondary education, it is imperative that the delivery of education is also of reasonable quality, so that all those students who pursue secondary schooling have good learning outcomes as well. It is essential to give equal attention towards quantitative and qualitative development of secondary education, and stringently control the commercialization of education by the private players.

Given the above-mentioned findings, it would be immensely interesting if future research is carried out with regard to developing a deeper understanding of the factors which households actually take into account while making school choice and household expenditure on education. Moreover, in future research, it would be interesting to examine the gender based inequalities in access to secondary education across the social categories after interweaving household income and educational capital of parents.

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