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Reproducing Difference? Schooling, Jobs, and Empowerment in Uttar Pradesh, India

CRAIG JEFFREY
University of Washington, USA

PATRICIA JEFFERY and ROGER JEFFERY *
University of Edinburgh, UK

Summary. — This article examines the role of school education in reproducing caste and class inequalities in rural Bijnor district, Uttar Pradesh, India. Drawing on Bourdieu's work, the article shows that a rural elite has used its superior wealth, connections, and social status to ensure that their sons receive privileged access to schooling credentials and government employment. The greater availability of formal educational opportunities allied to the political rise of lower castes has allowed a small group of Dalits to raise their social standing, but has failed to alter historical relationships of dependence and exploitation.
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Key words — Asia, caste, class, education, employment, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural north Indians are increasingly seeking prolonged schooling for their sons with a view to obtaining off-farm incomes. A rising rural middle class has been in the vanguard of this change, but the expansion of rural schooling is also affecting substantial sections of the poor. In large parts of rural north India, a shift is occurring from a direct mode of reproduction, wherein resources are passed on within households through the transfer of property at inheritance, to mediated reproduction, in which the provision of educational credentials and social networking skills is increasingly significant (Bourdieu, 1996).

In spite of the importance of these dynamics and their implications for understandings of development, there has been rather little research conducted on the impact of schooling on processes of social differentiation in South Asia. Much development research has considered the role of education in generating "human capital" (e.g., Krueger & Mikael, 2001) often through focusing on children's access to lower primary schooling (Grades I–V) (e.g., Drèze & Sen, 1995; Govinda, 2002; World Bank, 1998). But issues of power, social change, and the meanings attached to education have not been adequately explored (see also Heyneman, 1980). This article addresses this research gap through exploring how schooling beyond Grade V (upper primary and secondary schooling) [1] reproduces, transforms or undermines patterns and processes of social inequality in a single village in rural Bijnor district, western

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Uttar Pradesh (UP). Drawing on field research conducted by the three authors in 2000–02, we argue that the expansion of upper primary and secondary education is reinforcing inequalities based upon caste and class in western UP while also allowing some Dalits (ex-Untouchables) to challenge established structures of power. [2]

The next two sections outline the political economy of schooling and employment in UP and the theoretical basis of our enquiry. Section 4 introduces the setting of our research and methodology. In Section 5, we explore the schooling and employment strategies of the locally dominant Jat caste and relatively marginalized Chamars (a Dalit caste) in Nangal village. We uncover the role of secondary schooling in entrenching rural inequalities based upon caste and class. Jats have been more successful than Chamars in the search for educational credentials and salaried employment. Section 6 focuses on the occasional success of educated Chamars in the search for government employment and the social implications of this mobility. Section 7 summarizes our argument and draws out the wider implications of our study for an understanding of social reproduction and development.

2. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF UTTAR PRADESH

Economic neo-liberal reform has sharpened tensions between educational aspirations and employment outcomes for parents and young people in UP, as it has in many other parts of India (Harriss-White, 2003) and the developing world (Bryceson, 2002; Miles, 2002; Silberschmidt, 2001). The liberalization of the Indian economy from 1991 has had a negative impact on rural employment generation in many parts of north India (Chandrashekhar & Ghosh, 2002). Economic reforms have reduced opportunities for government employment, historically an important source of salaried work in rural areas. In 2001, the World Bank made an annual 2% cut in the number of government employees, a condition of its continuing aid in UP. Outside metropolitan areas, liberalization has often failed to generate private sector jobs (Sen, 1997). Simultaneously, economic reform has frequently reduced the availability of rural credit and therefore possibilities for entrepreneurialism (Chandrashekhar & Ghosh, 2002). As positions in salaried employment have dwindled, recruitment to these posts has been politicized through the extension of caste-based positive discrimination to "Other Backward Classes (OBCs)" in 1990. [3]

UP literacy rates are below national levels; in 2001, 70% of males and 43% of females over the age of seven were literate, and only 68% and 38%, respectively, in rural areas (ORG, 2001). Until about 1990, the public sector was becoming increasingly important within secondary schooling in UP; the Government established substantial numbers of secondary schools and extended financial aid to privately managed institutions. From the early 1990s, however, there was a shift in patterns of schooling provision in many parts of the state (Mooij & Dev, 2002). The fiscal crisis of the UP Government, allied to neo-liberal economic reforms introduced in the early 1990s, has eroded Government secondary schooling provision. Since about 1990, the only dynamic element in the public secondary schooling sector has been in girls schooling, under the influence of donor pressure. Government secondary schools typically lack teaching aids and equipment, catering facilities, and basic amenities (The Probe Team, 1999). The political power of government teachers appears to have prevented the State from diverting money allocated for teachers' salaries into developing educational facilities and monitoring curriculum delivery (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2003). In this context, secondary education is increasingly provided within non-state schools and extra-school tutorials in UP. Organizations promoting class, caste, or religious goals have capitalized on State neglect of schooling by establishing an array of privately managed educational institutions (Jeffery, Jeffery, & Jeffrey, in press). This privatization has coincided with the politicization of schooling through the efforts of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to ensure that government school curricula reflect the ideological concerns of politicized Hinduism. [4]

The neglect of employment creation and educational provision is connected to the entrenched nature of caste and class inequalities in UP (Jeffery & Lerche, 2003). Three categories of household may be identified in rural UP based upon their position in relation to the fourfold Hindu *varnâ* hierarchy. According to the 1931 Census of India, the last census for which caste figures are available, upper castes (principally Brahmins and Thakurs) comprised roughly 20% of the population of UP. As sub-

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