EMPLOYABILITY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Like many other nations of the world, India too has a huge reservoir of youth power, much of them residing in urban areas, either born there to parents migrated a few generations ago, or themselves moved to mega cities to seek quality education and vocational skills. India Skill Report 2016 has emphasized upon tackling the challenge of employability of the qualified youth and has recommended to the Government several new initiatives and policies to give a facelift to the country's educational system. The chief variables here are Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Institutional Infrastructure. This paper aims to sociologically investigate into the situation with social science education and the challenges inherent in career building. It is based on an explorative study undertaken in Kalaburagi city covering some of its social science educational institutions, both undergraduate and post-graduate. The study has shown that there is a huge rural-urban and class divide between students successfully achieving higher standards of learning and in obtaining employment. The role of the family/parents and changing market value of social science subjects present a complex scenario.

Keywords: Social Sciences, Employability, Private Sector, Family,Parental Aspirations, Regional and Class Divide

1. INTRODUCTION

Formal Education, that too formal education is expected to build the capacity of learners to become capable workers in various jobs because education teaches skills required to employment. The purpose of formal education is to train, orient and prepare the students for a range of future careers by teaching them with the required skills and experience. Skill formation is critical for employment potential. This is also referred to as 'Vocationalization of Education'. Social sciences are defined as a systematic study of social phenomena, in its static and dynamic forms. The social sciences are an interrelated set of subjects contributing to the allround understanding of the society in its economic, political, socio-cultural, and governance aspects. The need of the hour for India, and any other country, is skilled human resource, which is proficient in analysing the burning problems of society, and find workable solutions for their redressal. Sociology and other social sciences, needless to emphasize, have a significant role to play in this. We not only need a greater number of social scientists, but also good quality ones.

The new millennium has brought in much complexity in the educational system, already impacted by the three processes of: LPG, viz., Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization. The governments in the developing societies have taken strident measures through policies, programmes, and such others to encourage mass education. The union government of India with its flagship programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhyan (SSA) which concluded in 2015 designed and implemented many holistic and integrated programmes for the development of education. Its motto was to take the school to the community. Under the climate of decentralization that had set in by then (Late 1980s), its ideology was brought inside

educational reforms also. School Development Monitoring Committees (SDMCs) were established per every elementary school at village level, with the parents of those children as members. True to our decentralization climate already set in, all the funds granted under SSA had the power to be implemented with the Head Master/Mistress and the elected President of the SDMC.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

Social Science Education is considered as the 'elixir' of life. Over the decades, especially after independence, educational development has gained momentum receiving great attention from educationists, planners and policy-makers and the government (Both central and the state). The present paper (Based on a brief sociological exploratory study) intends to explore or attempt to make a situational analysis of employability of college and university graduates, who opted social science subjects for their courses. It tries to investigate into the pedagogical processes of learning and acquiring the necessary skills needed for career building by these youth; and attempt to identify any gaps in the current course designs (Sociology) and their job-orientedness. Finally, it attempts to offer some policy suggestions.

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from a group of selected students, faculty, and educationists from government colleges in Kalaburagi city, offering degree courses and universities offering post graduate courses in Social Sciences. Interview schedule and focused group discussions were the modes of eliciting the required data from them. In addition, qualitative information was elicited about students' (And parents') aspirations, motivations, affordability of good/quality education and type of employment sought by them.

The findings have clearly revealed that relevance of social science courses and subjects are directly linked to these subjects' "market" value (The type and financial and workquality of job they can fetch). The level or extent of the current labour market needing graduates and post-graduates from social science background determines the importance placed by students on these subjects. After obtaining social science education, the availability of job prospects, also depends upon which specific social science subject can generate greater possibility of well-paying and quick employment.

3. SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

Social Science Education Prospects and Challenges Despite its strong importance and relevance beginning in the 20th century, competency-based learning or educational attainments is the big challenge before social science (teachers and institutions offering courses), as we moved on to the New Millennium. Greater emphasis is being laid upon creativity and application of skills, irrespective of pursuit of engineering, management, or social science education; besides, there is greater also is the responsibility laid upon the building of the capacity of instructors/teachers too. Alongside this or an equally higher is the expectation regarding students' deeper involvement in studies, assuming responsibility of learning with efficiency and diligence, being keen on employability to be derived out of the course that they are pursuing.

4. HYPOTHESES

- Educational attainments are strongly related to unemployment and earnings across the world.
- Unemployment level decreases as educational levels increase.
- Social science graduates with poor skills are likely to face delay in employment.
- Non-university factors like one's religion, caste, gender, class, region, socio-economic factors, parent's education, employment status, housing, family size and structure, single parents etc., influence children's education and pace of employability.

5. SOCIAL INEQUALITY & ACCESSIBILITY TO QUALITY EDUCATION DECLINING STATUS OF DEMAND FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION.

Social Science Education is undoubtedly, education in a developing society, such as India, plays a significant role in promoting competent human resource that will be set to achieve an excellent personality, with socio-economic prospects. To put it bluntly, employability is what is expected of attainment of educational degrees and awards. However, a large number and variety of non-academic factors, such as ever-increasing density of population, poverty, social inequality, and marginalization of the vulnerable sections impact the smoothness of this transfer. It is also accompanied by/leading to a keen competition for scarce economic opportunities, or employment.

All these badly impact the freedom for every student to access quality education and thereafter sustained employment. While these fall-outs are no less important, sociological attention is direly needed to realise that in a socially stratified and hierarchical society in India, that is India, millions of students are placed at the lower rung of the socio-economic

ladder due to caste-based hierarchy. As a result, they are condemned to socioeconomic exclusion, caste, class, gender, region, and religion-based discrimination. As a result, they are kept away (Alienated) from mainstream benefits of seeking quality higher education that is offered at a huge cost. Reservation of seats in their favour has not been of much help as private institutions are involved to a large extent with heavy fee structure and other requirements.

Social Science Education when the above scenario applies to the situation with all disciplines or subjects (Like science, medical, engineering etc.), those who are studying social science disciplines are at a greater disadvantage. This is because of the steady decline in what is called as the 'market-value' for these subjects, in comparison with high potential employment courses, like Medicine, Engineering, Management, and Law - to mention the important ones. Choosing a course is always preceded by the parents and students reviewing/looking at the employability and the cost of pursuing the course. Students from poor socio-economic background are found to be hesitant to choose a 'good' course (defined as one that has promise for what is called as 'placement' for a paying job/career) due to the 'Cost' factor often influenced or restrained by the 'Caste' factor! It is observed that the number of students opting social science subjects for postgraduation (especially) is decreasing in recent years.

Social Science Education Conceptual Framework of the Study/Paper When the interface of education with society has to be analyzed; three major theoretical perspectives of early sociologists - viz., Functionalist (Robert Merton, in the main), Symbolic Interactions (Herbert Blumer) and Conflict (Marxian) - are relevant. The function of education is, primarily, to socialize the young, not only in formal ways using a school curriculum, but also acquainting them with the culture of that society: values, ethics, beliefs, mores, and norms. Interactions between teachers and students and among the peer symbolically frame their outcomes. Expectations and perceptions exist prior to seeking education and during its process. Its formal role lies in providing suitable training or building the capacities of students to take them forward to reach rewarding careers.

Social Science Education is the employability role of their education. Biases on the part of the teachers and others in the education system and broader society (Such as caste, religion, region, gender, disability etc.) influence the outcome negatively, thereby affecting employability. Thus, when education is unevenly, unjustly offered with discrimination at the root (Imparting stage itself), it is on the path of leading to disruption, disintegration, conflict, and inequality (Despite measures for equality mooted through constitutional guarantees of reserving seats in educational institutions for SCs, STs and other weaker sections in India).

Social Science Education Conflict theorists perceive the disruptive trait in education, used as a strategy to keep backwardness of vulnerable sections stagnant, not allowing for any change. According to them it is a technique of producing and reproducing exploitation and inequality. It comes in handy for the oppressive economic system, which rejects the claims of marginalized sections, and is supported by the political and hegemonic systems of caste-based social hierarchy.

According to Bourdieu, the school offers differential cultural standards leaning towards the upper and dominant classes, which Parsons observed as one part of the social system (Education) performing for the whole.

6. METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The study was set in Kalaburagi city. Representative sample of four institutions was taken to carry out data collection. The four educational institutions were:

- One undergraduate college for women.
- One undergraduate college (mixed-both boys and girls).
- One PG center in a government university.
- One PG center in a private university.

A total of 40 students (15 boys and 25 girls), 8 lecturers, 4 heads of institutions participated in the study. All students and faculty were from social science stream and were purposively selected for the study. 5 key informants included representative from the Karnataka Higher Education Council, Department of Collegiate Education, a social science research institute, and parents of students interviewed. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview schedule and analysed to arrive at conclusions. As the sample was very small, no statistical output was derived.

Role of the National Education Policy (NEP) The NEP (both 2015 and 2020) drew a road map to achieve integrated educational and skill enhancement among youth in India. The role of higher education in shaping the personality and career of youngsters was its primary goal, on the premise that if not addressed adequately and immediately, the country

may fall behind other developing societies missing out on global competition to achieve human development with justice and equity.

7. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Social Science Education study interacted with students in courses related to the disciplines of Sociology, Economics, History, Political Science/Public Administration, Developmental Studies, Education and Women Studies, who were questioned about the relevance of these courses to the current needs of labour market and employability. The students have basically expressed respect towards these subjects, adding that social sciences are 'human sciences', whose knowledge is of intrinsic importance to society's development. But at the same time, the demand for social science programs is also declining over the years. This decline in the number of admissions to these courses (According to their views) is due to the mushrooming of both private and government-run universities in the country in recent years.

A few choices considered as necessary for employability were placed before the respondents, like interdisciplinary skills, analytical skills, innovativeness, entrepreneurship, problem-solving and adaptability skills, and specialization in the subject (Such as a PhD degree etc.). They have confirmed the utility of all of them. But knowledge of statistical analysis was rated by many as very much needed. This was lacking in many courses till recently and even now in some syllabuses. Multi-disciplinary approach to learning, triangulation methods in conducting research and analysis, were also rated as necessary skills.

Social Science Education it was found that most of the students wished to continue their present studies but their readiness towards work was poor. Many said they fear even dropping out of courses to take up any job that is available, forced by economic pressures at home. This phenomenon was higher among boys and among those who hailed from families where father was unemployed/underemployed, alcoholic, unable to sustain the family's needs with only his earnings, indebted, and having more daughters. Thus, many students expressed difficulty to reach the stage of 'employability'. Another revelation was that inability to obtain a suitable (paying) job, kept the boys' marriage age to 30 + years. Selfemployment was not so much preferred by girls.

8. MAJOR DERIVATIONS OR INSIGHTS OBTAINED FROM THE PRESENT STUDY ARE AS FOLLOWS:

a) Absence of sufficient knowledge about the utility of a course or subject or discipline.
b) Earlier years of education (PUC for degree level and graduate level for PG course).
c) Counseling about which course/discipline to choose out of a complex list, is either not there or not very helpful.
d) There is the higher chance (threat) of the 'best talent' captured by technical and commercial courses. Thus, there is a dearth of bright minds opting social science subjects.
e) Another finding is that wherever such combination of subjects are offered, usually in private universities, students tend to opt for a social science subject that has better value in the job market, combining it with either Journalism, Psychology, English Literature etc.

The study has shown that not all subjects in social science stream are without demand. Some of them (Like Economics) continue to have reasonably good number of students opting to study. A matter of concern is that colleges in rural areas continue to attract good number of students towards "Arts" stream. Those who join are not always the 'best' or brainy' students, but those who fail in getting a seat in the science stream of subjects or for a sought-after social science like economics or psychology.

9. SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

In India, social structural factors like caste, class, gender, and even region impose and influence socio-economic inequality, income poverty and deprivation, because of which students from poor and rural background find it hard to obtain skill-based and quality education, as per job requirements or employability. However, over the last 2-3 decades, the government through the Ministry of Human Resource Development and other interventions has introduced a number of job-oriented courses, free coaching for the students from vulnerable background, free distribution of inputs, setting up of hostels, and promoting deserving students to seek higher education like PhD etc. From the time of globalization and accompanying processes of Privatization and Liberalization initiated in early 1990s, privatization of education has grown enormously introducing many novel courses, which have been designed keeping the employment prospects of the students in perspective. However, unless they are offered in government run institutions, students find it difficult to join such premier private universities where the fee structure is quite high.

10. IMPORTANCE OF APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

Social sciences provide the essential knowledge to understand the social, cultural, and other changing aspects of societies, that go a long way in moving society from a socially pathological state to equilibrium and holistic development. Social science research is grassroots one, generates qualitative data besides statistical one, and through evaluation and monitoring projects arrives at scientific solutions for society's ills. Their role in socioeconomic policy-making is indispensable, and in building sustainable societies where the marginalized and oppressed are given due attention to and liberated from social exclusion. They are heterogeneous with a wide range of content - sociology & social anthropology, history, economics, political science, etc.

11. THE PANDEMIC AND ONLINE EDUCATION: SOME REFLECTIONS

The pandemic (Covid-19) that struck in March 2020 caused an abrupt closure of all educational institutions, besides everything public, as lockdown was clamped for several months. With that, began an official era of 'online education' for a few months, to be resumed to regular classroom teaching by late 2022. But the damage had been done, especially for the students from rural areas, which stayed in the university hostels to pursue studies, or commuted. But many of them hailing from poor and backward castes, SCs and other marginalized groups, had discontinued studies and taken up whatever occupation that came their way. Wage labour in agriculture was also not uncommon. Because economic hardship imposed by the pandemic was rampant.

With global technological development and expansion, Online Education also called as virtual or remote learning, had already taken the place of classroom teaching in advanced countries. After Covid-19 struck, it became a dire necessity arising out of long duration or spells of lock down. With colleges and universities forced to resort to online education, this was the only way to complete the portions for the term and conduct examinations. Thus, technology transcended the boundaries of traditional classrooms. Virtual learning came to be hailed as "student-centred, innovative, and flexible". Learning was carried out and instructors transferred the required knowledge not directly facing the students. Both (Instructor/teacher/lecturer) and the learner/student were using different devices such as mobile phones, laptops, etc. The essential requirement for online education or virtual learning is uninterrupted provision or supply of internet access. Parents and students interviewed for the study complained that there was no sufficient time to adjust to the new method of teaching/learning. Institutional set up or infrastructure at home to learn online without interruption, noise, and other disturbances. Those from poor and rural background found it much hard to adapt to the changed mode of leaning. This is also supported by a few studies in this regard. Students and their parents have reacted that online education was not very useful; but there was no alternative. What the students missed most was face-to-face interaction with instructors/teachers/lecturers. They also missed discussing the lesson with the peers or classmates/friends. Discussions, debates, and collaborative learning, were also not there. Gopal has concluded that teacher-student interaction, and the support systems in place tend to determine its effectiveness.

12. CONCLUSION

India has a long history of its education system. The ancient Indian universities of Nalanda, Takshashila, Varanasi, Vallabhi, and Ujjain were the first centres of learning in the world, attracting students from Greece, China, and Persia. As notable centres of learning, they practiced indigenous system of education in literature, social sciences, science, astronomy, mathematics, and Fine Arts to mention a few. The colonial administration by the British gave a setback to this and preparing the Indians to serve in government service with the newly earned degrees replaced the old system. Independent India continued with the colleges affiliated to universities, focusing on teaching and not much research activities.

There is also a tremendous increase in the number of universities and colleges in the last few decades. With a gross enrolment ratio of 24.5 per cent, our education system is one of the largest in the world. Majority opted science, Technology, Medicine and Agriculture, and a small fraction preferred social science education. This decline has been going on from quite some years, with social sciences, & humanities taking a back seat in the choice by students. "Professional Courses" are in much demand.

The framework for successful career absorption after education is to prepare to enter the labour market with the needed skills – the two must be linked . All said and done social science courses are generalist in nature, not specific. This uncertainty regarding the doubts of potential employers about the capabilities of graduates seeking jobs with them

should be cleared; in an atmosphere where STEM programs are in high demand than from the Social Sciences. What the candidates can accomplish within the organization needs attention here.

Policy Implications In the above discussion on the study's findings, we have said that the availability of job prospects determines students opting social science education today. Girl students differed from boys in: opting to study further after graduating and did not show much preference for selfemployment. Students, in general, were found to be ignorant of various job prospects after studying social science courses. This is true of those from rural background. Economic background, caste, and place of residence (City or rural area) were found to be having much impact on their preference for subjects/courses. The fact that one must work towards improving one's employability was lacking among 98 per cent of them.

A negative perception that social sciences (Barring a few like Economics) are less useful is strongly found among most of them. Commonly held stance was that social sciences are sort of inferior to natural sciences (As the latter contribute valuably to the growth and survival of human society). Educational institutions and infrastructure are increasingly falling short of their abilities to provide needed skills, expertise, and application of their knowledge to use. The biggest block is students' (Parents too) perception that knowledge from social sciences is not as creative and useful in fetching jobs (Immediately after the course - "placement" as it is called) as compared to Medicine, Engineering, Law, Marketing, Business Management, and Commerce. Another strongly held notion is that these are the domain of 'bright' students. The study has enabled the realization that the issue of relevance of social science subjects is complex and multifaceted. It is not possible to combine these subjects, because they are unique in their utility and response to the needs of the labour market.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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