Unit 10
Education and Social Mobility

Contents

Learning objectives

After reading this unit you will be able to comprehend the:

- relationship between education, social mobility and nature of stratified society;

- concept of equality of educational opportunity and its evolution; and

- theoretical perspectives regarding the relationship between education and social mobility.

10.1 Introduction

Education, it is widely assumed, plays a positive role in enhancing a person's chances of social mobility. Why would one study otherwise? There is no doubt that education shares an important relationship with social mobility. It would not only be overly simplistic but also fallacious, however, to assume that education ignores social differences among individuals and gives everyone an equal chance to climb the ladder of social stratification. As students of sociology of education we need to understand the dynamics involved in the relationship between education and social mobility. In this Unit we begin with social mobility and strategies of educational selection. Having done that we will delve into the theoretical perspective. Towards the end we will look into the relationship between education and social mobility in the Indian context.

10.2 Concept of Social Mobility

As you are aware from the reading of Unit 26 (Block 7) of the core course on Sociological Theories and Concepts (MSO-001), the term social mobility refers to the movement of individuals or groups from one position of a society's stratification system to another. Sociologists use the terms open class system and closed class system to distinguish between two ideal types of class societies in terms of social mobility. An open system implies that the position of each individual is influenced by the person's achieved status. Achieved status is a social position attained by a person largely through his or her own effort. In an open class system, competition among members of society is encouraged. At the other extreme of the social mobility system is the closed system, in which there is little or no possibility of individual mobility. Slavery and the

caste system of stratification are examples of closed systems. In such societies, social placement is based on ascribed characteristics, such as race and family background, which cannot be easily changed. Ascribed status is a social position assigned to a person by society without regard for the person's unique characteristics and talents.

As with other ideal types, the extremes of open and closed systems do not actually exist as pure forms, for example, in caste societies, mobility is occasionally possible through hypergamy — a woman's marriage to a man of a higher caste. In the relatively open class system of the United States, children from affluent families retain many privileges and advantages. Hence, any class system should properly be regarded as being open or closed in varying degrees.

Here the key questions concern the way in which achieved status is obtained and the degree of movement that can take place across generations. It is in these circumstances that social mobility becomes important, as sociologists examine the way in which individuals compete for unequal positions. In studying social mobility, sociologists compare the actual degree of social mobility with the ideal of free movement through equal opportunity. As a consequence, the social position that an individual achieves may bear no relationship to the positions he acquired at birth. Movement up or down the social scale is based on merit.

Contemporary sociologists distinguish between horizontal and vertical social mobility. Horizontal mobility refers to the movement of a person from one social position to another of the same rank, for example, a lecturer from Gargi College leaves Gargi to join as a lecturer in Kamla Nehru College. Most sociological analysis, however, focuses on vertical mobility. Vertical mobility refers to the movement of a person from one social position to another of a different rank. It involves either upward (teacher to Principal) or downward (chief manager to clerk) mobility in a society's stratification system.

One way of examining vertical social mobility is to contrast inter-generational and intra-generational mobility. Inter-generational mobility involves changes in the social position of children relative to their parents. Thus, a plumber whose father was a physician provides an example of downward inter-generational mobility. A film star whose parents were both factory workers illustrates upward inter-generational mobility. Intra-generational mobility involves changes in a person's social position within his or her adult life. A nurse who studies to become a doctor has experienced upward intra-generational mobility. A man who becomes a taxi driver after his firm becomes bankrupt has undergone downward intra-generational mobility. Another type of vertical mobility is stratum or structural mobility. These terms refer to the movement of a specific group, class, or occupation relative to others in the stratification system. For example, historical circumstances or labour market changes may lead to the rise or decline of an occupational group within the social hierarchy. Military officers and strategists are likely to be regarded highly in times of war or foreign policy crises. Some time back, the demand for persons with a professional degree in business administration greatly shot up in India and a whole lot of management institutes mushroomed all over the country. As a result, we can say that management graduates as a group experienced structural mobility.

10.3 Social Mobility and Strategies of Educational Selection

Turner (1961) distinguishes between two modes of social ascent: sponsored mobility and context mobility. His analysis of modes of social ascent with their accompanying strategies of educational selection is a careful framework for

studying education as a process of selection. Sponsored mobility *refers to an* education system in which elite recruits are chosen by the established elite or their agents. Elite status is assigned on the basis of some criterion of supposed merit and cannot be acquired by any degree of effort or strategy. Upward mobility is like entry into a private club where each candidate must be sponsored by one or more of the members. Sponsored mobility is characterized by early selection, followed by a clear differentiation of those singled out from the rest, usually in separate institutions. The process that follows has the nature of a special preparation for elite status including inculcation of special skills as also indoctrination the code of behaviour and the value system of the elite group. This is typical of cases where the system of elementary education for children of the poor is distinct from the system of education for the middle class.

Contest mobility refers to a system in which elite status is a reward in an open contest and is achieved by the aspirants' own efforts. In these circumstances, there would be open access to all institutions that are of equivalent status. Here, there is no sharp separation between students taking particular courses and where there is relatively open access to institutions of higher education. Control over selection relies upon assessment, examination and testing procedures. Contest mobility is like a race or other sporting event, in which all compete on equal terms for a limited number of prizes. Its chief characteristic is a fear of premature judgment and not only is early selection avoided, but any open selection is as far as possible avoided altogether. Although in theory, all those who complete the school — leaving diploma are eligible for higher education, in practice the competition is so keen that the entire spectrum of higher education can be highly selective. The institutions themselves have their own entrance examinations and there are variations in standards, despite theoretical equality of status. These modes of social ascent are based on ideal types using examples drawn from Britain and America respectively over almost 30 years. Their application therefore, rests on the kind of changes that have occurred within specific education systems.

Another model that has attracted some attention is the one outlined by Boudon (1974:79) who explored the relationship between intelligence, scholastic attainment, social background and aspirations. On the basis of his analysis, he proposes a two - tier theory of attainment based on 'primary' effects of social background which are similar to intelligence and school achievement and 'secondary' effects which apply when children of equal intelligence and achievement have to choose between different kinds of curricula. Black, upper class students choose courses that lead to the same social status as their parents. Indeed, he maintains that a large degree of mobility takes place despite the bias of the education system in favour of the middle class and the fact that the hiring process gives the advantage to those who are more qualified. Given the competition that exists for places in the education system and the occupation system, however, there is no guarantee that the children from more privileged groups would be favoured. Indeed, he shows how children of high status are demoted and low status children promoted. As a consequence, Boudon's theory helps to explain why there is a degree of randomness in occupational attainment, why education does not seem to affect mobility and why patterns of social ascent appear to remain stable across generations.

Reflection and Action 10.1

Discuss the relationship between social mobility and strategies of educational selection.

10.4 Equality of Educational Opportunity

In connection with his large-scale project on equality of educational opportunity, James Coleman (1968) considered five different positions in this regard. Broadly speaking, there were those positions that were concerned with 'inputs' into schools and those that focused on the 'effects' of schooling. As indicated by Coleman, a key problem concerns whether equality implies equality of input or equality of output. He suggested, however, that neither inputs nor outputs are viable. He concludes that equality of educational opportunity is not a meaningful term. In the USA, the expression 'equality of educational opportunity' has, first meant the provision of free education up to the entry into the labour market; second, it has referred to the provision of a common curriculum for all children regardless of their social background; third, it has referred to the provision of education for children from diverse social backgrounds in the same school; fourth, it means providing for equality within a locality.

On this basis, equality of educational opportunity demands that all pupils be exposed to the same curriculum in similar schools through equal inputs. The evidence in the Coleman report showed that there was relative equality of education inputs but inequality of results. Accordingly, it is argued, if equality of educational opportunity is to be realized in the USA, it is not sufficient to remove legal disabilities on blacks, women and other disadvantaged groups instead provision has to be made to give them the same effective chance as given to white male members of the population.

The term 'equality of educational opportunity' was also considered problematic in Britain. In particular, two problems were highlighted. The first concerns the way in which educational opportunities are achieved, while the second concerns what is meant by equal educational opportunity. After Halsey (1972), a great deal of sociological research and writing in Britain has been concerned with different aspects of equality of educational opportunity, some of which has had direct implications for social and educational policy. In particular, Halsey identifies three trends in this work. First, a period in which research was concerned with access, lasting from about the turn of the century until the end of the 1950s when discussion was in terms of equality of access to education to all the children regardless of their gender, social class, religion, ethnic group or region of origin. The second phase occurred throughout the 1960s when its scope chiefly consisted of equality of achievement. On this basis, equality of educational opportunity comes about if the proportion of people from different social, economic and ethnic categories at all levels of education is more or less the same as the proportion of these people in the population. Hence, positive discrimination in the form of compensatory education was suggested the main aim of which was to reduce education disadvantage and reduce the gap in educational achievement. This problem was tackled in the USA through Project Head Start programme, which was established to break the cycle of poverty by assisting pre-school children. In Britain, the Plowden Committee recommended the establishment of education priority areas where schools would be given greater resources and where attempts would be made to initiate change. Bernstein (1970) however, argued that compensatory education carried with it the implication that something was lacking in the family and the child. Halsey argued that equality of educational opportunity is essentially a discussion about education for whom (access) and to do what (outcomes). The third phase was concerned with the reappraisal of the function of education in contemporary societies.

The concept of equality of educational opportunity has undergone significant change over the decades. The core of the idea, however, remains that all the children should have an equal chance to succeed (or fail) in a common school system. What has undergone a change, however, is the understanding of the concept of equal chance itself. Over time this concept has become more

inclusive in terms of its implications. The scope of 'who is included' has widened to encompass blacks, women and other minorities, as well as white men. The emphasis has shifted from the provision of formal or legal equal educational opportunities to the requirement that educational institutions take active or affirmative steps to ensure equal treatment of different groups. Underlying this shift of emphasis as Coleman has argued, is the emergence of a conception of equality of educational opportunity, as 'equality of results', where educational institutions begin to be held partly accountable for gross differences in the attendance or success rates of different groups and are expected to take measures to reduce those differences.

Until about 1950, equality of educational opportunity had a relatively simple and restricted meaning. It referred to the right then enjoyed by all except the black Americans to attend the same publicly supported comprehensive schools and to compete on formally equal terms with all other students, regardless of their class or ethnic background. Such rights, American educators pointed out, were not enjoyed by European students to anywhere near the same degree. In much of Europe, separate schools for the academically able were the rule, and in practice this meant a higher concentration of upper middle class students in the college preparatory schools.

The twenty years following the Supreme Court's Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954 saw a steadily broadening of equality of educational opportunity. The court ruled that the maintenance of separate school system for black and white students was unconstitutional because such segregated schools were inherently unequal. Not only the meaning of equality of educational opportunity but the criteria on which it was based also broke new ground. Testimony established that segregated schools attended by blacks were inferior in their facilities and resources to schools attended by white students. In the ruling that segregated schools were unequal because they were inferior schools the Court opened the way to a much broader conception of equality of educational opportunity, one that stressed the communities' or the school's response to provide some rough equivalence of effective opportunity for all students and not merely the responsibility to make some opportunities available. Scholarships and financial aid programmes were implemented, enabling a larger number of poor and working class students to attend college. The courts also moved to a more activist conception of equality of educational opportunity during the 1960s. It meant that black and other minority students should have real rather than merely formal opportunities to attend the same schools as white students.

It was during the seventies rather than the sixties that the most radical changes occurred in the concept of equality of educational opportunity. First, the term became still more inclusive in the groups to which it was thought to apply — attention was now paid to the handicapped and women. Separate colleges for male students also came under attack. Toward the end of the decade, a majority of previously all male or all female colleges had opened their doors to at least some members of the opposite sex. There was also controversy about the denial of equal opportunity implicit in the greater subsidies given to boys' school sports rather than to girls' sports.

At the same time, a radical shift occurred in the criteria that were used to assess whether equality of educational opportunity existed. During the mid 1970s, an increasing number of liberal and radical critics defined it as the existence of roughly proportional education outcomes for all groups, or as Coleman put it, as 'equality of results'. In this position, schools were held responsible for ensuring that blacks, women or other minority groups moved towards parity with white males across a whole range of educational outcomes. Differences in these outcomes from under-representation of whites in the

physical sciences to the over-representation of blacks among high school drop-
outs tended to be taken as evidence of inequality of education opportunity.

There is no simple answer to the question: do schools provide equality of
educational opportunity? If we were to use as a criterion the activist definitions
of the 1970s, then the answer would be an unequivocal no. Large differences
still exist between the relative successes of different groups in education. For
example, lower class black students in particular are much more likely to drop
out of high school and to fail simple tests of literacy than white students.
Adopting the pre-1960s criteria, however will yield positive results. There is
no doubt that there are far more formal opportunities available to disadvantaged
students now than existed a few years ago. However, sociologists are interested
in the degree to which changes in schooling have changed the relative chances
of different social classes and ethnic groups. The general issue is whether
schools continue to reinforce or reproduce existing patterns of inequality
among groups or whether schools have helped create a society that is open
to individual talent and effort regardless of social background. As education
opportunities have expanded, has the relationship between education success
and social class declined, as the functional paradigm would predict, or has it
remained strong as conflict theorists assert?

10.5 Equality of Social Access: Myth or Reality

To what extent does schooling provide equal access to social groups from
varying social, economic, linguistic, regional and religious backgrounds? The
question here is not simply regarding access to educational institutions but
the experiences that one undergoes in school, which determines the
educational performance of such students. Theoretically speaking, even though,
private schools maybe open to children from various ethnic backgrounds, the
very fact that they have a high fee structure restricts the entry of a large
number of students to such schools. The hierarchy of educational institutions
ensures the maintenance of socio-economic differences between groups in
society.

Blacks, women, lower caste or class groups, even after they enter the same
school, have experiences which place them at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* their
more advantaged counterparts. When secondary education is of different types,
working class children can be shown to be less likely to enter the more academic
schools and once there, to be more likely to leave early. There are also
considerable social class differences in access to the universities. In the US,
the pattern of class differences is much the same as in Europe, in spite of
differences in the organization of secondary education. Dropping out of school
before high school graduation is more characteristic of low-status families,
measured in terms of income level and of the father's occupation. In Poland
too, the children of the intelligentsia have a much greater chance of entering
higher education than the children of workers and peasants' in spite of a
system which allows extra points for social background. There is also
considerable differentiation by choice of subjects. Thus the children of peasants
are likely to enter a college of agriculture and the children of industrial workers
a technical university. The teacher training colleges and academies of theology
also recruit heavily from the children of working class and the peasantry.

Apart from these differences between social classes which seem to persist in
different societies, there are also widespread variations between regions,
particularly between urban and rural areas. There are also regional differences
between countries, ethnic minorities and between sexes. Women's enrollment
in schools and colleges is lower as compared to men. In Europe, universities
are still largely a male preserve. There are however large variations between
countries, dependent partly on the position of women in the employment
market, partly, as in comparison between Britain and the United States. In the

USSR, for example, men and women enter higher education in roughly equal numbers. There is some evidence that women tend to predominate in certain kinds of higher education rather than others. They are, for example, less likely to pursue post-graduate education and less likely to study science. They also join teaching and nursing professions in large numbers. Socio-economic background and gender interrelate with each other. Studies reveal that the disparity between the sexes widens, as one goes down the social scale, until at the extreme of the scale, an unskilled manual worker's daughter has a chance of only one in 500 or 600 of entering a university — a chance a 100 times lower than if she had been into a professional family.

Some theorists suggest that the solution for such problems lies in the reservation system, in which the proportion of children from various social backgrounds —women, blacks (for example, reservation of seats in educational institutions for lower caste children in India) — is fixed. But this does not, in itself solve the problems of the student who is not adequately prepared for higher education or is poorly motivated so that unless the institutions involved are involved to accept a double standard they must provide remedial teaching or face a high wastage rate.

According to Boudon (1973), inequality of educational opportunity is showing a slow but consistent decline. However, the value of higher education in terms of social mobility is depressed by the very process, which brings working class and other disadvantaged students into it in large numbers. At the same time, such students tend to be concentrated in shorter courses, or less prestigious institutions. As many observers have pointed out, a society based on strictly meritocratic principles would not necessarily be a more equal society. A rigid class structure is not compatible with a considerable measure of individual mobility and both Jencks and Boudon have argued, although in different ways that the way to equality of economic opportunity is through a more equal society rather than through equality of education opportunity.

10.6 Schooling and Equality of Educational Opportunity

One of the more important controversies in sociology of education is one regarding the consequence of the schooling revolution and its effects on equality of opportunity. In the United States, school has been long seen as a great equalizer, as perhaps the single most important institution that works to erase the handicaps of birth and create a society truly open to the talented. More educational opportunities, it has long been argued, are the key to create a meritocratic society, a society where talent and effort rather than privilege and social origins would determine an individual's status. Such arguments, stated in more formal and precise terms are part of the functional paradigm, and they continue to enjoy wide support, despite mounting evidence that the expansion of educational opportunities in recent decades has not had the dramatically meritocratic effects envisaged by the theory.

Much of this work and writing has been concerned with two linked concepts: meritocracy and equality of opportunity. In a meritocracy, individuals are rewarded on the basis of merit, as it is argued that the educational system allocates them to positions on the basis of ability. In a meritocracy, economic, social and political rewards are distributed according to performance in intellectual accomplishments. Those who do best in the educational system are allotted the most powerful, prestigious and best-paid positions in the occupational structure.

This means, that selection takes place through the educational system, which provides an avenue of social and economic mobility. Here, individuals are selected for positions in the economic and social hierarchies according to

educational criteria. On this basis, social origins do not determine educational success, so that those born into a wealthy family are not automatically destined for a high status.

10.7 Meritocracy and the Functional Paradigm

A central argument of the functional paradigm is that the development of mass education helps create a more meritocratic society, a society where effort and talent rather than birth or privilege determine status. There are two reasons why this should be so. First, as modern societies have become more complex and more dependent on a highly trained and skilled labour force, educational achievement would have increasingly powerful effects on an individual's adult status. Second, because success in school depends on universalistic criteria such as performance in tests and examinations, the ability of privileged parents to pass on their status to their children should be reduced when schooling becomes the principal criterion for allocating adult status.

From the functional paradigm, therefore, we can deduce three propositions.

1) The co-relation between educational and occupational status will increase over time.

2) The co-relation between parents' social status and the social status of their children will diminish over time.

3) The co-relation between parents' social status and the educational achievements of their children will diminish over time.

The apparent failure of the expansion of education to reduce the advantages enjoyed by children of privileged parents has led to two simple but very different explanations. Both are seriously misleading, but because of their simplicity and popularity, they warrant treatment before more complex and satisfactory theories are examined.

Box 10.2: Concept of Meritocracy: Critical assessment

The concept of meritocracy is not without problems.

i) It tends to assume that social inequality is inevitable.

ii) It focuses on placement in the occupational structure; it overlooks the significance of elites and the role of the propertied class.

iii) A meritocracy is a society with structured social inequality in which individuals have an equal opportunity to obtain unequal power and reward. On this basis, privilege and disadvantage are not eradicated as the educational system provides a different set of criteria to allocate people to social positions.

10.8 Neo-Marxist Paradigm

The second straightforward explanation came from the neo-Marxist sociologists. The functional paradigm received a significant challenge during the late sixties and seventies from more radical and conflict-oriented theories. Their argument claims that the rhetoric of equality of opportunity has concealed a great deal of systematic discrimination by schools and employers against disadvantaged youth. The picture that these theorists present is one of a society where inheritance status is very high indeed and of schools that routinely assign low caste status to slow tracks and discourage them from pursuing educational careers that might lead to upward mobility.

According to the neo-Marxist critique, schools have betrayed the promise of equality of educational opportunity. They also believe that schools within the

confines of capitalist society at least can have no other consequence than the maintenance of existing differences in life chances between privileged and disadvantaged groups. The rhetoric of equal opportunity from this perspective serves to conceal a process by which schools today, as in the past, reproduce class divisions and persuade large parts of the population that they lack the skills and aptitudes needed for high status populations. In all modern societies, conflict theorists point out, there is a struggle for a limited number of scarce and desirable high-status positions, a contrast in which the children of those who already have such status have great advantages. And since schooling has now largely replaced other more traditional avenues of mobility in modern society, it is naïve, conflict theorists suggest, to believe that high-status groups will not use their greater resources to reserve the lion's share of the most valued educational qualifications for their own children. The problem with this theory is that the data on social mobility indicates that rates of upward and downward movement were quite high throughout this century and perhaps the twentieth century as well.

10.9 Status Competition Theory

The status competition theory places great stress on how the process of competition between groups leads to a rapid expansion of educational credentials that maybe only tangentially related to the real skills to do a particular job. The expansion of schooling increases the available educational attainment of low-status groups and it provides skills and qualifications that in the past would have entitled them to claim desirable jobs. But such expansion also increases everyone's educational achievement and high and middle status groups have more of opportunities than low status groups. What matters in determining the chances of any particular group to obtain desirable jobs therefore is not the absolute level of its qualifications which may the theory suggests, be more than adequately satisfactory to perform the jobs in question, but its relative educational qualifications in comparison with other groups.

Increasingly educational opportunities may create the illusion of progress towards more general opportunities for disadvantaged groups but because high-status groups have always had greater resources to obtain more schooling to restore their competitive position, the relative chances of low-status students will remain virtually constant despite constantly increasing level of education. The implication of this theory is that educational opportunities will lead to increasing general opportunities only if there are deliberate and conscious strategies that increase the relative position of a particular group in its possession of education credentials that are currently most significant for desirable occupations. Only through affirmative action, the theory seems to imply, will low-status students be able to catch up with more privileged students.

Thus, working class groups are in a no more favourable position than they were in the past. Such groups may have the illusion of relative progress in that the current generation has far more schooling than past generations but their position in the competition for desirable high-status occupations remains no better than it was before the expansion of higher education. The growth of education opportunities in the last several decades has not been significant or trivial, but these increasing education opportunities have not yet been translated into clear improvements in the relative chances of low-status youth to obtain high-status jobs. Part of the reason for this is that education credentials alone are not the whole story. Working class youth and college degrees are not as likely to get good jobs as middle or upper class youth. But there is little question that a major reason for the continuing difficulties that working class youth face is also that on the average they do less well in school than other students.

10.10 Case Studies on Social Mobility

There have been several studies in Britain on social mobility, but out of all these studies, two have attracted most interest. The major one is the Glass study of 1949. The Glass team looked at a sample of 10,000 men who were 18 and over and lived in England, Scotland or Wales in 1949. Among the data collected were the respondents' age, marital status, schools attended, qualifications obtained and details of their own and their father's occupation. Such data were used to address two major questions. First, how open was British society? Second, was there equality of opportunity for those of equal talents? In addressing these questions, Glass looked at inter-generational mobility by comparing the occupational status of fathers and sons to examine the extent to which sons follow the occupation of their fathers. On the basis of this study, Glass (1954) found that there was a high degree of self -recruitment at the two ends of the social scale. Secondly, most mobility was short range as individuals moved mainly between lower white collar and skilled manual positions in both directions. Finally, that the middle of the occupational hierarchy was a buffer zone so that movement between manual and non-manual occupations was short range. Regarding inter-generational mobility, Glass found that less than a third of the men were in the same job as their fathers. Glass's data shows that inequality is not fixed at birth and there is a fair degree of fluidity of circulation. Although children from high status may be downwardly mobile compared, with their fathers, they may still have a better chance than their working class peers of getting to higher level jobs.

The second is the Oxford mobility study and was conducted by Goldthorpe and his associates (Goldthorpe with Llewellyn and Payne 1980). It consisted of a small sample of 10,000 adult men aged 20-64 who were residents in England and Wales in 1972. Here, the respondents were required to provide data on their own occupational and educational biographies as well as those of their fathers, mothers, wives, brothers and friends. This study involved an examination of the impact of the post war reform and economic change on the degree of openness in British society. Furthermore, the team also wished to examine the impact of post-reform education policy and the degree of movement between generations of individuals from the same family. The focus was therefore on patterns of intergenerational mobility. The Glass team used a status classification based on the occupational prestige to categorize respondents, while the Oxford team used a seven-fold classification based on social class. These seven classes were grouped into three broader categories as follows:

1) Classes I and II of professionals, administrators and managers are a service class.

2) Classes III, IV and V of clerical, self - employed artisans and supervisors are an intermediate class.

3) Classes VI, VII of manual workers and vice versa.

The main trends that can be derived from this evidence concern patterns of social mobility among men. First, there has been a considerable pattern of self-recruitment (follow in father's footsteps). Second, there has been upward mobility as the upper socio-economic groups have recruited individuals from those of manual origins. This has been a consequence of a growth in professional, administrative, managerial occupations as shown by the census data from 1951 onwards. The fact that these positions have been filled by the sons of manual and non-manual workers undermines the ideas that there is a buffer zone or that there is any closure of the upper status groups. Women have been excluded from studies of social mobility and no comparable studies to those that have been reviewed have been conducted among women.

10.11 Relationship between Education and Social Mobility in Indian Society

M. S. A. Rao (1967) systematically charted out the course of the relationship between education and social mobility in India from pre-British days till the introduction of the modern system of education. According to him, in pre-British India and during the earlier phases of British rule, education was generally the monopoly of upper castes, although in some regions like Kerala, middle and low castes also had access to it. Vedic learning was confined to *savarnas*, and even among Brahmins, only a section of the people had the right to study the Vedas and practice priesthood. The study of the Quran was open to all Muslims although Maulvis had the right to interpret and expound it in their own way. Similarly, among the Buddhists, education was open to all the followers of the religion. Certain literary professions such as medicine (Ayurveda) and astrology were also open to castes other than Brahmins. Members of castes that engaged in trade learnt accounting and book - keeping. In the courts of kings there were scribes who specialized in the art of writing and keeping records; in villages there were accountants who maintained land registers and revenue records. Other skills necessary to pursue occupations such as smithy, house building, chariot building, manufacture of weapons and fireworks, weaving, embroidery, leather work, pottery, barbering, laundering were passed on in the line of father or mother. Such a mode of acquiring skills restricted the choice of occupation. But certain occupations such as cultivation, trade and commerce were open to many castes.

According to Rao (ibid), in most cases, a caste frequently followed more than one occupation. The incidence of occupational mobility was more evident in cities than in villages. Just as formal education leading to certain professions such as medicine and astrology raised the status of some castes (in a limited way), mobility of castes to higher status positions entitled them to literary education. Ahirs, a caste of small peasants and milk sellers, for example, rose to political power in Rewari and claimed the status of Yadavas (Kshatriyas). They were then entitled to literary education, as it was an aspect of high caste status. Since these two processes were not common, literary education was not a significant factor in following an occupation of one's own choice. Oral communication and hereditary status played a far greater role in preparing an individual for earning a livelihood and these were determined to a greater extent by birth in a caste. Further, literary education was more open to males than to females.

With the introduction of the modern system of education, both the meaning and content of education underwent significant changes. It became less religious and many new branches of learning were introduced. The printing press revolutionized the education system in that the emphasis shifted from personal, oral communication to impersonal communication of ideas through books, journals and other media. It brought the sacred scriptures within the reach of many castes that were not allowed by custom to read them. English education was also the medium for the spread of modern science and ideas of equality and liberty.

The western system of education was gradually thrown open to all castes, religious groups and to women. Formal education became the basis of exploiting new economic opportunities which were, to a large extent, caste-free. Education opportunities helped one to acquire the necessary skills outside caste. Occupation thus became a relatively independent element of social status. The development of professions along with the salaried occupations led to the growth of the middle caste. This newly educated middle class in India could cut across different castes but frequently the advantages of English education accrued to upper castes because of the initial advantage of their high status.

The British adopted a policy of reservation of low paid administrative posts for members of low castes. The awareness of economic and other advantages of English education gradually spread to the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy, and there was a widespread effort on their part to seek new education. In independent India also, the policy of reservation was continued for backward castes, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe by the government to give educational and other privileges to them.One of the major changes that the new system of education introduced was a gradual dissociation of occupation from caste. While occupations in the traditional caste system were rated in terms of ritual purity and pollution, they are today rated, to some extent, in terms of the incomes they produce.

The western type of education has also made possible the upward mobility of individuals and groups in the framework of westernization, where membership of caste is not a decisive factor. Individuals get their children educated in public schools and convents, follow modern occupations, which are more remunerative and adopt a westernized style of life. Both the mechanisms of social mobility — sanskritization and westernization — are not mutually exclusive. People participate in both these and try to make the best of both the worlds. To reiterate, sanskritization is the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently 'twice born' caste. Generally, such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community. Westernization, on the other hand, refers to changes brought about in the Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, the term subsuming changes occurring at different levels — technology, institutions, ideology and values. The western system of education was also responsible for the spread of egalitarian ideas and modern, scientific rationality. These ideas became the guiding spirit behind the national movement in the fight for equality of opportunities, a source of inspiration for social reforms, and a challenge to traditional values, which supported the caste system.

Box 10.2: Are opportunities for education in contemporary India open to all?

There exists a hierarchy of educational institutions with respect to the standard and quality of education imparted by them to the students. At the one end there are public schools equipped with the most modern facilities and a highly qualified staff, and at the other, there are ill-equipped schools. On one hand, we have schools like G. D. Goenka in New Delhi with air conditioned classrooms and buses and skin sensor taps, with the best and state of the art infrastructure, which caters to the rich sections of society. On the other hand, we have several local, municipal schools with not just poor infrastructure and basic aids like blackboard and chalk, but even insufficient teachers. A similar disparity of standards exists between certain colleges and university departments and between one university and another. Not to speak of the differences between metropolitan, urban schools and village schools.

There is a rough correlation between the hierarchy of educational institutions and the social background of students and the teachers. Students from upper strata tend to join public schools and convents and those from lower ones are to be found in greater numbers in the Municipal District Board and government schools. There is a marked contrast in the quality of education imparted by these schools. The former provide a social environment for the children, which is to some extent congruent with the western style of life that obtains in their homes. *Education here is expensive and only students belonging to* upper classes and higher income groups are able to exploit it. They are also

in an advantageous position to seek admission to engineering and medical colleges, which sell seats in the name of donations. Also these rich students can also engage private tutors at the school, college and university levels. Occasionally, teachers employed in schools and colleges run tutorial classes and maintain high standards of teaching in the latter to attract students to their private colleges. However, educational opportunities are open to all those who seek to take advantage of them, without being bound by limitations of caste or religion.

It must be noted that caste associations have their educational institutions but they give preferential treatment in the matter of admission to students of the same caste. Members of the same caste are recruited as teachers. Caste enterprise and preferential state policies affect the system of education in their own way. Some schools started by sectarian associations promote high standards in education while others contribute to a general deterioration of standards. Such teachers are largely responsible for the maintenance of these; their recruitment on the basis of caste and religious considerations at the expense of merit and objective criteria is bound to adversely affect the education system and the development of human values.

When students from lower strata get highly educated, they not only qualify themselves to get more remunerative jobs, thereby raising the economic level of the family, but also contribute to the heightening of its prestige seeking alliance from castes which either have a higher ritual status or reputed ancestry, also helps untouchable castes shed the stigma of belonging to a low caste. Education has become a source of prestige and a symbol of higher social status. It has also brought about significant change(s) in the traditional social status of women.

Social mobility in the larger framework of students supported by themselves, i.e., self-help students concern more significantly the situation of intra-generational mobility. Those who are already employed to educate themselves further greatly benefit from the establishment of morning and evening colleges, correspondence courses and the professional and certificate courses leading to a degree or diploma, and the provision by some universities of admitting external students. These avenues of formal adult education act as an independent channel of social mobility. The pattern of mobility here is characterized by greater spontaneity and purposive motivation than those in the case of students supported by their parents. Individuals are able to work their way through higher education and move up the ladder of stratification during the span of their careers.

Reflection and Action 10.2

Collect at least five case studies of individuals who have enhanced their social and economic position in society by improving their educational attainment. Discuss with other learners at the study centre.

10.12 Conclusion

The relationship between education and social mobility is complex and dynamic. After reading this unit, you would have realized that it is extremely difficult to draw generalizations that would be of universal relevance. While there is no doubt about the fact that education makes an important contribution towards social mobility of individuals and groups, there are several factors that sometimes significantly alter the direction and fate of such a relationship. In a society which is rigidly stratified, it becomes very difficult for the formal institution of education to remain unaffected or unbiased. Under those circumstances, it ends up maintaining the status quo and reinforcing the socio-economic or

cultural divide between people. In many cases, the stigma of belonging to lower castes, for example dalits, may remain even after attaining the highest educational status. At the same time, however, there have been occasions, when schools have been able to rise above those prejudices and give a fair chance to people, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, to overcome their handicaps and move up the social ladder.

10.13 Further Reading

Boudon, R., 1997. "Education and mobility: A structural model". In J. Karabel, J & A. H. Halsey (eds.). *Power and Ideology in Education.* New York: OUP

Christofer, J. 1993. *The limits and Possibilities of Schooling: An Introduction to the Sociology of Education.* USA : Allyn and Bacon

Rao, M.S.A. 1967. "Education, stratification and social mobility". In Gore, Desai and Chitnis (eds.). *Papers on the Sociology of Education in India.* New Delhi: NCERT