SUMMARY

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY THROUGH THREE GENERATIONS:
A STUDY OF LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT, ASSAM

Sunita Sarmah

THE PROBLEM
All societies, from the most primitive to the most advanced, exhibit some kind of social inequality and stratify their members accordingly. Societies differ considerably in the depth, span and shape of their systems of stratification. Most of the inequality in any society is socially patterned, that is, it is governed by laws and norms. People who are unequal in property, power and prestige always differ in their life chances, their institutional patterns of conduct, their lifestyles or cultural patterns and their attitudes, ideologies and beliefs. Man, since the beginning of his civilization has been endeavoring to eliminate social inequalities and to establish an egalitarian society wherein goods and services and power and prestige are distributed equitably and wherein life chances of all the members are more or less equalized. With the emergence of the democratic political systems, the demands for equality of treatment of individuals have been getting more intense by the day. The democratic states, everywhere in the world, have been trying to institute mechanisms to reduce the social inequalities as far as possible and equalize the opportunities for improvement of life chances of all, especially of those who have been on the lower rungs of social hierarchy. Efforts, in certain parts of the world, have been made to eliminate the inequalities and thereby the systems of stratification by adopting socialist and communist political-economic ideologies. However, the societies continue to reflect stratification systems based on man-made inequalities and as such the chances of movement from lower strata to upper strata are consciously introduced or sometimes they are a necessary corollary of some socio-economic and political change. This movement across strata (from lower to higher or higher to lower) is called Social Mobility. Social Mobility may be understood as the movement of individual or groups from one social status or position to another status or position. In open societies of the West, the movement up and down goes on over generations and is characterized by the acquisition of statuses by achievement. By contrast in a closed society like India
which is featured as rigid, inflexible and static, statuses are essentially ascribed. In recent decades, social mobility and stratification have emerged as prominent fields of sociological enquiry. In fact, the phenomenon of mobility is intimately associated with industrial urbanism and the improved channels of transportation which have accelerated the process of migration from villages to cities, movement of people from one job to another, and vertical changes in the positions of individuals and groups. Industrial urbanism as a global trend, has changed the demographic composition of different regions of the world, created new conditions of work, encouraged the rise of new occupations, professional and job opportunities, divided society into new hierarchical groups and classes, and initiated new forms of division of labour and social differentiation. In the same way, the revolution in the channels of transportation, which started in the last century, has gradually broken the isolation of rural and tribal communities and has brought them nearer to the cities and the industrial centres of production. As a consequence, the increased rate of migration and change from lower occupation to higher occupations resulting in changes in the pattern of status and notions of prestige has also been emerging. The forces of mobility bring about social change and speed up the dynamism of society. Mobility whether physical or social, is the consequence either of migration or vertical changes in the positions of individuals, classes and groups, several historical evidences from ancient and medieval periods may be cited to indicate the migratory movements of population and vertical changes in the position of classes, groups and individuals in all parts of the world. But in the modern times, the growth of cities, factories, bureaucracy and demands for new personnel and talent are the chief factors for the increasing rate of mobility. The main bases of the increasing rate of mobility are equal opportunity to the aspirants, open competition and the sense of individual achievement, and that is the reason why, the idea of mobility is rooted in the pattern of stratification and classes, which emerged along with the rise of capitalism, advent of the democratic form of power structure and the spread of industrial urbanism. Education is considered an important determinant of social position of an individual. It is so because education is thought to be the basis for selection to an occupational position. Thus, it can be a channel through which it is possible to move from one occupational position to the next higher one or from a lower income level to higher one.
The adoption of the four-fold ideal of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity in our Constitution has been incorporated to eliminate social inequalities, economic disparities and political disadvantage. The founding fathers of the Constitution of India conceived education as a mechanism of social engineering and as such the state is directed to provide equal opportunities of education to all without any regard to the caste, class, religion, sex, or region. However, provisions for protective discrimination in favour of the hitherto exploited and disadvantaged sections of the society have been made to uplift them. Equal opportunity in public employment, based on merit, has also been made together with protective discrimination in favour of the weaker sections. A lot of progress has been made since independence but the dream of an egalitarian society continues to be far from realization in our country.

In the light of what has been said above it is pertinent to examine as to how far the constitutional provisions have succeeded in equalising educational and occupational opportunities and how far the promise of a better standard of life for the oppressed sections has been fulfilled. The present study, “Education and Social Mobility through Three Generations: A Study of Lakhimpur District, Assam,” is an attempt in this direction.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was undertaken with the following objectives in mind.

1. To find out the extent of vertical social mobility through three generations in terms of Educational and Occupational attainments and income of the population under study.

2. To find out the relation between various socio-economic background variables and an individual’s educational and occupational attainments and income.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since the study is a social survey, no hypotheses are proposed to be tested instead the study is addressed to seeking answers to the following research questions.

1. Does membership of a religious community affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?

2. Does a person’s gender affect his/her educational and occupational attainments and income?

3. Does a person’s Urban-Rural residence affect his/her educational and occupational attainments and income?
4. Does membership of any particular category affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?

5. Do parents’ and grand parents’ educations affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?

6. Do parents’ and grand parents’ occupational statuses affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?

7. Do parents’ and grand parents’ incomes affect a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income?

8. Does a person’s educational attainment affect his/her occupational attainments?

9. Does a person’s educational attainment affect his/her income?

10. Does a person’s occupational attainment affect his/her income?

**DELIMITATION**

Considering the paucity of resources and time available to the investigator it was not possible to make the study covering a large geographical area. The study was therefore delimited to the Lakhimpur Assembly Constituency of Lakhimpur District, Assam and was accordingly titled as: “EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY THROUGH THREE GENERATIONS: A STUDY OF LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT, ASSAM.”

**METHODOLOGY**

**THE SAMPLE**

The population of the Lakhimpur Assembly constituency, aged between 18 and 50 years, forms the universe for this study. The area comprises of North Lakhimpur town, the only urban area of the constituency, and 224 villages.

A stratified random sample of this population was drawn for data collection. This included the only town of North Lakhimpur and 10% of the villages drawn through a pure random method. Thus the sample areas included North Lakhimpur town and 22 villages around it. Form these sample areas (the town and the 22 villages) 10% of the households drawn through a random procedure were considered for data collection. All the members in the sample household who were between 18 and 50 years of age were administered the tool to collect data.
After collecting the filled in returns the students and the unemployed persons were excluded and the data for 680 respondents -355 men and 325 women - who were employed was analysed.

TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION
A social mobility questionnaire, containing items relevant to the variables under study, was developed to collect the requisite data. It includes items to seek information on education, occupation and income religion, gender, caste etc. of the respondents and their parents and grandparents. The data collected through this questionnaire was supplemented by a personal interview with the respondents.

TECHNIQUES OF DATA ANALYSIS
The data was tabulated according the requirements of the various objectives. Descriptive statistics, viz. comparisons of proportions was used to compare various categories. To study the extent of intergenerational educational and occupational mobility, mobility tables were drawn and outflow analysis of the data in them was made. To study the effect of various background factors on educational and occupational attainments and income, chi-square test was used.

MAJOR FINDINGS
The study leads to the following major findings with regard to the three aspects of social mobility examined in this piece of research.

INTERGENERATIONAL EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY
1. In absolute terms the rate of upward educational mobility between fathers and children, aged 18-50 years, has been very high while rate of downward mobility has been very low with a moderate rate of stationariness. Men have exhibited higher rates of upward educational mobility than women while women have experienced higher rates of downward mobility. The rate of stationariness is a little over 22% for both men and women.

The rate of upward educational mobility between mothers and the children is higher than that between fathers and children. With respect to mothers, daughters have exhibited greater upward mobility than sons. There is not much difference between men and women in their rates of stationariness.

Comparing the absolute educational attainments of parents and children lower rates of inheritance are found but if the relative educational attainments between the two
generations were compared much higher rates of inheritance may be noticed. Even in terms of absolute educational attainments the data reflect a very high dependence of a person's educational attainments on the educational attainments of the parents.

One striking fact revealed by these data is that the rate of stationariness or educational inheritance has increased between three generations of grandfathers, fathers and respondents and not declined as one would expect to happen with progress of the nation.

In comparison with the educational attainment of their grandparents respondents indicate very little stationariness and high rates of upward educational mobility. This implies that the grand parents' education may not be directly influencing respondents' educational attainments but it does so through their parents. Thus both parents' and grandparents' educational attainments are very strong determinants of a person's access to higher education.

2. Gender of a person is also an important determinant of educational attainments. There was practically no illiteracy among the sample respondents, larger proportion of men than women had access to higher education in general, the proportion of professional graduates appeared to be larger among women than men. This may be because B.Ed. which has been considered a professional graduation is taken by more women than men.

3. Another determinant of educational attainments is a person's residence. In this respect while urban residence enhances access to education especially to higher education, rural residence is a very strong hindrance in the acquisition of higher education, especially of professional and technical type. Rural residence is a greater disadvantage in the acquisition of education, especially higher education, for women than men.

4. Membership of a particular religion determines educational attainments of a person. While there was practically no illiteracy in the population (aged 18 to 50) under study, 91% had completed the compulsory elementary education of eight years with over 99% among the Muslims having attained this level of education followed by about 96% among Hindus, 92% of 'Others' and smallest proportion about (72%) with this level of education was among the Christians. However, Hindus had the greatest access to higher education in general while the Christians had the least access to it. The largest proportion (16%) of professional graduates was found among the Buddhists and smallest (5.52%) among again the Christians. Among the women 'Others' women
were the most privileged as far as access to higher education is concerned and the Christian women most disadvantaged. However, when the proportions of higher educated among different religious communities are compared to their respective proportions in the population it is seen that it is the Hindus who are underrepresented while all other communities are over represented both among men and women.

5. Membership of a social category also affects a person's access to higher education. Thus members of the ST category had the largest proportion with higher education and those of the General category had the smallest. When the proportions of members from different categories are compared with their corresponding proportions in the population all the categories except the General are overrepresented in participation in higher education while those of the General category are underrepresented. This is true for both men and women. However, it is interesting to note that the proportion of women with higher education is smaller than their men counterparts in all categories except the General where the proportion of women is a little larger than that of men.

6. Fathers' Occupational status is another strong determinant of a person's access to education. The children of manual workers have very few chances of acquiring higher education while children of non-manual fathers have very few chances of dropping out the education system before taking at least a first degree from a university. Even the mothers' occupation has a bearing on the educational attainments of children. However, fathers' occupation affects the chances of acquiring higher education more than that of mothers'. Parents' being in manual occupations is a greater hindrance in the education of daughters than that of sons.

**INTERGENERATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY**

With regard to the intergenerational occupational mobility through three generations and the determinants of occupational attainments, the study leads to the following major findings.

1. Comparing the occupational statuses of the respondents with those of their fathers it is found that over 45% had inherited their occupational status while about 35% had experienced upward mobility and 20% had experienced downward mobility. The rate of stationariness was very high over 56% among men than among women (about 34%). It was very low when the occupations of respondents were compared to those of their mothers.
Considering the binary division of occupations into manual and non-manual categories, the rates of inheritance shoot up very high as over 78% of the respondents were found inheriting their fathers' occupational status. Among the children of manual workers 89% had remained in manual work while among the children of non-manual fathers about 68% were in non-manual occupations like their fathers. The rate of inheritance was considerably greater among men than among women.

Mothers' manual status was inherited by over 99% of their children while non-manual status of mothers was inherited by only about 29% of their children. The results were similar for both men and women respondents.

The Data also indicate that whatever occupational mobility has taken place it has been mainly short range between somewhat adjacent ranking occupations and very little long range occupational mobility across manual- non-manual divide has taken place and whatever little mobility has occurred across this divide is between the highest manual occupations and the lowest non-manual occupations.

Thus one of the most important determinants of occupational attainment is parents' occupation, especially that of father.

Comparing the respondents' occupational attainments with those of their grandfathers it was found that about 60% had inherited their grandfathers occupational status, about 60% had inherited manual status and 40% had inherited non-manual status. About 29% of the respondents were in higher occupations compared to their grandfathers and about 11% were the lower occupations. Inheritance from grandfathers was noticed to a greater extent among women than among men.

Comparing the occupational status of fathers of respondents with that of their fathers'(grandfathers of respondents) about 86% of the fathers had inherited their occupational status from their fathers, over 63% had inherited the manual occupational status while about 37% had inherited non-manual status.

As in the case of fathers' and respondents' generations, between the generations of grandfathers and fathers most mobility, upward or downward, has been only short range between the occupations adjacent to each other in the hierarchy and long range mobility across manual- non-manual divide has been very little and mainly between the highest manual occupations and the lowest non-manual occupations.

Thus the trend in occupational inheritance is maintained through three generations of grandfathers, fathers and the respondents. Hence, in occupational attainment process not only fathers' occupation but even the grandfathers' occupation is a strong
determining factor. Grandfathers’ occupation affects both directly as well as indirectly through father’s education and occupation.

2. Only about 39% of the rural residents were employed in non-manual occupations despite their higher education while as the corresponding proportion among the urban residents was over 71%. Although the proportion of urban women employed in non-manual work was a little greater than their men counterparts, among the rural women far larger proportion was employed in manual work than their men counterparts. Among the non-manual respondents about 55% were urban and only 45% were rural while as in the manual work there were about 77% from rural background and only 23% from the urban backgrounds. The situation is more adverse in the case of women than men.

Thus rural residence is hindrance in entering non-manual occupations. Rural women have greater disadvantage than not only urban women but also than the rural men. Thus gender and rural-urban residence have combined effect on the chances of entering non-manual or manual occupations.

3. Religion also plays a role in a person’s chances of entering manual and non-manual occupations. Thus among the members of the category labeled ‘Others’ the largest proportion (92%) was in the non-manual occupations followed by Hindus 58%, Muslims 47%, Buddhists 44% and the Christians 39%. Thus the ‘Others’ who form a miniscule of the population dominate in access to non-manual occupations. The other community that has registered a dominant position in non-manual occupations, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians in non-manual occupations are respectively double and about four times their respective proportions in the population while Hindus are highly underrepresented.

4. Belonging to a particular social category too has a bearing on the occupational status of a person. While the ST’s had largest proportion employed in non-manual occupations, OBC/MOBC had the smallest proportion employed in this category. Consequently ST had the smallest proportion in manual occupations and OBC/MOBC had the largest.

Comparing the proportions of persons employed in non-manual occupations from each category with their respective proportions in the population one finds that SC’s are underrepresented in non-manual occupations while OBC’s/MOBC’s are a little overrepresented and the ST’s and General category people are highly overrepresented in this category of occupations.
Thus SC’s continue to have a disadvantage in access to non-manual employment. It is interesting to note that while among the ST’s proportion of men employed in non-manual occupations a bit larger than their women counterparts, among the General much larger proportion of men than women were in non-manual employment, among the OBC’s/MOBC’s a little larger proportion of women than men were found in non-manual occupations. Among the SC’s proportion of women in non-manual occupations was almost double of that of their men counterparts.

5. Educational attainments of a person appear to be a strong determinant of occupational status, i.e. higher the educational attainments higher is the occupational status. However, this does not seem to apply to the levels of education up to higher secondary stage, but among those with higher education of a bachelor’s degree in liberal arts and above occupational status is commensurate with their educational attainments.

A very small proportion of persons with higher education are employed in manual occupations as over 85% of them are employed in non-manual occupations only. In this respect women are a bit unfortunate as among them only about 82% with higher education were in non-manual occupations.

6. Fathers’ education is also an important factor affecting a person’s occupational status. Children of fathers with higher education have very great chances of entering elite occupations while the children of fathers with lower levels of education or illiteracy have very few chances of entering such occupation despite their own education. This is true for both men and women; however women appear to have somewhat still fewer chances than men in this respect.

Like that of fathers, mothers’ education is also a strong determinant of a person’s occupational status. Thus the children of mothers with higher education have practically no chance of ending up in a manual occupation. Mothers’ higher education is especially an advantage for men’s chances of entering elite occupations. Thus occupational status of person is a function also of his/her parents’ education.
INCOME MOBILITY

Since a miniscule of respondents could report the income of their grandfathers and majority of them could not report even their fathers' income, it was not possible to study income mobility through even two generations, not to speak of studying it through three generations.

However, since the data on the respondents' background including parents' education, occupation, religion and category they belonged to and their personal attainments are available an attempt has been made to examine the factors (other than parents' and grandparents' income) that affect the income of a respondent. The following factors appear to determine a person's income:

1. The data show that on an average the rural residents have lower incomes than their urban counterparts. Women, both rural and urban have a little higher income than men as a large proportion of them than men are employed in higher income jobs.

2. The group 'Others' had the highest incomes while the Muslims and the Christians had the lowest with Hindus and Buddhists in between.

3. Among the different social categories SC's had the largest proportion in the lowest income bracket while OBC's/MOBC's and ST's had the smallest proportion in this bracket with General Category in between. However it was the General category and OBC/MOBC that had the largest proportion in the highest income bracket while SC's and ST's did not have anyone in the highest income bracket.

Thus on the whole SC's were the poorest and ST's the second poorest. Among the men poorest were SC's and the richest General category and among the women poorest were from General and the richest among OBC/MOBC.

4. On the whole higher the educational attainment higher the income. Women with education up to high school had lower income than men with the similar educational attainments, but women with higher educational attainments had higher income than their men counterparts with similar education.

5. On the whole persons employed in non-manual occupations had higher income than those employed in manual occupations. Fewer women than men employed in manual occupations were in lowest income bracket but larger proportion of women than men in non-manual occupations were in the highest income bracket.

6. Fathers' education also affects a person's income. In general higher the fathers' education higher is the child's income. This holds true for both men and women.
Again while mothers’ education also affects both men’s and women’s income, lower levels of mothers’ education affects sons’ income more adversely than that of daughters but mothers’ higher educational attainments are more favourable to a daughter’s higher income than that of a son’s.

7. A person’s income also depends on the occupation of parents. Thus higher the occupational status of father and mother higher is a person’s income. This is true for both men and women. However, lower occupational status of father affects a son’s income more adversely than that of daughter’s while mothers’ lower occupational status affects a daughter’s income more adversely than that of a son’s.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Thus, the major findings, reported above, show that a person’s educational and occupational attainments and income are a function of his/her family background, despite the Constitutional provisions of protective discrimination in favour of the weaker sections of the society. This implies that in order to equalise the educational and occupational opportunities the State must exercise greater control over the distribution of these opportunities.