

Do Lives of People who Leave Formal Schooling Help us Understand the Objectives of Education?

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Report

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As I sit writing this acknowledgement at the entrance of Anveshi, with its four cane chairs, and dogs who somehow always tend to sleep under the chairs, I am going through a nostalgic feeling about the year that went by. I have met numerous people who devoted their time and energy to help me grow as an individual. Each student needs guidance and a vibrant intellectual environment to realise her potential, which Short Term Fellowship at Anveshi Reseach Centre for Women's Studies did provide. I can't thank everyone at Anveshi enough for embracing me with open arms.

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Introduction

In Mumbai 2007 to 2008 while pursuing economics at Wilson College, Mumbai we took a course in Developmental Economics where education, health, etc., of the population were taught as indices of the development of a nation, especially so in Human Development Index developed by Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen. The underlying idea was to shift the focus of development economics from national income accounting to people-centred policies. During the same time discussions on change which could be brought about by thinking youth were conducted as part of the excursions of the Nature Club of Wilson College. We had discussions on constitution, rights in our political science classes. In all this education seemed to me the tool through which the changes we looked forward to could be perceived.

My visits to NGOs across the country and eventually a Masters in Applied Linguistics from Hyderabad Central University have been attempts to find ways in which education could produce thinking individuals in the country. However this initial idea didn't take into account the reality of caste, religious and other forms of discrimination which I began to understand during the course of my work at Banapuram village in Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh. My visit to old city of Hyderabad to conduct a survey among adolescent girls in Urdu medium government schools raised questions: What is secularism? How is the

thought of an individual shaped by religion? These questions continued during my attempt to develop a gender empowerment curriculum.

My Short Term Fellowship at Anveshi- Research Centre for Women's Studies was an opportunity to delve into such multiple viewpoints with a focus on education. The first three months of the fellowship were spent reading from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, "The intellectuals", and readings on discrimination of Muslims and Dalits. Krishna Kumar's¹ books gave an overview of the public education system in India with a focus on marginalisation of economically depressed communities. These readings were guided by senior fellows.

The public education system has existed in India for more than 100 years with enormous funds at its disposal however its quality, in terms of teachers, study material and impact are problematic. For the last few decades it has become an emblem of the marginalised who comprise a vast majority in the country. This was the motivation to pursue research which touches on the public school system and the people who access it. In Krishna Kumar's book *What is Worth Teaching?* (1992)

¹Krishna Kumar's books –(1) Political Agenda of Education (1991), (2) What is Worth Teaching (2004)

“School enrolment figures for grades one to five, compiled by Department of Educationindicates 39 out of the 66 children (per 100) who stop attending school between grades one and five do so within grade one....Most likely these children are five to seven years old. Now, if these children are leaving school because of the economic necessity of their families, there ought to be a sudden increase in the children’s capacity for work between grades one and two, roughly age six to seven”.

This statement raised two important points. (1) There are large numbers of drop outs at the very initial stages of schooling and it’s important to spend time exploring the reasons (2) For some of us getting into next class in school is a natural progression. However it is not for many others. My personal examples are P. Srinivas, Shyamala and Mujib who are associated with Anveshi. Their life and thought is shaped more by their interaction with the environment. Formal education to them was yet another way to understand their environment better. The success and failures for them aren’t defined so much by popular notions of the good grades in school or number of books they read but by their participation in the community and being witness to the many changes in their environment. This success is captured in their very memory or better still their lives within this environment in an organic fashion. Many such other people are not so fortunate – they are termed failures as they don’t fit into the cultural mechanisms which construct consent among masses to favour the formal system

of education. The most detrimental consequence of this outlook is that it devalues the capacities of individuals who fall away, forced or choose to move away from such a formal system of education.

The idea of education for the marginalized as it is perceived or understood in literature of education is an elitist construction. What we have is an outsider's view of how quality of teaching, material development and examination reform would help improve the quality of Government schools. The grim state of affairs is visible in the numerous studies² that highlight contextual and institutional reasons for drop outs in schools and fail to provide a framework of education as hoped by the marginalized in their socio-economic milieu.

These concerns directed the research topic toward people who dropped out of the formal system of schooling since we know very little about their way of life and what education means to them. Practical difficulties of language and time didn't allow the original plan of research in primary classes, forcing me to interact with students in secondary schools. Discussions pushed me to move beyond a mere statistical research of reasons of drop outs towards exploring qualitatively the conditions for dropping out among young people.

² (a) Why Do Children Dropout? A case study of a metropolitan slum, Delhi Sunita Chugh 2004, Pg. 146(b) Violet Dissa , A study of effect of Alcohol Dependent on Domestic violence And Problems in families in an extant slum in Mumbai, Jan -2003 Pg 53(c) The report titled *Curricular Transactions in Selected Government schools of Andhra Pradesh* was undertaken by Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad from June 2000 to May 2002.

The initial focus was, can we understand the critique of the education system in the voices of people who dropped out 10 years ago from government schools? I thought a frame of 10 years would be useful because it would help us look at people's choices in the context of changes in education, in their lives and the understanding of these changes they develop overtime. In numerous discussions with my advisors I came up with a list of questions about the lives of young people in school and after they dropped out, as adults with a focus on various domains of their environment. Questions were divided in sections i.e. life at school, home environment, interaction with peers and future for their own children.

Pilot study

Pilot study started with a visit to COVA³ (Confederation of Voluntary Associations) situated in the Old City. COVA has been working to maintain communal peace in the vulnerable areas of old city and help Muslims through financial and other difficulties. Mr. Turab at COVA who has been living and working with the people in the old city for many years spoke about the problem of water tax, housing, education and other basic amenities in the old city. He said “The government is moving out of basic facilities to the people and it is getting privatised”. Mr. Turab acquainted me with the problems in the area.

³ COVA- (Confederation of Voluntary Associations) is a national network of voluntary organizations in India dedicated to the issues of social harmony, peace and justice. The prime focus of COVA is on citizenship rights and on perspective building for harmony and peace in South Asia. Source: covanetwork.org

Through these discussions it became clear that one can't begin to understand education in a vacuum. On the second visit to COVA Mr. Turab introduced me to two women who are volunteers at COVA. One of them (Sayeeda) asked me to visit the Madarsa where she works in the morning as it would be possible to meet the Maulvi who could help in arranging to meet a few students there.

Sayeeda who works at the Madarsa, made possible to speak to two girls and a family who had dropped out of school 6 years back and was now coming to a Madarsa. They all were concerned about education however circumstances forced them to move away from education. In case of one of the girls she tried to get admission in a government school however as she didn't know Telugu she wasn't allowed admission. She was now training to be a tailor and get ITI⁴ Certification so that she could use it to earn some money. When asked how education should be or is, less than satisfactory answers were received. It was difficult for students and their family to decide on what they actually wanted as education. They were also not able to critique the present system in terms of content or institutional systems. However one did get to know the circumstances which defined their choice of school, years of education and the kind of education (religious or government education)

It was obvious that the community felt the need for education but there were

⁴ ITI is Industrial Training Institute certification is provided by government-run training organisations. They provide post-school technical training. ITIs in India covered under the scheme – Up gradation into **Centres of Excellence**. It's a Vocational Training Improvement Project with World Bank Assistance. Source: wikipedia.org

forces beyond their control which limited their access. With these initial findings the research question was modified to study the circumstances in the lives of people in the old city which could help us understand the level of vulnerability in their lives and eventually give us a frame to think of an education for the marginalized. The next few months were spent reading available literature about the old city of Hyderabad and its many communities. Reading sessions on Karl Marx's book Capital Volume 1 and attending the Medico-Friends Circle⁵ conference in Hyderabad helped me develop a theoretical framework for the research.

Theoretical Framework

Education in a developing country like India has many roles to play and hence cannot be confined to the school. It is important to acknowledge the education received from community, peers and people one may interact in one's lifetime from varied surroundings. The education received through these sources is a result of interaction with the community which may evoke a sense of belonging

⁵ The Medico Friend Circle (mfc) is a nation-wide platform of secular, pluralist, and pro-people, pro-poor health practitioners, scientists and social activists interested in the health problems of the people of India. Since its inception in 1974, mfc has critically analyzed the existing health care system and has tried to evolve an appropriate approach towards health care which is humane and which can meet the needs of the vast majority of the people in our country.

and develop a critique of the current institutional systems. However the public school system in the country sponsored by the state has a crucial task at hand, to provide quality education to all communities so as to reduce racial, caste, class and religious inequalities among people as these inequalities create discontent and unfavourable living conditions for the growth and development of communities and nation as a whole. Formal education is linked very closely to livelihood and more crucially social mobility especially so for marginalised communities. These communities are economically and culturally disadvantaged when compared to the other privileged elite who possess cultural and financial backing. The elite also use their political power to define institutional systems in the country to their advantage. Public education system with its low cost and vast government funds acts as a bridge for the marginal communities to achieve their goals. Public education should equip people with the necessary skills to obtain well paying jobs that provide for their basic necessities like food, clothes, shelter, health and education of their children. The failure of public education system can be seen as the failure on the part of the state to meet these expectations. In this atmosphere of failed hopes the choices available for the marginal communities; their many struggles and sacrifices which require continuous physical, mental, cultural and financial cost are important issues for research.

Research Question

People from marginal communities access public education to improve living conditions for their future generations. However over a period of time they drop out or move away from this system due to institutional or personal reasons. These reasons vary based on age, caste and most importantly gender. As these young people engage with cultural and political institutions they develop an understanding about their surroundings while they struggle to earn a living. They in the process form ideas of about education which influences their choices of education for their future generations. It is in this light that I set out to explore the basic question: Do lives of people who leave formal schooling help us understand the objectives of education? I address this question by (1) looking into the childhood of adults in the school environment and 2) reasons or circumstances that led them to drop out 3) their struggle to earn livelihood 4) their articulation of expectations they now have for their children's education.

Method

(a) People

Interviews with 7 women and 8 men were conducted between February and March 2013. Three of the 15 interviews were based in the Old Malakpet area close to the old city of Hyderabad. It is through Abbas a resident of Old city and a student of M.Phil at Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad who

acted as the mediator and made the three interviews possible in the interviewee's work place. Abbas helped introduced me and my topic of research to the interviewees and much of the initial questions and hesitation was overcome because of his continuous mediation. All three interviewees are from a lower middle class background and are self employed at spare parts shop, sofa repair shop and a stationary shop respectively.

The other 12 interviews were based in Asif Nagar area of Mehdiapatnam. Zakiya who is a teacher and co-ordinator at Mahita Resource Centre⁶ acted as the mediator here. She introduced me to the people at Mahita; scheduled my interviews with interviewees, she was always available to solve any unexpected problems that may occur during interviews. Mahita has two centres one for men where they conduct skill based training in carpentry and electrical training for ITI training. The other is for women where Mehndi design, Computer education and Tailoring are taught for ITI certification and young girls are taught Math, Sciences and Social Sciences for class 10 government exam. All the interviews were conducted at Mahita centre.

(b) Questionnaire

The questionnaire has about 50 questions which were open and close ended. They were divided into 6 sections. i.e. before going to school, at school, coming from school, after school, reasons for dropping out and work after school. All

⁶ MAHITA, a term derived from ancient Indian scriptures, means regeneration. Mahita is a group formed in 1995 to initiate development interventions in the urban slum slums of Hyderabad.

the interviews were conducted in Hindi and were recorded with prior permission from the interviewee. The interviews were transcribed and translated in English after a week.

Main issues that emerged from the study

1. Uncertainty

Uncertainties of health and finance, constraints people, and make them take decisions that they otherwise wouldn't. Dropping out of school is one among many other decisions.

2. Life after dropping out

Does lack of education make people feel disempowered in any way? People who dropped out of formal schooling were seen to work in Informal jobs putting in long hours of labour in unhealthy working conditions which leads to their untimely death.

3. Commitment towards education

People tried to relive their unfulfilled dreams through the lives of their children. Their actions work as living critique towards the government school system.

4. Gender differences

In almost all interviews there were stark gender differences in terms of lives of men and women after they dropped out of formal education. In case of women

most of them left school to fulfil their reproductive labour while men joined the informal labour force.

What follows is a detailed discussion of the four issues described above with excerpts from the interviews to illustrate them. The report then concludes with findings, limitations and dilemmas.

Uncertainty

“God will take care of them (his children). They will study what they want to. The way I faced difficulty they shouldn’t. I am thinking of giving them good education rest is up to God” (Interview 1)

Mohammed sitting in his spare parts shop which he has been running for the past 15 years, chewing *paan* looks at people passing by and as on any other day anticipates the arrival of customers. His folded hands, calm demeanour and a receding hairline, speak about years of routine which he has grown into. His voice is childlike given his age. It conveys pain and discomfort especially about his past that has shaped him and his family’s present.

Mohammed wants his children to do better than he has -hence he has admitted them in an expensive private school. He works day in and day out to provide for his family. In spite of all his effort he seems uncertain about their future and fears whether he will be able to meet their and his own expectations. Is he a pessimist? Mohammed was forced to leave school when he was just 14. *“I used to study in the school. My father used to go for his duty. In 1986-1988 he had to leave his job. He used to work in a candle company....Since it was difficult to run the house we started working”*. His other two brothers also had to leave school by class 8 and now run a *kirana* shop. Neither he nor his brothers wanted to leave school however the circumstances were beyond their control.

The elders in the family couldn't support their education. Mohammed managed to start a business with the help of his uncle and built his shop from scratch. *"There were lots of problems. Like it was difficult to run the house, there were a lot of difficulties. I used to come for work. Whatever I could I used to get home for household expenses. That's how we ran the house....I used to earn Rs. 50 to 60. That time we could manage with that amount...we somehow managed to work hard"*. Courage was thrust on him. When asked if he ever felt like going back to school he said *"I thought but at that time my destiny passed me by. My father didn't earn and it was difficult to run the house. What could I do? We had to run the house. Taking that into account we started work in this field"* His only relief now is belief in some superior power which shall answer his prayers some day.

Mohammed's story isn't unique. It is one of the many that one hears in the old city of Hyderabad. In case of an unexpected event, lack of security whether health or financial, throws families like that of Mohammed's into dire circumstances. Once the parent's life is uncertain, the child's becomes uncertain too and so on. Thus, this uncertainty continues through generations, which never lets people surmount their present difficulties. One of the first consequences of this uncertainty is leaving school. When survival itself becomes uncertain education becomes a luxury.

The uncertain conditions affect men and women alike. However it brings about very different changes to their lives.

Men

“After taking class 10 exam I got into business. While studying I had learnt about the business...then my father passed away. I studied with the help of my father till class 5th. After that, after my father died, we bought the school’s uniform, bus pass and met other expenses from whatever we got for a week’s work. In government school there was no fee. We managed this way till class 10...I was the youngest and the elders in the house had to meet the home expenses. It was difficult for them to make me study. That is why I worked here and there. I worked in the night as well in the biscuit factory. I used to make seweya..... I also worked in the factory that made bubble gum”. (Interview 2)

In four of the 15 interviews, death of the earning member of the house makes the family financially vulnerable. In such circumstances the boys of the family who are also brought up with a sense of

My father scolded us if we talked. Don’t get food on time. If we go to the field then the whole day we had to work hard. We had to go and come in the sun.
(Interview 11)

responsibility towards the family are then expected to fill in the role for the deceased member. Children especially young boys often tend to work long hours in unhealthy conditions of a factory or workplace with little sleep. This continues in their adult life. The ones who are self-employed tend to perform the work of 2 to 3 men by themselves which puts great demands on the body.

As a result their health deteriorates. The ill functioning public health system and inaccessible private health system due to money crunch makes them dysfunctional and sickly, sometimes leading to their untimely death.

Women

Ibena like many other women got married when she was in class 10. “Our father passed away when we were still young. Our mother couldn’t handle all of us. She thought of marrying all of us as a duty, so we got married.” Ibena was never asked if she wanted to get married and neither did she expect to be asked. She thought it was her duty towards her mother to get married without asking too many questions as her mother had too many things to take care of. After all they were 7 girls and 3 boys. Her family was going through a rough patch as her father passed away when she was still young. (Interview 9)

A woman’s life is uncertain.
Women have no decision making
power in family affairs in case of

I come to study here sometimes and sometimes I don’t. I study in the house. If children are awake then I don’t come. Let’s see I will try studying ahead. (Saba, interview 7)

adversity and uncertainty. Any expenditure on the woman of the family is the first to be disregarded. They neither have any say in decisions that affect her life crucially, like marriage. Many of the dropouts in schools among girls happen because they are married off early (by class 8) and then migrate to their husband’s place where they may not be allowed to study further. In our country there is the ever threatening predicament of early marriage (prevalent in all

classes, religion etc), as is the dowry. The preference of boy children is quite common. There is inevitability to this practice when one is closely tied to the community. Families living in dire circumstances tend to help each other out. Hence even the decisions are taken not as individual families but are influenced by the community. This uncertainty affects women's lives directly. Families which may otherwise have taken a decision favouring the women in their family are forced to succumb to community consensus for their own survival.

The multiple responsibilities on the other hand may create an uncertain situation for the pursuit

There is so much to do. After I leave from here (Centre) then 2 hrs its household work. Kids come home, there food, cleaning all this has to be done. (Raiysa, interview 6)

of education. Saba is now preparing to take class 10 exams after 6 years of being married and having lost her husband to a heart attack. She has 3 small children because of which she finds it difficult to continue her education. She is unsure of finishing her class 10 due to the multiple responsibilities. Many women who come to Mahita for vocational training like tailoring, mehndi design or computer experience the same difficulties Saba does.

Conclusion

The uncertainties imposed by finance, health and family/community expectations shouldn't be looked at as a simple effect of poverty as it most often it is by NGO's and other organisations working in the area. The commitment and struggle of people towards a better life fails to materialise when public

institutions like schools, hospitals and other government institutions meant for the people fail to perform their role. This results in immense wastage of resources on the part of the state with little known change.

Life after dropping out

“While studying I had learnt about the business”

- (Interview 2)

The people I interviewed dropped out of school due to familial uncertainty, financial insecurity and health crises. Once they dropped out, almost all the men and some of the women had to work for a living. Given their lack of formal education, this was invariably informal work, self employed or on contract. The low wages, precarious employment and the lack of a safety net meant that the uncertainty that drove them to these occupations continued as the children became adults. This meant that the same uncertainty would haunt the next generation, and the respondents all were sharply aware of this. What follows are some reflections about working as children after dropping out of school.

In Asif Nagar area of Mehdiapatnam and other areas around old city shops selling cigarettes and pan, restaurants or workplaces of mechanic, carpenters, furniture shops, general stores are all lined up one after the other on either sides of the road. Young school going age boys are often seen working diligently in these shops. For many children school and work are part of growing up. Many families send young boys for

There are lots of girls in Hyderabad now who sitting at home are cutting betel leaves and saving money for their own Joode Ke rakam (Marriage)

- (Interview 9)

My elder sister who is a teacher her younger brother-in-law had a sofa shop. They asked me to go there. My elder sister asked me why I was roaming here and there with wild children. She told me to learn this (sofa repairing) after school.

- (Interview 2)

a few hours of informal work in nearby shops or work places for meagre earnings which would help support the family. These young adults learn the skill of multi tasking from a very tender age. Girls

contribute their labour for the upkeep of the household, typically unacknowledged and unrewarded. At the same time many of them contribute in Karchop (embroidery), betel leaf cutting, tailoring etc. and the money earned through this work is contributed to the family. After they drop out they are married off where this informal labour continues.

This raises the question: are they able to experience childhood? Most studies of childhood are from an elite lifestyle where parents' resources are sufficient to provide a protected and luxurious life to their children. However, when children grow up in a family with hand to mouth existence they experience and tend to share the troubles of family members. It is in this context that it is vital to examine the lives of these working children in their own milieu. A long standing debate between work and education has divided many academicians, activist and policy makers. This debate finds mention in this report as it provides us a framework to look at the question of work among children through a larger lens.

Many who support education for children argue that long and harsh work conditions deteriorate the health of children who grow up to be frail adults who are unable to perform to their full working capacity. The crucial time of skill building and education which could help communities improve their living conditions is devoted to work. On the other hand supporters of work for children take into account the many empirical instances to argue their case. Child labour is a reality, it exists and it's important to understand the reasons for its existence. Children work for the survival of their families and their own.

Once I got into business my interest from studies faded away. The responsibilities increased.

- (Interview 2)

The young boys either engaged in work during childhood or after they drop out of school get incorporated into informal work on a full time basis. For many this is brought about by a process of apprenticeship under a family member or an

After class 10 I started teaching in the school. But in those days they gave Rs. 200 to 300 and not much. What will they give a 10th pass? They didn't give much.
- (Interview 8)

Now I have private practice but after I get a certificate I can work in a company.
- (Interview 11)

acquaintance. This involves long hours of labour, some of which may be unpaid. The training may last from 3 to 10 years depending on the nature of work.

Once in the informal sector of work it is difficult to continue formal education as it provides little immediate benefits in the face of dire financial needs of the family. Many I spoke to recognise the importance of formal education in its importance in getting into the formal sector of industry with less strenuous working hours, job certainty and security in their lives. Formal education can be seen as empowering in this very way. A lot of them who aspire to get ITI certification at Mahita Resource Centre see it as a channel to get into the formal sector of work.

In the words of a teacher at Mahita Resource Centre *“There are people who work for 9 to 10 hours in a factory. However they don't have any qualification. If instead of wasting time they study in a college to get a Degree, they will be able to get a substantial salary working 8 to 9 hours in an office”*. According to the teacher, people need to put in arduous long labour because they lack any

formal qualification which meets market standards of recognizable skills which could fetch them, better incomes. However then they choose to send their children to work because they have “*financial problems*”. It’s a vicious cycle which is hard to get out of.

Commitment towards Children's Education

The many difficulties faced by people of old city have been part of our discussion. However how do Ikena, Mohammed, Raiysa, Asma or others like

If one is educated one need not ask anyone in an office or bank who the manager is, etc., as the uneducated have to ask the security guard. If they are educated they can read for themselves and understand. (Interview 11)

them continue to dream or fuel their aspirations with

hope? What drives them to continue their many struggles? Where are these struggles directed?

Parents continue to dream of their own unfulfilled desire in their children's success and go to great lengths to realise it. Almost all

I don't want to decorate make my face. I don't waste money on all this now. What if Sahil needs something tomorrow? Who will get him that, now that his father is not here?. I am his father...the entire responsibility is on me. (Interview 9)

respondents whether parents or yet to be married individuals spoke of a future

I couldn't study but as long as they (children) want to study, I will help them.....I have faced trouble and I realise. My children should not face the same thing....We will eat a bit less but get them educated. (Interview 11)

full of hope and change. When asked why do they want education for their children, people responded with incidents or situations where they faced difficulty and don't want the next generation to face the same struggles again.

They want to leave their young ones better off. This commitment towards the future is a result of learning through a whole set of difficulties that they understand resulted from lack of education in the many spheres of life. John

Dewey in his work *Democracy and Education (1916)* used “lack” as an instrument of change, as it pushes us through a renewed force and commitment.

Education is an abstract term and means different things to different people in different contexts and needs. However its use to achieve social mobility especially for the marginalised is often emphasised. The interviews echoed this belief and people wholeheartedly tend to bestow their faith on education,

especially private
education. In last
decade Hyderabad and

*E: Private (school) is expensive, isn't it?
- I: Yes...but in government schools too are not
teaching as they were before. (Interview 3)*

many other cities in India have seen a surge of private schools and colleges. These educational institutions cater to different social classes with specific needs and are most often unregulated. This gives them a free hand in terms of fees, services and quality. The most harmful effect of this phenomenon is the commodification of such a basic need as education. The exchange of money in the sphere of education makes it vulnerable to the global financial economy and cost inflation of educational services. This results from market forces determining education's use and abuse in the country without being sensitive to local needs. The spread of these private educational institutions is taking place with the blessing of the state. This suggests that privatization of education is a governmental step to wash its hands off basic services like food, water, health etc. There is very little choice available to people in areas like the old city

under the falling government school system in which middle class teachers, an elitist curriculum and lack of resources are inhospitable to new entrants and are now more symbolic rather than useful. The fee charged by most of these upcoming private schools in old city is very high from the point of view of the communities they cater to and provide no guarantee of better quality than government schools. In spite of the huge expenditure, parents choose private over public schools. This choice is a living critique of the public education system by the people it claims to work for. On the other hand it highlights the kind of importance attached to education by people.

When questioned about why do they want education for their children, the responses hinted towards a) knowledge of languages in terms of reading, writing and speaking; b) importance of literacy to gain knowledge about institutions which they otherwise find difficult to access or negotiate with; c) staying ahead with acquiring new skills like computer education. These very real life needs addressed by education may be the reason for many to drop out of government schools as the schools fail to fulfil them. On the other hand an extensive study of these real life needs and their satisfaction in education at school and in higher education could help people survive and prosper. These needs could also help us understand a framework of education for marginalised communities.

Lack of education denies access to certain necessary institutions like banks, government office as this requires certain skills like reading instructions and

writing for filling forms etc. For many, education or lack of it also leads to a divide among social groups. As Mohammed in Interview 1 points out “*They (educated friends) studied well. Now if they studied well they separate themselves from us, the ones who don’t study remain like us*”. This confines one to a social group and limits ones interaction.

In discussions with senior research fellows at Anveshi, higher educational levels

Now in order to give our children good education we think we can do something but there is a lot of problem. That is the reason in today’s world it has become important for both of us (husband and wife) to work. This is what I think. Because of this I stepped out of my house.

- (Interview 8)

among girls and boys increases their desirability and demand as suitable life partner for marriage. This is also seen to be one of the reasons for education of children.

Mothers’ commitment towards education gives them the strength and support

If I earn a bit then there would be some saving. I thought I should take it up. Half for the kids future and if I earn it might be useful for something.

- (Interview 6)

from the community to overcome barriers towards their own free movement. In families

of 4 or more, with the husband as the sole earning member of the family, he is unable to provide for all the needs of the family. In such circumstances women of the house are forced to step out and find work which would help them and their family earn the much needed few extra income. The silver lining to all this is that women get an opportunity to learn, interact with people beyond their family and are able to extend their social circle and forge new friendships. This

situation can relieve them of stress and help determine their own strengths and weakness. The work may also help them become financially independent and increase respect towards them from family and community at large.

Gender Differences

Gender differences help us understand societal norms and expectations for students which may limit or provide support for their further education. Definitions of school, education and stakeholders acquire new meaning when one starts to take into account the gendered differences in the division of labour and roles ascribed to men and women. However my description of these gender roles in this report is from an outsider's perspective. These descriptions are intuitive (to a large extent from a theoretical and practical understanding of gender differences encountered in my own milieu) hence are limited in the knowledge of the practice and approach of the women I interviewed.

During the analysis of the interviews, a pattern emerged in the reasons given by men and women for dropping out of school, their family situation and the roles or responsibilities they were forced to take up

I had a lot of desire to study ahead. I was crying when they got me married. (Interview 6)

For almost, all women I spoke to marriage was

undeniably the most important reason that forced them to drop out. Whereas

She (mother) said listen to your father since he is the one who is suppose to do things. I thought I will take exams at home but he said what is the need? Anyway after getting you married there is nothing to it.

- (Interview 4)

among men, the increasing family responsibility either due to lack of money or death of an earning member of the family created circumstances for them to fill in for deceased member's

role and fend for the family.

Families look at school education for women as a means for acquiring literacy, which could get them good prospects for marriage. Educated girls are never seen as persons who could provide social mobility for the family unlike in the

I didn't go anywhere. I was in the house itself. It's only this year that I came out. My sister-in-law and others got things for the house. If I had to meet my parents they would say they will come, why you need to go out...Now I had 3 kids so I go out.

- (Interview 6)

case of their sons.

Life of young girls and in their transition into womanhood are characterised by restrictions on

movement, space and interaction, and this is sanctioned by the family, and community at large. Every attempt is made to abide these rules.

Now I can go and teach in the school. They said I could earn Rs.2000. But there are men there. My husband doesn't let us work in front of men. Now if we work we will have to take off our burqa. We will have to sit next to him, attend meeting etc. Wherever there are men I don't go.

- (Interview 8)

Most women in the interview spoke of a childhood where they performed household chores, caring for other siblings, and study hours in the evenings to finish the homework received from school. On the other hand men spoke of games with friends, walking on streets, visiting the nearby pond to catch fish etc. However in retrospect they thought of these games as a waste of time and justified their parents' disapproval towards the games.

For many women life usually starts in the confines of the house and they are confined to it until they have a few children, for whose growth and

Now like in computer we have several parts similarly we have different parts in our life. We have to play the role of a mother, daughter, etc, and keep playing it satisfactorily.- (Interview 9)

education they then step out to work. To me it seems as if it is a cost of virginity they are forced to pay and which comes to an end with the reproductive labour after which they again step out to sell their physical labour.

The role reversal or transition from a daughter to a wife and then to a mother with its many responsibilities is fast and without any time to prepare oneself for it. At the same time each role is loaded with expectations and pressure to perform with utmost satisfaction of people it affects.

It's a matter to think about that a girl brought up in four corners of a house had to go to Mumbai. She had to learn to fend for herself and learn to speak there. (Interview 9)

It's in these differentiated gender roles men and women growing up have to struggle to continue their education. As these roles limit individual capacities, movement, space and

thought. In the case of women their identity and reason for existence is predetermined by these gender roles. For .e.g., most women or men when asked about their brothers or sisters who are married, introduced their sisters as being married to someone while their described brothers according to their occupation.

Conclusion

1. The lives of people who have dropped out, as expressed in the interviews in this study are characterized by pervasive uncertainty. In this context, schools, colleges and hospitals are public institutions which have been created to cater to marginalised and impoverished populations are meant to help bridge this individual uncertainty and achieve a transition to a modern life. These institutions, are failing to perform their tasks satisfactorily. The marginalised depend on these institutions because of their affordability and promised abundance of resources. However in the current situation the failure of these institutions forces people to opt for private schools for their children. These schools are unregulated and charge exorbitant fees. In order to find the financial resources to send their children to private schools they perform hard labour which takes a toll on their health and longevity.
2. Given the respondents' inability to acquire a formal education, the only jobs they do manage to get are in the informal sector. This results in a complete lack of financial security in their lives after their limited schooling. In this situation the struggle for basic needs like education for their children, food and health for the family never seems to end. This recourse to the informal sector as contract labour, casual labour or as self employed individuals is a clear sign of the failure of the state to provide these people with a transition to a modern life.

3. Under these circumstances, the individuals I interviewed were struggling hard to provide their children with formal education. This struggle is motivated and directed with a hope towards better future for their children. In these circumstances, the parents' lack of stable and adequate income, i.e., the uncertainty in their lives has a direct impact on the continuity of the children's education. Thus, uncertainty is propagated through generations due to events like ill health, death, marriage, or financial crisis in the families of drop outs who are trying to educate their children. Thus the failure of the educational system in providing this transition to students from marginalized backgrounds is a chronic one.
4. As the pilot study showed, the interviewees were not capable of expressing any criticism of the educational system based on their experience of it. However, the unanimous choice of private schools as a better option needs to be read as a critique of the state's education system expressed in their actions – they exit the state education system because of its failure. However, the quality of education in private schools is also as questionable as is that of the government schools.
5. Education is seen as a tool for social mobility. People see a link between education and a formal sector job, where they can work to enjoy a little peace, get some rest from their arduous lifestyle and most of all achieve some level of financial security. However I wonder whether this dream is

realisable or is it a false consciousness? In the era of globalization, even people with formal qualifications are finding it difficult to secure a job in the organized sector, as jobs are now more and more dependent on market conditions and international economic factors. Thus uncertainty exists even with education. The case of developed countries during the current financial crisis is a case in point. In the above scenario, then it is important to ask fundamental questions about education: what is the role of education? What should it aim to achieve? In the voices of people from Old city of Hyderabad a good education is understood as something that should equip them with survival skills e.g. knowledge of languages, writing skills to fill government forms, reading instructions in public places or important notices. At the same time they feel that education should give them access to institutions and participation in civic life.

6. The report has made visible many situations where women are seen as mere reproductive labourers. In spite of this, it was also clear that the women I interviewed had great capacities and desires in relation to their life. Their capacities and desires are undermined in their struggles as women within and as part of marginalized families. In this context acquisition of the survival skills mentioned above, which can be achieved through education will help women gain support from their families towards their own education and the community at large. It will also help them and their families better negotiate

with institutions and improve the survival chances of all family members. However these survival skills should be a part of, and not the end of, a broad educational strategy.

Limitations

The old city is home to many communities i.e. Muslims, Dalits, and Hindus etc. When the project was first envisaged I decided to interact with people of all these communities. However during the field work, I was unable to find people, suitable for the study that I could interview. After two weeks of long struggle I made a head way with a lot of help. My friends Mujib and Parthiban got me in touch with a few people among the Muslim community. Given the duration of the project I couldn't establish any contact with any other community. Hence the interviews are limited to interactions with people from Muslim community.

The interviews were conducted in the work place of the interviewees hence most often the recordings had a lot of background noise. The three of the 15 interviews had to be discarded due to this problem. There was interruption from customers and others during the interviews and at time they were short as the interviewees were not able to give enough time because of their work. In case of interviews at Mahita Resource Centre the interviewees had training classes to attend which limited the time of the interview.

Mahita Resource Centre's interventions are towards bringing the working children, child labours and other school dropout children to the manifold of education, through active involvement of State Education Department, Teachers unions, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, Community members, Teachers and children. Thus it is difficult to separate that people who were interviewed may not be biased towards education because of their association with Mahita.

The field work made visible other limitations which I was unaware of at the onset of the project; one of them being the language spoken in the old city. The Dakkhini Hindi spoken by the Muslim community in the old city of Hyderabad is similar to Hindi at lexical level but on the syntactic level it resembles Telugu more than Hindi. At various points in the interview I came across words I was unaware of. I tried to decipher the meaning of them with the people I spoke with and at times from others in the office I knew. I have tried my best to translate them in English but at time failed to capture the mood and tone of the words.

During the research committee at Anveshi, Shymala made a point that discrimination of religion; caste etc can't be captured if one looks at it through a Marxist framework. I must accept that in my position as a Hindu woman with the Muslim Community of old city I wasn't equipped to explore these questions. The questions were limited to a secular perspective and hence have not been successful to probe further on discrimination of religion etc of the community.

The interview approach of research adopted in the project required immense preparation. This project was possibly the first time I was conducting any academic oriented field work with interview methodology. Hence I may have lacked the skill to handle the questions maturely or may lack insight in interviewees' inhibitions and pushed them too hard to seek a response.

Dilemmas of being Hindu Upper Caste

When one visits a community or place very different from one's own surroundings, culturally and religiously distinct one faces many challenges to circumvent and opportunities to learn from. My visit to the old city of Hyderabad was one such experience. The people I interacted with spoke to me of a world I was unaware of. On numerous occasions It was difficult to decide what to make of their problems and concerns about education, health etc. It was easier to feel pity as this is what we are taught to feel for people who are any way close to being categorised poor. However doesn't that undermine their many struggles against this feeling every single day?

I remember a woman in my interviews who refused to send her children to government schools because she felt they are meant for the poor. She did not in any way want her family to be categorised as poor. These unconscious judgements at times hindered the process of my acceptance within the community and on other occasions kept me in check in terms of my attire, language and conduct as acceptable to the community.

It has taken immense effort to avoid this feeling (I don't think I have overcome it) which was first pointed out by Srivats and then friends. One useful way was to read the transcript and listen to the recorded interviews with a retrospective mind. Sometimes minor details in the emotions of the people provided hints as to what they felt and wanted me to feel of the situation.

Talking about emotions the other difficulty I faced was to understand the emotional outburst by people at times. How does one understand the intensity of a problem? Can a person's emotional outburst mean his/her suffering is more compared to another individual who isn't expressive? Can an individual's case be an indicator of the larger social framework? How does one maintain individual differences when we start to generalise?

When I started analysing the interviews, I found that I had to consciously block my outlook and voice in writing about the issues, people of Old city faced. The analysis had to be in their voices, which would also give us a direction to think about the issues that they faced.

Appendix 1

Questions for the interview:-

| Before going school | coming home |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What time did you get up for it? 2. Did you do any work at home before you left for school? 3. How did you travel to school? 4. Did you go alone or with friends/family/relatives? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did you ever save money to buy things from outside school? 2. What time did you come back home? 3. Did you come back home straight? 4. Did you ever come back from different routes? 5. What did you do once you came back home? |
| School | after school |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which school did you go to? 2. Was it co-educational/Urdu/English/Telugu medium? 3. How far was the school from home? 4. Did you have a heavy bag? 5. Describe the school to me-its building, number of classroom, the buildings around. 6. Do you remember any teacher from school? 7. Did you like him/her? Why? 8. How many teachers taught you? 9. How many students were there in your class? 10. Did you write a lot in class? 11. Which was your favorite subject? Why? 12. Can you read and write English/Hindi/Telugu/Urdu? 13. How did the teacher teach you? 14. Did you ever talk about your family, surroundings, and friends in class with the teacher? 15. What if you did? 16. Was he/she strict? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did you help your parents after you came back home? 2. Did you get any homework? 3. Did you find it easy? Why? 4. Did you play in the evening? |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>17. Did he/she ever use to hit the students? 18. Did you have friends in school? 19. What did you play with them? 20. What did you eat for lunch?</p> | |
| <p>reasons for dropping out</p> | <p>after school work</p> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did you go to school every day? Why? 2. Why did you stop in between? 3. Do you miss going to school? 4. Do your school friends meet you now? 5. Did they ask you anything when you stopped going to school? 6. What did your parents say? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you made new friends now? 2. What do they do? 3. After you stopped going to school what did you do at home? 4. Did you work? 5. How did you find work? 6. Where is it? 7. How much do you make in a month? 8. Do you like working? 9. When you were in school what did you want to become? 10. Do you feel bad that you couldn't pursue it? 11. Do you ever feel like going back to school or study? 12. Do you want your children to study? Why? |

Appendix 2

Interview Schedule

| No. | Age | Area of Interview | Gender | Years of schooling | Job | Years since left school |
|-----|-----|---------------------------|--------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | 35 | Old Malakpet | M | class 8 | Spare parts shop | 20 |
| 2 | 38 | Old Malakpet | M | class 10 | Sofa Repair shop | 16 |
| 3 | 25 | Old Malakpet | M | class 10 | Stationary Shop | 8 |
| 4 | 25 | Kishan Nagar, Mehdipatnam | F | class 10 | Domestic Help and beautician | 5 |
| 5 | 18 | Asif Nagar, Mehdipatnam | F | class 5 | Housewife | 13 |
| 6 | 30 | Asif Nagar, Mehdipatnam | F | class 9 | Housewife | 15 |
| 7 | 22 | Asif, Nagar, Mehdipatnam | F | class 10 | Widow | 7 |
| 8 | 30 | Asif Nagar, Mehdipatnam | F | class 10 | Housewife | 13 |
| 9 | 30 | Asif Nagar, Mehdipatnam | F | Class 9 | paan shop and other informal work | 16 |
| 10 | 22 | Asif Nagra, Mehdipatnam | M | class 4 | training to be a carpenter | 13 |
| 11 | 38 | Asif Nagar, Mehdipatnam | M | class 7 | refrigerator repair | 20 |
| 12 | 30 | Asif Nagar, Mehdipatnam | M | - | Teacher at Mahita Resource Centre | - |

Appendix 3

Short Term Fellowship at Anveshi- Research Centre for Women's Studies

The short term fellowship of Anveshi came at a time when I most needed it. I wasn't able to qualify for any entrance exam in any universities I had applied. I was sure academics and an intellectual environment is what I need to channelize my broken thoughts about issues I was concerned about.

Mujeeb and Madhavi made me realise my prejudice about non fluent English speakers. I believed that "*People who can't speak English can't reason*". On the contrary I was the one who failed to do so. Mujeeb's immense knowledge of Madarsa system and Urdu Language accompanied with his wit draws people towards him. Madhavi on the other hand is well informed about Andhra Pradesh politics. Their childhood stories during our English Classes thrilled excited and gave me a glimpse into the lives of rural India. Maheshwari's questions and logic in the class shocked one and all. She seemed to think out of the box and always kept me on my toes. The classes brought me closer to people in office and gave me a space to know them better.

Reading *Head Curry* and *Braveheart Badaiya* stories from Different Tales Series and the discussion that followed with Moid and Shyamala put the marginalization question of communities in terms of lifestyle, spaces and food out and loud. I remember I misinterpreted the friendly teasing of husband and wife in *Head Curry* as gender discrimination which Suneetha later pointed to.

Just before my travel to U.K for a short language testing course at Lancaster, discussions with Jacob Tharu on curriculum and evaluation which I am immensely interested in helped me critically examine debates at Lancaster on language testing keeping the Indian examination system in perspective.

I started reading Krishna Kumar's work on education however now in introspection I don't think I fully understood the gravity of his thoughts. This was also because I was too ambitious in my project as I wanted to read all his books in a span of a month. The reading of Gramchi's *Intellectuals* with Srivats taught me how to read texts and this really brought about a significant change in terms of my reading style especially of political writings.

The most interesting part of the fellowship has been its flexibility. I say so because when I discussed my curiosity to explore why non-Muslim women in Hyderabad cover their head? I designed a short project on it and many at Anveshi motivated me to carry it forward. They were there all along to guide and point out the mistakes on the way. This short project brought to the surface issues in methodology like designing questionnaire, group interviews and its drawbacks. This study sparked hundreds of questions in my mind related to burqa, advertisements, beauty which Suneetha, Srivats were quick to discuss and suggest further

reading. One lesson that I learnt from this short project was the diversity of reasons and beliefs for a single practice as headscarf among women.

Moid and Suneetha read Mahamud Mamdani and Asad Talal which questioned religious biases of the western world and towards Muslims in general. The question of religious practices and its symbols echoed throughout the reading sessions. Similarly Shyamala at any given opportunity kept reminding the question of caste and its problems in education and choices available to individuals.

The documentary screenings by P.Srinivas were something to look forward to. The ones that had the most impact on me were *Dandora* and *Merit Interrupted*. The animal like treatment of Dalit students in social welfare hostels made human life look worthless and the hostels as human slaughter houses. Dandora captured the movement for equality in reservations.

I always wanted to read Simon de Bouvieur's *The Second Sex*. Reading it during my time in Anveshi was useful as I could clarify and talk to people around on topics like assumptions of strength, cultural upbringing from a gendered perspective.

Vasanta's Paper on Development Psychology changed my idea of Vygotsky's developmental stages theory. Somehow sciences were always taught to us as true and pure knowledge without any impurity. This line of thought was challenged again and again by Vasanta, Anveshi's publication "*Taking charge of our bodies*" and debates at MFC Conference.

Discussions on Domestic Violence especially at one of the research committee meetings when questions of what constitutes violence, or what is a family and later discussions with Sujatha brought the question of women's rights to the forefront.

Readings towards the STF project got me into debates such as Work vs Education, the minority question in works of Javed Alam, Ratna Naidu's study of Old City. Vasanta highlighted the increase of private schools in the country which is one of the questions I explored with people in Old City.

We met people like Susie Tharu, Jacob Tharu and Prof. Mallesham Principal of Arts College in Osmania University. Each of them contributed in expanding my thinking of Education.

The short writing assignments with critical comments by Srivats helped improve my writing skills to a great extent.

MFC Conference got me interested in occupational health, issues of sex workers, measurement of good health, work and deterioration of health which I took up in my later interviews as part of the STF project.

Delhi gang rape case and the discussions and MGBS research following that has made me overcome my scepticism that one doesn't overreact if one raises voice against injustice of any kind around. Rather it is important to do so but with some thought as one is responsible of one's action towards the cause and the community one is fighting for.

The most intellectual stimulating experience in Anveshi has been through Reading Marx's book Capital. I remember in college I asked my Economics Professor to teach me Marx and she mentioned I don't need to know or read him as it is not part of the syllabus. I was disappointed and kept looking for opportunities to learn about his writing on several occasions. I don't think I could have made connections from education to peoples' lives taking into account their health and livelihood in my project without these reading sessions.

While reading "*Constructing Consent*" of Noam Chomsky with P. Srinivas we discussed class, caste and the Dalits with respect to media. I was fortunate to be part of Fact Finding Committee for P. Raju's suicide at University of Hyderabad.

Interaction with Prof. Periaswamy of School of Chemistry got me thinking about counselling centres and their wider role in university setup.

I have told this to not one but many of my friends that the first thing that caught my attention at Anveshi was the number of women conducting discussions on important issues and taking a lead to bring about important changes around them. It overwhelmed me. This has given me immense confidence as a woman and reassured me of my intellectual capacities and courage to do something meaningful with my life.