ABSTRACT

The study focuses on education and the occupational mobility of the Hmar tribe of Manipur. It also seeks to highlight the extent of educational inequality among the different sections of the Hmar society.

The study is based on field work conducted in three Hmar villages in the South district of Manipur, viz. Sielmat, Saidan and Pherzawl. Data were obtained through an interview of the heads of households. The total sample includes 320 households which accounted for 75.6 per cent of the total Hmar households in the three villages. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the growth and expansion of education among the Hmars.

2. To examine inequality of educational opportunity among the different sections of the Hmar society on the basis of:
   - Differential access to educational opportunities i.e. differential enrolment of children in the age group of 6-21 years.
   - Differential levels of educational attainment by the adult members (i.e. above 21 years)

3. To see as to what extent education influences occupational mobility among the Hmars.
4. To examine the extent of inequality between men and women.

The Hmars have a significantly high literacy rate of 52.2 per cent (1981). However, a closer examination of the educational attainment of the Hmars revealed that more than half of the literate population does not have any educational qualification. Further, only a small proportion had attained matric or higher qualification. This indicates that despite their high crude literacy rate, only a small section of the Hmars are able to obtain formal school education; and higher education is yet to be developed among them.

The study reveals the presence of a certain level of educational inequality among the various sections of the Hmar society. Considerable difference is noticed in the educational development of the samples villages. In general, educational development is found to be highest in Sielmat where exposure to urban facilities is also the maximum. However, Saidan, despite its relative proximity to urban area and its facilities, lagged behind Pherzawl (the most remote village) in many instances. This is attributed to the absence of good educational facilities within the village.
Further, a positive relation between socio-economic status and education has been detected. It is found that the high status category has educational advantages over the lower status categories. However, the relation between socio-economic status and education is not as clear cut as those observed by similar studies. Because a distinct relation between the two variables has been detected only in Sielmat village, while in the other two villages the relation has been almost negative in some instances.

Educational inequality is also been observed between men and women. The respondents' daughters are found to be lagging behind the sons in terms of enrolment as well as educational attainment.

The study indicates that considerable changes occur in the occupations of the respondents and that of their fathers'. The direction of movement is mainly towards the service sector, particularly in occupations that comes under category II - such as clerical jobs, junior liberal professions and other allied services. At the same time, it is also found that quite a large proportion of respondents are still engaged in their traditional agricultural occupations. Analysis by using the Index of Association shows that the overall association between the respondents and their fathers is highest for respondents in the higher
categories and low in the lower categories. This implies that occupational mobility is more prevalent among respondents whose fathers are in the lower categories of occupations.

The study also highlights the importance of education for occupational mobility among the respondents. Because in the Hmar society where the general tendency of manpower shift has been mainly towards the service sector, education is a precondition for occupational mobility. Therefore, only those persons having a certain level of educational qualification are able to take up occupation other than their traditional occupations. The mobility of persons with no formal education is negligible.

Finally, the study indicates that the Hmar women have lagged behind the Hmar men in terms of educational attainment as well as occupational mobility. However, the gap between men and women is gradually declining among the younger generation. Interestingly, a majority of the respondents have positive attitudes towards women's education. They have high aspirations for their daughters' education and future occupational career. Many wanted their daughters to go for higher studies and take up high prestige jobs.
However, the aspirations of the respondents for their daughters are not as high as that of their sons. The main reason lies in the Hmar social tradition which follows a patrilineal system. The future status of the family is seen as dependent on the educational and occupational achievements of the sons. Whereas, the daughter's contribution is in another family; her husband's family. This being the case, while importance of women's education is being acknowledged by most of the respondents, a majority of them still give priority towards men's education. Moreover, women's domestic role is given topmost importance and their occupational career is seen only as secondary. Hence, despite the diminishing trend in men-women inequality the Hmar women are still not given equal opportunity because of social traditions.