Title of the thesis: Aspects of Intergenerational Economic Mobility in India

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Abstract

Intergenerational mobility measures the association between the socio-economic attainments of individuals and their children. Low intergenerational mobility implies the persistence of socioeconomic deprivation from one generation to next for poorer sections of society. At the other hand of the scale, for the rich it implies the persistence of socio-economic advantage from one generation to the next. This thesis presents four essays on aspects of intergenerational economic mobility in India. It examines the levels and patterns of intergenerational economic mobility in India over the last three decades and compares variations in such mobility across different social groups. Following the international literature on social mobility, this thesis measures intergenerational economic mobility in terms of the occupations of individuals. The thesis also examines changes in two factors that are strongly correlated with intergenerational mobility, inequality in educational attainment and levels of assortative marriage. Our results on intergenerational occupational mobility between 1983 and 2012, based on evidence from National Sample Surveys, show that relative mobility declined between 1983 and 2012 and that this decline was sharper among Scheduled Caste and Tribe than among non-Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Our results also show that, in general, the impact of socio-economic origin on an individual’s educational attainment at the secondary, higher secondary, and graduate levels did not change dramatically between 1983 and 2011-12. This suggests that individuals from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds continued to have better access to educational opportunities than individuals from disadvantaged family backgrounds. Our results, based on intergenerational correlation between the educational attainments of fathers and sons, showed that educational mobility largely remained unchanged between 1983 and 2012. It is possible that this relative immoboloty could have contributed to the lack of improvement in intergenerational occupational mobility during the study period (1983-2012) in India. We found that the overall relative homogamy rate or the chances of individuals within a given level of education choosing a spouse with the same level of education increased over the reference period. This increase in educational homogamy characterised all social groups. The increase in the propensity of individuals to select spouses from within their own educational groups coincided with the increase in economic inequality and the persistence of intergenerational immobility during the three decades under study.