

CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter attention is drawn to the first major concern of this study - a descriptive analysis of the three schools in the socio-economic status (SES) composition of their student bodies.

The differences among schools in the SES composition of their student bodies are worth investigating as they have a recognized influence on differences among schools in achievement. Studies in the West show that schools differ in the SES composition of their student bodies (Marshall: 1961:157; Havinghurst and Neugarten in Miller and Woock: 1973:85). Further, there are studies that show that the SES character of the peer group is very important in the achievement of students. Coleman et al (1966) found that the higher the social class background of the other students, the higher was any individual student's achievement. (Mosteller and Moynihan: 1972:20). Few studies have been conducted in India, on this issue. The ones that have been done, clearly show that schools differ in the SES composition of their student bodies (Lindsey: 1978) and that schools with students from the lower SES groups are characterized by poor academic performance and vice versa. (Chitnis: 1982).

One major criterion used in selecting the three schools is that they cater to different SES groups of students. This is an assumption that is drawn from the fact that the

three schools are differentially financed, from information that the principals and some of the teachers provided and from my own impressions of the schools. The data presented in this chapter is important for establishing the validity of my choice.

The information presented here was collected with the help of a questionnaire distributed to all the parents of students from standards I, V and IX. However, frequently in school A, the questionnaire had to be treated as an interview schedule and information had to be personally collected from parents who did not submit the questionnaire.

The Occupational Background of Students' Fathers

Since differences in income, education and prestige are closely linked to differences in the occupations of fathers, occupational prestige is very often used as an index of social class. Occupational prestige is an important criterion that helps in the ranking of occupations and thus in evaluating them vis-à-vis one another. The data on the occupational background of students' fathers is presented in table 4.1.

The method of ranking occupations devised by D'Souza for his study of a Planned City (D'Souza: 1968) has been adopted. Occupations are ranked in a prestige hierarchy from categories I to VII, with occupations in category I commanding the highest prestige, those in category VII the least, and the occupations in the other categories, commanding correspondingly varying degrees of prestige. Using

TABLE 4.1Percentage Distribution of the Occupations of Students' Fathers by School

CATEGORY OF OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE	IDENTITY OF SCHOOL		
	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
I	0.0	1.1	41.2
II	0.2	10.6	39.6
III	1.5	15.1	14.2
IV	17.4	29.5	2.0
V	17.6	20.1	0.0
VI	42.2	11.7	0.0
VII	3.8	2.2	0.0
Service	8.6	2.8	1.0
Unemployed	1.4	1.1	0.0
Retired	0.5	1.1	0.3
Not specified	4.4	2.8	1.0
Not applicable	2.4	1.9	0.7
TOTAL 100 PERCENTAGE	100.0	100.0	100.0

such a classification of occupations, one finds that (Table 4.1) there is a great amount of occupational homogeneity within schools A and C but at divergent ends of the occupational prestige continuum. Thus, School A, the municipal school has a homogeneous occupational group of fathers who have occupations in the lowest prestige categories and school C the unaided school has a homogeneous group of fathers but with occupations in the highest prestige categories. Between these two schools, fall school B, the aided school, which has a more heterogeneous occupational population spread out over all

the occupational prestige categories.

In school A, 81.0 per cent of the fathers have occupations that fall in the lower prestige categories IV, V, VI and VII. In school B, the occupations are spaced out over all the occupational categories, with categories II, III, IV, V and VI accounting for 87.0 per cent of the occupations. In school C, the occupational categories I and II alone account for 80.8 per cent of the fathers.

Whereas the broad categorization of occupations brings out the differences among the schools boldly, it is interesting to look at the kinds of jobs that fathers are involved in. School A, has fathers who are washer-men, sweepers, railway porters, barbers and cobblers (category VII); mill-workers, hawkers, peons, vendors and workers in docks, hotels and furniture shops (category VI). There are skilled workers such as fitters, carpenters, drivers, mechanics, plumbers and machine operators (category V). Somewhat higher in status than all these are clerical workers, assistants in offices, jobbers and policemen (category IV); commission agents and small shop-keepers (category III) and a solitary bank officer (category II).

School C, in contrast, has fathers who are in top management jobs, are big industrialists, scientists, advocates, medical specialists and surgeons (category I); middle management personnel, architects, engineers, doctors, airline executives, college lecturers and principals (category II). In this school, there is a small percentage of fathers in categories III and IV and it is

interesting to note that as compared to the schools A and B fathers in the same categories, they are somewhat higher in status - they are junior executive assistants, photographers, programmers and technicians.

School B, has almost the entire range of occupations that are found in schools A and C. There are fathers who are in top management jobs (category I); engineers, doctors, chartered accountants (category II). There are small business men, musicians, salesmen and primary school teachers (category III); clerical workers, electricians, newspaper agents, cashiers, bus inspectors, assistants and laboratory attendants (category IV); fitters, drivers, carpenters and machine operators (category V); peons, welders, masons and factory workers (category VI) and finally there are washer-men, fishermen, butchers, barbers and cobblers (category VII).

Educational Background of Students' Fathers

On the basis of the assumption that fathers who have completed school are better able to support the completion of the schooling of their children, I have looked at the educational background of the fathers in the 3 schools in terms of the percentage of those who have completed or have not completed their matriculation. By the same logic, fathers who have a college education are better able to shape the future educational and job aspirations of their children, both in terms of providing role models and in terms of being adequately equipped to give their children the educational guidance that they need. Hence.

I have also looked at the percentage of fathers who are college educated, in each school.

TABLE 4.2

Percentage Distribution of the Educational Background
of Students' Fathers by School

EDUCATIONAL CATEGORY	IDENTITY OF SCHOOL		
	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Illiterate	14.3	3.9	0.0
Unschool ed but literate	0.3	0.0	0.3
Primary school	21.1	6.4	0.0
Below Matric	42.5	32.0	0.7
Matric and equivalent	13.9	32.3	9.8
Technical Diplomas	0.0	2.0	3.7
Some College education	2.0	3.6	7.8
Non-professional graduates	1.5	5.8	24.3
Professional Graduates	0.2	3.9	28.4
Non-Professional Post-graduates	0.2	2.5	6.4
Professional Post-graduates	0.0	0.6	12.8
Doctorates / Post Doctorates	0.0	0.0	4.4
Not specified	2.0	5.6	0.7
Not applicable	2.0	1.4	0.7
Total Percentage	100.0	100.0	100.0

In school A, (table 4.2) only 17.8 per cent of the fathers have completed school in contrast to 50.7 per cent in school B and 97.6 per cent in school C. The disadvantaged educational background of students from school A is further emphasized by the fact that 35.7 per cent of

them are illiterate or barely primary school educated. School B, does have a small percentage (10.3 per cent) belonging to this category and school C has practically none, except for one uneducated father, who is a rich business-man living opposite the school and finding it to be one of the "better" schools of the area, admitted his child there.

If school A is conspicuous, in that, most of the fathers have not completed school, school C stands out as the school where students have an advantaged educational background. In school C, as many as 76.3 per cent of the fathers are graduates or have higher levels of education as compared with 12.8 per cent of the school B fathers and only 1.9 per cent of the school A fathers.

Income Background of Students' Parents

Parental income determines the quality of living in a house - all the way from basic nutrition to the facilities that are available to the children, for study at home. More directly, income decides whether parents can afford school and thus limits the access that children have to schools.

The data on parental income is presented in (Table 4.3) in interval ranges of varying sizes that are small in the lower income brackets but become increasingly larger in the higher income brackets.

Income-wise (Table 4.3) school A, the municipal school has a homogeneous group of parents belonging to the

TABLE 4.3

Percentage Distribution of the Family Income of Students' Parents by School

INCOME LEVEL	IDENTITY OF SCHOOL		
	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Upto Rs.50	0.5	0.0	0.0
51 - 100	1.4	0.0	0.0
101 - 150	2.4	0.6	0.0
151 - 200	4.3	0.8	0.0
201 - 300	16.2	7.2	0.0
301 - 400	21.4	9.5	0.0
401 - 500	20.5	14.8	0.0
501 - 600	8.6	7.2	0.0
601 - 800	10.1	10.9	0.7
801 - 1,000	6.3	15.0	4.1
1,001 - 1,500	2.1	10.6	5.4
1,501 - 2,000	0.9	9.5	14.2
2,001 - 3,000	0.0	4.5	21.0
3,001 - 4,000	0.2	1.4	17.6
4,001 - 5,000	0.0	1.7	17.9
5,001 - 7,500	0.0	0.0	9.1
7,501 - 10,000	0.0	0.8	2.4
10,001 - 15,000	0.0	0.6	2.7
15,001 - 20,000	0.0	0.0	0.3
20,001 plus	0.0	0.0	1.3
Not specified	4.2	4.4	3.0
Not applicable	0.9	0.5	0.3
TOTAL PERCENTAGE	100.0	100.0	100.0

lower income levels. School B, the aided school, has a heterogeneous group of parents spaced out over the different income categories, and school C, the unaided

school, has a homogeneous group of parents but in the higher income brackets.

If one considers families with incomes less than Rs.500/- to be the really poor families, then school A has as many as 66.7 per cent of the children from such families. In school B, children from such families constitute 32.9 per cent of the sample and school C has no children belonging to this income group.

That school A has a large percentage of children from the very poor families is understandable, in view of the fact that, school A is a free school. It is surprising, however, that school B has as many as 32.9 per cent of families with incomes less than Rs.500/-. These findings may not seem unexpected if one considers the fact that 34.0 per cent (table 4.1) of the fathers fall in the occupational categories V, VI and VII, categories with low prestige. When these findings were discussed with the principal, he felt that the low income mentioned by parents could not be taken at face value. Educating the children in this school is costly given that fees have to be paid, uniforms and books have to be bought. Besides, most of the families are not single-child families. Various other sources seem to suggest that many of these families are getting side-income from boot-legging, smuggling and so on - activities that the area is famous for - and this income is undisclosed.

If one considers families with incomes over Rs.2000/- as higher income families, then school C has as many as

72.3 per cent of such families. The corresponding percentages for schools B and A are 9.0 per cent and 0.2 per cent respectively.

There are statistical differences among the three schools in family incomes. The differences between schools A and B are statistically significant ($t = 8.34$, $p < .001$) as are the differences between schools B and C ($t = 13.5$, $p < .001$) and the differences between schools A and C ($t = 17.79$, $p < .001$). If the per-capita income of families for the different schools had been considered (for which, data on family size had not been collected) the differences in income, among the three schools, would stand out even more sharply.

The SES of Students' Fathers

Even though differences among the three schools in the occupational and educational background of fathers and in terms of parental income (the three variables that are often used in combination to determine the SES of families) have been discussed the use of an SES index acts as a summary variable and helps to reiterate the differences among the 3 schools.

A notional SES index is devised by reducing each of the three variables - father's occupation, father's education and father's income - into five categories, categories that more or less coincide, one with the other. For each variable, the category scores range from 1 to 5. The highest possible index score that a father can have is

15 and indicates that he belongs to the highest SES level, and the lowest possible score that he can have is 3, which indicates that he belongs to the lowest SES level. In between 3 and 15 lie all the possible scores that fathers can have and they indicate correspondingly different SES levels.

There are fathers who have not specified, either their occupation, education or income, or have not provided information on all three of these variables. There are others who have provided insufficient information on their occupations. Thus they may have specified their occupation as service, retired and so on. All these fathers, fall outside the purview of the SES index, and make up 19.6 per cent of the school A sample, 15.3 per cent of the B sample and 4.4 per cent of the school C sample.

For the purpose of this study, scores 3 - 6 are treated as constituting a lower SES group, scores 7 to 10 as constituting a lower-middle and middle SES group, and scores 11 - 15 as constituting an upper-middle and higher SES group of fathers. Using this trichotomy, one finds (Table 4.4) that school A is essentially populated by students coming from the lower SES groups (64.9 per cent); school B, has a socio-economically heterogeneous population, with 33.6 per cent of the students coming from the lower SES groups, 33.8 per cent of them coming from the lower middle and middle SES groups and 17.3 per cent of them coming from the upper-middle and higher SES

TABLE 4.4

Percentage Distribution of the SES of Students'
Fathers by School

S E S SCORES	IDENTITY OF SCHOOL		
	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
3	15.4	4.2	0.0
4	27.5	7.2	0.0
5	12.7	10.3	0.0
6	9.3	11.9	0.0
7	7.0	10.6	0.0
8	5.8	10.9	0.0
9	1.7	8.1	3.7
10	0.8	4.2	5.7
11	0.2	6.4	8.4
12	0.0	4.5	11.2
13	0.0	4.7	22.7
14	0.0	1.1	31.1
15	0.0	0.6	12.8
Not applicable	19.6	15.3	4.4
TOTAL PERCENTAGE	100.0	100.0	100.0

groups; and school C has a student population that essentially belongs to the upper-middle and higher SES groups.

The Educational Background of Students' Mothers

It is the mother who, more often than not, looks after the over-all needs of the children. Hence, ensuring that the children attend school regularly, supervising their school-work and home-work and in general, keeping track of their progress in school, by and large, are a part of her

responsibilities. One can argue here that, mothers who have finished school or have higher levels of education, as compared with mothers who have little or no schooling, are in a better position to help their children in their studies, are more supportive of their children's education and are better able to help guide their children's aspirations.

TABLE 4.5

Percentage Distribution of the Educational Background of Students' Mothers by School

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	IDENTITY OF SCHOOL		
	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Illiterate	42.8	11.4	0.3
Unschoolled but literate	0.5	0.0	0.3
Primary School	20.7	9.2	0.3
Below Matric	32.0	37.1	1.0
Matric and equivalent	1.7	27.6	20.0
Technical Diplomas	0.0	0.8	3.4
Some College Education	0.0	1.4	14.2
Non-Professional Graduates	0.2	3.1	38.2
Professional Graduates	0.0	0.3	5.4
Non-Professional Post-graduates	0.2	0.8	12.2
Professional Post-graduates	0.0	0.0	3.0
Doctorates / Post Doctorates	0.0	0.0	0.7
Not specified	1.9	7.5	1.0
Not applicable	0.0	0.8	0.0
TOTAL PERCENTAGE'	100.0	100.0	100.0

The educational disadvantage of the school A children again surfaces in the education of their mothers. In this school only 2.1 per cent of the mothers (table 4.5) are matriculates or have higher levels of education as compared with 34.0 per cent of the school B mothers and 97.1 per cent of the school C mothers.

Their disadvantage is further high-lighted by the fact that as many as 64.0 per cent of them are either illiterate or have a primary school education. The corresponding figure for school B is 20.6 per cent and for school C is 0.9 per cent.

The educational advantage of the school C children is apparent in the higher educational background of their mothers. In this school, 59.5 per cent of the mothers are graduates or have higher levels of education as compared with 4.2 per cent of the school B mothers and only two of the school A mothers.

SUMMARY

In the foregoing pages the differences among the three schools A, B and C in the SES composition of their student bodies is high-lighted.

School A, consists of students whose fathers are occupationally in the lower prestige occupations, are found in the lower educational categories and are in the lower family income brackets. School B, brings together a socio-economically heterogeneous group of students.

School C, the unaided school, has a socio-economically homogeneous group of students whose fathers are drawn from the higher occupational, educational and income levels.

An educational profile of students' mothers is also presented. It high-lights educational disadvantage in the school A homes, educational advantage in the school C homes, with school B falling somewhere between these two extremes.