

Panel Proposal

Education and the (Re)Production of Social Inequality in Colonial and Postcolonial India. Interdisciplinary Perspectives

In historical and sociological studies on education, modern education systems have been portrayed as both, the key mechanism for reproducing patterns of social stratification, social inequality, and the division of labour in society, as well as the gateway to upward social mobility. The proposed interdisciplinary panel brings together new research on different educational institutions and programmes in colonial and postcolonial India which target and/or are used by non-elite, or disadvantaged social groups: rural populations, workers, and women. The contributions will explore, on the one hand, the politics of educational reform and the agenda of those who design and set up schools for “the masses”, or “the poor”. On the other hand, they seek to shed more light on the “demand side” of schooling, the decisions of families which schools to send their children to, or the agency of students and teachers within schools. In this way, they not only ask how schools are supposed to contribute to the production, reproduction, or contestation of a hierarchical social order, but also, how people make use of them and thus actively participate in shaping the societal effects of schooling. Taken together, the papers can offer a unique perspective on inequality, since they try to understand important mechanisms which contribute to maintaining, deepening, or changing the patterns of the societal distribution of material and cultural resources.

Arun Kumar, Centre for Modern Indian Studies (University of Gottingen)

Histories of Miscalculation and the Politics of the Possible: The Reproduction and Production of Subjects in Colonial Industrial Schools

Inserted within the pages of contemporary accounts, yet mostly absent from the mainstream historiography are the histories of ‘industrial schools’ of colonial India; this paper is an exercise to uncover the records of these ‘absent institutions’ of educational and labour histories. Such industrial schools were set up by Christian missionaries, factory authorities and subsequently the colonial state to educate poor children who were deemed unfit for book-centred, “proper” schooling. This paper limits itself to the industrial and technical schools managed by the colonial authorities. As per the A. P. MacDonnell memorandum, forty-five industrial schools had already marked their presence with 1, 379 students and 4 schools of Arts with 655 students in British India by 1886. The number of industrial schools expanded as the requirement for skilled and docile labour grew in the labour market. The objective behind this joint venture of colonial officials and ‘native’ elites was to produce a modern disciplined, semi-skilled, and productive labour force out of unruly lower-caste artisans by dignifying manual labour. This further reinforced rather than erased

social hierarchies. Industrial schools were envisaged as a space where the processes of social reproduction and material production would occur simultaneously and within which economic productivity and manual labour was formulated as core. This process of reproduction and production was not constrained only by social and cultural inequalities but was also crucially shaped by the economic values of colonial political economy. However, reproduction and production processes did not always meet with grand success, as noted in the colonial state records. And these contradictory outcomes can be read as histories of subversions, failures and miscalculations. The contradictory outcomes provide a crucial entry point to enter this class reproduction debate from a different angle as these very institutional apparatuses could be subverted to produce very different end results by the actors involved. How to recover such a history from the dusty files of the archives is a crucial question, which concerns many historians. Colonial knowledge production on industrial and technical education is absent on the voices of pupils who attended these institutions and seems to be a confused, repetitive, and conflicted epistemic space. To recover the other side of story in order to unpack the categories of social and material reproduction, class and caste nexus, one has to look for alternative ways of doing history. How to reconfigure the presence of these voices and experiences in our histories? Reading histories of miscalculation opens up the possibility of a methodological procedure through which these absent voices and experiences can be recovered and interpreted to some extent. State formulates its policies with some calculations (as an experiment with some prospect of success). It is the failure of these policies that state records in order to measure its success or failure for future purpose, and these can be read as histories of miscalculations. These histories of miscalculations provide a glimpse of the other side of the story as part of its failure. This paper will be based on the reading of colonial records and contemporary writings.

Jana Tschuren, Centre for Modern Indian Studies (University of Gottingen)

Mothers, Wives, Teachers: Agendas of Female Education in Colonial India

Sociological and historical studies which analyse the nexus between class stratification and education, such as Bourdieu's concept of reproduction, or Willis' exploration of "how working class kids get working class jobs", often center on the question of how education systems tend to uphold the existing patterns of social inequality. The literature on female education, in contrast, tends to foreground questions of social change and individual empowerment. By contrasting different experiments in female education in nineteenth century India, this paper outlines some of the contradictory agendas and effects of female education within and on the colonial social order.

From the 1820s onwards, female education became a prominent site for debates about social reform. In Bengal and Bombay, British missionaries and the novel education societies

(such as the *Calcutta School Book Society* or the *Bombay Education Society*) started to promote the education of girls and young women belonging to the urban underclass of European descent – which is the first case study this paper focuses on. Lessons in Christian morality and needle work were supposed to prepare them for their role as wives and mothers within “their respective social sphere.” Given the strong Christian agenda, and the promotion of the evangelical model of female domesticity, which was also part of the first efforts of British missionaries to “diffuse” new forms of education among Indian women, female education soon turned into a site of competing visions of social order and the formation of cultural identities. Women’s role as mothers of future generations became increasingly politicized in the course of the nineteenth century.

At the same time, female education became a crucial field for the development of women’s reform activism and professional activities. From the 1820s onwards, British women used the engagement with the imperial “civilizing mission” as a way to enter the public sphere, to go abroad as teachers of female schools and act as missionaries among women. Towards the later nineteenth century, a strong link was formed between feminist activism and the promotion of female education in many countries. In this context, the second case study of this paper focuses on the educational activities of Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), and the ways in which she linked the education of high caste Hindu widows to questions of the social emancipation of women. Her case is particularly interesting since it reveals the nationalist opposition towards the project of modern public female education, but also the limits of feminist emancipation within the caste frame. Applying an intersectionality perspective on inequality and empowerment, the paper points to the contradictory effects of (women’s engagement with) female education.

Simone Holzwarth, Humboldt University Berlin

A Postcolonial Social Order through Teaching Rural Crafts? The Debates about Basic Education between 1937 and 1949

The icon of the nationalist movement in India, M.K. Gandhi, envisioned a new postcolonial social order according to his philosophy of “sarvodaya” (translated as “the welfare of all”). This new social order was to be based on the principles of equality, communal self-sufficiency and the equitable distribution of wealth. In his vision, “the prince and the peasant, the wealthy and the poor, the employer and the employee are all on the same level”. Thereby, he and his followers were convinced that this new social order could only become a reality through radical education reform.

Gandhi called his concept for this reform of mass education “Nai Talim” (“new education”). In order to overcome the colonial legacies in education, he envisioned a new kind of

education for all members of society and especially for the village population. In his view, there was a need for the masses to be educated “from the cradle to the grave”, meaning education for all different age groups. At the same time he also saw an urgent need for a radical change of values for education. Instead of concentrating on an urban colonial bureaucracy and economy, Nai Talim should contribute to the evolution of a new “village-minded” social order concentrating on “village reconstruction” and inculcate selflessness and the dignity of manual work in the young generation. In order to do so, teaching and learning were to be practical and based on a „productive trade“, a village craft or trade such as spinning, weaving or agriculture. Through this, Nai Talim should also be self-supporting in the sense that the costs for the salaries of the teachers could be met by the sale of the production of the education institutions. One stage of this all-encompassing education concept, “basic education” (seven years of primary schooling starting at the age of seven), was for the first time officially presented in 1937 and thereafter implemented on an experimental basis in different places throughout India.

On the backdrop of the situation of education and especially primary education at that time, the ideas of Nai Talim were quite revolutionary. Towards the end of Britain’s colonial rule, the majority of the population remained excluded from formal education and education policy was geared towards higher education. At the same time, manual work was highly stigmatized since it was mainly associated with the exploitation of cheap labour in the context of a colonial economy. Vocational and technical skills therefore were mainly not regarded as important and not part of the curriculum of official primary schooling. A complex factor in the predominant ideas about work and education in colonial India was also the category “caste”, operating as a legitimation of social stratification. This dominant complex of representations for thinking about work and education in colonial India is also called the “Brahminical-cum-colonial paradigm”, meaning the interrelation between colonial and high-caste ideas on education.

This paper analyses the debates about basic education between 1937 and 1949 and presents how the different actors working on the nation-wide implementation of basic education conceptualized equality and inequality in the context of education. The paper presents, how in the view of the practitioners of basic education the new education concept would bring about equality in terms of religion, class, caste and gender and therewith help to overcome colonial legacies in education. In the end, the paper will also look at the problems that arouse during the implementation of model institutions of basic education and the criticisms on the concept that arouse in the course of the debates.

Lea Griebel, Centre for Modern Indian Studies (University of Gottingen)

Alternative Education for the Rural Poor: Inherent Social Good versus Reproduction of Social Inequality

Education is frequently portrayed as the panacea for problems of social inequality and the high road to development and thus as intrinsically beneficial. India's post-colonial leaders' agendas for development and modernization aimed at expansion of schooling to the masses since it was believed to be "the great leveling mechanism" (Levinson 1996) and therefore a "social good" (Kumar 1994). Echoed today by politicians, development workers, businesspeople and parents alike, this credo is reflected in Drèze and Sen's (1995) proposal of education as "social opportunity": Contrary to international development organizations' focus on economic growth and governance, they advocate an emphasis on the improvement of education and health care. In later works, Sen (1999) expansively elaborates on the ways in which education is connected to the achievement of "substantive freedoms" like political liberties, human dignity and employment. In sum, both mainstream government and non-governmental discourse are driven by the underlying assumption that school education is synonymous with civilization, progress and modernity (Corbett 2007).

A less optimistic discourse addressing the ambivalent nature of education is emerging through scholars like the Jeffreys (2008), Froerer (2011, 2012) and Higham (2013), who portray education as "contradictory resource" rather than inherent social good. Drawing on Bourdieu's reproduction theory as well as the works of Willis (1977) and Levinson (1996), these authors emphasize the ambivalent nature of education, conferring advantages and social mobility by providing possibilities to undermine traditional power structures at the one hand side, while potentially reproducing established inequalities and reinforcing hegemonic power structures on the other.

The aims of this paper are threefold: first, it examines the reasons critical authors blame for the failure of education to bring about social change. As second step, it introduces the Rishi Valley Satellite Schools (RVSS) in Andhra Pradesh which pioneered the MultiGradeMultiLevel pedagogy inspiring educational reform in several Indian states and abroad. The RVSS provide alternative education to the rural poor, trying to tackle problems small rural government schools are notorious for (c.f. Blum 2009; Sarangapani 2003). Third, it elaborates on the question of whether students and alumni of RVSS experience education as inherently beneficial and empowering or as conservative force which reinscribes, perpetuates and even justifies traditional inequalities. Basing on their narratives of educational experiences this paper will discuss the complex and entangled processes which mediate the sometimes contradictory potentials of education

Sumeet Mhaskar, Centre for Modern Indian Studies (University of Gottingen)

Schooling in the Times of Industrial Decline: A Study of Mumbai's Mill Workers' Household Decisions on Children Schooling

During the last two decades of the 20th century large scale industrial closures took place in major Indian cities such as Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Kolkata and Mumbai. The industrial closures resulted in the retrenchment of a large amount of workforce as well as a sharp decline in the employment opportunities in the formal manufacturing sector. The implications of industrial closures on the workforce and to a certain extent on their families have received significant scholarly attention. However, there remains a major gap in the literature that investigates the effects of industrial decline on workers' children's education. This paper attempts to fill this gap by examining the case of Mumbai's mill workers' household decisions on children's schooling. The focus on children's education is important as it determines in a significant way their future occupational preferences. In the context of Mumbai this issue becomes particularly significant as the city has transformed from an industry to a service sector economy which as a result requires a workforce with altogether different skills and knowledge. More importantly there has been a massive reduction in the better-paid employment opportunities for less educated rural labour migrants as well as ex-millworkers children who could have worked in the textile mills like their predecessors. In former times despite attaining less education mill workers children managed to obtain better paid employment in the textile mills. Since such possibilities have shrunk in a significant way it is even more important to study their educational attainment. Against this backdrop, this paper addresses the following research question. How did the industrial decline and the eventual closures influence worker's household decision-making with regard to their children's education? To answer this question this paper relies on quantitative and qualitative data collected during August 2008 to August 2009 and December 2010 to January 2011. Interviews with ex-millworkers, trade unionists, school teachers will be used. Along with the archival documents this paper will also use a survey data of 924 ex-millworkers households collected during July-July 2009.