# CHOICE OF FACULTY AND SOCIOECONOMIC PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

**SHANTA ASTAGI**

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY GOVERNMENT DEGREE COLLEGE
GULBARGA, KARNATAKA

## ABSTRACT

An attempt has been made to examine whether the relationship between choice of faculty viz., Arts, Commerce and Science by college students and their socioeconomic background with possible consequences for occupational aspirations. The assumption on which the paper is based is that since faculties have varying degrees of employment potential, enrolment of students is closely linked with their socioeconomic background. Data were collected by administering a structured questionnaire on the final year/ last semester college students in Gulbarga and Bijapur cities. The chief finding was that by and large there was a correspondence between students' socioeconomic background and the choice of faculty. To be specific, a greater proportion of college students drawn from higher castes classes and with urban background were found in commerce and science courses. This shows that the socially and economically better-off groups continue to reap the benefits of higher education.

**KEYWORDS:** Socio-Economic Status, Occupational Aspirations

## INTRODUCTION

Educational system is one of the basic institutions through which the social and cultural heritage of a society is transmitted from one generation to another. It is as Emile Durkeim (1956) observed "above all the means by society perpetually recreates the conditions of its very existence". In most of the developed societies education is intimately associated with the economic system. The diffusion of literacy, the growth in the number and size of schools and colleges and universities and substantial changes in the content and method of education were closely linked with the development of modern industry and the social changes that accompanied (Chinoy, 1967: 386). Thus, it is "becoming so fused with occupations that it may be seen as a part of the economic foundations of society" (Burton, 1962: 48).

In the context of developing nations, like India, education may be viewed as "the key that unlocks the doors to modernization" (Harbison & Myers,. 1964: 181). For, a developing economy requires a literate population, a well-trained group of executives, administrators, and professionals who are capable of running the government and introducing modern methods and techniques.

In India, even today, the education system is considered as a 'hangover' from the days of colonial rule and hence unrelated to the emerging social and economic needs of society. While it is true that education in India does not prepare students for any specific occupations (except where professional/ technical ones are concerned) a certain level of education or degree has become imperative for recruitment to most of the occupations, especially in organized sectors. For instance, a person cannot become a lawyer unless he/ she possessed a degree in law from a recognized university. A person is qualified to become a doctor (Medical) or an engineer only when he or she has a degree in medicine or engineering. However, an Arts or Commerce graduate cannot become a doctor or engineer although he is qualified for a variety of non-technical and general jobs in education, administration, police and military. In short, a particular degree from a university qualifies a man/ woman to a particular set or category of occupations and vice-versa. Thus, education and occupation place a premium on each other, "the two systems are interlinked since the entry to the occupational system is, in the case of the student youth, conditioned by their choice and performance in the educational system (Gore, 1968). Education has therefore, become the central determinant of the individual's life chances, that is, his opportunities for employment, earning and status" (Chinoy, 1967: 392).

Choice of faculty has a deciding effect on the educational and occupational goals of college students. Faculties such as Arts, Commerce and Science have their own scope for educational and occupational aspirations. For example, an Arts graduate has limited scope for choosing PG courses, whereas a science graduate is qualified to join not only science courses but also arts courses.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A good deal of research has been carried out with regard to the relationship between students' social background and higher education. Sewell and associates (1969, 1970) tested the hypothesis that levels of educational and occupational aspirations of both sexes are associated with the social status of their families, when the effect of intelligence was controlled. B.G.Desai (1967) has made a descriptive study of high school students in Baroda district. The study revealed that a majority of the students came from upper castes, classes and urban background.

M.S.Gore, I.P.Desai and Suma Chitnis (1970) conducted a study on the socioeconomic background of students in 8 states of India. The data showed that there was a differential openness of access to education in terms of one's social background.

M.N.Chitra (1972, 1977) in her thesis: Education, Social Inequality and Social Change in Karnataka, examined the distribution of the utilization of higher education among the various Hindu Castes of Mysore Society and made clear its implications for the social mobility of individuals and groups. Ambarao Uplaonkar (1988) made a study of "Social Background and Occupational Aspirations of College Students". The study revealed that one' social background and occupational aspirations were correlated.

However, there are no empirical studies on student's socioeconomic background and choice of faculties and hence this study is undertaken to examine the significance of faculty to the occupational choice of college students.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are

- To find out whether there is any relationship between respondent's age and faculty – Arts, Commerce and Science courses.
- To know whether there is any relationship between sex and faculty.
- To study if there is any relationship between caste status and faculty.
- To study if there is any relationship between rural-urban background and faculty, and,
- To examine whether there is any relationship between 'socioeconomic status (SES)' and faculty.

## UNIVERSE AND METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Bijapur and Gulbarga cities during 2011-12. Degree college students studying in the final year/ last semester constituted the sample units. Data were collected by administering a structured questionnaire on students at their respective colleges. The investigator first explained the aims and objectives of the study. The students were asked to fill in the questionnaires as per their perceptions. In all one thousand questionnaires – 450 in Bijapur and 550 in Gulbarga were administered. But only six hundred were returned with full details.

## HYPOTHESES

The alternative hypotheses of the study are:

- More number of older students seeks admission to arts courses, while more number of younger students seek admission to Commerce and Science courses.
- More women seek admission to arts than to Commerce and Science course.
- There is an inverse relationship between caste status and faculty status.
- More rural students enroll themselves in Arts than Commerce and Science courses.
- There is a positive correlation between students' SES and faculty status.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Section-1: Socioeconomic and Faculty Profile of the Respondents

Data collected in this regard show that 95 per cent of the respondents were young (21-22 years). It was observed that 40 per cent of the sample was drawn from the forward castes viz., Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Jains and Lingayats. Out of the remaining 60 per cent, 30 per cent each were from backward and SC & ST castes. The sample consisted of more females (54%) than males (46%). A majority (52%) of the respondents were drawn from the cities,

while 35 and 13 per cent were from towns and villages. Urban background of the sample is clearly visible.

The socioeconomic status in terms of parents' education, occupation and income revealed that 36 per cent were from moderate socioeconomic status, while 34 and 30 per cents were from low and high SES background. The data show that the sample is not dominated by any class of people. The respondents' faculty composition shows that 40, 30 and 30 per cents belonged to the Arts, Commerce and Science subjects respectively.

**Section-2: Socioeconomic Background and Choice of Faculty**

There is a close relationship between the respondents' age and faculty. It could be observed that Arts students, who generally come from poorer sections and rural background are older than students from the Commerce and Science faculties. Higher age factor of the Arts students may imply reduced employment chances.

**Table-1**
**Respondents' Faculty by Age**

| Age group (years) | Arts | | Commerce | | Science | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Young (21 – 22) | 228 | 95.0 | 172 | 97.0 | 172 | 94.0 | 572 | 95.0 |
| Older (23-24) | 11 | 5.0 | 6 | 3.0 | 9 | 5.0 | 26 | 4.0 |
| Oldest | -- | -- | -- | -- | 2 | 1.0 | 2 | 1.0 |
| Total | 239 | 100 | 178 | 100 | 183 | 100 | 600 | 100.00 |

$\chi^2 = 5.19$; df = 4 Not significant at 5% level

Data presented in Table-1 show that 95, 97 and 94 per cents of the sample who were from the Arts, Commerce and Science faculties respectively were young – 21-22 years. It means the age factor and faculty are not related with each other. This is perhaps due to expansion of school and college facilities at taluk and village levels. Also government's campaign for universal primary education has made the poorer sections aware of the importance of education. Consequently, students from poorer sections are getting their wards admitted to schools at an early age. The $\chi^2$ test is not significant. The hypothesis proposed in this regard stands rejected.

**2.2 Faculty and Sex**

By and large, women's enrolment in higher education has been inadequate, although there has been considerable improvement over the years. For example, Harsha Gandhar (2005) in his article "Gender Disparity in High Education in Independent India" points out that in 1950-

51, 11 girls per 100 boys enrolled in colleges and universities. However, in 1998-99 there were 66 girls per 100 boys in higher education.

Gandhar also discusses the enrolment pattern of girls in faculties. The data presented in the article show that women's enrolment in 1970-71 per 100 men was 50.2 per cent in Arts as against 21 per cent in Science and 6.2 per cent in Commerce faculties. However, the enrolment of women per 100 males went up to 80.1 in Arts and 55.3 per cent in Science in 1998-99. Sarina Paranjape (1989: 300) points out that women's enrollment in Arts courses was more than in Science courses. The reason was that a greater proportion of women who sought admission in colleges and universities had enrolled in arts and humanities as the courses were conformed to their needs and values. Arts courses ensured degrees rather than employment. Nalini Srivastava (2005) in her article "Empowerment of Women through Higher Education" gives details of women's enrolment by faculty. Data show that in 2002-2003 there were 51.13 per cent of women enrolled in arts faculty, while there were only 19.94 in science faculty. It means women or their parents are more interested in acquiring a degree rather than becoming or making them (women), economically powerful.

**Table-2**
**Respondent's Faculty by Sex**

| Sex | Arts | | Commerce | | Science | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Male | 91 | 38.0 | 100 | 56.0 | 86 | 47.0 | 277 | 46.0 |
| Female | 148 | 62.0 | 78 | 44.0 | 97 | 53.0 | 323 | 54.0 |
| Total | 239 | 100 | 178 | 100 | 183 | 100 | 600 | 100.00 |

$\chi^2 = 13.5$ df = 2 Significant at 1% level

Data presented in Table-2 show that of the Arts students, 38 per cent were males as against 62 per cent females. It is clear that more women than men tend to be in Arts courses. It may mean that 62 per cent of women are likely to be house-wives and/ or likely to take up self-employment or low paid jobs. Similarly 38 per cent of men are likely to look after their family trade/ agriculture and try for petty jobs.

Data with regard to Commerce courses show that there were 56 per cent males, as against 44 per cent females. It means more men than women are employment-minded. These students are likely to take up middle level white collar jobs. Data further show that of the Science students 47 per cent were males whereas 53 per cent were females. The preponderance of females over males goes against the researcher's expectations. It may be due to the fact that women are increasingly seeking white collar jobs. But from the data it could be said a greater proportion of women from Science faculty is competing with men for higher occupations. The $\chi^2$ test has supported the association between sex and choice of faculty.

In conclusion, it may be said that women are keenly competing with men for securing white-collar jobs.

## 2.3 Faculty and Caste

Caste status and higher education had been associated with each other during British rule, as the system of education designed by the British was for the upper class and urban people and not for the poorer and rural people. For example, Srinivas writing about Brahmins says (1962: 51), "They were the first to sense the arrival of new opportunities following the establishment of British rule and left their natal villages for cities such as Bangalore and Mysore in order to obtain the benefits of English education, an indispensable passport to employment under the new dispensation. Studies by sociologists (Manor, 1977; Omveldt, 1973; Irshick, 1969) have shown how the upper castes, who had higher economic status, had seized educational and occupational opportunities.

**Table-3**
**Respondents' Faculty and Castes**

| Caste | Arts | | Commerce | | Science | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Forward | 95 | 40.0 | 100 | 56.0 | 101 | 55.0 | 296 | 40.0 |
| Backward | 72 | 30.0 | 64 | 36.0 | 56 | 31.0 | 192 | 30.0 |
| SC & ST | 72 | 30.0 | 14 | 10.0 | 26 | 14.0 | 112 | 30.0 |
| Total number % to total N | 239 (40) | 100 -- | 178 (30) | 100 -- | 183 (30) | 100 -- | 600 (100) | 100 -- |

$\chi^2 = 38.5$; df= 4 Significant at 1% level

Table-3 reveals that of the Arts students, 40 per cent were from the forward castes, while 30 and 30 per cents came from the backward and SC and ST castes. As per the data, a majority of them are not likely to have higher occupational ambitions – by which is meant, white collar jobs. However, of the forward castes a majority are likely to seek jobs related to business and agriculture. Similarly, the backward and SC and ST castes are likely to join lower level jobs or even face unemployment.

Of the Commerce students, 56 per cent were from the forward castes, while 36 and 10 per cent belonged to the backward and SC & ST castes. It is clear from the data that a greater proportion from the forward castes are found in Commerce courses. On the other hand, the representation of the backward and SC & ST is not adequate. But these data have implications for their future employment potential. A majority of the forward castes may continue PG courses or take to medium level white collar jobs. Similarly, a majority of the backward and SC & ST castes may join middle level white collar jobs. Data with regard to Science students show that a majority (55%) are from the forward castes, while 31 and 14 per cents are from the backward and SC & ST castes. These students are supposed to be ambitious, progressive and

forward looking. A majority of them are likely to take up high level white collar jobs or appear for State or Union Service Examinations.

## 2.4 Faculty and Rural-Urban Background

The rural-urban background of the students is also significantly related to their ambitions, attitudes and values. An individual's basic or childhood socialization shapes his/ her personality. Students' who have spent their childhood (0-16 years) in rural areas are likely to be conservative and averse to change.

Earlier studies (Uplaonkar, 1988; Chitra, 1981) have shown that most college students who came from cities demonstrated higher aspirations. However, in view of government's policy of educational expansion, rural students are seeking admission to colleges. The rural-urban gap is being relatively reduced.

**Table-4**
**Respondents' Faculty and Rural-Urban Background**

| Rural-Urban background | Arts | | Commerce | | Science | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| City | 118 | 50.0 | 102 | 57.0 | 93 | 51.0 | 313 | 52.0 |
| Town | 106 | 44.0 | 48 | 27.0 | 52 | 28.0 | 206 | 35.0 |
| Village | 15 | 6.0 | 28 | 16.0 | 38 | 21.0 | 81 | 13.0 |
| Total | 239 | 100.0 | 178 | 100.0 | 183 | 100.0 | 600 | 100.0 |

$\chi^2 = 30.0$ df =4 Significant at 1% level.

From the data furnished in Table-4, it could be seen that the majority of students from Arts (50%), Commerce (57%) and Science (51%) faculties were born and brought up in the cities. It means, the majority of degree college students hailing from urban background are likely to utilize the benefits of higher education. Data further show 50, 44 and 6 per cents of Arts students were born and brought up in cities, towns and villages, respectively. It means the majority of the Arts students who are from urban background are likely to turn towards traditional occupations such as business and agriculture although the influence of caste, class and political contacts cannot be ruled out.

Of the Commerce sample 57, 27 and 16 per cents were from the city, town and village background, respectively. It could be said that a majority of the Commerce students from the city and town background are likely to plan for higher jobs or start skilled business. But students with the village background are likely to aspire for moderate and low jobs or start semi-skilled trades.

An examination of the Science sample shows that a majority viz., 51 per cent came from cities, while 28 and 21 per cents came from towns and villages. It could be said that the sample pattern conforms to urban background. These indicate that a majority of the sample coming from cities are likely to continue their study for PG courses and plan for higher jobs, appear for class I and II, IAS, IPS and bank jobs. Similarly, a majority of them coming from towns and villages are likely to stop at graduation and look for medium and higher white collar jobs. In short, the occupational and educational plans of Science students vary according to their rural urban background.

## 2.5 Faculty and Socioeconomic Status (SES)

The socioeconomic status of the respondents in terms of their parents' education, occupation and income, plays a significant role in influencing the children's ambitions, plans, values and attitudes of life. Sociologists have shown how parental class status influenced their children's occupational plans (Chopra, 1964). Let us examine whether there is any association between faculty and socioeconomic status.

**Table-5**
**Respondents' Faculty and Socioeconomic Status**

| Socio-economic status | Arts | | Commerce | | Science | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Low | 101 | 42.0 | 48 | 27.0 | 35 | 19.0 | 184 | 30.0 |
| Moderate | 69 | 29.0 | 63 | 35.0 | 71 | 39.0 | 203 | 34.0 |
| High | 69 | 29.0 | 67 | 38.0 | 77 | 42.0 | 213 | 36.0 |
| Total | 239 | 100.0 | 178 | 100.0 | 183 | 100.0 | 600 | 100.0 |

$\chi^2 = 27.8$, df = 4 Significant at 1% level

Data presented in Table-5 clearly show a broad association between socioeconomic status and faculty of the students. It means more students from higher SES have sought admission in the Science faculty. A further analysis of the data shows that 42 per cent of arts students belonged to low SES, while 38 and 35 per cents of Commerce students belonged to high and medium SES, respectively. Similarly, 42 and 39 per cents of Science students were from high and medium SES respectively.

The data indicate that students from moderate and high SES are likely to make use of the benefits of higher education. It may further be observed that despite government's policies to help the weaker sections by expanding educational facilities and providing financial assistance, the disparities do continue in the Indian society. The $\chi^2$ test has supported the association between faculty and SES.

## CONCLUSION

The study was conducted in Gulbarga and Bijapur cities of Karnataka. Final year/ last semester degree college students constituted the sample units. Data were collected by administering structured questionnaires on students in their respective colleges.

The results found that an overwhelming majority of the students from all faculties were young (21-22 years). More girls (62%) than boys (38%) were found in Arts courses, while the representation of boys (56%) was more than that of the girls (44%) in the Commerce faculty. But the representation of girls (53%) was slightly more than that of boys (47%) in the Science faculty. It appears that the gender disparity between faculties is disappearing. An examination of data regarding students' faculty and SES shows that a greater proportion of Arts students came from low SES, while a greater proportion of Commerce and Science students came from medium (38%) and high (42%) SES. It means that medium and high SES are likely to make use of higher education, which has consequences for their occupational aspiration and their potential for higher job recruitment.

To conclude, mere expansion of higher education is not enough for providing equality of opportunity. What is needed is the enhancement of employment potentials of the low SES and SC/ ST students through narrowing of the rich-poor gap, the rural-urban divided and through ensuring quality education being imparted in rural and semi-rural schools.

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