Choice of Faculty And Socio-Economic Profile of College Students: Implications For Their Aspirations

Social Science

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ABSTRACT *The main objective of the paper is to examine whether there is any 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. More poorer, older and rural students are enrolled in Arts than in Science courses. Data were collected by administering a structured questionnaire on the final year/ last semester college students in Gulbarga. 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.*

Introduction

Broadly speaking, the 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 Durkheim (1956) observed "above all the means by society perpetually recreates the conditions of its very existence".

Objectives of the Study

- To find out whether there is any relationship between respondent's age and faculty – Arts and Science & Commerce.
- To know whether there is any relationship between sex (males and females) 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.

Hypotheses

The chief hypothesis is that in view of modernization and government policy of providing facilities to poorer sections, the correspondence between students social background and faculties is considerably breaking down.

1. More young students are seeking admission in colleges regardless of faculty.
2. Although more girls seek admission in Arts courses, nevertheless, a greater proportion of women are enrolling in Science and Commerce faculties,
3. Although higher castes continue to dominate all faculties, the lower castes are keenly seeking admission in Science and Commerce faculties.
4. Although urban students continue to dominate both faculties, but a greater proportion of rural students are found in Science & Commerce faculties.
5. Higher SES students have higher representation in both faculties. Nevertheless, a greater proportion of lower SES students are found in Science and Commerce faculties.

Socioeconomic and Faculty Profile of the Respondents

1. Age Composition

Data collected in this regard show that 95 per cent of the respondents were young (21-22 years), while the remaining 5 per cent were old (more than 22 years). It is clear that an overwhelming majority of the sample was young. The mean age of the sample was 20.21 years and for males and females it was 20.96 and 20.66 years, respectively.

2. Caste

Fifty per cent (50%) of the respondents belonged to forward castes, while rest (50%) belonged to backward castes viz., OBC and SCs and STs.

3. Sex Composition

The sample consisted 54 per cent males and 46 per cent females.

4. Rural-Urban Background

A majority (52%) of the respondents were drawn from Gulbarga, while the remaining 48 per cent were from towns and villages.

5. Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Respondents' socioeconomic status measured in terms of parents' education, occupation and income revealed that 57 and 43 per cents belonged to high and low SES categories, respectively.

6. Faculty Composition

Sixty per cent (60%) of the sample was from Science and Commerce while 40 per cent was from Arts courses. It means Science and Commerce students were in majority.

2.1 Respondents' Age and Faculty

The hypothesis to be tested is that there is a significant difference in the age composition of Arts and Science and Commerce students.

Table-1
Respondents' Faculty by Age

Age group (years)	Arts		Science & Commerce		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Young (21 – 22)	228	95.0	344	95.0	572	95.0
Older (23-24)	11	5.0	17	5.00	28	5.00
Total	239 (40)	100.00 --	361 (60)	100.00 --	600 (100)	100.00 --

χ^2 = 0.00037;df = 1Not sig nificant at 5% level

It could be seen from Table-1 that 95 and 95 per cents of students from Arts and Science and Commerce, respectively were from young age group. It means there was no difference in the age composition of Arts and Science & Commerce faculty. The

χ^2 test also shows that age and faculty are independent of each other. This may be due to greater awareness among poorer sections about the importance of education.

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		Science & Commerce		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	91	38.0	186	52.0	277	46.0
Female	148	62.0	175	48.0	323	54.0
Total	239	100.0	361	100.0	600	100.0

χ^2 = 10.46   df = 1   Significant at 5% level

Data presented in Table-2 reveal that there were more girls (54%) than boys (46%). It means more and more girls students are gaining entry into higher education. Data further show that an overwhelming majority (62%) of Arts students were girls but boys constituted only 38 per cent. It means there is a relationship between sex and faculty. It may mean that more girls want a degree as a status symbol, or they are in colleges only as a past-time activity. Similarly, 38 per cent of boys are interested in acquiring a degree to manage traditional business or agriculture or to prepare for politics. It may be said that a majority of Arts students are likely to maintain status quo. A majority of the girls are likely to be educated house wives.

It could be further observed that a majority (50%) of the Science & Commerce students were males, while less than half of respondents were females. The interpretation is that males are slightly over-represented in Science & Commerce faculties. But the fact that 48 per cent of female students are in Science & Commerce courses shows that females are keenly competing with males. Girls' admission in Science & Commerce courses indicates their aspiration for employment, independent social self and empowerment. The χ^2 test has shown that both variables viz., sex and faculty are associated with each other.

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.

Higher Education since Independence

In conformity with the Constitutional goal of equality, the Government of India expanded schools and colleges to towns and villages. Consequently, a greater proportion of students from the lower castes and classes began to enter colleges and universities. But lower castes and classes are relatively found in greater number in Arts than in Commerce and Science faculties. In modern society, faculties are the main gateways through which occupational mobility is assured.

Table-3
Respondents' Faculty by Castes

Caste	Arts		Science & Commerce		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Forward	95	40.0	201	56.0	296	49.0
Backward	144	60.0	160	44.0	304	51.0
Total	239	100.0	361	100.0	600	100.0

χ^2 = 14.59;   df= 1   Significant at 5% level

In general, 49 and 51 per cents of the respondents were from forward castes such as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Jains and Lingayats and backward castes such as OBCs and SCs & STs, respectively. It is clear that the traditional gap between forward and backward castes in their representation in higher education has reduced to a great extent. It could also be said that the government's efforts to provide equality of opportunity through higher education to weaker sections also is gradually materializing.

It would be further observed that 60 and 40 per cents of Arts students belonged to backward and forward castes respectively. It means backward castes are more represented in Arts courses than forward castes. The interpretation could be that a greater proportion of backward castes are not going to be employed in organized sector. They will have to seek self-employment.

The 40 per cent of forward castes students are also not likely to join white collar jobs. But the forward castes have diversified occupational background. They could be absorbed in any of the occupations, which could fetch reasonable income.

Further observations of the data shows that 56 per cent, a majority of the forward castes, as against 44 per cent of the backward castes have registered in Science & Commerce faculties. Data clearly indicate that although forward castes are more registered in Science & Commerce faculties, the backward caste students are sufficiently represented. It means backward caste students are competing with forward caste students. It may be pointed out that backward caste students are positively responding to the demands of higher education. It may be concluded that the present system of higher education is making scope for backward caste students to qualify themselves for white-collar jobs.

Research Paper

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.

Table-4
Respondents' Faculty by Rural-Urban Background

Rural-Urban background	Arts		Science & Commerce		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
City	118	50.0	195	54.0	313	52.0
Town / village	121	50.0	166	46.0	287	48.0
Total	239	100.0	361	100.0	600	100.0

$\chi^2 = 1.24$ df =1 Not significant at 5% level.

An analysis of the data, as shown in Table-4, shows that there is not much difference in the rural-urban background of the respondents as 52 and 48 percents belonged to city and towns/ villages, respectively. These data give a clue to the findings that there are not much differences in the representation of students in Arts and Science & Commerce faculties on the basis of their place of residence.

From the data in Table-4 it could be seen that 50 and 50 per cents from cities and towns/ villages, respectively, have registered in Arts faculties. It means equal students from cities and towns/ villages are represented in Arts courses. It may be interpreted that although 50 per cent of town/ village students have registered in Arts faculties, they are less likely to enter white-collar jobs due to lack of job perception. On the other hand, the city students have enough job opportunities in cities and are likely to acquire city based jobs.

Data further show that 46 per cent of Science & Commerce students are from towns/ village background. These students will have greater scope for white-collar jobs, including Public Service Commission jobs.

On the other hand, 54 per cent of Science & Commerce students from city background have greater perception of higher education and competitive jobs. It may be concluded that although higher education has provided greater scope for mobility to town/ village students, nevertheless, one's place of residence does make a difference to their perception of aspiration, job and mobility. Interestingly, the χ^2 test has not shown any association between rural-urban background and faculty.

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 was related to children's occupational plans (Chopra, 1964). But since Independence, facilities provided by the government for poor sections as intervention measures have altered the situation. Student's from low SEs are becoming conscious of higher occupational aspirations by enrolling in Science & Commerce faculties.

Table-5
Respondents' Faculty by Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Socio-economic status	Arts		Science & Commerce		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
High	138	58.0	201	56.0	339	57.0
Low	101	42.0	160	44.0	261	43.0
Total	239	100.0	361	100.0	600	100.0

$\chi^2 = 0.258$ df=1, Not significant at 5% level

Data presented in Table-5 show that 57 per cent, a majority, belonged to high SES, while 43 per cent to low. College students continue to be drawn from high SES, but the fact that 43 per cent of them are from low SES is a significant development. This is certainly a change in the social profile of college students.

Data further show that a majority of the students from Arts (58%) and Science & Commerce (56%) are drawn from high SES, respectively. On the other hand, 42 and 44 per cents from Arts and Science & Commerce are from low SES, respectively. It means students from low SES are gradually seeking in employment oriented courses.

The fact that a majority of the Arts and Science & Commerce are from high SES shows that they have broader educational and occupational opportunities. But 42 and 44 per cents from Arts and Science & Commerce faculties, respectively, who are from low SES have fewer chances for higher aspirations.

To conclude, there is some association between SES and faculty.

Summary and Conclusion

The aim of the paper is to examine whether the traditional association between students' socioeconomic background and faculty is breaking down in view of government's measures to help lower SES students with a view of bringing equality of opportunity. The study was conducted in Gulbarga on a sample of 600 students, both boys and girls.