



REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AMONG STUDENT SCHOLARS: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

One of the oldest applications of sociology has been in the field of rural society, as more and more sociologists devoted their attention to the study of regional differences from the sociological point of view. The problem of education in modern societies cannot be over-estimated. Hence, crucial need for the education of the rural masses is strongly felt. It is very fascinating to probe into the intricate realities pertaining to the background, aspirations and achievements of the students coming from rural and urban background in the field of higher education. In all 300 research scholars of Bangalore University drawn from rural and urban areas were studied by employing an interview schedule. Surprisingly, the data consist of 197 student scholars coming from rural areas. The findings seem to negate the much debated and lamented poor levels of representation, aspirations and achievements of rural students in the field of higher education. Further, the findings indicate that the identity of student scholars with rural background has significant and positive implications for gender, faculty, social origin and orientations.

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Introduction:

With the advent of national independence and globalization the problem of rural education has assumed urgent importance and new significance. The free Indian people have set to themselves the task of building up of a democratic, progressive, rational life, which surely cannot be achieved when millions of rural people are illiterate, ignorant and superstitious (Desai, 1969). Education implies the creation of a society free from all forms of inequalities and exploitation and based on individual liberty and social solidarity and co-operation. Thus, education in a given society is viewed as a means to achieve social mobility, to improve one's ascribed status. As every-where, in India too there is a close link between education, occupation and income. This is more so in relation to higher education. It is often believed that higher education can serve the nation by providing highly skilled manpower and advancing the frontiers of knowledge. Hence one of the desired objectives before higher education is to achieve a greater degree of effective equality of opportunity for every talented person, irrespective of the stratum to which he or she belongs.

The reports of the Education Commissions and the deliberations in seminars on higher education contain ample proof in this regard. The most serious concern of them is that our system of higher education has failed to fulfill its desired purpose or the stated goal and that some sort of 'goal displacement' has occurred in this regard. The lot in Indian education is thus ultimately related to the structure of Indian society. J.P. Naik observes, "At the university stage, more than 70 per cent of the seats are taken by the top 5 per cent of the social strata" (1965: 108). Similar views have been expressed by many other researchers (Chitnis, 1974 : 207; Gore, Desai and Chitnis, 1970 : 15-17 ; Kamat, 1978a: 260 ; Kamat, 1978b : 11 ; Kaul, 1974:34-37; Kaul, 1975 : 41 ; Damle, 1975a : 273-274 ; Damle, 1975b : 84 ; Rao, 1975 : 130 ; Mumtaz, 1978 : 4 ; Shukla, 1975 : 78 ; Panchamuki, 1975 : 157 ; Jayaram, 1978a : 185 ; Jayaram, 1977 ; Jayaram, 1978b : 9 ; Palmier, 1975 : 168).

Obviously, admission to colleges and universities is a more attractive alternative to the higher secondary passed entrants than entering the labour force. This is more so because the 'opportunity cost' of higher education, being highly subsidized, is not prohibitive to middle and lower-middle class families. The fact that fees are low and the bulk of financial outlay comes from the State in one form or the other enables a large number of students, who might have decided otherwise against it, to join higher education. Moreover, our government and other employers have a fascination for a university degree even when it has no requirement for the job concerned. Thus, young people join colleges and

universities either because there is nothing else to do, or in the pious hope that a job may be more readily available from the raised platform of a higher degree. Having a high degree may not immediately provide a job, but it improves the scope definitely for getting a job in future. These people are better off than those who have not taken the course at all.

The higher education system, for that matter, has become synonym to university system with its own internal structure and subculture, with its own population divided in different sections. The university education, these days has become quite affordable due to its highly subsidized nature. The concept of private university has not yet reached the Indian shores and all the universities, deemed universities and institutes of excellence are either State government supported or Central Government supported, where education is not charged at cost price rendering it affordable to middle and lower middle class people (Charkaborty, 1985). Further, the provision of scholarships to the students from socially and economically backward sections renders higher education accessible virtually to those at the rock bottoms of society resulting in phenomenal increase in the student strength in the institutions of higher learning. A proportionate increase has been observed in the strength of research students, known as research scholars, research fellows and doctoral students. It is this section of the academic fraternity which occupies a unique position in the academic hierarchy by virtue of their being neither the part of student fraternity nor the faculty. They also occupy the position of marginal men serving as the bridge between the two other sections of academic fraternity. Research has now become such an integral and inherent part of higher education imparted by the universities, that the very structure and division of academic work in the universities is designed to promote its productive existence. This has resulted in a phenomenal increase in the member Ph.D students in the universities world over (Valimma and Westerheijden, 1995; Pearson, 1996; Hockey, 1996; Nakayama and Low, 1997; Parry, 1998; Wright, 2003).

Statement of the problem

The present paper addresses itself to several issues pertaining to higher education in the Indian academic context and the status of research scholars, so widely debated and speculated in academic circles. In doing so, due consideration is given to the gaps in empirical literature and areas that seem to be lacking in empirical coherence and consistencies as evidenced by the existing literature as well as those aspects that could be of immediate applied significance. The paper focuses on the regional differences, background factors, aspirations, orientations and achievements of the university research scholars in the context of academic profession.

Methods and Field

The findings are based on a study of research scholars carried out in Bangalore University, Bangalore, Karnataka. The data are gathered principally through an interview schedule specifically devised to collect the required information. The data gathered were primarily qualitative in nature. The same were quantified by employing suitable coding and scoring techniques rendering the data amenable for statistical analysis. The sample for the present study was drawn following the systematic methods of sampling so as to render the sample studied representative of the universe from which it was drawn. The sample of 300 research scholars was chosen at the first steps. In all there were 197 research scholars were drawn from rural background. Hence, the special attention in this paper is given to study the profile of typical research scholar. Correlation, regression and the chi-square are the statistical measures widely employed in analytical and diagnostic studies involving testing of hypothesis. Chi-square is employed in testing the association between the variables and coefficient of contingent that is, 'C' test, is employed to measure the strength of association. In case of chi-square test, 0.05 level of significance was accepted as statistically significant association at respective degrees of freedom. In short, care was taken to see to it that research methods and statistical measures that could suit best the study in arriving at valid, verifiable and reliable generalizations and findings to enhance their predictive value.

Conceptualization

Conceptualization is an indispensable and a crucial methodological issue that lends standardization and clarity to the process of research, as well as just basis for justification of the findings. It is imperative that every concept and variable used or employed in the study is defined and clarified, as such; these could also be looked upon as the operational definitions of key concepts. Although it may not be possible to define and clarify each and every concept or variable employed in the study, an attempt is made here to conceptualize and operationalize a few important or core variables and concepts employed in the present study.

Rural Urban Background

The information pertaining to the place of birth, place of schooling and place of college education is taken to classify them as of rural and urban background. For classifying the respondents as those with rural and urban background, the respondents who exhibit rural background in two of the above mentioned spheres

are considered as with rural background and the respondents who have been in urban places in two of the above mentioned three areas are considered as with urban background

Social Origin

Social origin is a composite variable employed in this study as a more realistic measure of a respondent's socio-economic background. It is well acknowledged that the status of an individual in any society is no longer unicausal or unidimensional even in the so called traditional societies. With growing societal complexity and trends towards secularization, modernization and liberalization the parameters that determine the status of an individual in society not only have changed but have become multiform. The social status accrues to an individual on the basis of one's possessions commonly valued by the society. Many socio-economic status scales have been evolved incorporating several indices such as occupations, education, caste, landownership, family size, income and the like. But to have a more integrated and more realistic measure of social background limited variables such as caste, occupation, education and income have to be put together and keep other variables constant as distracters. Hence, for the purpose of the present study, a social origin scale has been evolved taking into account the respondents' caste, parental education and family income. Each one of these components have been further graded to ascertain the score of each respondents on each of the components to yield an integrated score to determine their social origin as "high" or "low"

Orientations

There are several other concepts employed in the body of thesis, which are not explained at length here, owing to paucity of space. Those concepts not explained here are explained briefly wherever they are employed.

With this note on the methods, tools and techniques of the study, an attempt is made in the following section to give a detailed account and profile of the field where the study was actually carried out. It is assumed that an exhaustive and detailed account of the field is indispensable to pin the study down to socio-cultural and psycho-physical setting of the study on the context of which the findings and generalizations of the study gain greater relevance and meaning. It may also demarcate the geographical and hence the socio-cultural jurisdiction of the study, to which they are tenable and are tenable to the settings that are similar to the socio-cultural and psycho-physical traits of the setting of the present study.

Student Scholar

The concept of student scholar used in this thesis refers to a research scholar or research student who is working for his Ph.D or doctoral degree in full-time or part time research at a post-graduate department of Bangalore University in Karnataka State. The student scholars included in the study are research oriented and functioning in their respective disciplines under the guidance of able scholars or faculty members of Bangalore University. The term student scholar itself suggests that the research scholars or research students are oriented towards becoming scholars in their respective areas of knowledge in the near future. Hence, these are termed as student scholars by following the model of Merton who termed the medical students as student physicians.

Rural urban background is an important variable in the sociological analysis owing to its implications and conditioning effect on several social traits of individuals. It is assumed to be determining the educational opportunities, attitudes and orientations, life style and consumption habits, aptitudes and dispositions and even the patterns of marriage and fertility. An attempt, hence, is made in this section to analyze the rural-urban background of the research scholars.

It is acknowledged that, to be a research scholar one has to have a relatively higher levels and grades of educational attainments and an innovative and creative aptitude, that are normally assumed to be going with the urban background. However, several empirical sketches have negated this assumption by revealing the fact that, ruralites many a time are more accomplished and committed academicians and professionals. The findings of the present study seem to support the latter view as about two-thirds (65.7 percent) of the respondents studied are from rural background. It may also mean that ruralites are temperamentally better suited for academics rather than for high profile professions, business or entrepreneurship, where urbanites could be having an upper hand. The phenomenon could also be attributed to universalization of primary education, subsidization of higher education as well as the policy of protective discrimination in the areas like educational opportunities and employment. Diverse schemes of scholarships, fellowships and studentships appear to be attracting the students from rural and lower socio-economic sections of the society to taking to research.

Coming to the gender distribution on rural urban lines, the findings support the argument presented in the foregoing pages, that is, the women from urban areas are more prone to be in research than are urban men.

Table-1.1: Rural Urban Background and Gender

Rural Urban Background	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Rural	33 (42.3)	164 (73.9)	197 (65.7)
Urban	45 (57.7)	58 (26.1)	103 (34.3)
Total	78 (100.0)	222 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

$X^2 = 25.50$; d.f. = 1; C = 0.280; Significant at 0.01 level.

The data presented in the table show that a majority (57.7 percent) of the women research scholars are from the urban areas and a significant proportion (42.3 percent) of them are from rural areas. On the other hand, among men research scholars, the proportion of those from rural areas is as high as 73.9 percent and the urban component is just 26.1 percent. This may reinforce the analysis presented earlier that, male urbanites tend to go in search of more prestigious and highly potential professional courses and the ruralites with no resources to afford expensive professional courses tend to take to research as the best alternate. The association between the rural urban background and gender was found to be highly significant with 'C' value being as high as .280.

A much stronger association was found to be existing between the choice of faculty and the rural urban background of the research scholars.

Table-1.2: Faculty and Rural Urban Background

Rural Urban	Faculty					Total
	Natural Science	Social Science	Humanities	Education	Commerce & Management	
Rural	39 (46.4)	106 (76.3)	34 (64.1)	12 (85.7)	6 (60.00)	197 (65.7)
Urban	45 (53.6)	33 (23.7)	19 (35.9)	2 (14.3)	4 (40.00)	103 (34.3)
Total	84 (100.0)	139 (100.0)	53 (100.0)	14 (100.0)	10 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

$X^2 = 23.38$; d.f. = 4; C = 0.269; Significant 0.1 level.

Among those pursuing Ph.D in natural sciences, the urbanites are in majority (53.6 percent) whereas among those pursuing Ph.D in social sciences, ruralites are in overwhelming majority (76.3 percent). The composition is almost similar even in case of humanities with 64 (64.1) percent of them being with rural background and 36 (35.9) percent being from urban background. However, in case of other single discipline faculties considered to be of applied significance, the ruralites were in majority. Hence, the situation could be representing a state of transition with earlier stereotyping fast becoming obsolete or becoming no longer tenable with ruralites taking to scientific research of applied nature as well as challenging research in other areas of specialization. The association between the choice of faculty and rural urban background was found to be statistically significant at 0.01 level with 'C' value being quite high at 0.269.

Further, a very close association was found between the social origin and the rural urban background, which is in tune with the findings discussed in the foregoing pages.

Table-1.3: Social Origin and Rural Urban Background

Social Origin	Rural Urban Background		Total
	Rural	Urban	
Low	168 (85.3)	40 (38.8)	208 (69.3)
High	29 (14.7)	63 (61.2)	92 (30.7)
Total	197 (100.0)	103 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

$\chi^2 = 68.63$; d.f. = 1 ; C = 0.431 ; Significant at 0.01 level.

The data presented in the table clearly indicate that, the student scholars from rural areas or rural background quite often tend to be from lower social origin and on the contrary, those from urban background tend to be from higher social origin. Among the rural respondents overwhelming majorities (85.3 percent) are from lower social origin and only 15 (14.7) percent are from high social origin. It is further evident that among those from urban background only 39 (38.8) percent are with low social origin and the remaining 61 (61.2) percent are from higher social origin. Viewed in the light of the earlier findings, it may be stated that, the student scholars are mainly drawn from rural men and urban women, that is, those who join from urban areas are more often women and those coming from rural areas are men. As such, it may also be stated that,

urban men and rural women are under represented. Here, the under representation of urban men may be by choice, that is the urban men not willing to take to research, but on the contrary, in case of rural women, the situation could be quite different, that is, rural girls are denied of opportunities, do not receive encouragement and support to take to higher education leading to highest academic degrees. In support of this, the association between the two was found to be quite significant with 'C' value being as high as 0.431.

With regard to the other background variables the analysis reveals that those coming from rural background are more prone to be ideologically oriented than their urban counterparts.

Table 1.4: Orientations and Rural Urban Background

Orientations	Rural Urban Background		Total
	Rural	Urban	
Ideological	55 (27.9)	12 (11.7)	67 (22.3)
Intrinsic	66 (33.5)	36 (34.9)	102 (34.0)
Instrumental	76 (38.6)	55 (53.4)	131 (43.7)
Total	197 (100.0)	103 (100.0)	300 (100.0)

$X^2 = 11.45$; d.f. = 2 ; C = 0.192, Significant at 0.01 level.

It may be observed from the table, that true to the general way of life and approach, the student scholars from urban background tend to be more instrumental in their orientations (53.4 percent) than their rural counterparts. On the other hand, the proportion of those who are ideologically orientated is twice as much among student scholars from rural background (27.9 percent) than it is among those from urban background (11.7 percent). The association between the orientation and rural urban background is statistically being significant at 0.01 level. Similar trend could also be observed with regard to the social origin of the respondents with those coming from lower social origin being more prone to be ideologically oriented (20.4 percent) than those with higher social origin (17.1 percent). Further, owing to their socio-economic status constraining them to strive for a steady income through employment, those from low social origin were relatively more prone to be instrumentally oriented than those from higher social origin with better socio-economic status. It may also be observed

that, those from higher social origin tend to value the intrinsic satisfaction they derive from recognition, appreciation from research they do than do those from lower social origin.

Achievements

The achievement levels of the respondents focused in this section pertain to the accomplishments of the respondents as student scholars in their research career and as such, they pertain primarily to their academic achievements. The indicators of achievements taken to ascertain the level of the achievements of the student scholars were the number of research paper published, number of conferences seminars and workshops attended, number of training courses attended, acquisition of additional skills, knowledge and technical know how, gaining mastery over subject and methodology, qualifying through tests of proficiency, passing exams and courses and the like. Taking the performance of research scholars on all these parameters, they were classified as belonging to three categories of achievement such as "high", "moderate" and "low".

The data also reveal that the scholars had knowledge of working in other research projects as well, in addition to their own research programme. About half (49.7 percent) of the respondents had such experience. An equal proportion (51.7 percent) of the research scholars was confident about their mastery over it. As such, the type of research they had embarked upon, according to a majority (76.6 percent) of the student scholars, was applied or policy oriented as well as combination of applied and basic or pure.

Based on their scores on these variables, the scholars were graded in terms of their academic achievements as those belonging to 'high', 'moderate' and 'low' level of achievement. The findings so arrived at indicate that much against what was found in the case of aspirations the student scholars had modest achievements. It is quite logical to note that, achievements do not always commensurate with the aspirations or ambitions. Aspirations normally represent the highest position a person can think of acquiring and in reality the achievements lag far behind what one aspires. Further, in a competitive world the opportunities are few and aspirants are many and in case of quite a few, aspirations remain aspirations unfulfilled. In view of this, only a small proportion, that is, one fourth (24.6 percent) of the research scholars exhibiting high level of achievement appears to be logical. The data indicate that 30 percent of the student scholars had achievements that could be termed as low and the remaining about 45 (45.4) percent of the student scholars had moderate levels of achievement. Further, a wide gap between levels of aspirations and achievements could be a

cause for concern as it could lead to a sense of frustration or resignation that could in turn have negative implications for the process and progress of research. However, looking at the negative association between the span of research career as well as stage of research and level of aspiration, we may state that, by the time they reach the final stage of research, having spent four to five or even six years at research, the aspiration level would have come down and in view of thus, the gap between the aspiration and achievement may not be of alarming consequences. Nevertheless, the fact that efforts need to be made to encourage the research scholars to reach higher levels of achievement can not be lost sight of.

As stated in the foregoing lines, the study further seeks to ascertain the factors that could hold the key in determining the levels of achievement among the research scholars. As was the case with the level of aspiration, the analysis indicates that several variables relating to the personal background of the student scholars were not of much significance in determining the level of their achievement. Age as a personal trait was found to be not significantly associated with the achievement. Contrary to what could be expected, it is the younger student scholars who had a lower proportion (26 percent) of those with lower achievement than was the case with their elder counterparts (33.9 percent). However, in terms of higher achievement, the elder scholars were marginally better off (26.0 percent) than the younger scholars to (23.1 percent). Further, with regard to gender, female scholars were a shade better achievers (28.2 percent) than were the male scholars (23.5 percent). As could be expected, the married scholars, though in small number, appeared to be with lower levels of achievement (20.5 percent) than the unmarried scholars (25.7 percent). Thus, it may be stated that, the level of achievement varies independent of the personal traits of student scholars.

Coming to the background variables, the analysis reveals again that, as has been the case with aspirations, the rural urban background is not of much consequence so far as the level of achievements are concerned. However, as expected, those from urban background are higher achievers than are their rural counterparts. The proportion of those with low achievement was higher at 32 percent among those from rural background compared to 25 (25.2) percent among the urbanites. Conversely, the proportion of high achievers was higher (31.1 percent) among urbanites as compared the corresponding proportion (21.9 percent) among ruralites. Similarly, the social origin was found to be not significantly associated with achievement level, though scholars from high social origin were relatively better off (27.9 percent) than those from lower social origin (22.6 percent).

It was also observed that, the rural urban background of the research scholars had nothing to do with the level of aspirations among them. It is normally assumed that young, male unmarried urbanites have higher aspirations in life. But the findings indicate, though not categorically, that it is female and rural respondents who are marginally better off in terms of level of aspirations. Further, it was noted that the research scholars, with rural and urban background had similar level of commitment to research though, research scholars from urban background (49.8 percent) tended to be a little better equipped in terms of commitment than those from rural background (37.7 percent). However, level of commitment was not found to be significantly associated with age, gender and rural urban background.

Conclusion

It could be stated the rural research scholars possess some great qualities conducive to the field of research as they are more humble, committed, patient, compatible and faithful. The findings of the study seem to indicate that the rural research scholars are found to be influenced by the background aspect such as gender, social origin and faculty. It is the male rather than the female research scholars are more prone to be in the field of research. It could be stated that, male urbanites tend to go in search of more prestigious and highly potential professional courses and the ruralites with poor social background tend to take to research as the best alternate. In consonance with this finding, it is also found that the under representation of urban men may be by choice, that is the urban men not willing to take to research, but on the contrary, in case of rural women, the situation could be quite different, that is, rural girls are denied of opportunities, do not receive encouragement and support to take to higher education leading to highest academic degrees. Coming to deal with faculty, more and more rural research scholars have chosen Social Sciences and Humanities for their research purposes. Hence, the situation could be representing a state of traditional with earlier with ruralites taking to social research of applied nature as well as challenging research in other areas of specialization. Further, owing to their socio-economic status constraining them to strive for a steady income through employment, those from low social origin were relatively more prone to be instrumentally oriented than those from higher social origin with better socio-economic status. It may also be observed that, those from higher social origin tend to value the intrinsic satisfaction they derive from recognition, appreciation from research they do than do those from lower social origin.

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