

Education, Elites and Public Sphere: Exploring Inequality and Change in Bikaner

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Abstract: *This paper aims to examine the contemporary dynamics of the educational field and its relation with the wider public sphere in Bikaner town of Rajasthan. Existing researches have focused on educational development mainly in rural areas and hence there is a lack of such research in urban contexts. This study looks at how this relationship between the education field and the public sphere is mediated by the status and role of elites in such urban locations. The initial growth of educational institutions in princely towns corresponds to the social and economic changes happening in the city. The institutionalization of public education in the post-independence period contest and complicate the relation between elites, public sphere, and education. This study, based on empirical research, shows that elites tended to control the public sphere in colonial Rajasthan and it is only with public education in the post-independence period that this sphere has acquired a democratic character. Besides, it would also examine the position of the field of education in the larger field of power of Bikaner town to map the changes in the elite structure as well. It concerns with position and role of traditional elites in the changing educational field and to what extent they can shape and control the dynamics of the contemporary public sphere in Bikaner's context.*

Keywords: Elites, social reproduction, public sphere, educational field, social closure.

Introduction

It was a broad consensus among the political class in the post-independence period that establishing modern educational institutions would aid in

promoting new libertarian values and create an educated workforce. The key words during the post-independent period politics were 'planning', 'self-reliance', 'democratic space', and 'nation-building'. Translated into policy decisions, this collective national dream meant to build modern educational institutions like Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) and dams, science centres and so on. Similarly, educational institutions were aimed to create a democratic public sphere where individuals could participate with free will and dignified social identities. These institutions were laid upon the ideal of social mobility for marginal social groups. Political scientist Sisson has argued in his work on political formation in Rajasthan that political parties and voluntary associations helped in contributing to the democratic public sphere in feudal Rajasthan. In the Indian context, the education system, established after independence, has been an important field for the creation of the public sphere as well as the reproduction of cultural privileges (Kumar 1985). With the opening of educational institutions many social groups gained social and cultural capital which was earlier unavailable to them. Post - 1990s neoliberal policies had its impact on the education system in India. With the broader transformation in information technology and communication, the onset of social media and privatization of various institutions, education as a field began to be perceived differently and to achieve different objectives. Instead of self-reliance and educating Indian citizens, the state and market had shifted its aim to open itself to foreign capital and gradual initiation of disinvestment policies. With the aid from the World Bank, foreign universities started opening their campuses across various cities in India. It is in this period we start hearing the narrative of the failure of government schools, their infrastructural unpreparedness, absenteeism of students and teachers and overall decline. This also provided both material and cultural contexts for the directing middle classes and masses ideologically towards the new model of privatization of education. It laid the ground for perspectival hegemony and superiority of private capital and simultaneous crisis in public education. We saw the changes in the education structure with the coming of Right to education, private universities bill, budgetary cuts for education, especially for higher education as the state seems to be focused only on primary education. This paper takes a closer look at deliberative popular terrain to examine the relationship between educational development, elite structure, and the public sphere in Rajasthan.

The case of Rajasthan is important to understand this link between the education system, the public sphere, and the power structure. The state of Rajasthan was formed after the merger of 22 principalities and chiefdoms

in different stages. Very few states gave any attention to the development of modern education institutions and even fewer made any sincere attempt to improve the social condition of their citizens. Thus, the general picture of Rajasthan at the time of independence was of 'backward economy', 'hierarchical society', 'feudal polity' and that of low in educational prospects. The legacy of Rajput kinship-led princely rule had deep influences in the establishment of several modern institutions. Even with the emergence of western - educated middle class in central India, no such major change was noticed in the case of Rajasthan. Particularly interesting is the development of the education system to analyze social changes in the Rajasthan society i.e. in the context of women education, attempts by marginalized social groups to gain literacy and socio-political empowerment (Ramachandran 2001). The pace of education development had also altered the erstwhile political environment of subservience and patronage - based on the princely and feudal rule to a more market - based structure of politics and economic worldview. This paper analyses the social changes of the elite structure by taking education as a domain of the public sphere.

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on theoretical insights on concepts such as 'field of power' and 'public sphere'. In order to understand process of social inequality and reproduction of power relations, it is instructive to look into these conceptual formulations while engaging empirically. Studies on the field of power and education have differed (Khan 2012) in raising questions regarding the unit of the power structure of modern societies, either the focus is on individual control of resources (inspired by Weber) or at structural relations of domination (Marx). The existing scholarship on elite studies has debated that whether to define 'elites' in terms of *individuals*' control over resources or *positions* within the power structure (Khan 2012: 362, emphasis added). These conventional approaches were challenged by Bourdieu in his analysis of elite schools as key institutions in the field of power (Bourdieu 1996). Bourdieu claims that social inequalities are legitimated by the educational credentials held by those in dominant positions (Bourdieu 1996). This enables higher elites to maintain their dominant position in society. Also important to understand that the entry of low caste persons into the education system would make the system look more representative and hence would decrease the chances of any systematic revolts. Pierre Bourdieu's sociology helps us in understanding the role of social resources to convert educational credentials into the class position and vice-versa.

With this question in mind, Bourdieu shifted his focus, in the context of French society, on the way the dominant class reproduces itself. While classical elite theorists, pluralists debated on the nature of elite, typology, etc., Bourdieu was concerned with what resources (Bourdieu's term is 'capital') these dominant classes employ to strengthen their position in the 'field of power' (Bourdieu 1996). 'Capital' for Bourdieu means actual or possible resources which can be classified into three major forms (economic capital, cultural capital and social capital) and each can be converted into other forms depending on the respective field. These different forms of capital, in turn, provide different forms of power. Similarly, by 'field' Bourdieu means 'a network, configurations of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 97). Thus, these 'objective relations' between positions are determined by the structure of distribution of capital among various agents and institutions which decide their access to different powers and profits (ibid.) Bourdieu's differentiation of 'field' based on different 'forms of capital' and the processes of maximizing calls for a more nuanced understanding of diversified power structure (Bourdieu 1996). His field approach argues for an objective understanding of relations of domination. In his work on *The State Nobility*, Bourdieu defines 'field of power' as 'a field of forces structurally determined by the state of the relations of power among different forms of capital' (Bourdieu 1996:264).

Thus, the *field of power* is a space where 'agents' and 'institutions' compete with their different capitals (economic, social and cultural) for the dominant positions within the fields (ibid). It is not just about the struggle for controlling the maximum amount of capital but importantly also to influence and 'determine the relative value of the different forms of power that can be wielded in the different fields' (ibid: 265). Bourdieu makes it very clear that the struggle is also about monopolizing the '*dominant principle of domination*' (ibid, emphasis original). In other words, within the field of power, various agents struggle to occupy a dominant position both objectively and symbolically. Bourdieu observes that the structural 'differentiation and autonomization' are crucial processes within which fields diversify and along with fields the forms of capital (Bourdieu 1996: 265). Therefore, the comparative understanding of the logics of respective subfields aids in developing the overall picture of the fields of power. It also aids in challenging the tendency of soft-functionalism prevalent in mainstream discourses of education. This objective understanding is related to the symbolic value (not conscious) that leads to acts of social discrimination, which are systematically invisible to the naked eye.

To relate the above discussion broadly dealing with Bourdieu's framework of approaching inequality, capital and structural differentiation of societies, with public sphere can be interesting. The question raised by Jurgen Habermas on the other hand is related to the social and political conditions for the making of democratic culture. His theory of public sphere deals with the historical possibility, in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, of an institutional space where individuals engage in rational-critical debate with each other without bringing in their respective social and economic statuses into the scene (Habermas 1989). His theory of public sphere has to do with normative aspects as well as actual history. In this way Habermas actually extends his arguments on modernity by describing the public sphere as an autonomous realm of political reasoning and discussion (Habermas 1989). Conceptually then, he demarcates the public sphere as a distinct arena from state and economy which gets conflated as one in many popular theorizations (for more details see Calhoun 1996). Based on this brief description this paper takes the case of education field in Bikaner city of Rajasthan to raise questions related to elites, public sphere and field of power.

Methodology of the Study

This paper draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'field of power' and Habermas's popular conception of public sphere. While field of power would allow comprehending the structural linkages of different sectors of society i.e. economy, polity, academy, culture, and art in a given town or city. The 'public sphere' would help us in understanding how education sphere remains embedded in wider field of power and manages to gain semi-autonomy with the emergence of democratic politics. Bourdieu's concept of the field of power also helps us to understanding the contemporary nature and character of the public sphere in Rajasthan. Bourdieu's work on different and interconnected fields and dimensions of capital has been empirically operationalized to capture approach the diversity of elites and different 'fields of power' (both individuals and their institutions). The city was divided into three main domains of power, economic, political and socio-cultural, and from each domain, 35 individuals were identified based on the positional (e.g. whether they hold any position in institution or organization) and reputational (what is the perception of other individuals about them) parameters. For this chapter, field data related to the education domain has been utilized. After the mapping of the field, data collection included – archival work from Rajasthan State Archives-Bikaner, government reports

on education, semi-structured interviews with academic elites located in college, university and school; and social histories of institutions.

The Context of Educational Development in Rajasthan

Historically speaking there are no written records that show that any kind of public education was encouraged under the Rajput rule in Rajasthan, then called 'Rajputana'. There are mentions of several poets and bards in the court who recited the acts and deeds of their respective rulers and mainly emphasized the genealogies of the princely rulers. These poets & bards were patronized and appreciated by rulers for their literary pursuits. The archival records tell us that in the Rajasthan then the temples, *gurukuls*, and *pathshalas* run by Brahmins and Jains were the only places for some kind of religious education in different parts of the state. Again, these places were open to their respective caste members.

With the onset of Mughals in India, separate schools for Hindus and Muslims began to be established, with teaching Hindi-Sanskrit and Urdu respectively. These were known as 'Pathshalas' and 'Madarsas'. Ajmer, for instance, was known for being a centre of Muslim education and learning. During the Mughal rule, several schools were established in Ajmer for spreading Islamic education (*dargah schools*) and teachings through Persian languages. It is this form of teachings along with caste and religious education reserved mainly for Brahmins and Baniyas that was known as indigenous education when Britishers entered into treaties with Rajput rulers in 1818 (Jain 1996). Princely rulers founded several schools in their respective states and cities; Brahmins were mostly appointed as teachers. These schools were revived and modernized during the British paramountcy in Rajputana. With the introduction of English education by East India Company, various changes occurred in the educational field in Rajasthan. On the one hand, education gradually became open for all the social groups instead of traditional upper castes, it also brought modern values of equality, scientific temper and appropriate channel to modern professions such as teaching and judiciary. Christian missionaries played their part in spreading English education in the state of Rajasthan. After the signing of the treaty the region which came under direct British rule, Ajmer-Merwara became the first such location where Britishers established modern educational institutions. The first modern school was opened at Ajmer in May 1819 by Jabez Carey, a Baptist missionary (Powlett 1874).

Table 1: Indigenous Schools in 19th century Rajasthan

District	Schools	Number of students
Ajmer	99	1434
Alwar	101	1351
Jaipur	110	2598
Jodhpur	94	2426
Merwar	14	272

Source: Rajasthan State Gazetteer, Vol. IV (Govt. of Rajasthan 1996: 195)

Apart from Britishers and princely rulers, some other private business and cultural groups had also established educational institutions in Rajasthan. One of the early such institutions was Arya Samaj Educational Society in Ajmer founded in 1883. Initially established as a school financed by this society, later it was converted into D.A.V. College. Similarly, in Pilani the Birla Educational Trust started a school in 1901 and it contributed immensely to the education for the larger society. Lately, even this school became Birla post-graduate and Engineering College. It has successfully developed a network of various institutions and has been the foremost educational institution in the state of Rajasthan. In other words, before the 1850's there were no major organized efforts to establish educational institutions in the various states. Private interests led by Brahmins, Marwaris, and Christian missionaries were the few groups who could lay the foundation. Even though these institutions were located in big states and the smaller states lacked that infrastructure to invest in the field of education. One can identify three broad levels through which social groups have engaged with education in Rajasthan's recent past.

First is the princely engagement for their children to educate with modern education with the establishment of modern schools and colleges i.e. Mayo College in Ajmer, Maharaja College & Maharani College in Jaipur. The origin of Mayo College, one of the oldest Public Schools in the country, dates back to 1869, when Col F K M Walter, the Political Agent of the Bharatpur Agency recommended a school in India (Powlett, 1874). In 1870, Lord Mayo, the then Viceroy and Governor - General, came to Ajmer, wherein a Darbar, before the Chiefs of the ruling Princes of Rajputana, he expressed his desire to set up a 'Raj Kumar College' in Ajmer, "devoted exclusively to the education of the sons of Chiefs, Princes and leading Thakurs." It is interesting to point out that several generations of the descendants of many presents at that Darbar have since continued to study

at Mayo College. The College was opened in October 1875, with Sir Oliver St. John as the first Principal and one boy, Maharaja Mangal Singh of Alwar. In the year 1875, Richard Bourke, 6th Earl of Mayo, founded the school. The Main Building was completed in 1885. Some of the greatest changes in the school were brought about by Mr. Stow who was the Principal from 1931-1943 (Sehgal 1972). In the same year, the Viceroy ceased to be the President of the General Council. This body was in the future presided over by a ruling Prince elected by the council (ibid.). It also helped the princely rulers to organize their states with the modern administration and specialized bureaucracy. Thus, even though they had formed several assemblies in their respective states, the overall control remained in the hands of Maharajas. It is through these elite educational institutions that the upper class could gain access to modern professions and also reorganize and reproduce their domination.

The second level is regarding the engagement of communities and social groups in Rajasthan with the educational institutions. It began primarily during the nationalist movement. Western - educated leaders took the command to mobilize people against the princely autocratic rules. With the spread of modern education and the emergence of modern professions like education, law, medicine, a new social sphere, and economic structure was in the making, which could lay the grounds for the middle class to be born. Most of the beneficiaries of the western education came primarily from the Hindu upper castes males i.e. Brahmins, Baniyas.

Thirdly, with the process of independence and merger of various principalities into the union of Rajasthan, a structure of public education, with government schools and colleges (even though limited mainly to elites and middle classes) was established. The establishment of schools and colleges by the Government of Rajasthan for educating the masses increased the literacy rates, even though the rates remain very low in comparison with other Indian states. These educational institutions also became an important aspect for the public sphere. For instance, Kota has become a major hub of engineering and medical education in Rajasthan. Similarly, many erstwhile agrarian communities and several Scheduled Tribes population have gained social mobility through education and entered into government employment.

With the paradigm shift towards the privatization and neoliberal policies, the state has also changed its engagement with the education system. It is no surprise as to what has been proposed under the new model called PPP (Public-Private Partnership) and in the name of creating new schools, literally called 'model schools', many of the government schools have been

shut down¹. Finally, my aim in this chapter is to look broadly at two levels, the scenario at the state level and in Bikaner's specific context, where the regional structures of domination become visible.

Education in Contemporary Rajasthan: A Brief overview

The backwardness of Rajasthan in access to basic education and water resources has been narrated over and over again in the last 50 years. Almost any discussion on educational access and educational backwardness of Rajasthan invariably begins (and often unfortunately ends) with stories of unequal access, the persistence of caste prejudices and the situation of women and girls. These snapshots of the situation on the ground are often used to argue for more investment in the education of lower caste girls and boys. It has been also used to make a case for privately funded institutes of education in Rajasthan. In spite of its considerable progress in the last 50 years especially in providing primary schools within one to three km radius. Yet, it remains one of the most difficult regions of India to ensure universal access to basic education. Even though the government of Rajasthan has also come up with schemes like *Shiksha Aapke Dwar* 2001 (Education at your door) which aims to achieve primary education levels across all the districts, the actual attainment has been quite low. The crisis in education is especially apparent in the four BIMARU states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh – with 445.1 million of India's 1.2 billion population and some of the lowest literacy rates in the country, according to Census 2011. Bihar had a literacy rate of 61.8%, Rajasthan of 67.1%, Uttar Pradesh of 67.7% and Madhya Pradesh a rate of 70.6% in 2011, lower than the all-India average of 74%. Kerala has a literacy rate of 94%, the highest in the country. According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate was 66.11 percent in Rajasthan, out of which the male literacy rate was 79.19 & and the female literacy rate was the country's lowest at 52.12 %. While in 2001 census, the literacy rate in Rajasthan stood at 60.41 percent of which the male and the female were 75.70 percent and 43.85 percent literate respectively. Likewise, the state also lags behind many other states in teachers' education and medical education.

Table 1 shows the low rates of literacy in the state of Rajasthan, even though there has been an increase in the average rates, it is quite slower in the case of females. Both in urban and rural areas the rates were extremely low. Over the years with the establishment of various schools and colleges, the network of education has improved in Rajasthan. By the end of 2001,

Rajasthan had more than 65,000 government schools and over 17,000 Rajiv Gandhi *pathshalas*.

Table 2: Growth of Literacy in Rajasthan, 1901-2011 (in percentage)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1901	06.42	00.21	03.47
1911	06.24	00.30	03.41
1921	05.78	00.42	03.25
1931	07.01	00.60	03.96
1941	09.36	01.16	05.46
1951	13.09	02.51	08.50
1961	23.71	05.84	18.12
1971	28.74	08.46	22.57
1981	36.30	11.42	30.11
1991	54.99	20.44	38.55
2001	75.70	43.90	60.41
2011	79.20	52.10	66.11

Source: Census of India 2011

The provisional data of Census 2011 for Rajasthan shows that the districts of Churu and Barmer experienced negative growth in literacy. While Churu's literacy rate has fallen from 67.59% to 67.46%, Barmer reported a much higher drop from 58.99% to 57.49%. Jalore had the lowest literacy rate in the state at 55.58%. The highest male literacy was reported in Jhunjhunu district at 87.88% followed by Kota (87.65%) and Jaipur (87.27%). Pratapgarh reported the lowest male literacy at 70.13%. Of the 33 districts, only 12 managed to register the male literacy rate above the state average of 80.51%. Kota, country's coaching hub, registered the highest female literacy rate at 66.32% followed by Jaipur (64.33%) and Jhunjhunu (61.15%) while Jalore scored the lowest with 38.73%. In 2001, the national literacy rate was 64.83 percent while that of Rajasthan was 60.41%. In 2011, the state fared below expectations with the average literacy rate of 67.06 percent compared to the national average of 74.04 percent. Again in the case of the male literacy rate, the state was ahead of the national average in 2001 by 0.44 percent, but in 2011, it fell short of the national average by 1.63%. Kota was the sole district to register a higher literacy rate at 77.48%. Even though the urban-rural gap in literacy rates

have decreased from 27.3% in 2002 to 24.9% in 2011, the rural literacy rate in Rajasthan is still quite low at 61.44 % in comparison to the urban regions, 79.68 percent.

Table 3: Literacy Rates in Major Cities of Rajasthan

City	Literacy Rate
Jaipur (M. Corp)	83.33
Jodhpur (UA)	80.19
Kota (M. Corp)	82.80
Bikaner (M. Corp)	79.29
Ajmer (UA)	86.37
Udaipur (UA)	89.52
Bhilwara (M CI)	82.20
Alwar (UA)	85.29
Ganganagar (UA)	82.06
Sikar (UA)	75.73

Source: Census of India 2011

Also interesting to note is the regional disparities in literacy rates in Rajasthan. For instance, districts closer to national capital region i.e. Alwar, Jaipur, Jhunjunu and Sikar (except Kota) have much higher literacy rates (above 70%) than districts located on the India's border with Pakistan i.e. Jaisalmer, Barmer, Jalor and Sirohi and few southern districts bordering Gujarat (literacy rates less than 60%).

Table 4: Educational Institutions in Rajasthan, 2011-12

Institutions	Number
Primary & Pre-Primary Schools	49642
Upper Primary	40602
Senior Secondary & Secondary	24127
Colleges	1422
State Universities	17
Deemed Universities	08
Private Universities	14

Source: Basic Statistics Rajasthan, 2013; UGC Lists of recognized Universities

Education and Public Sphere in Bikaner

Historically speaking, education was traditionally imparted mainly through religious institutions (by priestly class) and schools were established by mercantile communities for commercial training. The purpose of these community and caste specific educational institutions in Rajasthan was to train one's own younger generation for the future instead of democratic dialogue and developing critical rationality. The progress of modern educational institutions is quite slow in the case of Bikaner as compared to other ex-princely states like Jaipur, Jodhpur, Ajmer, etc. As mentioned earlier the education remained the preserve of elites in Bikaner. Hence the education was not primarily the arena for laying the foundation of the public sphere in Habermasian sense. Political mobilizations and the domain of electoral politics opened the space for the interaction among different sets of caste and social groups. The efforts to create an education system that could cater to the needs of all the social groups are primarily of the early nineteenth century period. During the colonial period, many public schools were opened for the educational training to create a bureaucratic class. A Hindi and Urdu school was started at Bikaner in 1872. In 1883, the Darbar Primary School was opened. Darbar School hardly catered to the needs of non-princely castes and lower caste groups. The number of state schools in Bikaner state was 29 in 1887, 43 in 1911 and 60 in 1918. The state has passed the Compulsory Primary Education Act as early as 1928. With the coming of this Act, public schools were bound to welcome students from various social groups. The cost of institutional arrangement was divided between the Bikaner government and the municipality. The following are the important figures of education in Bikaner state.

Table 5: Educational Institutions in the Princely State of Bikaner

Year	No. of State Schools	No. of Teachers	No. of Students	Expenditure (Rs.)
1897-98	29	49	1606	18125
1911-12	43	96	3056	62040
1918-19	60	169	3512	84299
1920-21	74	205	5238	14162
1925-26	71	211	4795	138735
1930-31	108	328	7701	241537
1935-36	122	386	9361	292357

Source: *Rajasthan District Gazetteers*, Bikaner 1972, p. 342.

Not just these state schools, there was an upsurge in private schools as well in Bikaner state during the 1940s. It is in the 1920s that Educational Directorate was established in Bikaner by the princely government. In this context, Dungar College and BJSR Jain College gain popularity as they actively became the destination of the political elites of the city. During the course of the fieldwork, it was reported by several respondents who had studied in these colleges and who described the social history of these institutions. These accounts of educational development also tell us about the scope and nature of the public sphere in Bikaner's society. Education struggled to become the principal socio-spatial site for political negotiations and mostly remained a preserve of the elites and middle classes. Interestingly the education sphere in Bikaner continued to be an aspirational space for wider sections of the society. Schools and colleges became the sphere for the news, talks, opinions, careers and so on. Due to the structural connections of school and college administration with the wider government institutions, it became the sphere where some of the democratic processes were configured.

Dungar Government College, Bikaner

The government Dungar College of Bikaner in its childhood was known as *The Darbar School*. It was started in 1837 by the then ruler of Bikaner State, Dungar Singh. After his demise, his brother Ganga Singh elevated the Darbar School to Dungar Memorial College on 25 September 1912. College - level teaching started in 1928. In the year 1937 degree classes started in the college and in the same year the school was separated from the college with the name of *Sardul School*. In July 1940, intermediate Science Faculty started with Physics and Chemistry subjects. In 1942, Degree level Science, law classes and post - graduate Departments of Hindi, Sanskrit, English, History, and Economics were opened. In the year 1951, there were only five post-graduate colleges in Rajasthan. Dungar College was one of them. In 1962, the college shifted from Sardul school premises to its present building. Postgraduate teaching in physics and Chemistry started in the same year. In 1970, classes in Zoology, Botany and law faculty were started. The college enjoyed the privilege of being the only college of Rajasthan, where postgraduate studies in law being pursued. The college extended its academic growth with postgraduate teaching in Geography, Sociology, Economics, Geology, and Urdu departments. From 1988-1995 the college was given the status of an autonomous college. In the session 1996-97, the commerce faculty was

started in the college. The conversation with a senior faculty from this college provides a synoptic view of the changes that have happened in the functioning of the college. According to one such respondent, Dungar College has been the centre of town politics since its inception. All the major politicians of the town had their schooling from Sardul School of the old city and graduation from Dungar College. In the last two-three decades, the social composition of the college students and faculties has changed drastically. Due to the growing social awareness and social transformation in the countryside, many of the backward castes have started entering such educational institutions. As one of my respondents² opines, who is a senior lecturer in Dungar college, 'this college present-day form has been dominated by Jat students and also Jat teachers and has become the hotbed of the caste conflict between Jats and other upper castes'. This statement also reflects the larger issue of how far educational institutions could contribute towards the representation of traditionally backward groups. Bikaner's experience of government colleges shows that more than these normative aspects, the educational sphere represents these issues of local caste relations and power equations.

BJS Rampuria Jain College, Bikaner

The prestigious institution B.J.S.R. Jain College was established in 1934, just 13 years before the independence. Initially, it was founded as a middle school at Dauji Road, in the heart of the city by Late Sh. Bahadur Mal Jaskaran Sidhkaran within one year of its beginning the institute was promoted to high school. In 1945 it was again raised to Intermediate College. In 1937, the institute was converted to Degree College. It is one of the prominent institutions in the private sector. In fact, many of the present - day politicians and government officers working in Bikaner and other places in Rajasthan have studied in this college. BJSR Jain College is one of the key educational institutions for the upper caste Hindu (Brahmins, Baniyas) families. BJSR college today has opened its several branches for management studies and engineering studies across the town.

The above description of the two elite educational institutions of Bikaner also provides a brief idea about the characteristics of the educational sphere of the town. The larger context of the ecology and climate has also shaped the growth of certain educational institutions in Bikaner. For instance, the establishment of Indira Gandhi Canal Project (1987) provided new life to the people of this region. With the increase in agricultural productivity, demography has also changed in this region.

Educational Field, Elite Politics and Public Sphere

Elite educational institutions are key sites to understand the relationship between education and power (Bourdieu 1996). According to him, critical analysis of elite schools can help us in understating the dynamics of the reproduction and symbolic recognition of the elites. Moving beyond the relevance of different forms of capital to convert one's privilege into different realms, this chapter has shown the sheer dynamics of the educational system itself as constituted by a larger field of power.

With the establishment of a public education system in the post-independence period, Bikaner has seen the growth of modern schools in both the private and public sectors. More importantly, the growth of different educational institutions also reflects the changing nature of power in the town. In the colonial period and post-independence period the stronghold of schools established by princely elites continued. These schools remained the centre of attraction for education in the region. In the case of Bikaner, Sardul School, Court School, etc. were the key places for elites to send their children. In the course of fieldwork, it was found that the families of today's political elites used to send their children to the schools established by princely rulers i.e. B. D. Kalla, Virendra Beniwal, Dilip Joshi, Ashok Acharya to name a few. The dominant narrative of the teachers and administrators of elite educational institutions in Bikaner is the decline of the educational atmosphere in government educational institutions. There are various explanations for this decline as discussed by my respondents. According to many college teachers, this decline is linked to the growing popularity of private colleges in Bikaner, such as BJS Rampuria College, Binani College, Institute of Business Management, Damani College, Tanveer Malawat College of Nursing, etc. With the growth of the population in new town portions, several groups from neighboring suburbs have been approaching private colleges. This development along with a declining public image of government institutions, (as sites of dominant caste group bullying, local violence among Jats and Rajputs, absenteeism of teaching staff, etc.) the town has challenged the elite position of Dungar College. As a whole, these local developments provide some hint to understand the changing nature of the public sphere in Bikaner. Bikaner's public sphere has experienced an increased significance of administrative and private corporate logic. Educational institutions have gradually ceased to be the independent spaces of deliberation within civil society. Corporate logic instead of welfare approach has provided a new impetus to the business communities of the town to further open new educational institutions to

cater to the increasing demand for private schooling. Another significant narrative is the transformation of politics of Bikaner, into old city (old established business elites) and new city (migrant groups, professionals) with the two portions of city representing power claims of different social groups in the town. Thirdly it was argued by my respondents, that due to the rising social and educational consciousness among lower castes, the Dungar College has been a key educational centre for such communities and therefore upper castes avoid socializing their children in such institutions.

As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, the organic link between the educational field and the struggles of power provides a window to understand the social formation public sphere. Bikaner's educational field bears this relation very positively. The field of education in Bikaner has experienced the journey from being restricted to the princely elite and business families in the 17th and 18th centuries. Education was seen as a prominent space for structuring modern relations among different classes and castes. Elite dominance in Bikaner was challenged with the opening of public sphere with entry of educated members of non-privileged groups. The schools catered to different needs and purposes of these private groups. In a sixteenth and seventeenth century, education was a private resource for these elite groups. The nineteenth century social and political transformation brought to Bikaner the public education system which was fought for by several social groups. Along with the democratic upheavals, the shift in education from private resources to public institutional systems also initiated the formation of democratic public sphere. It also led to the formation of the middle class in the town and shaped the class structure of the region. Many communities gained access to such educational institutions and education acquired a public character. In contemporary times with the growing private educational institutions in Bikaner can be seen as a return to the private mode of education. This time the shift has both the ideological backing and structural organization within the democratic setup. This recent change can be interpreted as a shift of public sphere from its basis in democratic rational debate to mere negotiation. With the growing interference of corporate elite in public sphere via education as weakened the democratic potential of the public sphere and restructured it as staged nexus between elite groups and bureaucracy.

At the cost of blurring the specificities of historical change, these movements can be characterized in three ways. The broad paradigm of education and politics in Bikaner can be said to have transformed from '*private to private via public*'. In the first instance, private refers to the colonial and pre-

colonial period when the education was reserved only for princely elites. In the second usage of private, it means post - liberalization period in which increasing private education has become a norm and it induces class inequalities. While the 'public sphere' referred to the establishment of a democratic state in Bikaner during 1950s when education acquired a public character for the masses, with the contemporary trend of privatization the public sphere has been dominated by corporate logic. Hence with the privatization of education once again, the elite groups, both in politics and business, gain upper hand in their access to education and the public sphere lose its democratic deliberation. This contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities in general and class inequalities in particular.

Conclusion

The structure of the educational field explains certain interesting insights to understand the unequal distribution of social resources. Access to education more often than not depends upon the social location of individuals and communities. In case of Rajasthan, historically speaking the elites have controlled cultural capital and with the establishment of modern educational institutions, their domination expanded too. Due to their hegemony over public sphere in post-independence period, their agenda has been to utilize educational capital to reproduce their control over field of power. This chapter, based on the empirical research has looked at how this relationship has developed historically with the institutionalization of education. The initial growth of educational institutions in colonial centers like Ajmer corresponds positively to the democratization of politics and entry of non-privileged communities and groups into education and public sphere. Secondly, it tries to understand the position of the field of education in the larger field of power. As the data suggests, educational opportunities also provide channels to enter the administrative services and employment in the private sector. This mobility potential of education is severely restricted by the initiation of neoliberal economic policies after the 1990s. This study has captured the historical development of education and struggles of elite groups and the changing nature of the public sphere. Habermas had hinted about the 'refeudalization of public sphere' when bourgeoisie interests dominate it (Habermas 1989), in Indian context, maybe we can refer to it as 'neo-liberalization' of public sphere where welfarist capabilities are constantly weakened with ever growing hegemony of financial elites.

This paper argues that field of education has a close association with the elite power in Rajasthan and with the increasing class inequalities it is becoming the preserve of the privileged few and hence acquiring the form of elite dominated public sphere with lower middle classes and poor excluded from it. With the privatization of education at all levels, the nature of public sphere as public arena' open for all groups to engage in democratic interaction is undermined and exhibits the tendency of 'privatization/ neoliberalization of public sphere' too. This trend corresponds to the growing corporate control over economic policies and political process in India. Further research must be conducted to understand the cultural environment of these educational institutions, their curricula and stakes they have in the larger public sphere. It is especially important since the recent renewed interest in 'researching up' has shown how the choice of some elite schooling for the advantage of one's children is related in meaningful ways to the disadvantage of others. Thus, we need more ethnographic studies to map whom goes to the elite educational institutions, how do they get in, and what are the implications of this new educational system for developing a rational, normative public sphere.

Notes

1. This has been done from 2004 onwards where the argument is that primary education is deeply inefficient in government schools with fewer teachers in classrooms, therefore the call for 'school rationalization'.
2. Interview conducted with Shyam Sundar Jyani, on 21 September 2016 at his residence.

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