



Marginalization Through Lack Of Quality Education: Deprivation's Grip On Social Mobility With Special Focus On Arunachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of marginalization, educational quality, and social mobility, with a special focus on Arunachal Pradesh, a frontier state in Northeast India characterized by ethnic diversity, linguistic plurality, and geographical remoteness. Despite significant progress in enrollment, the quality of education remains alarmingly low, leading to persistent learning poverty, high dropout rates, and limited intergenerational mobility.

Through the lenses of sociological theory—including Bourdieu's cultural capital, Durkheim's functionalism, Marxist perspectives on reproduction, Weber's credentialism, and Sen's capability approach—the study critically examines how structural inequalities are embedded in the education system. Employing a mixed-method research design, it integrates national datasets (UDISE+ 2021–22, ASER 2022, Census 2011, NFHS-5) with secondary literature and field-level insights.

Findings show that infrastructural deficits, teacher shortages, language mismatches, and cultural alienation reinforce deprivation. Comparisons with national averages highlight that Arunachal Pradesh lags behind India in secondary completion, female literacy, and access to quality learning environments. The paper contributes to the wider sociological debate on the reproduction of inequality by presenting a region-specific case study of a frontier state where education simultaneously promises and denies mobility.

The study concludes that quality education is a decisive lever for breaking cycles of marginalization, but policies must address socio-cultural realities, linguistic diversity, and geographic constraints with a holistic and equity-driven approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education lies at the heart of sociology's engagement with stratification, inequality, and mobility. Durkheim (1903) envisioned schools as institutions that integrate individuals into the collective conscience, while Bourdieu (1973) argued that education often reproduces social hierarchies by privileging dominant cultural capital. This tension—between the promise of equalization and the reality of reproduction—frames much of the sociological debate on education.

In India, decades of policy interventions such as the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have expanded access to education. Enrollment has reached near-universal levels at the primary stage. However, quality deficits undermine these achievements. According to ASER (2022), only 20.5% of Grade 3 rural children could read a Grade 2 text, while arithmetic skills remain stagnant.

This crisis is even more acute in Arunachal Pradesh, where challenges of mountainous terrain, ethnic diversity, linguistic plurality, and weak infrastructure amplify deprivation. Despite a reported primary enrollment rate of more than 95% (UDISE+ 2021–22), the secondary transition rate drops to 62%, and female literacy (57.7%) lags behind the national average (65.46%).

This paper situates Arunachal Pradesh within broader sociological debates on marginalization and mobility, seeking to answer:

How does lack of quality education shape the social mobility trajectories of marginalized communities in Arunachal Pradesh?

In what ways do structural inequalities and cultural exclusion perpetuate deprivation?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Classical Sociological Perspectives

Durkheim (1903): Saw education as a moral institution that fosters social solidarity. In Arunachal Pradesh, fragile school infrastructure and language mismatches undermine education's integrative role, leaving tribal communities dependent on kinship networks for social cohesion.

Marxist and Neo-Marxist views (Bowles & Gintis, 1976): Education functions as an “ideological state apparatus” that reproduces inequalities. Urban elite schools in Arunachal prepare students for competitive mobility, while rural tribal schools reproduce subsistence livelihoods.

Bourdieu (1973): Highlighted the role of cultural capital—linguistic fluency, academic norms, symbolic codes—in educational success. Tribal students, often first-generation learners, lack such capital, experiencing symbolic violence when curricula ignore indigenous knowledge.

Weber (1978): Emphasized credentialism as a form of social closure. In Arunachal Pradesh, most tribal students cannot cross the threshold of board examinations or competitive entrance tests, making credentials inaccessible and reinforcing inequality.

2.2 Contemporary Perspectives

Sen (1999): Capability Approach: Education expands freedoms and choices, but poor-quality provision constrains capabilities.

Crenshaw (1991): Intersectionality: Gender, ethnicity, and geography intersect to disadvantage tribal girls in remote regions.

OECD & WEF (2020): Show strong correlations between equitable quality education and intergenerational upward mobility.

Tilak (2007) & Krishna Kumar (2005): Indian scholars argue that education in marginalized areas remains a site of exclusion where curriculum design and resource distribution reinforce inequality.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We integrate social reproduction theory (Bourdieu, Marxist critiques) with capability theory (Sen) and cumulative disadvantage (Merton, 1968).

Reproduction: Schools reproduce inequality through curriculum, language policies, and resource allocation.

Capabilities: Poor-quality schools restrict the ability to acquire literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking, limiting substantive freedoms.

Cumulative disadvantage: Small learning gaps in early grades accumulate, leading to dropout, credential failure, and blocked mobility.

This framework explains why tribal youth in Arunachal Pradesh remain locked in cycles of deprivation despite high enrollment.

4. OBJECTIVES

To analyze the quality dimensions of education (teachers, infrastructure, curriculum, language) in Arunachal Pradesh.

To understand how educational deprivation affects social mobility pathways.

To apply sociological theories to explain the reproduction of marginalization.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do structural inequalities within Arunachal's education system perpetuate marginalization?

What role do sociological factors (cultural capital, functional integration, reproduction) play?

How does lack of quality education constrain upward mobility among tribal communities?

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

Mixed-methods approach: Combines quantitative analysis of secondary datasets (UDISE+ 2021–22, ASER 2022, NFHS-5, Census 2011) with qualitative insights from limited field interviews and secondary ethnographic literature.

Framed as a secondary data analysis and interpretive case study, due to field access constraints.

6.2 Sampling

Districts chosen for contextual diversity: Papum Pare (urban), East Siang (semi-urban), Tirap (tribal, insurgency-affected), Tawang (remote border district).

Respondents (small field sample): 80 students, 40 teachers, 20 parents, 10 administrators.

6.3 Tools

Questionnaires: Literacy and numeracy skills.

Observation checklists: Infrastructure, teacher presence, student-teacher ratios.

Interviews: Teachers, parents, students to understand linguistic and cultural barriers.

6.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative: Regression analysis of PTR, infrastructure, and literacy outcomes; national vs. state comparison.

Qualitative: Thematic coding of interviews, highlighting symbolic violence, cultural alienation, and aspirations.

7. EMPIRICAL DATA AND FINDINGS

7.1 Enrollment and Literacy

UDISE+ 2021–22: Enrollment exceeds 95% at the primary level.

Dropout rates: Secondary transition rate only 62% in Arunachal, compared to 72% nationally.

Literacy (Census 2011): 65.38% overall (Male: 72.55%; Female: 57.7%), below India's average of 74% (Male: 82.1%; Female: 65.46%).

7.2 Teacher Quality and Availability

PTR: 17:1 (better than national average of 26:1), but distribution is highly unequal.

Vacancies: 25% of sanctioned posts remain unfilled in remote districts.

Specialist shortages: Acute shortage of science and mathematics teachers in secondary schools.

7.3 Infrastructure and Facilities (ASER 2022, State Data)

Enrollment (age 6–14): 98.4% in 2022, up from 97.2% in 2018.

Girls' toilets: Usable facilities improved from 28.2% (2018) to 43.6% (2022).

Drinking water access: Increased from 44.7% to 62.0%.

Libraries with books beyond textbooks: Rose slightly from 4.4% to 5.9%.

Despite progress, Arunachal still lags behind the national average in library and ICT facilities.

7.4 Language Barriers

Diversity: 26 major tribes and 100+ sub-tribes; nearly 50 distinct languages (Census 2011; UNESCO).

Medium of instruction: Hindi and English dominate, creating cultural dissonance.

ASER 2022: Reading comprehension deficits persist, linked to the language mismatch.

Ministry of Education (2019): Found that children taught in unfamiliar languages exhibit slower cognitive development.

Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital: Hindi/English confer symbolic legitimacy, while tribal tongues are marginalized.

7.5 Social Mobility Outcomes

Low representation of tribal students in technical/professional jobs.

Migrant tribal students in metros face additional alienation due to weak academic foundations and cultural unfamiliarity.

8. ANALYSIS THROUGH SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Bourdieu's Cultural Capital: Students lacking dominant linguistic codes (English/Hindi) face symbolic exclusion, undermining performance.

Marxist Reproduction: Schools in urban Itanagar prepare elites for exams, while rural tribal schools channel students into informal economies.

Durkheimian Functionalism: Education fails to integrate youth into broader society; tribal identity remains stronger than civic belonging.

Weber's Credentialism: Tribal students rarely obtain the credentials required for upward mobility (UPSC, JEE, NEET).

Sen's Capability Approach: Foundational skill deficits restrict capabilities, narrowing freedoms and life choices.

9. DISCUSSION

Marginalization in Arunachal Pradesh is shaped by multiple, intersecting factors:

Structural inequalities: Teacher shortages, poor infrastructure, digital exclusion.

Cultural dissonance: Tribal knowledge excluded from curriculum.

Gendered barriers: Girls' education restricted by household responsibilities and early marriage.

COVID-19 impact: Widened learning poverty, especially in digitally dark regions.

These align with broader sociological theories that stress how education can either function as a site of integration or reproduction of inequality.

10. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Multilingual pedagogy (MTB-MLE): Use tribal languages in early schooling, transition gradually to state/national languages.

Equity-based financing: Allocate funds proportionally to deprivation levels (similar to Kerala's equity model).

Teacher incentives: Housing, hardship allowances, and career progression for postings in remote districts.

Vocational education: Align with tribal economies (horticulture, weaving, handicrafts).

Community participation: Strengthen School Management Committees to ensure accountability.

11. LIMITATIONS

Reliance on secondary datasets (UDISE+, ASER, NFHS-5), which may mask micro-level disparities. Dropout data often underreported.

Geographical barriers restricted extensive fieldwork in border/remote areas.

Linguistic diversity posed interpretation challenges; meaning may have been lost despite using local facilitators.

Temporal scope: Data up to September 2022; long-term COVID-19 effects still unfolding.

11.1 SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS: A SOCIOLOGICAL RESPONSE

Strengthening Data Reliability: Participatory Action Research (PAR) with communities (Freire; Symbolic Interactionism).

Bridging Accessibility: Mobile schools, teacher-fellows, digital ethnography (Durkheim's functional integration).

Tackling Linguistic Exclusion: MTB-MLE and indigenous knowledge integration (Bourdieu's cultural capital).

Gendered Inequalities: Hostels, scholarships, mentorship for tribal girls (Intersectionality – Crenshaw).

Post-COVID Recovery: Longitudinal tracking and remedial bridge programs (Merton's cumulative disadvantage).

12. CONCLUSION

Arunachal Pradesh illustrates how lack of quality education perpetuates marginalization and obstructs social mobility. Despite near-universal enrollment, persistent learning poverty, teacher shortages, and cultural alienation show that access alone does not guarantee opportunity.

From a sociological lens:

Bourdieu reveals how lack of cultural capital locks out tribal students.

Durkheim shows how weak institutions fail to integrate youth.

Marxist critiques highlight reproduction of inequality.

Weber underscores credential barriers.

Sen stresses that deprivation limits freedoms and life choices.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified these challenges, deepening divides. Girls and first-generation learners remain the most vulnerable.

The future of Arunachal Pradesh hinges on transforming education into a system that is inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive. Targeted teacher training, mother tongue-based instruction, and equity financing must be prioritized. More importantly, schools must become sites of empowerment, validating tribal identities and nurturing aspirations.

In conclusion, education is not merely about enrollment numbers but about justice, equity, and transformation. For Arunachal Pradesh, the challenge is not in bringing children into classrooms but in ensuring that classrooms truly serve as ladders of mobility rather than walls of exclusion.

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