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LEARNING FOR LIFE

A STUDY OF PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION



*Puja for Saraswati, goddess of knowledge.
(photo by author)*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis was to understand the ways parents with different educational backgrounds perceive education as enabling their children 'capabilities'.

Situating myself in a rural area of Uttarakhand, I interviewed parents from diverse educational backgrounds about their children's education. Some parents were illiterate while others held university degrees. Their perceptions are viewed against the backdrop of the growing access and availability of education, facilitated both by private entrepreneurs and the Government of India, in a world increasingly stressing the need for education as well as the demand for education. I looked specifically at parents' perceptions of how education contributes to their children's 'capabilities'; what they perceived education as enabling their children to be and do. These perceived abilities ranged from 'being literate' to 'learning computers and English', partly reflecting the different aspirations and notions of what the content of education *is* and means to them, although everyone agree that education is necessary in 'modern times'.

Keywords: India, education, parents

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At an initial stage of the field study the plan was to do interviews with parents from the nomadic tribal people Van Gujjars. I had therefore been put in contact with the NGO SOPHIA (Society for Promotion of Himalayan Indigenous Activity) in Dehra Dun through my supervisor Pernille Gooch. In the end my plans changed due to rain and landslides, but by then SOPHIA's director, Manto and his family had already extended hospitality and helped me with arrangements to settle me in Uttarakhand.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DPEP	District Primary Education Program
GC	General Castes
Gol	Government of India
HIMAD	Himalayan Society for Alternative Development
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NGO	Non Government Organization
NPE	National Policy on Education
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PROBE	Public Report On Basic Education
SOPHIA	Society for Promotion of Himalayan Indigenous Activity
SC	Scheduled Castes
SSA	<i>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</i>
UEE	Universal Elementary Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recently the Indian education system has expanded. Elementary education is now available in government schools and in private schools in small villages even in the remote countryside. The large expansion of available government schools is mainly the result of national education programs set in motion to improve earlier bad enrollment rates and low levels of literacy.

By the Government of India (GoI) education is perceived as a tool for elimination of inequalities based on gender, caste or ethnicity and a strong relationship between elementary education and socio-economic development is acknowledged (GoI, in Page 2005: 179). Education is seen as necessary precondition for the achievement of a range of economic goals and social development for the whole society, as well as for self-realization for the individual.

Just as the Government of India acknowledges the importance of education for the nation's well-being, parents recognize education as important for their children. Large social and economic changes have taken place in the Indian society, including spread of the cash economy, increased ease of communications and transport, the growing importance of the media and the increase of contract-based relationships instead of previous personalized patron-client ones, all of which have increased the value attached to the acquisition of basic levels of information and knowledge (Kabeer 2000: 464, 474). Among parents from all communities education is increasingly seen as vital for their children (Drèze and Sen 2002: 155; PROBE 1999), but the school options and especially higher levels of education show large gaps between boys and girls, social communities and rural/urban locations (Ramachandran 2004; Ramachandran *et al.* 2007).

Within the vast field of changing educational opportunities, I have chosen to look specifically at parents' perceptions of their children's education.

1.1 PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Despite incentives for girls and marginalized communities, and a range of available school options, education is in the end the parents' responsibility. Parents' perception of education color their attitudes and choices regarding their children's

education. It affects the motivation for sending them to school and in the end have an influence on the children's education attainments.

Situating myself in villages in the district Chamoli, a largely rural area in the mountainous Garhwal division of the north Indian state Uttarakhand, I interviewed parents about their children's education. When the parents were young the educational options were fewer, and often only men from higher castes got post-elementary education while women and lower castes did not participate beyond elementary education, if they were enrolled at all.

I find this inter-generational relation interesting, how parents with highly different education levels perceive education for their children against the backdrop of a changing educational landscape.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

I have chosen to look specifically at the parents' subjective perceptions of their children's education, in the context of today's increased demand for education as well as increased supply of education. In the past, in the parents' childhood education was not accessible for all of them, leaving the parents with different experiences in the field of education. The focus is on parents' contrasting answers regarding what they perceive as the essential learning from education for the children's future (Appendix 1 Interview guide). My aim is to contextualize their diverging perceptions with their lives, and thereby, with the capability approach (Drèze and Sen 2002) see how education is perceived as enabling their children's capabilities.

By looking at the parents' subjective perceptions of education I hope to gain further understanding of their choices regarding the children's education.

1.3 REVIEW OF PREVIOUS LITERATURE

Important for the thesis regarding the increased demands and changing parental aspirations is the book *India: Development and Participation* by Drèze and Sen (2002) and *The PROBE report (Public Report on Basic Education in India)* by PROBE (1999). Despite the title *The PROBE report* it is not an official report, but a report written by a team working in association with Centre for Development

Economics at the Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University (Willmore 2004: 21, fn 1). Particularly relevant in this context is the team's research in rural areas and interviews with parents. The research shows a large demand for education and increased motivation from the parents' side, and at the same time growing social fragmentation in school choices.

IDS Bulletin published an issue in 2003 (vol. 34, no. 1) on education in India and South Africa. In the introduction to the issue, Ramya Subrahmanian outlines the five broad themes underlying the approach for the undertaken research, where especially the third theme inspired me to adopt the same approach to my field study:

“Third, while factors relating to income and livelihoods have been identified as the primary *economic* causes of exclusion, the cultural and social factors that lead different groups to place value on education differently require deeper empirical investigation. Studying the interconnections between cultural and economic processes of exclusion becomes essential in both countries, where ethnicity, gender and race identity overlap with poverty and deprivation, intensifying experiences of marginalisation.” (Subrahmanian 2003: 3, emphasis in original)

1.4 TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

Here I would like to mention a few terms and peculiarities often misunderstood in the context of education in India.

'Primary education' is class 1-5. In the Indian Constitution, article 45, the Government has committed itself to provide free education to all children aged 6-14 (Dréze and Sen 2002: 41), e.g. 1-8th class, called 'elementary education'. The free elementary education is provided in primary and upper-primary (class 6-8) government schools, and occasionally through different schemes and special programs.

Private schools can be funded by fees or by a combination of fees and financial aid from either a private organization or the government. The last type, with financial aid from the government is called 'aided schools'. To be aided by the government it is also necessary to be a 'recognized school', e.g. approved by the authorities, following any of the officially recognized curricula. Many recognized private schools do not get any aid from the government and are fully financed by fees from the students, or by the combination of fees and funds from a religious

community or organization. In this thesis I will refer to 'private schools', which here encompasses both aided and un-aided recognized private schools.

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 2 contains a brief introduction to the expansion in elementary education in India. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the field study. Chapter 4 introduces the theoretical concepts in use. Chapter 5 presents the primary empirical material, namely the parents partaking in the interviews. In the following chapters 6, 7, and 8 the findings from the field study - parents' perceptions - are presented under themes. In the discussion, chapter 9, I take up some main points from the parents' perceptions to finally summarize the discussion.

2. EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Since Independence 1947, India has struggled to bring down the high numbers in illiteracy. With disparate figures across the country the national literacy rate of 64.8% (Census of India 2001) says very little about regional and local situations, but it is a change for the nation since the time of Independence when only one fifth of the population was literate (Mooij 2007: 329).¹

2.1 EDUCATION POLICIES AND 'UNIVERSAL ELEMENTARY EDUCATION'

*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*² started in 2001 and it is the most recent national education program to improve elementary education. It was preceded by the District Primary Education Program (DPEP), launched in 1994, with focus on districts with low female literacy rates. The enhanced efforts to increase availability and access of elementary education started in 1986 with the National Policy on Education (NPE), later modified in 1992 (Wu *et al.* 2005: 29), and was paralleled by national liberalization strategies redistributing the workforce from the agricultural sector to the service sector (Tendulkar and Sen 2003: 208; Mooij 2007: 325).

SSA focuses on enrollments, children that have never enrolled and drop-outs, as well as on improving the quality of education. The challenge is to enroll the

¹ The accuracy of the figures from Census of India is sometimes doubted (Taylor 1991:327).

² In English *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) is called Universal Elementary Education (UEE) (Wu *et al.* 2005). SSA, <http://ssa.nic.in> (2007/12/31).

estimated 40 million, or 20 percent, of the children in the age-group 6-14 who are out of school (Ashley 2005: 134; Mehrotra 2006: 266). The reason why these children do not come to school are explained both by social and economical variables in the households and in the communities, as well as by poor availability and quality in the supply of education. Consequently SSA is motivating the families to send their children to school with incentives, such as for example free schoolbooks for girls and no fees for girls and children from the Scheduled Castes (SC)³ community, but also through improving the quality of and physical access to schools. This strategy will help to achieve the national goal of “universalisation of education”, i.e. universal access, universal enrollment, universal retention and universal quality of education (SSA, <http://ssa.nic.in> (2007/12/31)). In addition, SSA is complemented by another national program, the Mid-Day Meal scheme, to ensure a daily nutritious meal to all primary school children as well as to encourage children from poor households to go to school (Mooij 2007; Wu *et al.* 2005: 31).

As mentioned before, the bad statistics for enrollment and children dropping-out from elementary schools have improved greatly, but some researchers and critics regard it as a show of figures with little real quality. An increase in enrollments does not mean an increase in learning which is evident in numbers gathered by Pratham (India’s largest NGO in the field of education), showing low learning outcomes in government schools (Banerjee *et al.* 2007: 1236; Pratham 2007). Paradoxically, the difficulties in providing quality education can partly be seen as a by-product of the large increase in enrollments – the result of increased access and increased availability, the growing demand for education and a growing number of children in the school-going age group (Banerjee *et al.* 2007: 1236). The number of children in the age group 6-14 increased from 170 millions to 205 millions according to Census of India 1991 and Census of India 2001, at the same time the gross enrollment rate increased from 82% to 95% for class 1-5, and from 54% to 61% for class 6-8 (Wu *et al.* 2005: 29). Many of these children are often first-generation learners and require more attention from the teachers, which increases the pressure on the teaching facilities of the government schools even more. At the same time the

³ ‘Scheduled Castes’ (SC) is a legal classification used in the Indian quota system for people previously generally called ‘Untouchables’ (Jaffrelot 2006:174). See Appendix 2 for further explanation.

first-generation learners' parents are often unable to monitor and evaluate their children's learning (Banerjee *et al.* 2007: 1236; Mooij 2007: 331-2; Ramachandran 2004: 76-77).

3. METHODOLOGY

The case study is interpretative in design and the primary empirical material is based on interviews with parents (Yin 2003: 12-14).

3.1 DATA

To supplement and contextualize the data from the interviews, as recommended for case studies (Yin 2003: 97), I also approached statistical information on students and schools, and observations from field visits to private schools, government schools and offices. I went to some of the major and minor local education options available, the government schools and a range of recognized private schools, and asked for information (enrollments, gender statistics, castes, fees etc) to get a better picture of the scene.⁴ Additional material is observations and conversations with teachers and principals, and observations during youth and children meetings with a local NGO. For the broader context of education in India I have used articles, policy documents, reports and books.

3.1.1 INTERVIEWS

With the help of the interview guide (Appendix 1) I obtained primary qualitative material (Mikkelsen 2005: 125-127; Kvale 1996) where the parents expressed their subjective perceptions on their children's education.

The interview guide is focused in design (Yin 2003: 90-91) and covers three main areas: children's education, parents' educational background, and the use of education for work and in daily life. During interviews some respondents further developed the questions and gave additional information, while others could not relate to the topics I wanted to talk about and instead placed more emphasis on other subjects such as poverty and family disasters. This is a feature of the semi-

⁴ More or less the same statistics can also be collected from Uttarakhand Government SSA division <http://gov.ua.nic.in/ssaua/> (2007/12/31). National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) give more extensive figures on schools and enrollments: <http://www.ncert.nic.in> (2007/12/31).

structured interview, where the view of the respondent is expressed and additional questions can be asked that may lead to new and unexpected information contextualizing the respondents lives (Mikkelsen 2005: 169). The number of children varied from 1-8, which of course also influenced the length of the interview and the quantity of data obtained from each parent. By asking the parents about their own experiences of education, in the past and now, and how they viewed their children's education and learning, a focused Life history approach on education evolved. The Life history approach is used as the aim of the thesis is not to make large generalizations, but to contrast and see differences:

Certainly no individual life history can be said to be representative in its entirety /.../,
but,
/.../ it may be possible to abstract various themes from the lives of individual members of a given social category that are indeed representative of most of the members of this category and hence provide empirically generalizable knowledge. (Davies 1999: 170)

The parents have lived, and continue to live with the experience of being educated or uneducated, something they very much put in relation to their children's education. By looking at their own experiences with education I hoped to gain understanding of the historical links forming their perceptions of the children's education (Yin 2003: 86).

I had intentionally chosen a 'positive' subject to do interviews on - children's schooling is something parents generally are proud of, and indeed, the educational achievements were proudly spoken about. Still there was in many cases an anxiety expressed about the future and not being able to provide financially for neither education or for the children's overall well-being and health.

3.1.2 SELECTION

To get in contact with respondents a partly non-randomized method was used where the criteria of the respondent was to have at least one child enrolled in class 1-12. Two of the respondents have children who quit school or graduated recently, i.e. they were initially not meant to be in the group of respondents, but are included anyway.

In the beginning of the field study I was introduced to respondents through people from the local NGO HIMAD. After some time I also went to the villages alone with the interpreter, a young educated man from the area, and asked for parents willing to participate. I will discuss the snowball effect further in the next section.

3.1.3 LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There was a tendency that the snowball effect resulted in interviews with *mothers* belonging to *General Castes* (GC)⁵ and occupied in *farming* and *household work*. Since I visited the villages during the daytime, employed parents, especially fathers, working outside the home were difficult to find for interviews. Hence, the high number of uneducated women among the respondents might be explained by the fact that they are the ones left in the village doing agricultural and household work. The number of *educated* women and the number of men among the respondents could have been higher if the interviews had been done at another time of the day. However, statistics for the district Chamoli point towards that there is lower literacy levels among women (61.6%) compared to the men (89.7%), and 75.4% literacy level for total population (Census of India 2001). Generally men, being educated or not, work outside the home while women, educated or not, do farming and household tasks which is also the case among the respondents. There is a so-called money order economy prevalent in the area where men work and live in a city and send money to the family in the village. These men mainly work in the military or in the service sector. This was also confirmed among the respondents where 7 of the 23 mothers' husbands work in towns or cities, and 2 of the 10 male respondents were retired from the army. I also made an effort to get in contact with respondents from Scheduled Castes (SC), but did not succeed in interviewing any men from this group. Among the 33 respondents there are 23 (70%) women and 10 (30%) men. All the respondents are Hindus, and of course, their identities are disclosed in the thesis.

⁵ 'General Castes' (GC) is a legal classification generally encompassing the higher castes, in context of this study they are mainly *rajputs*, a major group of *Kshatriyas*. See Appendix 2 for further explanation of caste and the quota system.

3.2 SITUATING MYSELF IN THE FIELD

Being a foreign woman surely also affected the respondents in their answers. I found especially the women very articulate and aware about prevailing gender norms, maybe they stressed it since I was known to them as a 'friend' of the NGO working with social issues of women and children. Maybe they said what they thought I expected them to say, or tried to form their answers in line with the dominant discourses of showing positive attitudes towards education – especially since I was to some extent seen as an 'educated' person (Yin 2003: 86).

3.3 LANGUAGES

I understand Hindi on a basic level, but during all the interviews I was accompanied by the interpreter and the main languages used were Garhwali and Hindi, translated from and to English. All the interviews with the parents were recorded and partly transcribed afterwards. In a small number of the interviews and in meetings with teachers and government employees I was able to communicate quite freely in a mix of English and Hindi. In some cases I found that my basic Hindi and the respondents' English limited their ability to express themselves and sometimes led to misunderstandings. On the other hand, the ability to communicate directly without interpreter was enriching the interview and often seemed to make the respondents more comfortable.

4. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

4.1 DEVELOPMENT IDEOLOGIES AND EDUCATION

Interestingly, as Mundy notices (2006: 44), in the last couple of years development advocates have united in their efforts for education as a way of promoting development. Previously there was a tendency to stress either social equity or economic growth for development, but now both these schools of thought find education useful as a tool to achieve development. The two schools of thought also generally view the emergence of globalization differently, the first being skeptical towards the emerging global market and the latter inevitably positive towards global integration and trade.

/.../ the new focus on basic education as a strategy for poverty reduction may be seen as a victory for those who continue to frame the problem of

development as one of individuals who are not well adapted to the demands of the market, and states that need to bear responsibility for development failures. It contrasts markedly from an understanding of development focused on structural inequalities that require both national and global measures of redistribution. (Mundy 2006: 44-45)

It seems as if the two schools, or development ideologies, largely have united around one development strategy⁶, education, to pursue the same goal of poverty reduction.

This partly reflects the schism in development literature concerning human capital theory, where education is seen as vital to improve human capital for the sake of skilled labor and also for effects on health and socio-economic conditions. Education is promoted as a productive investment benefiting people in multiple ways, both on the individual and societal level (Mundy 2006; Subrahmanian 1999). Education can be seen both as development, - a sole goal in itself, and *for* development. In particular elementary education is valued for its positive influence on health indicators which are of high priority in policy work.

The value and workings of education, its direct and indirect role for development, also play an important part in Drèze and Sen's (2002) 'capability approach' in *India: Development and Participation*, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.2 EDUCATION ENABLING 'CAPABILITIES'

Discourses on poverty articulated in the last ten years of the twentieth century have significantly changed the understanding of relationship between education and development. Further, interpretation of poverty in terms of capability deprivation has brought the role of education into sharper focus, not just in its instrumental role in alleviating poverty, but also as a core constituent of development and human well-being. (Govinda 2003: 81)

The inequality in India, economical and social, is seen as related to the absence of education and economical opportunities among groups of people, who traditionally have had a limited access to education; groups that have been excluded from

⁶ For the definition of 'development strategies': "/.../ development strategies can be defined as the practical paths to development which may be pursued by international agencies, states in both the so-called developing and the developed worlds, non-government organisations and community based organisations, or indeed individuals, in an effort to stimulate change". (Potter 2002:61)

education, and thus given less access to economic opportunity, as well as restrained possibilities to claim their rights (Ramachandran 2004: 21; Subrahmanian 1999:71).

Drèze and Sen (2002) elaborate how education is now recognized as a major change factor for individuals from the marginalized groups to improve their situation, both economically and socially. In realizing 'capabilities' for the individual, education plays an important part:

The life of the person can be seen as a sequence of things the person does, or states of being he or she achieves, and these constitute a collection of 'functionings' – doings and beings the persons achieve. 'Capability' refers to the alternative combinations of functionings from which a person can choose. Thus, the notion of capability is essentially one of freedom — the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead. Poverty of a life, in this view, lies not merely in the impoverished state in which the person actually lives, but also in the lack of real opportunity — given by social constraints as well as personal circumstances — to choose other types of living. (Drèze and Sen 2002: 35-36)

I use primarily the 'capability approach' (outlined by Drèze and Sen above) to look at how education is perceived by the parents as important in contributing to their children's 'capability' in the future. e.g. what education as one of the 'functionings' enables the children to *be* or *do*. How is education seen as contributing to their 'freedom' to seize 'opportunity', including their ability to make use of economic opportunities, given their social and personal circumstances?

I will not dwell much longer on the many benefits arising from education (intrinsically and instrumentally) for individuals and for society (Drèze and Sen 2002: 38-44), but I will give one example to illustrate how both the instrumental value, and enabling abilities from girls' education is seen as postponing their marriage age and set off a number of positive effects on development indicators. By marrying later women will also start giving birth to children later, which, in turn, is likely to lead to improved maternal health and giving birth to fewer children, births that are likely to be more spaced with higher survival rates for both mother and child. The mother's education level is likely to have positive influence on the children's education level and health. But it is not just getting married a few years later that is seen as triggering the positive effects mentioned above, but also the skills and social norms the woman learnt from being in school. Her 'capabilities' to act in her social context

and seize 'real opportunity' have become enhanced as a result from being educated and thus her freedom and well-being has increased (Drèze and Sen 2002).

4.3 THE SOCIAL WORLD

In Bourdieu's theory 'habitus' is central in order to understand human experience in the social world. Habitus (in his later writings also called 'dispositions') is a way of being, a habitual state, "and in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination" (Schwartz 1997: 103, fn 16). Primarily, habitus is seen as resulting "from early socialization experiences in which external structures are internalized" but where continuously an adaptation process is going on when habitus encounters new situations (Schwartz 1997: 103).

The social arena where habitus, operates, the space where it comes into contact with situations, is called 'field' by Bourdieu. It can be defined as a network, but with underlying and unseen relations that shape actions. To enter into a field, a person has to silently accept "the rules of the game" (Schwartz 1997: 125), namely that some tactics are allowed while others are not, a knowledge carried in habitus.

In fields people struggle for control over valuable resources. When people enter fields they possess different forms and amounts of capital, whereby they are positioned within the field. In this context, by looking at parents' perceptions, it is a useful concept since it "calls attention to the social conditions that shape cultural production" (Schwartz 1997: 119-122). In particular as it calls attention not just to internal and external structures, but rather emphasizes the constant process between subjectivity and objectivity when human beings navigate in society. When parents talk about their children's education, a constant negotiation is taking place between previous experiences and today's setting of social relations. Education is a form of 'cultural capital', which just like any other capital in society, social or economical, is pursued by human beings to improve their positions. Insights into the definition of what is 'legitimate' cultural capital, in this case educational credentials, is essential since it can be converted to other forms of capital. Those with a stronger hold of the cultural capital required for the field are in an advantaged position towards the newcomers with lower assets, and they become the dominant actors in

the competition over what should be recognized as legitimate and valuable cultural capital.

Education and the perception of the 'capital' acquired from education have shown to be important in identity formation for both individuals and communities in the Indian modernizing society. Ciotti (2006) discovers how "education is understood as a substance" (2006: 909) and "as an idiom of knowledge and progress" (2006: 900) in identity formation among *Chamars*⁷ in Uttar Pradesh. To them education becomes an important asset to negotiate identities with the help of what it means to be literate or illiterate, in the past and the present. For them 'being educated' is denotes not just the skills of literacy but also a change of mindset where the educated person is seen as embodying certain qualities. These qualities can be seen as both pertaining to the roles educated persons traditionally have played in the Indian society and to today's stress on education as importance for social and economical progress.

5. PARENTS' EDUCATION LEVELS

In the countryside illiteracy rates are generally higher, the educational level is low and people's access to education has until recently been limited, and to some extent still is compared to urban areas. This is certainly true when looking at the small villages in the distant countryside of Chamoli and the big city Dehra Dun, eight hours away by jeep – an educational center and famous for its prestigious boarding schools. Most of the interviewed parents have grown up in villages in the area. Here I will give definitions of the educational levels of the parents.

Fourteen of the parents have never been to school, or dropped out after a year or two; I will refer to them as 'uneducated' parents.

The six respondents having completed 4th or 5th class balance on the line of being uneducated, in terms of being literate, but they have gone to primary school and hence they are referred to as 'having primary education'.

The thirteen respondents having completed 8th, 10th, 12th class, or who have a BA or a MA degree, are all lumped together as being 'educated'. This is evidently a

⁷ *Chamars* are a community of former 'Untouchables' and have traditionally worked with leather goods – today they are classified as Scheduled Castes. See Appendix 2 for further explanation of the caste system and professions.

group with quite diverging educational experiences, some of them are highly educated while others only have elementary education.

A note on gender and caste is needed. The two groups of educated and uneducated parents carry unequal amounts of communities, as well as are dominated by either men or women. In the group of thirteen educated respondents there are none belonging to the SC community; the seven women belonging to the SC community are all uneducated or with primary education. Of the ten male respondents, nine had an educational level of 10th class or above, hence dominating the group of educated respondents. In contrast to the group of educated parents being dominated by men, the fourteen uneducated respondents were all women, nine of them GC and five of them SC.

6. PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION

The respondents live in four villages approximately 5-30 km from the town Gopeshwar. Together the four villages have several government primary schools, and a few upper-primary schools, two high schools (9th-10th class), one of them established last year, and an inter-college in a village close by. There are in addition to the government schools, to my knowledge⁸, two private primary schools (1st-5th class) and one private '10th-fail school' with courses for students who have failed exams in 10th class.

In the following two subsections I focus on how the parents perceived the skills to learn in school differently, such as reading and writing, subject knowledge, and also the value of English.

6.1 THE DEMANDED FOR EDUCATION IN 'MODERN TIMES'

The increase in the 'demand' for education, as mentioned before, is seen as a result of the changing aspirations and the recognition that education facilitates access to new opportunities (Subrahmanian 2005: 67). It is also argued that to be able to participate in the decision-making process, particularly at local level, literacy is required in "modern times" (Stephens 1991: 228) and likewise in the PROBE study (1999) parents say that education is indispensable in the modern society.

⁸ I asked the respondents and the local NGO for private or other alternative schools, and these two were the ones that came up.

Skills required for “modern times”, computers and English, were frequently mentioned as the most important subjects to learn in school by educated parents. Also uneducated parents or with primary education, often talked about “modern times” and “new things” in connection to their children’s education but had another view of which type of education and learning that was needed. To explain “why education is necessary for their children” many of them answered that ““modern times’ require reading and writing, it is different times”. To become educated is not seen as an option; it is a necessity for a person, which was not the case when they were young. As Sangita, age 50, an uneducated mother with six children said “*Aré Ram* (Eng. Oh *Ram* (a God))! In my time it was not needed!”

They themselves, the mothers without education (fourteen respondents) had for different reasons not gone to school or left school within a year or two. Poverty and/or the absence of a school in the village were the major reasons behind, but attitudes towards girls’ education also played an important role. A couple of the mothers had been enrolled for a few months but the teacher had beaten them. In these times girls did not go to school, and if they did it was very difficult for them, they said. The teachers were not used to teaching girls. Instead they described a rather enjoyable time grazing cattle together with their friends, a group of girls that used to play games in their natal villages. Growing up and getting married, as early as 14 for a few of them but more commonly at the age of 15-18, they moved away to the village of the husband, all of them coming from villages nearby in the Garhwal region. Their childhood and youth was not too long ago, many of the mothers were 24-30 years old while some were older, as Sangita, aged 50, and a few of them had their first child at the age of 16.

For Jaya, age 38, a mother of four, her childhood stood in stark contrast to the other women’s. Having had a stepmother was the explanation for missing out on education for her and her siblings. Education had been out of reach with a childhood that had consisted of making it through the day with hard farming work, physical abuse and less food than her half-brothers and sisters. A few of the other women had also lost their mothers. In the cases where the fathers had not remarried, they had been taken out of school, or never enrolled, to cover up for the missing mother in the household work and farming. This job was shared between the sisters and the

responsibilities were passed down to the younger sister when the oldest got married, letting the youngest acquire primary schooling. The daily chores included taking care of the younger siblings as well as farming and all the time-consuming and physically hard daily work, including collecting firewood, water, and cutting grass for the cattle.

Some educated parents, who stressed the necessity of learning English and computers – “skills needed in ‘modern times’”, would choose to send their children to private schools in Gopeshwar. As Vinod, age 34, a father of two small children, said, “‘modern times’ require this school”. They were clear about the necessity of English to move further up in the education system and obtain ‘good’ jobs. They didn’t have any in-depth knowledge about computers or English themselves, but ‘knew’ that it would be a prerequisite for the children in getting a good job. Ruci, an educated mother with her son in an English medium nursery said:

[When I was young my parents said:] ‘At least they (our children) will get literate.’ In that time we only had to do the signature, write down our names, now it is essential with education, without education you cannot do anything. (Ruci, age 29, mother of two daughters and one son)

All the parents acknowledged the necessity for education in ‘modern times’, but education, and what education *is* was perceived differently by the parents.

6.2 BEING EDUCATED OR BEING LITERATE?

According to Ciotti (2006: 901) notions of being able to read and write and, subsequently, to access knowledge and to become ‘educated’ cannot be easily disentangled in her study of education among a group of Chamars in Uttar Pradesh. Similarly I would say that all the parents stressed education and acquiring ‘knowledge’ as something their children learn in school, but what useful knowledge consists of is perceived differently by the parents. The need of education in ‘modern times’ meant for the illiterate mothers primarily to be able to read and write, which for them, as Ciotti (2006: 901) writes, is seen as useful to acquire further skills and knowledge, to be able to make their way in life.

Two uneducated mothers, Kusuma and Sangita, about what their children had learnt in school:

We sent them for learning in school - that is what it is for, so surely they must have learnt something, but what we don’t know. (Kusuma, age 48, mother of two sons and two daughters)

Whatever they teach in school they are learning, what do we know, we are illiterate. (Sangita, age 50, mother of four daughters and two sons)

Ciotti (2006:901) also notices how her respondents in Uttar Pradesh synonymously used the Hindi adjective *parhe-likhe*⁹ for 'educated' and 'literate'. The confusion of being literate with being educated, and vice versa, is not just a linguistic peculiarity, but also a common understanding or misunderstanding, not the least in statistics and literature on education and development (Taylor 1991: 327). It can partly be explained by the fact that education to a high degree is used as a measurement for literacy, while learning to read and write is just one of the skills learnt in school and easily forgotten if not used, especially for adults outside a larger literate environment (PROBE 1999: 6; Ramachandran 2006: 4854). The critique towards using a level of education as a possible measurement for literacy is also evident among some of the respondents with primary education in this study, who had forgotten how to read and write after working in the fields and not using the skills.

The skills of 'only' being literate was for the uneducated seen as a highly valuable and useful skill for the children to achieve, and to some extent also for the mothers. Prita, an uneducated mother with her educated husband working in Delhi, and two children in elementary school explained:

I am illiterate - I tell them (my children) 'read this, what is this?' Then they read and say 'mother sign here, do it this way, do signature here'. They tell me to learn how to write letters since [my] husband is [working] outside (in Delhi). When the letters come [from him] I give them to our son and he reads for me. (Prita, age 28, mother of one son and one daughter)

For Solochana, who is uneducated and a widow since she was nineteen, her fifteen year old son's skills are very useful for the household:

He writes. He calculates all the expenditures from selling milk. All the financial things he does. He doesn't hide one rupie – he could since he is the only one who knows how to read and write. (Solochana, age 34, mother of one son)

The educated parents already knew the specific knowledge and skills their children needed for 'modern times'. Learning to read and write in school was by them taken

⁹ In the interviews the parents would in Hindi generally distinguish between 'educated' (*shikshit*), or education (*shiksha*), and 'literate' (*parhe-likhe*), or learning to read and write (*parhna-likhna*). Although the latter to some extent is used for 'educated' it literally means 'to read and write'.

for granted, being literate is seen as a basic skill to get the knowledge of English and computers, and thereby skills which according to them possibly would give access to good jobs.

The changing 'need' for education can be argued to be closely connected to political agendas and economical policies (Subrahmanian 2005: 62; Vasavi 2003), hence work opportunities, something which becomes clear in the case of educated parents' stress on English as important for their children to learn. According to Annamalai (2005: 22) today's focus on English as a valuable asset goes back to colonial ideas of an English educated elite, with access to power, wealth and status. Their status as the agents of change towards modernization still prevails in the Indian education system. Private schools with English as the medium of instruction fulfill the demand of the people and come in conflict with the government policy to provide education in Hindi to strengthen nation building. At the same time English, the language of the upper middle classes, is still in use in the higher strata of administration, and has not been replaced by Hindi as was planned (Annamalai 2005: 22).

Ciotti (2006)¹⁰ also notices how the socio-political transformations as a consequence of literacy – a part of the supposed workings of literacy according to the 'literacy thesis', such as 'the questioning of tradition' and 'emergence of democratic thinking', comes true with the values imparted in what it means to be educated:

I argue that if the socio-political 'predictions' of the literacy thesis hold true for this Chamar community, it is precisely because these predictions converge with colonial discourses on education, enforced by the modernist project of the Indian developmental state in the post-independence era and its mantra of mass literacy programmes – including the creation of a 'stigma of illiteracy'. (Ciotti 2006: 902)

In the academic literature there are examples of the perception of what qualities the 'educated' and the 'uneducated' person represent and embodies specifically in the Indian context, which to many is much more than 'only' being literate (Ciotti 2006; Jeffrey *et al.* 2005; Jeffrey *et al.* 2004: 974). To some extent the capabilities from educated person was seen as giving the children abilities to "move forward" in

¹⁰ For further discussion Ciotti (2006: 902) refers to Brian Street (1995) *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography and Education*. London: Longman.

contrast to the illiterate lives of their mothers. Rekha, an uneducated mother with four children said:

Our children can move forward, [they] can travel around by the help of education, we are only here digging in the earth. They get to see life while we are earning a little from the fields. An educated person can go anywhere. (Rekha, age 35 (estimated), mother of two daughters and two sons)

Educated parents were also convinced of the workings of education and they frequently mentioned the expression “development of the mind” when talking about the importance of education. As Anju, age 29, an educated mother with one child put it: “A person can do anything in the future if the mind is developed by education.”

Some parents would even say that education is “a demand of today” - rather than seeing education as a ‘need’ for their children, they perceived it as demanded by society and the ‘modern times’. This further brings up how the ‘need for education’, whether it being the skills of writing and reading or the more specific subject knowledge, was perceived as a major force for people to act in society.

7. LEARNING FOR LIFE: SOCIALIZATION

“Manners” and to learn social skills from the teachers and the school environment was described as just as important as subject knowledge for the children to make it in life.

7.1 LEARNING SOCIAL SKILLS

“How to say *namaskar*”¹¹ and “how to sit and how to talk to people” was mentioned before skills such as reading and writing or specific subject knowledge. When parents developed their answers to the importance of learning correct manners many gave metaphors in line with the answer one of the respondents, a grandfather of eight children, who said: “if a house has a solid base you can build high”. The skills of writing and reading was for many parents secondary to the qualities the child would get from learning “discipline”, “correct manners” and “moral”. Having obtained

¹¹ ‘Namaskar’ or ‘*namaste*’ is an Indian greeting and parting phrase, often accompanied by a slight bow of the head and the hands pressed together with the palms touching and the fingers pointing upwards. In the context, my impression is that the parents refer to the whole greeting procedure of ‘*namaskar*’, i.e. the children learn how to introduce themselves and how to act in communication with other people.

these the child was set for the future and could fend for itself in all kinds of situations.

This is in line with the socializing function of schools, as “schooling provides not just the transmission of technical knowledge and skills, but also socialization into a particular cultural tradition” (Schwartz 1997: 190-191). The home is generally seen as the primary place for socialization while the school functions as the secondary place for socialization.

Drèze and Sen (2002) also acknowledges education’s socializing dimension and argue free public provision of education (and health):

The inequitable nature of private health and education arrangements in India is evident enough. So is their inability to guarantee basic entitlements such as ‘free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years’ (Indian Constitution, Directive Principles, article 45). Entitlements of this type are important not only because they consolidate the bargaining power of those who are deprived of basic health and education services, but also because they shape broader notions of solidarity and citizenship. (Drèze and Sen 2002: 41)

Gradstein and Justman (2000) discuss the socializing function of the school environment as an argument for the importance of public provision of education. According to them, public provision of education is instrumental in giving people an equal frame of reference and a common cultural framework. Additionally, it increases the likeliness to reproduce a more normative social capital¹² where social tensions are reduced between different population groups, provided that ‘everyone’ attend them. However, assimilating a child to a broader cultural framework also means a loss of social capital from the parent and the link between parent and child is weakened (Gradstein and Justman 2000: 880-83).

7.2 PRIVATE SCHOOL OR GOVERNMENT SCHOOL

If all the parents stressed the socializing function of the school environment, the few parents with children in private schools with religious philosophies especially emphasized the importance of “teaching the children the right behavior” and “transmitting our culture”. According to the respondents the children also learn

¹² ‘Social capital’ is not defined by Gradstein and Justman (2000), and a variety of definitions exists. However one commonly known definition is “the potential benefit accruing to actors because of their insertions into networks or broader social structures.” (McAslan 2002:140)

“Indian values”, to sing the national anthem and pay respect to their parents. Parents expressed their worries about a world in transition, “nowadays people forget their culture” and “what can we do when the children will not even bring us water”.

In private schools parents generally thought the children would “learn behavior” – the important socializing function, better. Partly they motivated the private schools excellence over the government schools with the higher financial assets they perceived them to have. This gave them possibility to employ more teachers and have fewer children per teacher, compared to the government schools that were often described as lacking in discipline since the teachers could not manage to control the large number of children. In addition, they said the private schools were “more modern” or “more developed” and made use of new methods in the learning processes.

Generally in India, studies and statistics point toward that parents who can afford tend to send their children to one of the increasingly available private schools, while those who cannot afford send their children to government schools which often fall short of parents’ expectations (Drèze and Sen 2002: 172; Mooij 2007: 331). Other studies show how also poor parents increasingly are willing to pay for sending their children to low-cost private schools rather than enrolling them in badly managed government schools (Ashley 2005: 134; Tooley and Dixon 2007). The fees for the private primary schools in the villages start from around 100rs per month. In addition to the schools in the villages some parents also chose to send their children to the town of Gopeshwar where there are approximately 20-30 private schools available.

Another important reason given by the parents choosing a private school was the fact that they could hold teachers and principals accountable for the teaching since they had *paid* for the service. Teacher ‘absenteeism’ is common in government schools, and a well-known problem, especially in north India (Mehrotra 2006: 264; PROBE 1999; Ramachandran *et al.* 2005). It contributes to a general problem of understaffing in these schools, and is partly the result of teachers having other regular functions outside the classroom, such as handling enrollment registers and paychecks, but also because of lack of monitoring of teachers and bad infrastructure in remote areas (Kremer *et al.* 2005). Studies have shown that parents

generally have a strong interest in 'accountability from below', when teachers answer to the local community, and it works even better if parents are involved in the management (Drèze and Sen 2002: 175), but in this case there was a personal relation of 'accountability' between the family paying and the teacher. If the children did not make progress, or if there was any kind of problem in school, the parents would go and talk to the management in the private schools. In government schools they felt they could not hold the school responsible in the same way. According to Vinod, an educated father with two small children in a private primary school:

The child will learn the civil manners in Saraswati Academy (local private school), learn to respect their parents, do proper work at home and to control themselves, that is generally uncommon in the government schools. We pay a lot of fees in Saraswati Academy, if I feel anything that I am not satisfied with I may claim this for my children, but I cannot do that in the government school. (Vinod, age 34, father of two sons)

Some of the educated parents who sent their children to the government schools said that the parents who send their children to the private school does so because they thought they would "learn better culture" there, to earn prestige for themselves and because they thought the school-uniforms looked better. On arguing for the good quality in the chosen private school, parents' perceived negative aspects of government schools often surfaced, mainly the lack of discipline, but also the children's physical appearance was important. Raji, an educated mother with two children attending a private school in Gopeshwar:

They [our children] dress and improve their behavior. The [government] primary school is not advanced, they [the children] are not clean, our children learn to dress and good manners. (Raji, age 38-40 (estimated), mother of two sons and one daughter)

Critics of the Mid-Day Meal scheme for schoolchildren in government primary schools considered it of bad quality, time-consuming and taking away the children's attention from learning. Parents would say ".../some people just send their children to school for food, they are poor". From informal encounters with teachers from government primary schools, many confirmed the view; they considered the parents a bit too eager to send their children to school. According to the teachers, parents would send their children to school even on Sundays or if the children were very ill. The reason, according to the teachers, was above all for the food provided in school

– the parents did not care about education, or at least not as much as they cared for food, they would point out with resignation.

The educational backgrounds among the parents also partly affects their access to jobs with an income, and hence possibly also the financial potential to make the choice of a private school. Seven of the nine parents with their children in various private schools were educated, while the remaining two parents had primary education, leaving all the uneducated mothers with their children in government schools. Of the husbands to the 19 mothers who were uneducated, or had primary education, thirteen had passed 8th class or had higher levels of education, while seven had primary education or no education at all. Still, only four of these thirteen educated husbands were employed in the service sector, or in lower positions in the government sector: the remaining nine worked as wage laborers or ploughmen. The women occupied in farming, and the men relying on the unstable income of wage labor, left the household with fragile financial resources.

8. GENDERED EDUCATION AND LIFE

On a national basis there is a deficiency in girls as a result of selective abortion and neglect of girls' health, and this can also be seen in the district of Chamoli where there are only 934 girls per 1000 boys in the age group 0-6 (Census of India 2001). Still there are only slightly more boys than girls enrolled in the primary classes and the upper primary classes on district level¹³. Generally, boys are overrepresented in private schools, resulting in a higher percentage of girls in government schools (Tooley and Dixon 2007: 209). This also holds true for the district Chamoli where 80% of the students in the private schools elementary classes are boys.¹⁴ However, in the villages the figures were almost even in the schools.

Among the respondents' 107 children there were 43 girls (40%) to 64 boys (60%). Only one respondent had no son, compared to the seven respondents without daughters.

¹³ According to the School Education Department (2007: 15, 18) 25 491 boys and 24 994 girls are enrolled in primary school, 14 589 boys and 13 530 girls in upper-primary schools. Both unrecognised and recognised private schools and government schools are included.

¹⁴ According to the School Education Department (2007: 15, 18) 10 549 boys and 2 672 girls are enrolled in class 1-8 in aided, recognized and unrecognized private schools in the district of Chamoli.

In the following two sub-sections I will move away from taking the starting point in parents' education level and I will instead focus on how parents perceive the sons' and daughters' education differently.

8.1 "NOW IT IS DIFFERENT"

Generally all parents stressed one thing regardless of education level - how different it is now from when they were young - now girls just like boys should have an education.

As mentioned earlier it was even more striking for the mothers who never had gone to school, but now had daughters as well as sons in school. Malini, an uneducated mother with her three daughters in the government schools' class 11, 10 and 8, and two sons in class 6 and 4:

"My parents were illiterate, I went with the cattle, that was the fashion of that time, if a girl was not studying no one paid much attention /.../. Nobody from our group [of girls] went to school, our parents were poor. Now we are treating boys and girls the same way and girls are even better than the boys in studying, the boys are only going here and there." (Malini, 34 years, mother of three daughters and two sons)

Another mother, Ritu aged 34, explained that her father had decided it was enough for her with 5th class while her two brothers' had passed 8th and 10th class - but now things were different; both boys and girls should be educated.

The girls' excellence over the boys in school achievements was mentioned in many interviews, and at the same time they voiced extra care taken for boys' well-being and made financial investments in their higher education. In academic literature (Page 2005: 178) parents' unwillingness for girls' education is seen as grounded in the lack of enthusiasm for enhancing girls' public sphere participation, compounded by a lack of conviction about enhanced participation of excluded groups. According to Deshmukh-Ranadive (2002: 135) groups giving low priority to education as a family strategy can further be divided into two groups, one which is extremely poor and depends on women's unskilled labor and one group which observes women's seclusion. In the Garhwal region families depend to a very high degree, one could argue, on women's unskilled labor and many households lack financial resources.

8.2 'HIERARCHIES OF ACCESS'

Sangita, the uneducated mother of six, explained why her third daughter had quit school in fourth class because of the little brother, while the older daughters had studied, one had even enrolled in a BA, but after she got married she had, so far, not had the chance to continue her studies:

After the third daughter we finally got a son and we thought that we had to look after him well, so she did that. (Sangita, age 50, mother of four daughters and two sons)

Age, gender composition and number of brother and sisters are just a few of the many variables in the household which set the 'hierarchies of access', telling us which children that are more or less likely to get an education (Ramachandran 2004). Nevertheless, integral in this hierarchy is also the household's need for children in the household work, where it might only be possible to spare time for some children's education. Girls are expected to marry early, have few economic opportunities and there might also be a security risk for them to go to school, thus parents generally are less motivated to invest in their education (Subrahmanian 1999: 72).

8.3 DIFFERENT ENDS AND MEANS OF EDUCATION

As previously mentioned (in 4.1 and 4.2), education of girls and women have a positive affect on mothers' health, as well as on children's health and educational achievements (Drèze and Kingdon 2001: 20; Fan 2003). In addition, Kabeer (2000: 272) points to the gendered, social and political dimension of why mothers with education have a positive impact on the children's health and on infant mortality compared to illiterate mothers. This is not exclusively achieved with knowledge and skills acquired from education, but also from the social landscape the mothers are situated in. When educated mothers seek medical care, they get more respect from the household members and from outsiders than the illiterate mothers. Education will thus increase the probability that the woman will insist on medical care, return to the hospital for further treatments, immunize the child, and act before asking authorities in the household in case of emergencies. The aspects Kabeer (2000) brings up are important in relation to the perception of education as enabling a person's 'capabilities', and the relative value it has in its context.

As perceived by the parents, the financial situation of the daughter's future husband would influence to what extent she would be able to use skills acquired from education. Like the mothers among the respondents said, a girl with education has a better chance to marry a man with a higher education level, who in turn makes more money and can provide financially for their children's education and health care, as well as for his wife's health and well-being. Living this kind of life with access to money from the husbands' income, they hoped the girls would be spared from the physical work they themselves endured. In the same way as a son-in-law's education level was important for the daughters, mothers saw the value of an educated bride for their son, which necessitated the education of the son as he 'had to' have higher education than the bride. One mother, Amba, age 29, whose two children were in elementary school, pointed out to me, while talking about her daughter's further education and future life: the son's educational level is also important in marriage negotiations – if her son was not educated, at least had completed 10th class, how would she be able to “bring an educated bride” for him?

9. DISCUSSION

We need a different vocabulary to deal with behaviour in situations where a sense of agency may be muted or missing, where the future is unknowable and unpredictable and where there is only the past to provide guidance as to what the future holds in store. (Kabeer 2000: 466, on parents' investments in their children)

The past often plays a major role in relating to the future, but also perceptions of the present are highly influential for the decisions of today for a life after tomorrow.

In chapter 6, 7 and 8 I have tried to catch the parents' perceptions of their children's education - framed by their own educational backgrounds, today's greater demand for education, as well as increased availability and accessibility of education. What was it they perceived education as enabling their children to do or be?

9.1. REVISITING CHAPTER 6, 7 AND 8

The fact of being educated or uneducated, literate or illiterate is evidently part of the parents' habitus, and when facing a world where education has a major place, they

all perceived education as a necessity. From internalizing their different experiences and expectations of what it means to be uneducated or educated, in a world increasingly depending on literacy, they all thought of education as entitling their children to 'be' or 'do', but with different perceptions of what the capabilities would contain.

Contextualizing their lives, education means different paths for achieving capabilities for the children: uneducated parents to a greater extent saw literacy as the main skill, while parents with education tended to specify subjects, especially the ones needed in 'modern times', English, Hindi and computers. Parents from different educational backgrounds generally seemed to have different perceptions of what education was supposed to give the child. For the educated parents the perception of what their children should learn was clear according to themselves, they had made themselves a picture of what education 'is' and in addition had 'knowledge' of skills and the specific jobs profitable to invest in. Uneducated parents also seemed to have made themselves a picture of what education 'is' - from being uneducated they lacked the key skills of literacy, skills they perceived as achievable from education. As the past was remembered, the present was experienced and the future imagined, both clearly calling for literacy as the uneducated mothers stressed, but the educated did not mention as an asset they had.

Parents acknowledged the learning of social skills, education's socializing function, as being just as important as subject learning. Both subject learning and social skills were by some parents considered to be learnt better in private schools. With educated parents to a higher degree choosing private education one could argue for a reproduction of cultural capital, as schools are seen, in the writings of Bourdieu, as "the primary institutional setting for the production, transmission, and accumulation of various forms of cultural capital" (Schwartz 1993: 189). However, the perception of what desirable cultural capital consisted of, in forms of behavior and manners, seemed to differ. As "learning culture" is not only done in schools but also in society at large, parents who perceived society's culture to be changing in a rapid and unpredictable way would rather chose a school where they were familiar with the culture – where their children would learn the 'right' culture as they understood it.

What parents perceived as possible for education to do for their children was highly influenced by whether they talked about their sons or daughters. For girls (also for boys) being 'educated' is in itself seen as containing possible abilities, as Kabeer (2000: 272) writes, an educated woman gets more respect from people surrounding her, and when she knows her educated identity is respected, maybe her agency increases as well. Unlike for boys, parents generally did not see education as leading to a job for girls. The skills a girl would acquire from education, reading and writing, were seen as valuable assets for her. Even though things had changed regarding education of girls, the lower educational levels were often regarded as sufficient for girls as they would be enough for what she would 'do' or 'be'.

9.2 SUMMARIZING REMARKS

A main issue in the discussion of what education enables people to do or be seems grounded in the diverging perception of what education is.

I am inclined to follow what Ciotti (2006: 902) argues, that what education *is* for the interviewed parents, is closely connected to the 'stigma of illiteracy', and diverging perceptions of what it means to be modern and taking part in development. During the fieldwork, parents' answers surprised me on a number of occasions, especially when educated parents told me about the value of computer knowledge and English, skills hardly visible in the environment of the villages and only to some extent seen in Gopeshwar. The stress laid on these skills seems to be influenced by contemporary discourses where 'computers' and English is given immense importance for economic opportunities – both for the nation and for individuals. The uneducated parents experienced the disadvantages of lacking the practical skills of literacy and lived with an uneducated identity that embodies more than just illiteracy.

I would say that the different concepts of what it means to be educated or uneducated are cultural capitals parents carry and transmit in their expectation of what education can bring in forms of capabilities. The uneducated mothers experienced a number of disadvantages from being illiterate, but also their identities as uneducated denoted an inability to act. In the struggle over which form of education that is valuable, parents' perceptions depended on how they had internalized previous experiences of what it means to be uneducated or educated.

Education meant different things to the parents, and when relating to their children's education they hence perceived different uses of education. Educated parents perceived the children's education as the acquisition of further educational credentials, but if they had been without the skills of literacy, they would have been less likely to 'know' which skills that are 'valuable' to learn. The uneducated mothers rather saw education *per se* as the substance making their children able to act, pointing towards the disadvantages they themselves experienced from being illiterate and uneducated.

9.3 FURTHER RESEARCH

The connection between community identities and education is important to research more in depth in order to deepen the knowledge of how parents chose education for their children and which skills they consider as important in today's society.

I argue that the different communities' contemporary and past experiences with education will become even more evident in future educational patterns and investments on the household level. These experiences with education can become crucial in both individual identity formation and for community boundaries, not the least in national identity formation where education plays a very important role and trigger investments in different sectors. The colonial heritage of English seems to take a more and more prominent position in an increasingly globalized India. It would be interesting further research language and education politics with a postcolonial lens to investigate the role and value of English in the Indian society.

9.4 POSTSCRIPT

Before I started the field study I was made well aware by people and the media, of the ongoing debate about the introduction of 27% quota for 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC)¹⁵ in central institutions of higher education. In *The Times of India* the Supreme Court's concerns were voiced regarding priorities; children's education or reservation (Mahapatra 2007/09/29). The Government's share in financing

¹⁵ 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC) is a legal classification in the Indian quota system. See Appendix 2 for further explanation.

elementary education programs has over the years come down from 80% to 50%, leaving the growing remaining portion to be managed by the state governments:

'If you cannot meet 80% of the funds required for elementary education, why spend Rs 36,000 crore on higher education? This money could be put in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to empower all children. What is your primary requirement — right to education or social empowerment?'¹⁶
(Mahapatra 2007/09/29. Original quote by the five-judge bench headed by chief justice K G Balakrishnan)

I think the quote catches many aspects that are important in the educational field for India, many aspects the parents also were concerned with: financing education, and problems of deciding where to make priorities, what really matters – elementary education or higher levels? What is the primary requirement – the “right to education” or “social empowerment”? Reservations or not? Will SSA “empower” *all* children if it is provided with adequate funding?

¹⁶ A crore is an Indian English word for 10 millions.

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10.1 INTERNET SOURCES

National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT):
<http://www.ncert.nic.in> (2007/12/31)

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA): <http://ssa.nic.in> (2007/12/31)

Uttarakhand Government, SSA Division: <http://gov.ua.nic.in/ssaua/> (2007/12/31)

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your name?
 2. Did you go to school?
 3. How many years did you go to school?
 4. Education/school experience/years of schooling
 5. What do you work with?
 6. Did your husband wife go to school?
 7. What does he/she work with?
- The children's education:
8. How many children (girls and boys) do you have?
 9. What age are they?
 10. How many of them are in school?
 11. Which classes are they in?
 12. Which school do they go to?
 13. Why do they go to that school?
 14. What is especially good about their school?
 15. Do you know any other schools around?
 16. Would you like your children to go to another school?
 17. If there was a private school around would you have enrolled your children in it? Why/Why not?
 18. Why do you think some people chose to send their children to private schools?
 19. What do you think about the Mid-day Meal scheme?
 20. How often do you go to parent-teacher (PT)-meetings?
 21. What do you talk about in these meetings?
 22. Have you had any problems with for example financing, transport, etc, in sending you children to school?
 23. Do the children like going to school?
 24. What do you think about the quality of the education?
 25. What do you think is the most important thing that your children learn in school?
 26. What subjects do you think are the most important?
 27. What can you see that your children have learnt so far?
 28. Do you help them with their homework?
 29. Would you say that education is necessary for your children? Why/ Why not?
 30. How do you think the school education will *benefit* your children in the future?
 31. Is the children's learning of any use for you today?
 32. Will the children's education be of use for your family in the future? How?
 33. How far would you like your children to continue studying?

34. Why until X grade?
35. What do you *think* your children will work with after school?
36. What do you *wish* your children will work with after school?
37. What do you think your children would like to work with?
38. At what age do you think your children should get married?
39. Do you think it is possible to continue to study after marriage?

The parent's education:

If the respondent has gone to school:

40. How have your education benefited you?
41. How have you used what you learnt in school?
42. How many of your sisters and brothers went to school?
43. Why did they not go to school?

If the respondent has no education:

44. How do you think education could have affected your life?
45. Can you think of when you could have had use of it?
46. How come you did not go to school?
47. How come you quit school?
48. What did you do during the days?
49. How many of your sisters and brother went to school?
50. When did you get married?
51. Did your parents know how to read and write?
52. What did you do if something had to be read or written in your childhood?
53. Are many people in your family educated?

More to add:

54. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about on this topic?

APPENDIX 2: CASTES AND COMMUNITIES IN THE QUOTA SYSTEM

'Scheduled Castes' (SC), 'General Castes' (GC), 'Scheduled Tribes' (ST) and 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC) are legal classifications in the Indian quota system of affirmative action (Jaffrelot 2006).

The British first introduced the Indian quota system (also called 'reservations') in 1892. The purpose of the quota system was to improve the socio-economic conditions for the underprivileged segments in society.

The 'Untouchables' (often called *dalits* (Hindi for 'the depressed' or 'the underprivileged'), *Harijans* ('God's people') by M. K. Gandhi, 'casteless', or 'the Depressed classes' by the British administration) were the largest groups of people constituting the underprivileged segments in society and today make up the majority of people belonging to Scheduled Castes.

In 1892 the British established special schools for the Untouchables (then called the 'Depressed classes') and in 1919 they got quotas for political representation. Since education did not lead to employment for the Untouchables, 8.5% of the civil servant jobs were reserved for the community in 1934. The name 'Scheduled' Castes was introduced in 1935 and comes from the 'schedules', or lists, with the names of the castes that are officially recognized as belonging to the *former* community of Untouchables. In 1946 the percent in the civil service rose to 12.5% to reflect the proportion of Untouchables in the population and the percent is continuously changing (in 1991 it was 17% for SC). In 1950 'untouchability' was

legally abolished in the Indian Constitution, and in 1955 the practice of untouchability was made a criminal offence (Zachariah 1972: 17).

Just as the Scheduled Castes are the castes listed on schedules, the Scheduled Tribes are tribal groups that can prove their tribal status and thus become officially recognized and listed on a schedule. Like the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes are generally underprivileged in socio-economic standing and with lower levels of education.

In addition to the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Castes, other groups in society with weaker socio-economic conditions and lower educational levels benefit from economical incentives and have quotas in higher levels of education and government employment. These groups are lumped together as 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC) and are mainly belonging to *jatis* being classified as *Shudras* or *Vaishyas*. The 'General Castes' are the remaining higher castes, so-called since they are only eligible to apply in the 'general' quota open to everyone.

The quota system is thus based on caste ('General' or 'Scheduled') and community ('Tribes' or 'Other Backward Classes'). The quota system is complicated by the fact that in a country with 1.1 billion citizens, the caste system and the many communities, in the past and today, show *many* local varieties. Social standing and economic conditions of people belonging to groups, whether it is castes or communities, can be very different from area to area. The caste system shows many regional and local exceptions and variances in practices, and one would rather speak of various *systems* with some major features in common. (Ghurye 2004).

When talking about a person's 'caste' in India one generally means *jati*, but also *varna* is a part of one's caste. *Jati* is the ascriptive social group people are born into, which are arranged in a hierarchical order *within* each of the four *varnas*. The four *varnas* in turn, are ranged in a hierarchical order after professional groups and ritual purity with the Brahmins (priests) at the top, followed by *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (merchants) and *Shudras* (agricultural laborers) at the bottom. Many consider the four *varnas* the base of the Indian class system, and a superstructure to the many *jatis*. The *varnas* are an essential part of the caste system since some people see the four *varnas*' diverging social functions as legitimized in religious scriptures such as *the Manu Smriti* and *the Vedas*.

As mentioned above, one major feature of the caste system is the hierarchy of ritual purity and impurity governing the social order. The division of purity and impurity largely explains the exclusion of certain groups from education as well as their restricted access to professional choices. The major groups in the bottom of the hierarchy of the Hindu social order were the ritually 'untouchable' – the Untouchables. As they were considered ritually impure they were in fact outside the caste system's four *varnas* and hence 'casteless'.

A person's caste belonging is manifested in daily practices and profession. Since caste is hereditary and ascriptive, it ascribes entitlements and/or disadvantages to a person. Customs, profession and marriages are generally restricted to what the caste practices allow. If a person does not follow the caste practices, he/she would take the risk of being 'outcasted' and lose family and community belonging. Untouchables traditionally worked with the most degrading tasks such as butchering up dead animals, cleaning and handling leather goods, occupations considered ritually impure by the upper castes. From being ritually

impure the Untouchables were prohibited to enter temples, had to collect water from separate taps, could not eat together with the *varnas* or handle their food. The 'upper castes', the so-called 'twice-born' *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas* would have to purify themselves ritually if coming into contact with, or being touched by the shadow of an Untouchable. Untouchables were therefore not let into schools, and at the same time the social order with hereditary professions did not require their education since they could not do any other job because of the impure/pure division.

In the same manner, the Other Backward Classes' hereditary professions, and Scheduled Tribes' traditional lifestyles in rural areas, kept them from accessing education. Their occupational opportunities are now shrinking with the arrival of modern production modes and new markets. All these groups are, with their low levels of education and low social status, considered disadvantaged in income possibilities and democratic participation abilities and therefore benefit from incentives and quotas in various government institutions.