FORMAL EDUCATION, ASPIRATIONS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY: A STUDY OF EDUCATED YOUTH OF ASSAM, INDIA

A THESIS TO BE SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled **"Formal education, Aspirations and Social mobility: A Study of Educated Youth in Assam"** is the result of investigation carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Dr. Sawmya Ray. The work has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university/institution for a research degree.

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This is to certify that Ms. Jahnabi Goswami has prepared the thesis entitled "Formal education, Aspirations and Social mobility: A Study of Educated Youth in Assam" for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The work was carried out under my supervision and in strict conformity with the rules laid down either in whole or in part to any other university/institution for the purpose. It is the result of her investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university/institution for a research degree.

IIT Guwahati — Dr. Sawmya Ray

Jan, 2023 — Supervisor

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Guwahati, for giving me this research opportunity, and I hope I have done justice to their expectations. I am indebted and owe to Dr Sawmya Ray, Dr Sambit Mallick and Dr Ngamjahao Kipgen for motivating and inspiring me for rigorous research through the course work, presentations and other deliberations. The academic engagements of the department kept me highly motivated.

I am particularly indebted to Dr Sawmya Ray, my PhD supervisor, for her rigorous and timeous feedback, which made me learn new things each time.

I thank Dr Andrew Deuchar, Melbourne University, for his help whenever needed.

I owe a big thank you to the participants in my study who cooperated, mostly without expecting anything in return but offering more help selflessly. I remember how warmly I was received by some HR people who, without hesitation, let me talk to employees, who provided tea and made me feel secure.

I am also grateful to Parag, Durga, Mala and other Humanities staff of the department of HSS.

I also owe gratitude to the principal of Sunny Rose English High School, Mr Puna Gogoi, and the teachers for developing the student in me and placing faith in my abilities.

I dedicate this thesis to my family, Deuta, Ma and Rika, for their love, support and patience throughout the process.

I wish IIT Guwahati achieve more landmarks and laurels in future and will forever be grateful for its contribution to building the nation great.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Abstract

This study attempts to understand the relationship between formal education, aspirations, & employment among youths in Assam. The focus is on the youths employed in unskilled-informal jobs in Guwahati. This study traces their educational experiences, the aspirations that preceded and followed their enrollment in education, & their struggles to convert these educational attainments and aspirations to employability. Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, group discussions, case studies and observation methods. My study's youth relied enormously on educated distinction, educated consumption and education credentialism. The study is a youth narrative of longing for educated distinction and being valued more than their predecessors. Socio-economic problems and circumstances compel these youths to drop out of their pursuing education and prepare for opportunities for earning a livelihood. This research attempts to document how disadvantaged social agents are encouraged to invest in education for salaried employment and to understand the relation between formal education and career aspirations and the desire to attain social mobility among educated, employed rural youths (intermediate and degree holders) in Assam. It also documents the patterns of formal education and aspiration mismatch or gap and how youth as a category is influenced by waithood and prolongation of youth. The study argues that formal education is perceived by youths as an opportunity to avoid traditional occupations. Through formal education they seek to attain a secured white-collar job and they yearn for more finances, more value or respect and attainment of more socio-economic status. They believe that social mobility can be attained through

quality education and a white-collar job. Their waithood phase is a period of hope for attaining attributes of adulthood. Attributes of success will ensure desired intergenerational mobility.

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is framed in the larger context of the state of the formal public and private education system and people's expectations. The focus of this study is on the relationship between the educational achievements of youth and their aspirations and its achievement. Disadvantaged social groups and individuals are encouraged to invest in education to obtain 'cultural capital' even after academic credentials cease to provide salaried employment (Bourdieu, 1984). However, not only for jobs, agents also tend to invest in education to obtain 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu,1984) even after educated' credentials cease to provide salaried employment. The media has also presented images of progress through developments in the formal education system and entry into white-collar work (Silberschmidt, 2001). Education is offered as an objective tool of aspiration and upward social mobility by dominant groups like state authorities, the market and the media (Jeffrey et al., 2004a, 2010). A large chunk of the population in India is higher education deprived. Education exclusion forces youths to leave institutions after matriculation or Higher Secondary (HS), and for some, after completing a bachelor's degree (Tilak, 2007). To Bourdieu (1984), though the value of education has its place among educated people from a poorer background, it does little to alter class-based patterns of access to employment or the overall balance of power within society (155). Thus, class and access to employment are related. Different classes in society have different success rates in finding access to employment. Research shows how educated youth from disadvantaged

backgrounds are excluded from meaningful employment opportunities (Arnot et al., 2012; Jeffery R et al.,2005; Jeffrey et al. 2005a, 2005b; Rogers, 2008). These studies argue that success in finding meaningful or desirable work is closely related to one's social class position. So, different social classes have different success rates in finding meaningful work. Success in finding desirable work is also related to one's caste position, race, gender or religion, region, eventual differential access to information and affordability to utilize such information (Jeffery et al., 2005a). Within the context of these studies, I place my thesis whereby the exploration is to delineate the relationship between education, aspiration and achievements among youths in Assam.

1.2 The Context of Formal Education in Assam

Assam is not industrially forward (Sarkar, 2017) in terms of job opportunities are growing but not at a rapid pace. Youths depend on industries. Among other aspects, Assam has also been affected by insurgency, militancy, illegal immigration, conflict and strife. Here, border conflict, security problems, the presence of refugees, internally displaced persons, ethnic conflicts, mass-scale displacement due to natural disasters and environmental degradation are all issues that get enmeshed with each other. Assam has an overwhelming bearing on the local labour markets, with the expansion of government employment and the introduction of industry such as small and medium, as well as the growth of trade and commerce (Xaxa, 2014).

Since the late 1970s and 1980s, at the infrastructural level, roads, railways and other means of communication had been initiated, leading to the setting up of industries that led to needing a labour force. However, local labour was disinclined to work as labourers. Durable employment opportunities were filled among the educated in the region. Traditionally, people from the hills, even in regular employment, have

generally been weak. They were disinclined to move out of their places and lacked information on new enterprises besides skills and qualifications (Xaxa et al., 2018).

Market reforms arising from the economic reforms of 1991 have led to a spurt of new economic activities and a shift of the population from rural to urban. With Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG), the number of people engaged in the secondary and tertiary sectors has been increasing. Government employment is shrinking like elsewhere in India, influenced by the structural adjustment programme. However, alternate employment opportunities are still growing. Given the context, a rise in educated unemployment is noticed, leading to migration for employment. Virginius Xaxa et al. (2018) write that the expansion of modern education at the primary, secondary and higher levels post-independence boosted the employment market. Students with the low level of training and skill have been moving out of the hills to seek employment, especially to South India. The North East youths are visible in job opportunities of the mainland, however, mainly at call centres, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, beauty parlours, airlines and commercial establishments as sales men and women, as well as guards and housekeepers. This scenario relates to the whole of north-east.

Assam is the largest northeastern state with a geographical area of 78,438 sq. km. 98.4% is rural. Assam is administratively divided into 33 districts with 80 sub-division, 219 Development Blocks and 2202 Gaon Panchayats, out of which three districts with four sub-divisions & 16 Development Blocks are under three hill districts of Karbi-Along, East Karbi-Along & Dima Hasao. Further, four districts with eight sub-divisions are under Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) area viz Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baska & Udalguri. The Brahmaputra valley consists of North Bank Plains Zone (NBPZ), Upper Brahmaputra valley Zone (UBVZ), Central Brahmaputra valley Zone (CBVZ) and Lower Brahmaputra Valley Zone (LBVZ),

whereas the Barak Valley Zone mainly consists of a plain area of three districts, viz. Cachar, Karimganj & Hailakandi (Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2016).

According to the Census of India, 2011, the population of Assam stands at 312.05 lakh, of which 159.39 lakh are male, and 152.66 lakh are female. It has a rural population of 2.6 crores and an urban population of 43 lakhs.

The decadal growth of the State's population works out at 17.07 per cent during the decade 2001-2011 as against 17.68 per cent for the country as a whole. Out of the total 312.05 lakh population, 86 per cent live in rural areas & 14 per cent population lives in urban areas of the State. The density of the population of Assam increased to 398 persons in 2011 from 340 persons in the 2001 Census, or on average, 58 more people inhabit every square kilometre in the State as compared to a decade ago. The literacy rate stands at 72.19 %, with a rural literacy rate of 69.34 % and an urban literacy rate of 88.47 %. The percentage of the BPL population [Tendulkar Methodology (2011-12)] is 31.98 %. The number of educational institutions as per the government report on State-run schools (2015-16)[1]:

[1] Source: https://des.assam.gov.in/information-services/state-profile-of-assam

Table 1

Level of Schooling		No. of schools
Lower Primary		40480
Upper Primary		11591
High and Higher Secondary		8241
Junior College		657
College of General Education		344

Table 2

College for Professional Education		No. of colleges
Agriculture & Forestry		2
Technology & Engg. College		18
Medical College(Homeo, Ayurvedic, Dental etc.)		11

Table 3

Enrolment (in Nos.)	
Lower Primary	2925349
Upper Primary	1452778
High and Higher Secondary	1150746

Table 4

Drop out rate in schools	Percentage
Lower Primary	15.4%
Upper Primary	10.5%

1.2.1 Types of Schools in Assam

Saba Hussain's classification of schools in Assam is based on Mehrotra and Panchamukhi's (2006) classification of schools in India. According to Mehrotra and Panchamukhi (2006), schools in India has been essentially classified[2] into:

[2] Based on this classification Saba Hussain (2019, p. 15-16) classified schools in Assam. They are

1) **Assam State Government-aided schools** The state government aided schools are funded and administered by the Directorate of Elementary Education and the Directorate of Secondary Education. Both the directorate follows the rules of government of Assam, inspect and supervise schools as a supporting agency, play instrumental role in appointment and transfer of teaching and non-teaching staff and in the deputation of teachers, provides in-service training, participate in budgetary activities regarding payment of salary, grants for infrastructure, and development /establishment of schools. The medium of instruction in these schools is Assamese. They include middle, secondary, and senior secondary schools affiliated with the Government of Assam.
2) **Government-aided provincialised schools** These are schools started by the community or individuals in a community, but once they reach the norms of size, student enrolment, teacher recruitment, infrastructure and so on, they are adopted by the state government under the Assam Venture Educational Institutions (Provincialised of Services) Bill, 2011. Provincialised schools then become eligible for grants, aids, and benefits under government-run schemes.
3) **Government-aided central schools or Kendriya Vidyalayas**
Established in the year 1963–64, on the recommendation of the Second Central Pay Commission, as a welfare measure for the employees who are transferable throughout the country. They are managed by the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan that comes under the Union Government.

4) **Private-aided schools**
They are administered and managed by private organisations affiliated to the state or central Board(s) of education. These organisations receive aid in the form of maintenance grants from the Government of Assam, meant to help them meet their expenditure for the payment of salaries, allowances, and the provident fund of the employees of the school (up to 95% of their costs). Students from these schools are not eligible for any state benefits.
5) **Private unaided schools**
They are run by registered trusts and societies. These schools are affiliated with the state or central government either through SEBA or CBSE. But these organisations do not receive any financial support from the government. Also, the students from these schools are not eligible for any benefits, unlike the students from government-aided schools. Missionaries run many private unaided schools in the state.

- Government schools, including those run by local bodies,
- Private schools, aided by the government,
- Private unaided schools, and
- Unrecognised private schools (the first three being recognized by the government

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The circulation of images of progress through formal education is increasing the hopes and aspirations of youths from rural and urban areas. It plays a significant role in forming identities among youths in search of a secure future (Jeffrey et al., 2004b). Formal education has become a medium of gaining upward mobility in society, specifically for those who were educationally deprived and marginalized. For their subsequent generation, they seek a better future than theirs. Parents have a human capital approach to their child's education to secure jobs and better income (De, Khera, Samson, & Kumar, 2011). Parents for their children and youths aspire to seek a secure government job. This is a significant expectation from the educational system. However, it is known that formal sector employment opportunities are declining. The state has been decreasing its welfare responsibilities (Dreze & Sen, 1999) and job precariousness has resulted. This is not unique to India; this has been a significant challenge to youth worldwide. Secured and formal employment provided by welfare societies has now been replaced by job insecurity and precariousness (Carmo et al., 2014). An essential feature of neo-liberal market regulation is

"Fewer people should do more work, ideally for less money, irrespective of the negative impact on an employee's emotional and economic well-being, including their capacity to meaningfully contribute to society outside the workplace, in

addition to the inevitable increase in the numbers of people not in work…." (Cairns et al. 2016).

The comparative education discourse asks questions about the relevance and role of formal schooling in the lives of educated youths (Stambach,1998). 'The Diploma Disease' by Ronald Dore (1976) critically looked at the role of formal schooling. The book depicts how youths overestimate the transformative power of education. Formal education delivered by schools, especially in rural, semi-urban, and urban areas in India, is not different from the schools Ronald Dore (1976) depicts because he was talking about education in developing countries like India and China.

Similarly, Kumar (1991) writes that our skills, crafts and knowledge have been devalued in the system designed by the British, and this has also been reflected in the curriculum. He discusses how children from marginalized backgrounds drop from school, unable to cope with the curriculum. The flaws in the curriculum have been spoken about in the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1992. Besides curriculum, the National Education Policy, 2020 discusses how language acts as a barrier for disadvantaged students.

Since the promulgation of the constitution, till the 1990s, there has been a lack of political will for the universalization of elementary education. The elites ensured their children reached higher education; they did not speak for the rights of 'lower classes' (PROBE 1999). To quote Jean Dreze (2003), "educational disparities, which contribute a great deal to the persistence of massive inequalities in Indian society, also largely derive from more fundamental inequalities such as those of class, caste and gender" (p. 982). A report on such inequalities was reflected by the PROBE report of 1999, which for the first time, presented an empirical view rather than a political viewpoint on the Indian education system. As per the report, half of the

country's population could not read and write after decades of independence, where the share of women was more than men. Only 30 per cent of all adults had completed eight years of schooling. One-third of all children aged 6-14 were out of school. Economically underprivileged, who are again primarily from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and Muslim communities had the lowest literacy rate and are less likely to go to school than children from other communities. Another crucial pattern. [3]

is that literacy rates are much lower for women than for men in most regions. Regional disparities were evident. This report was followed by several reports which highlighted the poor educational and occupational outcomes of disadvantaged section of population in India-SC (Scheduled Castes), ST (Scheduled Tribes), Women, and Muslim in India. With this background, this study discusses the ways in which youth in Assam belonging to various marginalized sections perceive/d formal education & the role played by it in shaping their aspirations & achievements in terms of career building & other pursuits of life.

In the context of precarious employment, youths tend to have doubts about the system of education. In this study, the sampled respondents who are employed basically in the service sector are migrants from rural areas to Guwahati city. This migration is essentially job-oriented. Either, they are 10+2 (Higher Secondary) certificate holder in Arts, Science or Commerce or Bachelors of Arts, Science or Commerce degree holders who are excluded from higher education due various reasons majorly due to poverty, lack of economic resources and other forms of capitals. Such resources are very important for educated identity interplaying with youth and parental background (Jeffrey et al., 2004, 2005). It is in this context of

[3] The first constitutional step towards elementary education as a fundamental right was the 83rd constitutional amendment, which was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in July 1997

hegemonic constructions of education as an objective tool of social mobility and in reality, the continued differential access to this tool and its claimed consequent benefits, that I place my study. This study will attempt to understand the relationship between formal education, creation of aspirations and social mobility through access to desired employment opportunities.

1.4 Methodology

Methods of Data Collection

Qualitative methods were primarily used to gather primary data for the present study. Semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, group discussions, case studies and observation methods were used to collect data. Different methods were used depending on the context at different stages of this research.

Primary data was collected through qualitative methods. The sample size is 213 participants. Out of 213 participants, 113 were males, and 100 were female participants. Two hundred thirteen participants were selected from a population of security guards from educational institutions; sales executives and desk receptionist (in wholesale & retail); and restaurant and cafeteria attendants. These are primarily non-permanent, volatile and contractual job (though without an actual document) service sector jobs which have seen dynamic growth since the 1990s. The contribution of this sector to the GDP has been significantly rising since the 1990s (Eichengreen & Gupta, 2011). Labour shifting out of agriculture is getting absorbed in services rather than manufacturing (Ramaswamy & Agarwal, 2012). The respondents have chosen such jobs that are characterized by contractual condition and absence of social security benefits because they are low-skilled than the other services.

Service trade and hotels and restaurants is frequented by a significant amount of labour which is increasing year by year. The urban employment in these two sectors has been the highest in 2017-2019 as per NSS Employment and Unemployment surveys. These are basically precarious jobs as per government reports.

The secondary sources of data include reports of PROBE (Public report on basic education in India,1999); PROBE revisited: A report on elementary education in India; reports from ASER (Annual Status of Education Report); reports from CREATE (Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity). Secondary sources in terms of newspapers are “Axomiya Pratidin” and “The Assam Tribune”.

Background of Respondents (youths)

Out of 213 respondents, a large number of youths migrated from villages, rural areas or semi-urban areas to Guwahati city in search of a job. These youths are excluded from the higher education of their choice. They are intermediate and degree holders. Most of the time, they arrive in Guwahati in a state of failure to obtain a secure salaried government job or in the process of preparing for a secured job. Sixty-two (62) per cent of male respondents and fifty-two (52) per cent of females qualified only for higher secondary exams. Thirty-eight per cent of male respondents and 48 per cent of female respondents qualified only for graduation and not further than that, and thereby they exited the formal education system looking for jobs.

According to findings, out of 213 respondents (113 being males, 100 females), the maximum number of respondents had failed to obtain a secure salaried job, and they are preparing and putting effort to gain such a job, while a few had stopped trying to qualify for a secure government job. Two groups of youths were found one of age

19-27[4] who still nurtured hopes of entry into formal employment or white-collar employment, another of age 25-32 who gave up hope and made an effort for adjustments into aspirations, hopes and future employment. In this context, the occupational and educational backgrounds of these 213 youths are:

Educational backgrounds of youths

Male-respondents: Fourty-nine (49) of the male respondents have passed HS examination. Twenty-one (21) of the respondents could not appear for HS final exam or failed the exam for various reasons like death of a parent. Fourty-three (43) of the male respondents are graduates.

Female respondents: Fourty-one (41) of the female respondents have passed HS examination. Eleven (11) of the respondents could not appear for HS final or failed the exam for various reasons. Fourty-eight (48) of the female respondents passed the graduation exam.

Occupational backgrounds of respondents

Youths belonged to occupations of Security Guards, Sales executives, Desk receptionist, Restaurant and Cafeteria Workers. Thirty (30) security guards were males and thirty-seven (37) security guards were females. Fifty (50) sales executives/desk receptionist were males and fourty (40) were females. Thirty-three (33) restaurant and cafeteria workers were males and twenty-three (23) were females

[4] The explanation of this age overlap is that there were youths who belong to age 25, 26 and 27 who gave up hope of entry into white-collar employment. Again, there was another group of age 25, 26 and 27 who were hopeful of entry into white-collar employment.

Occupational background of parents

Parents of respondents belonged to professions like farmers, unskilled manual labourers, owners of convenience store and pan bidi shops, and teachers. Out of 213 parents, occupational background of 198 fathers, and 196 mothers could be found because, the rest were dead. In terms of occupation, sixty-nine (69) fathers and twenty-five (25) mothers were farmers; sixty-three (63) fathers and thirty-four (34) mothers were unskilled manual labourers. Again, fifty-two (52) fathers and thirty-three (33) mothers were working at the unorganized sector as convenience store and pan-bidi shop owners. Twelve (12) fathers were working as contractual teachers in venture schools and two (2) fathers were working as fishermen for their livelihood.

Caste background of youths

Forty-six (46) male and thirty-nine (39) female respondents belonged to the unreserved category. Thirty-three (33) male and twenty (20) female respondents belonged to the OBC (other backward castes) category. Twelve (12) male and ten (10) female respondents belonged to the SC (scheduled castes) category and twenty-two (22) male and thirty-one (31) female respondents belonged to the ST (scheduled tribes) category. Highest number of youths belonged to the unreserved category.

Religious compositions of youths

Highest number of youths belonged to the Hindu religion, the number of male and female respondents being sixty-six (66) and fifty-four (54) respectively. The number of Christian male respondents is eighteen (18) and female youth respondents is thirty-two (32). The number of muslim male respondents is nineteen (19) and female youth respondents is fourteen (14).

Annual income of household

Out of 213 households, seventy-five (75) households earned an annual income of less than Rs. 30,000; 86 households earned an annual income of less than Rs. 50,000. 52 households earned an annual income of less than Rs. 100,000.

Rationale for the Study

Aspiration is a cultural capacity in terms of the orientation of culture towards the future (Appadurai, 2004), and therefore background or culture capacitates some individuals to endeavour for a better future than others. To address the research problem, 'aspiration' will be dealt with as 'educational aspiration and 'occupational aspiration', for there are different aspects of aspiration in an individual's life. Literature has addressed how societal stratification halts an individual's occupational aspirations and social and economic mobility. Discrimination and exploitation take away the hope of a better life in future. Formal education can play an essential role for disadvantaged people in motivating for a better future. In fact, without schooling, economic and social mobility is impossible. However, the literature suggests occupational aspiration and mobility among the marginalized cannot be fulfilled with discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, gender, religion, region and other factors. Parental educational aspirations, in many cases, serve as motivational forces that encourage youth to strive for academic success (Sewell & Shah, 1968). Assessment of the literature review related to the sociology of education and related areas will bring forth a considerable amount of literature on the problems related to deprivation in access to education and employment due to caste, ethnicity, religion, region and gender stratification. Drawing insights from these discourses, this

research attempts to understand whether the education system plays any role in further marginalizing the marginalized.

This study of understanding aspirations and achievements through education gains more relevance given the presence of a diverse population in terms of caste, religion, and, more so, the considerable number of ethnic tribes in Assam. Since there is a dearth of sociological research on aspiration and social mobility in Assam, drawing insights from existing sociological perspectives and empirical works from other parts of India and the world, this study attempts to understand formal education, aspiration and social mobility in Assam.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are

1. To understand the relation between formal education, aspirations and the desire to attain social mobility among educated youths (intermediate and degree holders) in Assam.
2. To document the patterns of access to education among these youths and its relation to their socio-political backgrounds.
3. To find if and how their social backgrounds, and the forms of education they received influenced and determined their aspirations.
4. To document the process through which their educational achievements/skills materialized into employability and social mobility.

Research Questions

1. What are the various ways in which education is perceived and used among youths from marginalised social backgrounds?
2. How do social backgrounds determine aspirations and choices of different forms of education?
3. How has enrollment into different forms of education helped materialize their aspirations, build new ones and achieve social mobility if any?
4. What strategies do youths employ to negotiate unequal access to formal education and employment and what does "waithood" bring upon them?

Field Site

As per the 2011 census, the total population of Assam is 31 million. Assam has a Hindu population of 61.47%, a Muslim population of 34.22%, a Christian population of 3.74% and a negligible amount of Sikh, Buddhist and Jains, as per the Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2016. Similarly, according to the handbook on Social Welfare Statistics. Assam has a youth (15-24 yrs) population of 19.2 % of which scheduled caste is 20.2 %. Guwahati city is a land of opportunities. It is a sprawling metropolis, a gateway to northeast India and strategically crucial for being the entry point to South-east India. City corridors have important commercial areas with retail, wholesale and commercial offices. I was in the field site for eight months (March 2019 – October 2019). The city of Guwahati was selected first based on accessibility and convenience and second based on it being a hub for migration by youths from all over Assam for employment and livelihood. I met and interacted with 213 participants.

The site where this study's fieldwork was carried out was Guwahati, Kamrup district, Assam. I was in the field site for eight months (March 2019 – October 2019). The city of Guwahati, one of the main urban centres of Assam, the erstwhile capital, was selected first based on accessibility and convenience and second based on it being a hub for migration by youths from all over Assam for employment and livelihood. I met and interacted with 213 participants.

I began my fieldwork in one of the educational institutions in Guwahati where many contractual employees serve in various positions. I interviewed this institute's security guards, food service attendants, and delivery boys. My fieldwork then shifted to shopping malls and cafeterias in Guwahati. Sometimes, I directly approached the participants. They were kind enough to allow me to interview them after I introduced me and my research topic to them elaborately and promised confidentiality. I further explained to them how we maintain confidentiality, which convinced them about my approach. In shopping malls, desk reception and cafeterias, first I had to take permission from the human resource personnel or the manager. Some of them were kind enough to allow me, some were suspicious and did not grant me permission to speak to their employees. Respondents were largely very busy. They worked in shifts and did not have the time to be interviewed on the spot. I had to make appointments with them and meet them later at a convenient time and place for them. I also offered them refreshments after the interview was over. Though the convenient method of interviewing was recording, it was not used when participants did not give consent or showed any hesitation.

I visited eight shopping malls, two educational institutions, two restaurants and three cafes for fieldwork. These were seen as apt for conducting fieldwork because they employ many youths as contractual labour. The minimum qualification for youth to attain such jobs is a higher secondary (HS) pass. Three or four years earlier,

the minimum qualification for this contractual employment was matriculation or 10th pass. They enter a mall job at a very early age. Youths in my study entered mall jobs mainly at 18, and some continue to work there for as long as they had no better opportunities. Human resource personnel generally prefer a young population who is vibrant, energetic, competitive and uncomplaining. So, the age group of the respondents for this study is 18-32 years. By 18 years, youth in general, attain a HS pass certificate if socio-economic circumstances favour them.

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter II, *Formal Education, Aspiration and Social Mobility: A Review of Literature,* locates this study in the broader context of the sociological and other disciplinary discourses on education, aspirations, and employment. Along with literature from other parts of the world, this chapter explicitly situates this study in the context of education in India and the aims it propagated, analysis of statistical data on education and employment, the onset of neoliberalism and precarious employment in India. It also provides a detailed literature review of the different debates on youths' and parents' approach towards formal education from the perspective of the degradation of the value of traditional sector jobs and emerging value attachment towards modernity. Debates and theories on education, aspirations, and social mobility, especially among the marginalized communities in India, are looked at closely.

Chapter III, *Education, Aspirations and Employment in Assam,* documents the interrelationship between formal education, aspiration, and the experiences youths in the field, face in attempting social mobility in various service sectors. The chapter also explains how among respondents human capital approach towards education

and employment intersects with the proliferation of images of progress, neoliberalism and globalisation in the employment sector. Overall, the chapter brings forward the factors impacting the education-job mismatch faced by aspiring rural youths who aims for a secured job[5] and consequent adulthood. The chapter also brings forth the gendered transition of women, and their journey from schooling to college.

Chapter IV, *'Transitions, Waithood and Prolongation of Youth in Assam,'* examines the interrelationship between formal education and aspiration and its interlinkages with the waithood and prolongation of youth based on the data collected from the field. It further accounts for their experiences of hopelessness, despair and anxiety associated with underemployment and job dissatisfaction. It is also about their constant effort to overcome the state of limbo or wait for a secure or stable job in the future or, in other words, their effort to avoid dependence on traditional sector jobs shortly. It accounts for how patriarchal norms and values doubly impact women's pursuit of education, intents to limit their aspirations, and affects their employment efforts.

Chapter V, *Conclusion*, summarises the preceding chapters. It brings out essential observations and findings of each of the chapters. It also brings the crucial arguments of the study and explains the place of this study within the larger discourses on education and employment in India.

[5] The primary goal of majority of the respondents is to gain a secured job or permanent job which they believe they can gain through qualifications acquired through formal education.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

2.1 Formal Education in India

According to Nalini Juneja (2010), since colonial times, there has been a hierarchy of schools in India, and that access to education differs from place to place and from time to time. She also stated that schools in the private sector are more diverse than the schools in the government sector. There are government and private schools in India. Besides, there are various forms of government schools and private schools, government aided and unaided; government- recognized and unrecognized schools. Formal schooling in India is synonymous with government /municipal schools which are run by the government (Juneja, 2010). The central and the state governments share legislative power to legislate for the education sector.

Moreover, different levels of government, central, state, and local, run different kinds of schools. There are both government and private model schools in each district, which is often better equipped than other government schools. These are meant for a select and exclusive group. In contrast, Education Guarantee Schools(EGS) have a mass appeal and often have poorer quality provisions. Education Guarantee Schools(EGS) and Alternative and Innovative Education(AIE) are under the SSA (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan) mission to ensure access to schools for out-of-school children. EGS&AlE primarily focuses on children aged 6-14 years who are either not enrolled or have dropped out prematurely. It also covers children up to the age of 18 years complying with the provisions of the Persons with

Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 of India. It is recognized that children in the 12-14 years age group (who have never been enrolled or have dropped out early) and certain complex groups like street children, children who migrate, bonded child labour etc cannot be admitted into formal schools and would require alternative interventions for some time. Again, SSA (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan) is India's flagship programme, operational since 2000-01 for the achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education to spread education and ensure access to education irrespective of caste, class, gender, language, religion and region. Besides model schools and Education Guarantee Schools, there are three categories of schools run by the Central government- the Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central schools), Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and the Central Tibetan Schools for Tibetan refugees. The Kendriya Vidyalayas was created in 1965 as separate schools for children of transferable Central Government employees. Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, residential schools were set up to cater to rural children all over the country after the Education Policy of 1986 (GoI, 1986). There is at least one in every district. The objectives of the Navodaya Vidyalaya Scheme are to a) provide good quality modern education, including a vital component of culture, inculcation of values, awareness of the environment, adventure activities and physical education, to talented children predominantly from rural areas, without regard to their family's socio-economic condition. Admission to these schools is greatly sought after, and tests are conducted to select children for these schools. Ashram schools have been viewed as effective institutions to meet the educational needs of tribals living in the interior, most backwards and scattered habitations where opening up regular schools is not viable. State governments provide free education, accommodation, and stipends exclusively for students belonging to ST communities to facilitate their integration into mainstream society. Ashram Schools are in forest areas, near dwellings of tribal communities and tehsil

towns (local administrative headquarters), but never in cities or large townships. Ashram School buildings usually have one room of approximately 300-400 sq. ft. in size with a tiny classroom, an office room, and a kitchen, where meals for the students are prepared (Sujatha, 1990). Thus, it is evident that there are schools that meet the educational priorities of elite and privileged groups and some other schools that meet the educational needs of marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, there is a vast difference in the quality and the infrastructure embedded in these two groups of schools.

In India, the craze for private schools is not only due to the medium of instruction in English, quality, and infrastructure. It is perception rather than fact that the high quality of private schools is often cited as an essential reason parents choose these schools for their children (Ashley *& Alii,* 2014, cited in Narwana, 2017). Nambissan (2010) noted that after the middle class fled from state schools during the 1980s, the lower middle class started following suit by the increasing desertion of these schools in the next decade or so. State schools are now primarily dominated by children from the poorest, belonging mainly to lower castes and minorities. Narwana (2017) exemplifies the case of a village in the Jind, Haryana district, where children frequent government schools rather than private schools where the medium of instruction is the local language, while the medium of instruction in government schools is English leading to the closure of government schools. However, there were other reasons for the closure of private schools, like bad pupil-teacher ratio and lack of seating arrangements. Government schools could provide free school uniforms, books and stationary and mid-day meals up to 8th class under the Right to Education Act (RTE henceforth). Scheduled caste students also receive monthly stipends in government schools under State schemes. The private school does not provide any such incentive. But local language as a medium of instruction was a major reason for the

closure of government schools. Faust and Nagar (2001) perceive that English education, along with the changes in attitude, lifestyles, mannerisms, and aspirations that it brings, becomes a form of cultural capital that provides higher economic and cultural status.

In independent India, education of the scheduled castes proceeded at a snail's pace. Reports and studies have documented the social opposition to the early schooling of the scheduled castes as well as the social and economic constraints that impede their education even today. Movements to abolish the caste system and end discrimination have always proposed education as the primary means to overcome caste oppression (Omvedt,1993). Consequently, the educational status of Scheduled Castes is significantly better in the Southern and South-western states of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra where strong SC liberation movements, and broad based anti-Brahmin movements emerged in the anti-colonial struggle for independence. For a variety of complex reasons, such movements had a comparatively weak presence in North India (Velaskar,2005).

The history of Scheduled Tribe movements is quite different in that basic livelihood needs and the struggle to retain access to forests and natural resources took centre stage in their struggles for dignity and a better life, while access to education remained a secondary issue (Surajit,2002). But to enhance skills for employment among the tribes centrally-sponsored government scheme of ashram schools exclusively for ST children from elementary to higher-secondary levels was initiated in the 1970s and continue to the present(ibid.). Emphasizing on the lack of imaginative curriculum and pedagogy, Kurrien (1983:179-80) underlines in particular the detrimental effect that deficiencies in schooling have on 'early learning' of children from poor and illiterate backgrounds. He emphasizes that when dalit and other 'educationally backward' pupils are provided with learning opportunities as

well as effective pedagogic supports to acquire specific language, numerical and other competencies, they are likely to be better able to academically cope with the rigours of the formal school. Amman Madan's (1986, p.5) remarks in relation to the poor achievement of the blacks in schools apply to SC children as well: 'This does not mean that black children (read scheduled castes) are culturally deprived, or that they are deficient in some way. It is just that they have fewer opportunities to develop the specific skills and knowledge demanded by the school'. Computed from NSSO 55th Round Survey ; 1999-2000- Data shows the percentage of graduates in population aged 20 years or more in different castes and communities in rural and urban India. Only a little more than 1 per cent of Scheduled tribes, scheduled Castes and Muslims are graduates in rural India, while the figure for Hindu upper caste is five times higher at over five per cent. The real inequalities are urban India, where the SCs, but also Muslims, OBCs and STs are way behind the forward communities and castes with a quarter or more of their population being graduates. Another way of looking at it is that STs, SCs Muslims and OBCs are always below the national average while other communities and especially Hindu upper castes are well above this average in both rural and urban India. Banerjee and Somanathan (2007) analyse the census data between 1971 and 1991 and find that unequal access to primary schools has been a major factor in creating disparities among different caste groups. They mapped the availability of public goods against the parliamentary constituency areas and found that the areas of SC/ST concentration had much less access to primary or secondary schools in 1971 as compared to other areas. As regards Scheduled Tribes, government policy focused on education as the main avenue by which to integrate them into 'mainstream' society. The concept of 'ashram schools' – residential schools for ST children – came into vogue in order to overcome structural barriers such as difficult terrain, inaccessible locations and spatially dispersed habitations, and thereby to improve educational access for Scheduled

Tribe communities. A centrally-sponsored government scheme of ashram schools exclusively for ST children from elementary to higher secondary levels was initiated in the 1970s and continues to the present (Sujatha, 2002). Ashram schools include vocational training in their curricula in order to provide ST youth with skills and training for jobs in the industrial sector. The poor quality of education in ashram schools, however, has undermined confidence in education as a vehicle for social mobility. The curriculum bears no relation to the economic and social life of Scheduled Tribe communities and instead attempts to wean young people away from it, alienating them in the process. Thus, the drop-out rate is high (ibid.). The understanding that education is a vehicle for integration and assimilation of SC and ST students into the social mainstream is also increasingly being questioned and is seen as having limited usefulness in overcoming prejudice, discrimination, and marginalisation. To bring about equity in education for excluded populations such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, scholars and activists advocate a framework of social justice that goes beyond aggregative concerns of equity in the context of access, participation, and outcomes, to one which emphasises qualitative aspects of the educational experience and their impact on identity, self-worth and future life chances (Secada, 1989). This, they argue, can only take place in schools that are set up exclusively for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students and that are invested in the success of these students (Illiah, 2000).

Post liberalization and privatization has impacted the lives of the SCs, STs and women. According to Kancha IIaiah (2004, p.159), “The market is tearing apart the lives of the laboring Dalit-Bahujans as they are unable to cope with growing aspirations on the one hand, and increasing deprivation on the other.” They are being threatened by the new development of advanced capitalism and globalization. There is no improvement in the agrarian relations and exploitation still continues to exist.

The vast majority of SCs, STs and OBCs who come within the agrarian labour economy, live below the poverty line. They have no share in the in the industrial capital. And they are being exploited to feed the global markets which is leading to suicides (ibid.159-164). In this scenario, withdrawal of government funding from education and increasing privatization of the same hampers students from marginalized sections. A study of school drop-outs among 'Harijan' children in Uttar Pradesh stresses that the physical conditions of the schools are of deplorably low standards and are partly responsible for their inability to retain dalit pupils (CIRTPC,1975, p.115). As children from dominant communities and economically advanced groups move from state-sponsored to private educational institutions, the overall quality in terms of infrastructure, teacher requirements, curriculum etc. is neglected by the state authorities. Studies show that students other than those belonging to the SC and ST are found in relatively greater numbers in private institutions. For instance while 20.77 per cent of 'other' (non-SC/ST) students in general education in rural areas are in private institutions, this is true of only 10.09 per cent of SC students (NSSO, 1989). Such trends leads to serious handicap for children from marginalised background to compete in the labour market. Thus it becomes a cyclical process whereby, with privatization, there is a deliberate negligence on the part of the state for public schools, this leads to severe dip in the quality of public schools, students from relatively affluent backgrounds manage to shift to private schools, and as they move out the negligence of such schools become sharp. In this entire process children from marginalised communities are deprived of the minimum quality of education that they received earlier through public school systems. Again, the cultural marginalisation and oppression faced by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes that mainstream education does not tackle is one part of the problem. The second important failing of mainstream education is its inability to deliver the promise of jobs and upward economic mobility.

Privatization of education with liberalization does not have a positive impact on access to education and employment in India. Information technology industry is one of the product of privatization in India. Nagaraju Gundemeda (2014) in his study on access to employment found that women, dalits and tribals comparatively have less access to IT education and employment. He further said that students who hail from ex-untouchable families suffer from inferiority and fear of revealing their caste identity in the IT industry. Again, rural youths deprived of multiple forms of capital, including linguistic, symbolic and cultural codes tend to be denied entry and access to the fruits of the knowledge economy in the era of globalization.

Apart from this, the dalits neither had the necessary financial strength nor were they able to access inexpensive loans. This also deprives the poor students from utilising reservation-based admission options (ibid: 4135). There is a limited amount of evidence available on the number of dalits and adivasis who have graduated from higher educational institutions (Chanana, 1993). Henriques and Wankhede (1985) show that those SC and ST students who do finish their secondary education are more likely to be boys than girls, and that they are most likely to come from the uppermost socio-economic strata of the dalit and adivasi population. So, it seems that there is stratification even within the Dalit and Adivasi communities and social exclusion occurs in such a way that only the privileged have access to education and employment and can fulfil their occupational aspirations.

2.1.1 Policy Imperatives and Context of Education in India

In postcolonial India, larger share of the investment in education is a state responsibility and public investment in education is not encouraging which has led to poor infrastructure, teacher absenteeism and teacher shortage. While progress has

been made in retaining children in primary and lower secondary school (UNESCO, 2014). Our schooling system is a socio-economically class based system (Mukherjee, 2015). Though access to education has little improved through education for All (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan) universal access to education for all is still a distant reality. This situation is prevalent despite the implementation of Right to Education Act (2010) (Mukherjee, 2015). Moreover, drop-out rates and quality of education are major issues of Indian education system as per government reports like ASER (The Annual Status of Education Report) and Pratham.

The Macaulay Minute of 1835 is the onset of formal English language education in India replacing the traditional forms. This was the outcome of the enthnocentric bias of English as a superior culture over the Indians. However, pre-independence policies did not focus on elementary education and education of the marginalized. The Mudalier Committee report of 1952 was rather a gendered approach to girls' education, the focus being on domestic science and about their contribution to nation-building. But the coming education policies had constitutional underpinnings in meeting goals of social justice. The stern advocate of education as a constitutional principle is from Justice P N Bhagwati's interpretation of Article 21:

"The right to life includes the right to live with human dignity and all that goes along with it, namely the bare necessities of life such as adequate nutrition, clothing and shelter and facilities for reading, writing and expressing ourselves in diverse forms, freely moving about and mixing and commingling with fellow human beings." (Francis Coralie Mullin v. Administrator, UT of Delhi).

This formed the basis for inclusion of education as a fundamental right through the landmark J.P.Unnikrishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh, a constitution Bench had held education upto the age of 14 years to be a fundamental right…. It would be

therefore incumbent upon the State to provide facilities and opportunity as enjoined under Article 39 (e) and (f) of the Constitution and to prevent exploitation of their childhood due to indigence and vagary."

The national education policy, 1968 was about promoting social cohesion and national integration through a common school system. Financial and organizational loopholes which aggravated educational disparities. The national education policy (1986/1992) made special mention for Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) children, girls, minorities and other educationally backward sections; ashram schools for tribals; location of schools in Scheduled Caste (SC) neighbourhoods and tribal areas, curriculum reform to include tribal culture and "objectively reflect minorities"; also redesigning of the curriculum with reference to girls; Identifying innovative methods for participation of SC children and promoting integration of children from minority backgrounds so as to promote national integration.

It was this education policy which gave importance to exclusionary practices and set objectives and goals for eliminating the same. However, the above interventions suffered from administrative loopholes, lack of finances and quality issues. Therefore, the first generation learners were exposed to low-quality Education Guarantee Centres (EGCs) and underqualified and underpaid "para teachers". The ashram schools set up for tribal children were of very poor standards. At state level, special attention to tribals children has not been given (Sujatha, 2002). Moreover, policies encouraged poor quality of services to children of excluded community and "hierarchies of access" (Bhatty, 2014).

Before structural adjustment programmes started in India, education projects were rarely backed up by foreign funds. Since 1990, the World Bank and others started

aiding elementary education in India. The DPEP programme scheme targeted over seven years of timeline :

- Decentralised and participatory planning and administration at the district level, involving village leadership, NGOs, schools, district and block personnel.
- Specific strategies to increase enrolment and retention of girls, SC and ST students (identified as gender, caste and tribe 'gaps' in primary education).
- Focus on enhancing capacities of teachers by providing workshops for teachers and production of new teaching learning materials to improve student achievement of learning.
- Administrative capacity building at the district and block levels.
- Collection of data and setting up an Education Management and Information System (EMIS) [MHRD 1995].

Through District Primary Education Program (DPEP), finance were directed towards school infrastructure, teacher training, textbook improvement, etc. The aim was to improve universal elementary education. During that time there was a large number of out of school children, majority were girls. Studies have declared DPEP as successful in achieving its objectives (Menon, 2001, Pandey,2000). It opened new schools and alternative schooling centres and teacher training facilities. DPEP improved educational attainment among castes, but did not reduce disparities across different castes (Azam & Siang). A further boost was given to the education system by the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) OF 2001-02 and the DPEP was integrated into this framework under centre-state partnership.

Indian education policies have a framework of segmented approach towards children from marginalized and deprived sections which has led to provision of substandard facilities for them (Bhatty, 2014). Policies tend to have bias towards model schools rather than regular government schools. This has enhanced exclusionary practices towards the marginalized. Regular government schools has to rely on SSA programmes which is subjected to administrative loopholes and delivering poor quality education. Moreover, the Right to Education Act suffers from the same administrative and financial hardships (Bhatty, 2014, p. 100).

2.2 Aspirations and Transitions to Adulthood

Literature on aspirations in global south, showcase aspirations being influenced by the desire of accumulating wealth and accessing modernity (Jeffrey, sancho, patel oxford thesis, mains 2012). This happens around the context of extremely competitive government job and desire for white-collar employment. Lower middle class young men's hopes and aspirations faces setback by concerns of lack of cultural and social capital, bribes, familial connections. The period of neoliberalism in India has brought various socio-cultural and labour market changes. It has created inequitable opportunities in indian formal education system. There are macro impact on youth aspirations. Government school students cannot reach white-collar employment (Jeffrey,2004,2005)

In India, though youths aspire for white-collar employment, the overproduction of college graduates compels students to make adjustments of their aspirations for working in poorly paid, unskilled positions. (Cross, 2009; Jeffery, R 2005; Jeffrey, 2008).

Alex Inkeles and David H. Smith (1974) in their research in developing countries documented how education played a crucial role in promoting modern attitudes and

values. In the same work, the ‘modern’ was also about moving away from hierarchical control and the opinions and attitudes of the past. However, the traditional man is all about passive acceptance of fate; fear of innovation and distrust of the new; dependence on traditional authority and the wisdom of the elders and religious and customary leaders; fear of larger regional and national entities; exclusive identification with purely local and parochial primary groups. (see if copied. According to Tanguy Bernard and Alemayehu Seyoum Taffesse (p. 198-99, 2014), aspirations are future-oriented, that is, they can only be achieved in the future time. Secondly, aspirations are goals in which individuals are willing, in principle, to invest time, effort or money to attain in contrast to idle daydreams and wishes. Appadurai (2004) argues that ‘the poor are frequently in a position where they are encouraged to subscribe to norms whose social effect is to further diminish their dignity, exacerbate their inequality, and deepen their lack of access to material goods and services’ (p. 66). According to Arjun Appadurai(2004), aspiration is a cultural capacity. Social factors such as family, friends, schools play a significant role in influencing young people’s aspirations and determining realistic aspirations (Prodnovich, et al., 2014).Culture makes a major difference to various aspects of human behaviour determining economic success (Sen, 1973, 1982). Arjun Appadurai argues that though culture is a matter of pastness- habit, custom, heritage, tradition, and development is always seen in terms of the future- plans, hopes, goals, targets; he focuses only on one dimension of culture--its orientation to the future (Appadurai,2004). He further mentions that the idea of the future and the past are embedded and nurtured in culture. Though several treatises on development see culture as a worry for planned economic change, Appadurai, in his work on culture and aspiration, made culture and ideas of future: wants, needs, expectations, calculations, hopes goals, plans compatible. Culture is a capacity worth building and strengthening (Appadurai,2004). Appadurai made effort to place future in our

understandings of culture. In order to strengthen the idea of aspiration as a cultural capacity, Arjun Apppadurai built this idea on Charles Taylor's concept of recognition. Charles Taylor asserted the importance of the link between recognition and identity in these sentences:

Appadurai (2004) uses recognition exemplifying the conditions of the poor who faces misrecognition dimishing their dignity and enhancing unequal distribution of resources. gain, Appadurai uses the concept of 'voice' by Albert Hirschman to signify in what way 'voice' matters significantly for the world's poor. He is concerned in what way poor articulate their dissatisfaction and critical views for change or whether they are able to do so or not. Therefore he asked the prominent question, " How can we strengthen the capability of the poor to have and to cultivate "voice".....?"(Appadurai,2013,p. 183). Therefore, aspiration is a cultural capacity since the poor lacks the 'voice', 'empowerment' and the necessary resources to express dissent and criticism against domination.

The capacity to aspire is less for the poor and the disadvantaged due to fewer access to social resources and networks (ibid.). Bourdieu (1986) mentions how cultural and social capital privileges a certain class of individuals against the others. Important in Arjun Appadurai's (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69) framing of aspirations as a navigational capacity is the understanding that everyone aspires, but that circumstances can enhance or diminish the capacity to navigate from where we are to where we would like to be. Aspirations do not just deliver us from a start point to an end point, rather they require an understanding of how to navigate the "dense combination of nodes and pathways" that lie between the present and an imagined future. The more we get to practise and explore our aspirational maps, the more robust and realistic is our capacity to navigate the future. Those who have less opportunity to develop their capacity to aspire – such as marginalised and

disadvantaged students – have "a more brittle horizon of aspirations" (ibid.) that can tend towards the ideal rather than the realistic (St. Clair, Kintrea & Houston, 2013). This approach invalidates deficit notions that see a lack of aspirations as an individual failing……. (Prodnovich, et al., 2014) The people around us help to define exactly what it is that is meaningful to aspire to(ibid.). Structural, social and access issues are significant constraints on the capacity to aspire. Constraints can manifest in a number of forms including poverty (Appadurai, 2004), financial and performance factors (Looker & Thiessen, 2004; Eccles, Vida & Barber, 2004), inadequate academic preparation (Conradie, 2013) and adverse terms of recognition, which is often evident in the incongruence between individual (or specific group) aspirations and state or institutional aspirations. Constraints such as those generated by poverty result in a "diminishing of the circumstances" (Appadurai, 2000) that the more educated and more affluent the parents are, the better is the level of occupational aspiration of their children.

Amartya Sen's work on development, social welfare ("capabilities" approach) and freedom has an influence on Appadurai's work on 'capacity to aspire'. According to Amartya Sen, capabilities represent the freedoms to achieve something in life a person has reason to value. A person may have different capabilities or freedoms. But only some of these can become functionings (Hurt,2013). In Sen's own words:

"A functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve. Functionings are, in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they are different aspects of living conditions. Capabilities, in contrast, are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead" (Sen,1987, p. 36).

Freedom is central to development as development is about expansion of the freedoms that people enjoy as citizens of a country. And capabilities are the freedoms that people require to achieve well-being or functionings. Narrower views of development, such as identifying development with growth of gross national product or rise in personal incomes, industrialization, and so on has been criticized by Amartya Sen. According to him, enhancing human freedoms is central to the concept of development since freedom emphasizes on enhancing the capabilities of human beings which will eventually help in the all-round development of a human being. Freedoms depend on means such as facilities for education and health care, as well as political and civil rights, liberty to participate in public discussion or liberty to exercise 'voice', in Albert Hirschman's term.

Deriving from Durkheim's social fact, aspirations can be attributed as a social fact because aspirations are made to increase by waves of neoliberalism and the structure of labour market brings adjustments and changes to aspirations. Therefore, aspiration causes feelings of hopelessness and shame. According to Deuchar (all dressed), youth aspire for white-collar employment so that they can assert their masculine status (105). Respondents in Jeffreys (108-deuchar) study added a temporal dimension to their aspirations. Respondents in Deuchar's study(whole article)r added a spatial dimension to their aspirations. According to Jamie Cross, a disparity had been displayed between the aspirations of educated youth and the capability to realise in future in his study.

2.3 Waiting and Adulthood

Literature suggests that concerns and preparation for adulthood compels youth to wait for better opportunities. Daniel Mains (2007) ethnographic work in Urban Ethiopia documented in his research how youth choose to remain unemployed rather

than performing in ‘small jobs’. There the unemployed youths who lived with their families and dependent on them for financial support had completed secondary school and all had at least completed grade eight. It is ‘yilunnnta’ which is disrespect for low-status employment or the fear of what people might say about one’s family if they were seen performing such work by urban Ethiopian society that refrained them from stigmatized employment like carpentry, blacksmithing, and pottery and they chose unemployment over those. These youths would rather wait and seek for government employment which commands respect and better livelihood opportunities and lifestyles than select low valued jobs. This phenomenon has also been documented by Craig Jeffrey (2010) where he elaborated how young men failed to obtain salaried jobs describe themselves as middle-class unemployed or someone just waiting. They imagine themselves as just waiting. He examined cultures of limbo among educated unemployed young men. Such ‘waitings’ has also been influenced by high aspirations created by images of economic mobility promised by the formal education system. Youths are seen modifying their aspirations amidst shortage of salaried jobs (McRobbie, 1994). Such experiences have slowed down experiences of adulthood. So, modern adolescence has been characterized by dependency of all sorts. Youths, by age, adults tend to be identified as ‘young’ because they are unable to establish financial independence and remain unmarried (Jeffrey, 2008).

Frustrated youth characterized by economic and social uncertainties, in which marriage and other expected responsibilities associated with adulthood are postponed and delayed (Jeffrey 2010; Mains 2013; Ralph 2008; Singerman 2007; Sommers 2012; Utas 2005). Honwana (2012, 2014) uses the concept “waithood” to describe the suspended period between childhood and adulthood in which youth “wait for adulthood.” We agree that youth or waithood is often a period of

experimentation and creativity as well as frustration, and this may be perceived as a suspended period, like how liminality is often conceptualized as a period of creativity (see Turner 1969-1987). So, the journey towards adulthood is not easy. Youth has become an extended phenomenon due to unemployment. Temporally they have entered adulthood but they do not feel adulthood as they don't have a job, still live at home with their parents, unable to marry and start a family of their own. In my study, not only male but also female youths expressed the social responsibilities they have as an adult. They feel hopelessness if they fail to fulfil adult responsibilities. Their hopes and aspirations surround material pursuits of life like to have their own house and car, support family and become responsible member of the community.

2.4 Educational Trajectories of Women

When India adopted Millennium Development Goals in 2000, there was a vast gender disparity in education: the absence of girls and women from the education system. India has taken numerous policies to reduce the gender gap in education. Efforts have been taken to improve the gender parity index, which is the enrolment ratio of females to males. Nirmali Goswami & Rekha Pappu (2015, p.160) said mere improved GPI would not resolve the gender question in education. Access and retention of girls are only the initial steps. In this regard, more important is to consider the background of the management, teachers, and students. To comprehensively understand the gendered dimensions of education, the intersectionality of gender with other identities must be considered. Besides, it is essential to critically analyze the differential implications of education for boys and girls.

Gender-based inequality is seen in women's education in India since it is a patriarchal society. A gender gap is seen between men and women regarding

literacy, enrolment rate, income level, etc. According to Sample Registration System Survey for the year 2018 the average literacy rate for the female aged between 15-49 is 87%. After Independence, the five-year plans gave particular emphasis on women's education. The Report of the Committee on the Education of Women (1956-58) and Report of the Committee on the Status of Women (1974) made extensive recommendations on women's education. The sixth plan made the shift from a welfare approach towards women to making women active partners. The National Policy on Education 1986 and the Programme of Action (POA) 1992 emphasized the need to plan a positive interventionist role in women's empowerment. It was based on the universalization of elementary education for the girl child and emphasized the increasing participation of girls in all stages of education and in all streams like sciences, technical, vocational and commerce education. The POA advocated that a gender-sensitive approach be reflected in implementing all programmes and the need to promote gender equality in education. These two influenced the ninth, tenth and eleventh five-year plan (1997-2012) focus on accessible education for girls in elementary to a higher level. Since Independence, the government have made various schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Education (NPEGEL), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), and Mid Day Meal Programme for the enhancement of elementary education. These schemes are specially aimed at strengthening girls' education in educationally backward districts. The SSA was significant from a gender perspective and took initiatives to bridge all gender and social category gaps at the primary level by 2007 and at the elementary level by 2010. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 contributed to the gendered dimension of school and higher education curriculum and textbooks.

According to the latest District Information System for Education (DISE) figures of 2015-2016, though Assam lags states like Mizoram and Sikkim in terms of

enrolment in schools. However, the state seems to be doing well in terms of gender parity. Nirmali Goswami's study (2020), who has done research works on gender and education in Assam, attempts have been made to look beyond numbers when it comes to indicators of girls' primary education in the state. She asserts the need for attaining gender equity rather than closing the gender gap.

CHAPTER III

Education, Aspirations and Employment in Assam

Abstract

This chapter analyses how formal education is perceived by the educated youths of Assam who belong to marginalized backgrounds in the context of failure to obtain a white-collar job or a job they aspire to obtain through formal education. The chapter includes narratives of diverse aspirations, social mobility and meaningful employment. Further, it delves into how these narratives have changed the diverse perceptions of formal education from enrollment to access to further education and transition to employment after exclusion from higher education and deprivation from prospective employers. These are also accounts of marginalized backgrounds of class, caste ethnicity and rural underdeveloped backgrounds/contexts and their consequent effects on achievements and self-esteem. This study is also an account of youths' efforts to avoid the traditional sector and undergo waithood for sustaining a life of educated consumption.

3.1 Introduction

The state and other social institutions present formal education as an essential tool for social mobility. It is believed that through formal education, not just those who have "achieved" but even those belonging to marginalized communities can aspire and fulfil their aspirations. Formal education can undermine established caste and class reproduction processes but does not immediately lead to social mobility. Instead, it gives a sense of individual dignity and confidence to face oppression (Jeffrey et al., 2004a). Vested interest groups like state authorities present education

as an objective tool of aspiration and upward social mobility (Jeffrey et al., 2004b). However, education has provided marginalized sections with an agency to escape harsh poverty rather than social mobility (Naudet, 2008, pp. 418-19).

Education is a fundamental right provided by the Constitution of India, thus, in principle, entitling all citizens the right to aspire and achieve. However, scholars argue that existing stratification (Jodhka, 2015; Deshpande, 2011), in terms of caste, continues to determine differential access to formal education and distribution of material benefits of education. Groups traditionally privileged in terms of social identities continue to enjoy better education and employment vis-à-vis marginalized groups. They have the more cultural capacity (Appadurai, 2004) to fulfil their aspirations and attain vertical mobility in society. Literature on sociology suggests that education is central to an individual's endeavour for mobility in life. At the same time, it shows that education is "only partially successful in raising the social standing and economic position of disadvantaged groups" (Jeffrey et al., 2004, p.964). NCERT survey (1986) revealed that Dalit communities in India have relatively poorer access to schooling compared to the general population regarding the distance at which these facilities are available. Physical accessibility of schools within a reasonable distance gives no indication of how socially accessible the institution actually is. Social accessibility becomes critical for communities facing discrimination and living in relatively segregated habitation (Jodhka,2015). Research also shows that even when formally educated, Dalit backgrounds limit their access to jobs and hence accept unskilled work or return to traditionally assigned labour such as farm work and others (Jeffrey, 2004). The same can be said of scheduled tribes (ST) in India and their access to education and social mobility (Xaxa, 2015, Brahmanandan & Babu, 2016). Again, according to Conflict, Marxist, and Neo-Marxist theorists, the system of formal education serves the interests of the

dominant and privileged group in society (Apple, 1979; Althusser, 1971; Gintis, 1976). Krishna Kumar (1983) mentions that the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are invisible from the curriculum and textual materials, and the knowledge produced by the curriculum does not represent their worldview, skills and information. Apple (1980, p.86) says, *"The school curriculum responds to and represents ideological and cultural resources that come from somewhere. Not all groups' visions are represented, and not all groups' meanings are responded to".* In this context of hegemonic constructions of education as an objective tool of social mobility and in reality the continued differential access to this tool and its claimed consequent benefits, I place this chapter. This chapter will bring forth the relationship between formal education, creation of aspirations and social mobility through access to desired employment opportunities among youth respondents of my study.

3.2 Educated Identity as a Resource

3.2.1 Youth and Formal Education

In March 2019, I was chatting casually with a group of sales girls and boys in a bustling mall in Guwahati. They were dressed in well-ironed mall uniforms. Initially, they were chatting with me in Hindi and a little English. While chatting, they eventually came to know that I am Assamese. The discussion became more friendly. They appreciated me for my research work and started narrating some incidents from their college days. Rajesh[6] said that graduation degree has become valueless nowadays. Deepak said that let alone graduation even masters' degree has become valueless. They further were of the opinion that it is the responsibility of the government to provide 'good education' to children and that the degree should be

[6] All names are changed for privacy

helpful enough to provide the desired job to the educated youths of Assam. When asked whether they are interested in traditional rural jobs, they reiterated that traditional rural jobs are redundant and backward. The other two nodded to these statements. These college graduate youths have migrated from rural areas of Assam and are now employed in this mall with a meagre sum of money. Their viewpoints reflected a human capital approach to education. The concept of human capital goes back to Adam Smith(1937). His definition noted, “The acquisition of … talents during … education, study, or apprenticeship, costs a real expense, which is capital in [a] person. Those talents [are] part of his fortune [and] likewise that of society" (Smith, 1937, p. 12).

Like many young men in Guwahati, the above respondents migrated to Guwahati a few years ago from different districts of Assam. All of them are college graduates and could not continue their master's program. So, they quit education after their graduation program. Rajesh said that though he registered for the master's program, his father pressured him to search for a job because of his old age. His father could not work because of health issues and earn money for the family. So, Rajesh decided to migrate to Guwahati, looking for employment and suitable employment packages. Deepak, mentioned above, was reluctant and impatient to continue the master's course. Pinku thought that his graduation was enough to find a meaningful job. Though their parents have a human capital approach to education, higher education is a struggle for these youths. After achieving a secondary education certificate, they leverage their credentials further. Because youths like Rajesh, Deepak and Pinku belong to either the lower class or lower middle class, this effort to enhance their status and respect becomes challenging. Their parents are either illiterate or under matriculate. It is observed that their parents are employed in precarious, insecure and unstable jobs. Andrew Deuchar (2014), in his study on Indian youth, found that the

challenge of gaining a desirable education and a desirable job is common in India and countries of Global South. Advantaged classes are more successful in finding meaningful work than poor and minority social groups.

Rehana and Sushmita are sales girl in a cosmetic shop. Rehana has done her masters from Guwahati University. Susmita failed to complete her masters because of her fathers' death. When I first met Rehana and Sushmita, they carried beautiful smiles and welcomed me towards their store. They wore heavy make-up because they are supposed to look pretty and appealing, which it is argued also helps attract customers towards the cosmetic store. In order to create their interest in me, I bought some cosmetic items and then started conversations with them. Both of them told me that city life is better than rural life. There are no suitable jobs to do after education in rural areas. Nevertheless, in city there are no dearth of jobs. One needs the required qualification. Further, I enquired about the importance of their education in the employed job. They told me that school and college education level certificates help in qualifying for a job but rather than those certificates skill-based like those offered by vocational education institutions, provides placements for sales girl or boy position.

They further said that such a job where they stand like objects to appeal to the customers is actually not satisfying. But they need money to make both ends meet. Rehana wants to do a tailoring course, and Sushmita wants to open a beauty parlour in Guwahati. They are passionate about these two professions. For two years, they have been planning to apply for some vocational courses which will provide them placements as tailor and beauty experts. Due to the cosmetic store's hectic schedule, they could not save time to pursue such courses.

Here, youths like Deepak, Rajesh, Rehana, and Susmita consider their formal education worthless and useless for their present employment. Their current jobs are just temporary destinations in which they would not want to be engaged in the future. They aspire for better jobs and intend to work towards securing the same to make their future more secure for themselves and their families. They desire to attain job satisfaction at the same time.

They do not look confident at their workplace but rather need more direction. However, youths, as security guards, sales executives, restaurant attendants, and desk receptionists tried their best to impress their employers. They feared they could be fired from the job on the pretext of anything because there is no dearth of candidates for such a job. In the book *"The Diploma Disease"*, Ronald Dore (1976, p. ix) writes, *"Unfortunately, not all schooling is education. Much of it mere qualification-earning" "And more qualification-earning is mere qualification-earning ritualistic, tedious, suffused with anxiety and boredom, destructive of curiosity and imagination; in short anti-educational"*. This is true of the respondents of my study. Given the circumstances of their lives, the job market requirements, and the larger milieu of education, it is seen that youth emphasize more and rely more on gaining more certificates rather than gaining knowledge. In the process, education becomes a certificate earning activity rather than a knowledge gaining activity. Thus, given various factors, youth respondents appear to be job-oriented. Since the educational process becomes ritualistic and tedious, followed by boredom, creative skills in the process suffers.

3.2.2 Who is an Educated Person?

Participants in my study, when asked about the definition of an educated person, that is, the meanings they attach to it, the most vital interpretation derived from their narrative is that an educated youth must not be a drop-out from secondary schooling and must hold an eighth pass certificate at least. However, most basic to this interpretation is that an educated person is a person who can read and write the *Assamese alphabets*, for an Assamese medium school or *English alphabets* for an English medium school, for any regional language school, their regional language alphabets; at the same time, do calculations, have passed primary and secondary schooling and having gathered the secondary schooling certificate is looking for a job. In India, it requires youth to have at least a Grade VIII pass certificate for a low-ranking private or government-salaried employment which indicates that the knowledge and learning till the VII class are for life skills and knowledge of citizenship duties. However, a VII th drop out youth may fail to earn a job. So, what respondents meant is that a VII passed youth who is a drop-out from standard VIII is not educated because they don't qualify for a white-collar employment. However, they also believe that in today's modern world it is important for someone to be recognized as educated to be at least a matriculate or a matriculate certificate holder because of the increasing competition in the labour market. A whole lot of respondents emphasized completion of matriculation and earning the pass certificate as essential to be proclaimed as educated.

These youths said,

"Anyone who goes to schools and colleges and complete formal education upto matric or beyond are educated".

"Anyone who did not drop out of education before matric is educated person".

These youths observe that their employers are reluctant to employ anyone who does not have a matric pass certificate. Some employers in recent years have been reluctant to employ anyone who does not have an HS certificate. The meanings of being educated differ, and further discussions revealed that they might be literate, knowing how to read, write and calculate, but they do not qualify for any job. Educated people qualify for a job according to their beliefs conditioned by globalization and neoliberalism (Katz, 2004; Honwana, 2012). So, for most respondents, a youth who holds a certificate of matriculation is an educated youth for them. For the majority of these youths, the holder of this certificate is an educated youth. They justified this argument by differentiating between them and their parents, who are drop-outs from education, never passed matriculation, or never attempted or applied for the exam. Narratives of being educated were motivated by linkages to capabilities of qualifying for jobs. They further added to this discussion by differentiating between more educated and less educated people. By more educated, they meant more qualifications like graduate, master, M.phil and PhD and other professional degrees certificate holders and vice versa. For them, the more the qualifications, the more the chance for a white-collar or aspired job and vice versa.

Rahul Das, a cook in a restaurant in Guwahati said, *"A matric pass student, intermediate pass student or even a post graduate certificate holder are less valued instances of an educated person if they are declared as 'sikshit*[7] *nibonua' in society. A youth who fails to earn a job and remains unemployed after completing their education is looked down upon by society. Society will mock those unemployed youths and advise their children not to become like them and rather study hard to*

[7] 'sikshit nibonua' is the assamese terms meaning 'educated unemployed'.

earn a job. Money is important for us, but more important is the recognition of being educated and the value and respect of having a secured job".

Rahul further said that society has changed because people once valued a person of good character and morals, but now people value powerful positions, status, and a hefty salary.

Nijara is a sales assistant in a shop. She is an intermediate certificate holder. She believes she is an educated person because she has managed to earn a senior secondary pass certificate. People from her background struggle to pass matric with good grades, but she has passed HS in the second division, and she was five marks short of a first division. She further said she was reluctant to continue graduation because the household expenses were rising. So, she preferred to work after HS to contribute to the expenses. But as time passed and given the increasing competition for a private sector job in Guwahati, she regretted her decision and somewhere, she has preserved the desire to be a graduate.

Besides, there were other interpretations of an educated person as a good citizen, of good character and behaviour, who contributes to the society and the country. Their interpretations of these meant that if a person fail to be educationally and morally upright or fail to do justice to the education they received through qualifications, they should not be termed as an educated person. Ideologies of fulfilling the duties of a good citizen has been carved in the curriculum since pre- independence days.

Citizenship goals have also been mentioned in the curriculum of the schools. The preamble of the constitution has been written in all the NCERT books. The *National Curriculum Framework, 2005* of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) made clear that education in India is a democratic enterprise and should follow the objectives and goals of the constitution of India. So, NCERT

encourages Indian schools to promote citizenship goals and ideas of social justice-equality, justice and liberty. NCERT also influences regional government school curriculum. They also promote citizenship goals. This is a reason why participants in my study spoke about aspects of an educated person like,

“An educated person is a person of good character and moral values. An educated person hesitate to do bad things”.

“An educated person is a responsible person who understands his or her responsibility towards the family and society”.

“An educated person is encouraged to do something for the country. He or she likes to fight against evil forces through police, army, airforce, or the navy”.

Sanjay Shrivastava's ethnography of the Doon school established in 1935 brings forth such trends among youths whose educational institutions prepare its students as good citizens for a new India and as builders of a developed nation-state (Shrivastava, 1998). This is also evident in Shukla (1997), who writes about how flag-raising and singing of the national song became an essential practice in all schools. Similarly, among my respondents, there was also a belief that an educated person is one who, along with particular essential qualification, has also, through education, become a good citizen with good morals.

3.2.3 Educated Identity

Education and the rise of identities are modern phenomena. Bara (1997) has shown how Mundas and Oraons were empowered with the introduction of formal education for the first time. New identities were formed, which gave tribals leadership, organization, direction, new identity and confidence to speak and stand for the cause of their fellow tribals. These identities were distinct from the tag of 'uncivilization'

and 'primitive', outcaste, and untouchable, added to their identity by the upper caste middle-class section (Bara, 1997, p. 788). Similarly, in my study, youths expressed their 'new' educated identity as distinct from their traditional identities of gender, class, and caste. Klenk (2003), in his study on gender, found that women were using education as a basis for contesting aspects of patriarchy and negotiating structural and gendered contradictions in their lives. Education has been central for marginalized communities in shaping their identities (Bara,1997). Public formal education is of modern origin (Singh, 1973) and attaches a modern identity to people. Education is of 'central symbolic importance' to the identities of educated people (Jeffrey et al., 2004). In their study on the marginalized Dalits and Chamars, Craig Jeffrey, Patricia and Roger Jeffery (2004) found how these communities, in the context of lack of secure salaried jobs, carry their educated identity with pride.

From literature, it is seen that youths embrace alternative identities or reject a 'schooled identity' and seek out traditional work as the basis for self-respect in the context of a lack of aspired jobs (Levinson,1996; Demerath,1999; Oni, 1988). In my study, respondents expressed education as essential even in a lack of jobs or meaningful jobs. Since their school and college days, these youths and their parents see education as a carrier of white-collar jobs and social status. They have invested in schools and colleges so that they qualify and become eligible for their aspired job. However, they had to exit from education because of circumstantial situations and started looking for employment. Earning for themselves and their family became a necessity rather than waiting for an aspired job and having enough time to prepare for the same. So, the challenge for them was managing time between work and study. A significant amount of respondents in the initial period of their jobs believed that they would be able to manage time for preparation of exams for the job they aspire to earn. However, the life after joining their jobs became hectic. They lacked time to

prepare for exams like defence or civil service while continuing the job or learning skills through vocational courses. However, they see the importance of formal education for a job and their overall and full-fledged development. Through education, they can challenge the narratives of underdevelopment, backwardness, weak, and inequality associated with their caste, class, and gender. Raju belongs to an SC community from Assam. Raju said, *"I reside in a village where people are majorly upper castes. I belong to an SC community. My father told me that these upper castes people are not supposed to come to our homes and dine with us traditionally. However, since my grandfather was a respected teacher in that area and some of these upper castes were his students, they visited us and dined with us during events. They tell us that caste differences were present in the past and now, with formal education, everyone is supposed to be equal. So, my father always asked me to study hard and earn respect through education and a respectful job".*

Kamal, who belongs to the OBC community, also narrated, *"We belong to a backward community in the paper. We are clueless about why we belong to a backward community while others belong to forward communities. Perhaps these other communities had more people with highly revered education and job. So, I believe that if people from backward communities want to be treated equally they are required to prove themselves through higher qualifications and commendable job.".*

Rehana is a Muslim girl who works as a security guard in an educational institution. She said that she is an Assamese Muslim and has always considered her education an emancipatory resource. She doesn't command much respect in her society as a girl and in the Assamese society altogether as a Muslim. However, her self-respect doesn't allow her to bow down to the demands of society. She said, *"As a girl, I am not allowed the freedom a Muslim boy enjoys. So, since childhood, I decided to*

become a working woman rather than a housewife. I studied hard to get rid of the tag of a housewife and knew that the tag of an educated housewife is even more disempowering, so I told my parents that I would not marry unless I could find a job".

Ravi, 25 years, belongs to a Scheduled Tribe, and he falls in love with a Kayastha girl who works as a nurse in a government hospital. Traditionally, his family disallows marriage from another caste, but since he was employed in a private and insecure sector, they perceived the marriage as a security for his future. His parents believed that a working daughter-in-law would benefit the boy's household. So, it appears that caste would have become an issue in marriage if the girl was not employed and earning. Because of such reasons, formal education is seen by youth as an asset rather than a contradictory resource.

Several youths like Raju, Kamal, Rehana and Ravi considered formal education as fundamental to an identity distinct from their traditional identities. Formal education brings hope to them, hope not only for a better economic position but also the ability to cope with the discrimination and biases attributed to the traditional hierarchies of caste and gender; and along with these, the possibilities of gaining 'cultural capital': the possessions, manners and attributes that tend to be valued in social settings (Bourdieu, 1984).

The youth responded positively to education despite poor occupational outcomes or lack of desired jobs. The following section discusses the various aspects that made education relevant among the respondents of this study.

3.3. Why Education?

The different benefits of formal schooling accruing to respondents who expressed that directly or indirectly are described in this section. Some respondents looked at

it as a medium to access jobs which is also an epitome of modernity; some looked at it as an instrument to attain autonomy or respect. Some expected cultural and social distinctions (Bourdieu, 1985) from it. Some of the reasons for selecting formal education are addressed below.

i) Aspirations to escape from traditional jobs

In scholarly works (Deuchar, 2004; Jeffrey, 2000), the jobs available to the lower middle class or caste are prone to retrenchment processes, increased job insecurity and a shift to subcontracted work. These jobs are not popular but act as a fallback occupation to avoid the rural economy. The degradation of the job of educated youths joining manual labour is expressed in Paul Willis's 1977 work 'Learning to Labour', which states that manual labour job is meant for working class children. In my study, youths prefer to do such jobs rather than enter the rural economy. Respondents of my study chose to take up insecure informal jobs vulnerable to retrenchment rather than take up tasks involving manual labour in rural areas. Privatization and globalization have brought changes in the way education is looked at. It is looked at as an escape mechanism from manual labour (Balagopalan, 2008). Education in terms of an escape has been expressed in the right to education (RTE) Act and child labour discourse in India. Education has been interpreted as an escape mechanism from traditional jobs. Every child has the right to remain in school rather than work as a manual labourer. Such works are available for the lower middle classes who lack the economic, cultural and social capital to enhance their mobility in the class structure. Several studies have discussed the aspirations of the lower middle class and their expectations of educational achievements. In my study, too, there is a state of marginalization that the youth respondents intend to overcome through their attained degrees. Education encourages youths to search for jobs that promise middle-class mobility (Deuchar, 2014). They are not willing to do a job

which threatens their mobility. Thus, in contrast to some scholarly works (Levinson, 1996; Stambach, 1998; Demerath, 1999), my youth respondents are unwilling to return to the village economy and embrace traditional work and traditional identities. There is a dislike for manual-based labour, which is characteristic of the rural economy. Even parents invest money in their children's education so that they get opportunities outside their villages (Jeffrey et al., 2004). There is an underlying assumption that manual works are for people who are illiterate and have never been to school. Generally, schools are oriented towards mental work rather than manual work (Balagopalan, 2008).

In my study, many youths (boys and girls) have undergone mental work for almost ten-twelve years or more for degree holders. 86 per cent of the respondents in my study expressed their unwillingness to join the rural economy in the context of failure to obtain secure salaried jobs. They are well aware of the right to education (RTE) Act and believe in education's importance for every child. They attach the image of a bright future to education and therefore emphasize the need to become skillful. Youth respondents would prefer to work in a coffee shop rather than a pan-bidi shop or prefer to work in a convenience store in an urban area rather than a petty store in a rural area.

Their parents expect them to pass matriculation and pursue higher studies because they believe formal education can improve their children's future. Parents do not have high regard for the lives they are living. School education is seen as key to mobility and secure futures without agricultural, manual labour. Youths expressed various reasons for the high-value parent place on the education system. Deepak, a sales executive, working in a cloth store, answered, *"My parents do not want me to become a farmer. They say that educated people do not do farming"*. Their parents consider manual work as the fate of failure. However, education often fails to lead

to desirable employment. Modern education is predicated on and promotes values, skills, aspirations and attitudes often at odds with those rooted in a rural agrarian context. The rationale of modern education also works to reproduce the material and cultural devaluation of agriculture, rustic space and manual work as 'backward' (Morarji, 2014).

Youths aspired to do something better than their parents. Most parents are engaged in the agriculture sector traditionally associated with the uneducated rural poor. Youth's depiction of parents' occupation further depicts a subdued life, posits the stigmatization of agriculture: the unproductivity and unattractiveness of the work, and the disdain of the broader society towards farming. Agriculture is just an escape route in case of joblessness rather than a preferred choice. Assam is a predominantly agrarian society, with about 86 per cent of its population living in rural areas earning their living from agriculture. In accordance with the development narrative, the government has been promoting education in the country with the emergence of several public and privately owned schools and enrolments. This coupled with associated life exposure to the wider world, young people are increasingly looking for better opportunities, including life beyond farming. High educational aspirations seem to raise their ambition for better jobs of high return, generally out of their parents' occupation, farming.

Research studies show that parents and children aspire to jobs better than parents (Behnke et al., 2004). Parents' role is enormous in socialization in which they transmit their wishes to their children (Jacobs et al., 2006). Thus parents want a better life for the subsequent generation. Even farmers wish for children to have non-farming occupations. They want to become doctors, teachers, or civil servants. They believe that education would help them transfer to better life opportunities. Farmers

remain food insecure and have limited access to essential services. So, seeking non-farming occupations seem evident.

For instance, Rahul is a sales executive in a shopping mall in Guwahati city. His father is an agricultural labourer who works in the lands of others. Rural life is hard for him and his parents. So, he persistently maintained his ambition for occupations other than farming. He said,

"*Since my childhood, I was determined not to join the occupation of farming. I have seen my father toil hard in life. He works day and night in the fields and earns a meagre income. With rising food prices, it isn't enough to sustain a family with that much income. Better education is a distant dream. A government job is what my parents and I want for me. So, I want to clear the Assam civil service exam".*

Farming is not the desired choice; rather, farming could result from failed aspirations. Youth expressed that farming could be an option if their aspiration does not work out or if they become unemployed. However, that would be a reluctant option. So, farming has become a fallback occupation. Asian Development Bank (2008) suggests that over the past 15 years, youth employment has shifted from agriculture towards manufacturing and services.

In India, along with some other countries, agriculture-related occupations are looked down upon and regarded as socially unviable. Such jobs are not popular or sought after and associated with low-self esteem. This is because of the drudgery and low dignity in such an occupation. The Indian youth consider it high risk and don't find an attraction in it. Hence education and employment-related migration occur. Thus, farming has become a fallback occupation. They prefer low-paid, informal work rather than farming as a livelihood (Proctor & Luchessi,2012).

These youths are better educated than their parents and therefore nurture aspirations for a better future and life than their parents. Greater expectations come with this progression which only automatically converts into better opportunities but rather intermingles with their struggles.

For example, as in the case of Neeli and her brothers:

Neeli is 24 years old and belongs to the ST community. Her father is a farmer, and the land is traditionally inherited from her grandparents. Her father has got a small holding of land from his father. Farming is their traditional occupation. She narrates her brothers' apathy towards manual work.

I am disappointed in our brothers. I have one elder brother and one younger brother. The elder one is sitting idle at home. He has completed his bachelor's in chemistry and did not continue his education any further. Initially, he was unsure of passing the exam but somehow got second division in his final exam. What can we expect from a second-division holder in Chemistry? We are suggesting he do tuition, but he is not doing that and instead sitting at home idle. At least he can help our father in the field, but he despises it. In his opinion, educated people like him should do something other than manual jobs. Otherwise, people will mock him. The younger one is also searching for a better job rather than earning something for the family. So, I am the only one who is earning for the family. Because of my brothers, my marriage is pending since I am saving money for my marriage.

Neeli works as a sales executive in a cloth store in Guwahati city. She earns a sum of Rs. 6500. Though she wishes her brother to do the manual job on their farms or, in general, in agriculture sector for an income rather than wait idly at home. She does not want to take recourse to a manual job in the state of failure to continue her job in the cloth store. She said as a girl, its not suitable to do manual job. She opined

that she may consider taking up a non-manual labour job in the rural sector but not a manual labour one. Demerath (1999, p. 167) found that formal education becomes an enculturation into a 'Western school view' and devalues the culture and tradition, village lifestyles and particularly the traditional world views of students in his study on Pere village. What education has done in India, too, is introduce students to modern status and identity (Bara,1997). While supporting manual jobs for her educated brothers, who have failed to obtain a decent job matching their education, in contrast, Neeli herself did not prefer to do the manual job in the above case.

Similarly is the case with Deep, who is 26 years of age, who belongs to the OBC community and is engaged as a security guard in a premier institution. His parents are agricultural labourers working on other people's land. He said, *There is no respect in doing such work. It requires no qualification to do manual labour. Everybody can do it. However, education is for those who are capable and meritorious. If you excel in the exam, you get respect in society. Every year, during the declaration of Matric and HS final year results, there is a celebration in the households of rank, distinction and star holders. But manual labour is celebrated by no one".*

In these narratives, mental labour is shown as superior to physical labour. What is typical of it is the common desire of youths to do something out of education that is different from what their parents or grandparents were doing, who also happen to remain out of the education system at an early age. A suitable job is what these youths want rather than succumbing to their traditional job. As in Jeffrey's work on

Chamars in Uttar Pradesh, whose narratives are marked by failure to obtain secure salaried jobs and association of education with modern status (Jeffrey et. al, 2005). In my study, too, respondents associate being educated with modern status and thus

discard anything that is associated with traditional occupation. Further, a secure salaried job is a means to attaining social mobility in the class structure in terms of respect and status. So, they are tilted towards jobs where mental work gets preference over physical work.

To quote Amartya Sen(1999) on schooling,

"Basic schooling can be central to human security for several distinct reasons. First, as already discussed, illiteracy and innumeracy are their forms of insecurity. So the first and most immediate contribution of successful primary education is directly reducing one form of deep rooted insecurity". Amartya Sen advocated the critical role of elementary education in the security of human lives. These youths' narratives are just manifestations of this vision of insecurity. To them, modern education through access to quality jobs provides status and social security to groups in society who are traditionally deprived of white-collar jobs and social status in society. Such is the impact of education on their lives. But participants give lesser importance to attaining status in society and more important to lessening the struggle to improve their economic and social security. While in their jobs, the importance of further education, continuing the education left behind, and the regret for their under-qualification are expressed only at that point where they feel those can help them relax their struggle and pain of an inadequate life.

In contrast, few respondents spoke about returning to their traditional jobs despite the mockery they were to face in their village. These are the same people who value mental work over manual work or modern jobs rather than traditional **ones.** However, their decisions are influenced by the difficulties of sustaining themselves in urban areas with their meagre income. As in the case of Nibir,

Nibir is 26 years old and has spent 4 years in the city working as a salesboy. He said,

"I am tired of city life. There is nothing here. I feel homesick. The expenses are getting higher and higher. We don't earn much. When sales are good, we earn almost Rs. 7500 per month, of which Rs. 3000 is paid as rent. We also need to send a small amount home because our socioeconomic condition is not good. So, I am considering returning to my village as soon as possible. We have a small piece of land where my father and I are planning to work."

These youths cannot bear the expenses of city life and therefore were planning to exit the city at the earliest. They once admired city life as spaces of empowerment and modernity which dwindled after experiencing it firsthand. However, this does not change their idea about rural life and they continue to not think of it highly. One respondent informed about his friend who once enjoyed importance in his village for having a security guard job in the city. Having a city-oriented job is a big thing in villages. Villagers used to request him to refer their boys and girls to his employer for a job. As he returned to his village permanently, being tired of city life, he lost the importance, and people now mock him for being educated unemployed and for being dependent on his father's income now. He further said, even though they earn a decent income from ancestors land, they are always tagged as 'bekar' or 'useless' for not utilizing the benefits of education, that is, jobs which also reflect mental labour or which are epitomes of modern world like a coffee shop or a mall or a school which they do not associate with a traditional economy.

A significant proportion of youths also expressed an idealistic viewpoint on the benefits of education despite negating a traditional job. Nijara said, "The purpose of education, even in the face of poor outcomes, is to develop a morally strong person. Though one may fail to get employment, the education received will teach people to deal with adverse situations in life or cope in the village economy if circumstances do not favour a desirable job". The same respondent expressed dislike for

agriculture, or fishing, or livestock cultivation as a job. This is typical of the narratives of respondents.

ii) Education for a white-collar occupation

I interviewed 213 respondents, and all of them asserted that formal education is supposed to provide white-collar occupations or government jobs to youths in Assam. These are first-generation educated youths who belong to the marginalized background. They consider formal education as the fundamental pathway to upward social mobility. Just like Sen (2000) and Dreze and Sen, (1995, 2013) these youths see the potential of formal education to empower individuals through employment and enhancing capabilities.

Binoy said, *"We invest in education because we look forward to its future return in terms of a government job". Likewise, Snigdha said. "Education is important for us because it increases the prospects for a white-collar job". Neha said, "Education is empowering because we qualify for a job and we earn money in future. In the modern world, a better life cannot be imagined without a secured white-collar job".*

Partha said, "*Education is a resource. We have to pay money for it. So, it becomes an investment for us. Our parents invested in our future, and I have somehow completed my graduation. My parents are not matriculate pass; therefore, they have high hopes from our education. We are four children, three brothers and one sister and my parents believe that if they educate us, we will live a better life than them. Our parents don't want us to work as a farmer or labourers. They want us to attain a government job for a secured future. Life of a traditional worker is difficult. They want us to do modern sector jobs. Therefore, they have invested in our education".*

Krishna said, "*A white-collar occupation can only bring more money. My father always suggests that my siblings and I should take our studies seriously to earn good*

grades in school. Since I am in a job, my father believes that my siblings continue to study to earn good grades till the completion of formal education to qualify for a white-collar job. Our parents see the source of their miserable lives as themselves, being uneducated and illiterate. They believe that since they are school drop-outs, they only qualify as labourers or other traditional occupations and don't possess the scope for earning more".

Dimpi is the eldest of all siblings in her household. She has two younger brothers. She said, *"My parents advise us to take our studies seriously so that we earn a secure job in future. Since their childhood, we were discouraged from sports and games because those consumed study time and diverted our attention from studies. Parents believe sports and games don't bring a well-earning, secure and respected job. So, they suggested that we concentrate on our studies only and try to get good grades".*

Thus, almost all the participants expressed the importance of senior secondary, higher secondary and graduation pass certificates in gaining access to a government or private job. The certificates help them in gaining access to a job. Participants of my study expressed to me how it was vital for them to pass the exam and gain the certificate since the certificate would enable them to qualify for a job. For these youths, the grades, the certificates earned and the learning process matter significantly.

Most of these youths don't have the agency to select the kind of education they value. Because the vision of a better life is associated with a job or education that is needed or a must rather than those they value or want. The majority of these youths told how they exit education and start earning to share the expenses of the family along with them. However, they continue to value a secure government job with the belief that the process of attaining a government or secured job is not smooth. They have seen

that in rare cases, a youth from a low social position attains a secured job through merit.

iii)Formal education is a resource for fulfilling family responsibilities

Case Study 1: Rupam, General , Age 26

Rupam, 26 years, works as a security guard in the 'Good life' mall in the Bhangagarh area of Guwahati city. He belongs to the Nagaon district of Assam. A relative informed him about this job which demanded qualifications like High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC), the ability to write or read few words and physical fitness. He is an intermediate degree holder, so he qualifies for the job. The job is an urban job; he migrated to the city to settle down, and finally, he was appointed as a security guard in the mall. He has family responsibilities. Being the eldest sibling, family burden is on him. He also needs to save money for his sisters' marriage. His parents were agricultural labourers who are aged now and unable to work in the fields. His parents have worked so hard in the fields of others to finance his education. He recalls that his family had not received any financial assistance from the government, being from a general background. So, it is now his turn to salvage the family from economic hardships. Since he needed some immediate relief in terms of income, he searched for a decent job. Now he earns an income of Rs.9500, which keeps fluctuating according to the sales. He pays a rent of almost Rs.3000, and the rest constitutes his personal and family expenses. He could send only a tiny amount of money home. His parents are not satisfied with his job as it is insufficient in the context of rising prices and increasing other expenses like house maintenance. Again, his younger sister has to be married off. With such insecurities, his parents suggested he search for a secure government job in between doing a flexible private job. Therefore he wants to save sufficient time for preparation for a government job.

One of the obstacles is time. He has faced difficulties in time management. The only available time after the shift is over 5 pm to 7 am. After 5 pm, he has to commute a distance of about 8 km from his destination to his room. The traffic jam makes him reach his room late, sometimes after 2 hours. He reaches his room tired, prepares his food and uses the rest of the time for exams which he keeps applying back to back. He needs a secure job to fulfil his responsibilities for his family and also for himself.

Case Study 2: Diganta, OBC , Age 29

Diganta, 29 years, has been working as a restaurant attendant for three years. Before this job, he did a vocational course on cooking for one year. So, he got placed as a cook plus attendant in a restaurant. He has been staying in Guwahati for five years and narrated why, because of family responsibilities, educated employment became vital for him. He said,

"I came to the city in 2012 when he had graduated from college. He was looking for a job immediately to cover living expenses in a city. For six months, I owed some money from a close friend. So, I started networking and applied for a store sales boy job. The manager recruited me for a salary of Rs. 5500 per month. This money provided a huge sigh of relief. I could pay my debt in a few months. However, after six-seven months, I started disliking the job. I had household responsibilities, and comparatively, I was earning less than expected. I have a family of five individuals- my parents, two younger brothers, and the youngest is my sister. My father is a daily wage earner, and my mother is an anganbadi worker. They educated me because they wanted me to take responsibility for household expenses when they aged. So, after graduation, they asked me to pursue a job rather than continue my master's. My dreams and aspirations took a backseat when I decided to exit education to pursue a job. Now, when I send home money, the demands for more money keep

appearing every month, which makes it important for me to look for better earning opportunities".

Case Study 3: Sanjeet, OBC, Age 25

Sanjeet is 25 years old. He belongs to the Nalbari district of Assam. His father is a farmer, and his mother looks after the family shop nearby to their home. His father is educated till the seventh or eighth standard. Mother studied up to the sixth standard. Being under-matriculated, his parents wanted their children to pass matriculation at least. All three siblings attended the same government school, which he termed the best in his area. They belong to the BPL category. The annual income that comes from agriculture and shop business keeps fluctuating. Some years, his family receives an income of less than 100000 and sometimes less than Rs 50000. He has three siblings- one elder sister who has been married off at the very young age of 21, one younger brother and one younger sister. The younger brother is doing his intermediate course at a nearby college in his village. According to Sanjeet, his brother is meritorious. He obtained a star percentage in matriculation. They wanted to send him to a good college in Guwahati, but due to financial difficulties, that could not happen. The younger sister is also doing intermediate and is also a good student. She is reluctant to continue her education amidst the financial difficulties the family is going through. Their land has been mortgaged against a loan for the marriage of the elder sister.

Sanjeet aimed to become a postgraduate in the Assamese language, his favourite subject. Financial difficulties in the household did not persuade him to do so. Being a graduate, he explored some opportunities in his village. However, could not find any job that fit him as an educated person. So, he informed his parents about his decision to migrate to Guwahati. He knew that there he could have limitless

possibilities in the private sector. He was not mentally prepared to study for a government job. He urgently needed a job. He migrated to the city and started the search for a rented room. The rent was very high. He had some money but not much to pay rent after two to three months. He had to share his room with some other migrated youths already doing private jobs. One roommate referred him to an security guard employment agency that did some preliminary examination which he did well. But he was not selected. Later he got recruited as a salesperson in a small cloth store. Initially, he was satisfied with the job. He was able to pay off some amount of debt. When things were going fine, his father passed away. Family responsibilities burden Sanjeet. He had to pay for the educational expenses of his sister and brother. He has to marry off his sister. Amidst all these, he heard from a relative that his mother had borrowed money from her self-help group unit to run the family's increasing expenses. Burdened and depressed, Sanjeet realized that his earnings were insufficient to tackle these problems.

Sanjeet decided to prepare for a government job. He so badly wanted it. Nevertheless, he could save little time for preparation. He was doing two jobs, one in the morning shift and another in the evening shift. He earned an income of Rs. 13000. He had to pay rent of Rs. 5000. He was paying off the debt against their land and the loan borrowed by his mother. A portion of the remaining amount covered family expenses, and another personal expense which is not more than Rs. 2000 for the whole month. His marriage is getting delayed because of such problems, which he expressed with grief and hopelessness.

These case studies substantiate the importance of formal education in fulfilling responsibilities for the family. Several youths like Diganta, Rupam and Sanjeet accounted for family responsibilities as reasons for pursuing formal and vocational education. They vision education credentialism as a hope for the future. Family

responsibilities are transferred to sons and daughters when their parents believe they can earn money at that stage. Assam's rural and urban areas are characterized by deep social connections within families and communities, which contribute to rural adolescents' educational pathways. This is not particular to Assam or India. Literature found that deep social connections within families and communities characterize rural areas. As a result of growing up under these conditions, many rural adolescents exhibit strong feelings of attachment and social responsibility in relation to their families and communities (Rojewski 1999; Dyk & Wilson 1999; Crockett et al., 2000).

iv) Formal education to earn status, respect, middle class mobility

Case Study 4: Hridoy, upper caste, lower middle class, General, Age 26

Hridoy belongs to the Brahmin community and works as a salesperson in a cloth showroom. He is originally from the Sivasagar district of Assam. He belongs to an upper caste with a lower-middle-class family. He migrated to the city after the sudden demise of his father when he was 22 years old. He is the eldest at home, and family responsibilities are on him. He is an intermediate degree holder. He graduated in Arts with Political science honours and did well in it. He could not apply for post-graduation because of his father's death. The family lost financial security. He believed that the scope of a job suitable to a graduate was not available in his village. He aspired to become a civil servant by clearing the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) exam. When asked why he wants to become a civil servant, he replied that a 'good' government job earns social respect and status. It, thus, enhances the mobility of a family in society. He further said that though he belongs

to the upper caste, his family does not enjoy the respect they would earn as an upper caste member due to his lower-middle-class status.

Before this job, he stayed in his village in the Sibsagar district. His family consists of his mother, one younger brother and one younger sister. The educational and marriage responsibilities are on him. He believes it is not easy to obtain a government job without dedicated preparation. He needed a temporary settlement in the shape of a private job that did not need higher qualifications. When he migrated to the city, he made contact with people and friends. One of his friends informed him about an opening for a security guard. He was selected for the same. Due to economic problems and the high expenses of city life, he was doing two jobs in a single day. On the morning shift, he worked as a newspaper hawker and was a security guard on the night shift. After a few years, he realized he had no time to prepare for a government exam. He explained how badly he wanted a government job. He needs respect and status in a job that he thinks only government can provide. He resigned from both jobs for a while and started wholeheartedly preparing for a government job. When his savings were dwindling, he approached a friend for a job. His friend had acquaintance with an employer of a cloth store. He was very happy to get the job as the employer was good enough to encourage him in his preparation.

Case Study 5: Anita, Scheduled Tribe, Age 22

Anita hails from the Barpeta district of Assam and is 22 years old. Her family constitutes her parents and brother. Her parents own a convenience store in the village. Presently, they are doing well in terms of income. Her parents always wanted her to become a civil servant. Anita's father always inspired her by giving examples from the neighbourhood. Two boys from her neighbourhood have cleared the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) exam, which is the most sought-after exam in

Assam. Though the financial struggle is subtle, her parents suggested that she migrate to the city. They believe that village cannot provide her with the atmosphere of preparation for a severe affair like a secure job. So, she migrated to the city in search of a government job. However, the expenses of settling in a city are high. She had to look for a job to help her deal with her financial struggle. Finally, she got employment as a salesgirl. The volatility of the job encouraged her to look for a government job. The family aspiration has become her aspiration. Belonging to the Scheduled Tribe, she mentioned the high chances of getting a government job. When asked about the reason, she claimed that tribals in Assam are educationally not forward and suffer from low aspirations than the other communities. They are happy in their villages, occupied with their traditional jobs, which she would dislike to return.

Formal education, thus, has become an essential source of mobility for lower middle classes in developing countries. Media images of a better future highly influence family aspiration through formal educational institutions to gain mobility to a certain status. In low-income families, family responsibilities are transferred to the subsequent generation, which is aimed to fulfil by attaining specific educational credentials

3.4 Youth's Background, Aspirations and Transitions

3.4.1 Youth's Socio-Economic Profile and Challenges

Since six decades of independence till the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, profound changes have been seen in the school education scenario of India and the same adopted by the state of Assam. The Constitution, since independence, provided the state with a special responsibility of educating historically disadvantaged and neglected social groups since education is

seen as a key pathway out of poverty globally. However, in the narratives of the participants an account of the impact of socio-economic condition of participants is imperative on their educational trajectories and experiences. The majority of the sampled youth respondents are first-generation matriculation pass. Some are the first-generation intermediate pass. Their parents work as agricultural labourers, self-employed in agriculture, unskilled manual labour in the unorganized sector or as contractual teachers. It is seen that the socio-economic background of sampled educated and employed youth families represents that they belong to a low-income quartile. The parents' education level is under matriculate primarily, that is, those who have not cleared their matriculation or 10th standard exam succumbing to unavoidable circumstances like economic disadvantages or death of an earning member. Parents from such backgrounds cannot guide their children due to a lack of school knowledge. Their socioeconomic condition also hinders their capacity or freedoms (Sen, 2001) and ability to grasp the education received from schools. Their future is not secure. They migrate from the rural, semi-urban area or town to Guwahati in search of better occupational opportunities.

78 % of the sampled educated youths belong to the BPL (Below Poverty Line) category. They are 'economically backward'. They are entitled to ration card benefits. According to the Economic Survey of Assam 2017-18, the rural population percentage is 86. The percentage of the BPL[8] population in Assam (using the

[8] The latest BPL is determined by the Rangrajan committee. The planning commission appointed in 2014 the C. Rangrajan Committee to review the methodology for the measurement of poverty. The report retained consumption expenditure estimates of NSSO (National Sample Survey Office) as the basis for determining poverty. For rural areas the daily per capita expenditure was fixed at 32 rupees per day which amounts to approximately Rs. 11,600 annually. So, according to the estimate if a person from a rural area is earning less than Rs. 11,600 annually he happens to be below the poverty line. The contrasting thing is that all my BPL respondents' families earns more than this amount annually, but still prefer to include themselves in the BPL category. Obviously, such estimates are controversial and debatable issue. As per critics, government has deliberately kept poverty line low so that they can show a bright picture of salvaging millions from poverty.

Tendulkar methodology) is 33.89. In terms of occupation, the majority of the respondents' parents are engaged as agricultural labourers in the farming sector. 44 of the respondents' fathers are agricultural labourers in agriculture, 12 are farmers with a small holding of land and 46 are self-employed in agriculture. More than half the households in rural Assam are self-employed in agriculture (Mahua Bhattacharjee, 2010). The number of fathers engaged in unskilled manual labourers -42, unorganized sectors like the convenience store and pan-bidi shop-52, fishing-4, and contractual teachers- 14. Mothers were also engaged in unskilled manual and agricultural labourers, convenience stores and pan-bidi shops. In terms of income, the household income of educated, employed youths ranges from less than Rs. 30000 to a maximum of Rs. 1,50000 annually. 25 respondents have a household income of less than Rs. 30000. 23 respondents say they have a household income of less than Rs. 75000, and 32 others earn a household income of Rs. 1,50000. This shows that the socio-economic background of sampled educated, employed youths families represent that they belong to a low-income quartile. The highest income earned is less than Rs 1,50000 a year. “Income is directly related to the amenities of decent living like housing condition, electrification, sanitation and drinking water.” (Bhattacharya, 2010, p. 393). The less the income, the less the ability to access these facilities. These have an impact on the educational outcomes of youths. For instance, Sen (2001: 87) has argued that ‘poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty’. The 'poor' are also extraordinarily diverse in economic and social terms.

3.4.2 First-Generation Certificate Holders and the Struggles for Access

Education is increasingly projected as the only pathway out of poverty but obstructed by the bureaucracy and inefficiency that is seen to increasingly characterise state-

run public systems, including education (Marsh, 2011). Since the mid 1980s, reforms in education in countries have focused on introducing market principles of competition among schools and standardised high-stakes testing that are used not only to monitor school performance but also to decide which schools will receive state funding and which students can access further educational opportunities. Test scores are also made available for parents to make 'informed' choices around schooling for their children. Handing the running of schools to the private/nonstate sector, vouchers for students and the parental choice became the buzz-words that characterised market-based reforms in schooling towards the end of the last century in early capitalist countries. Individual schools in high-poverty areas and teachers were made responsible for school outcomes and were called upon to shape up or ship out (Rani, 2004).

Assam also took inspiration from the elementary education policy thrust in India to remove regional, gender, social and rural-urban disparities. This was also the period where low-income families (from independence until the 1980s) were seen as largely ignorant of the benefits of education, and those people were not incapable of bearing the burden of schooling (Nambissan, 2016). The narratives of my respondents carried instances of child labour which hampered their experiences of schooling and further education. The environment in their schools was such that it did not sustain a tuition-free environment, and free textbooks were managed by only a few who attended publicly funded schools. Some participants went to low-fee private schools.

The policy interventions effort to facilitate easy access to SC/ST communities appeared to work when I met and interacted with many SCs/STs/OBC or other religious minority respondents in the field. Said Nambissan (2016, p.16), lesser importance was given to the happenings of schools at the empirical level. It is known that the public education system has been constantly questioned for lack of

infrastructure, facilities, gender and caste-insensitive curriculum and pedagogy (Krishna Kumar, 1990), and rote-based learning hampered children's progress in schools and colleges. These factors also pushed children out of school and discouraged them from learning.

Respondents' struggle for access to education is related to parents' socio-economic background and class or some unfortunate incident like the death or illness of an earning member or the need for more income for various reasons; for girls it is societal norms. The participants projected narratives of affordability of a general low-fee, low-quality state government education because of their socio-economic circumstances. At the same time, their parents aspired for them private education despite their circumstances which ensures quality and good grades because of the competition they face in the private education market. Some youths narrated how some of their friends from their neighbourhood who could afford private education seem to avoid government educational institutions because they believe that appropriate attention and exposure are lacking in government institutions. According to them, teachers in government schools lack proper training and their children suffer from low-quality education. They are not dedicated towards their students and favour students from the relatively ‘good’ backgrounds. The teachers look down upon economically inadequate students. Respondents said that they have observed that their friends from private institutions are able to achieve better grades despite being equally meritorious. Besides, they believe that private quality institutions can compensate for the lack of study atmosphere and guidance from home.

Most male youths complain that their parents want them to study in nearby schools and colleges, and they fail to understand the importance of private schools and colleges that situate far away from their homes in distant city or urban areas. These nearby institutions are government institutions which has helped them reach where

they are right now but not reach their real aspirations, including a secure job. However, if their parents had the necessary resources of affordability for a private school, like ability to pay hostel fees, buy uniforms, and provide tiffins that would have helped them to attain middle class status. They believe these are necessary abilities of a family for the success and progress of their sons and daughters.

From Bourdieu (1984), educational institutions have become places where the subsequent generations of people of lower social standing develop a sense of their social position. In India, the marginalized youths and economically weaker sections develop ‘a sense of their own social limits’ in society (Levinson & Holland, 1996, p. 6). The education system has become all about inequality of access and outcomes (Jeffery, 2005). Youths from lower castes/classes have become entrenched in the inequalities of public-private sector schooling (Jeffery, 2005).

The struggles start from their homes. During childhood, they dreaded books and homework. At that time, they could not understand the importance of going to school, learning their textbooks and passing the examination. It was a compulsion from their parents to go to school every day. Some parents were very strict about maintaining regularity in going school, while some parents were not. However, most parents expected them to bring good grades; otherwise, they faced rebuke from their parents, relatives and teachers. As they progressed through grades, they understood the importance of tuition in bringing good grades. Madhav Deori is an ST boy from Sivasagar who is now employed as a security guard in a cinema hall in Guwahati. He said, “I was a good student in school but I always dreaded Mathematics, Science and English. I pestered at home about the need for tuitions for those subjects. However, my parents did not have the finances for tuition. While I have seen my friends bring good grades through it. In schools, teachers fail to provide special attention to the needs of the students. Because of financial inadequacy, I could not

buy the required textbooks or guidebooks for exams." Similarly, many respondents expressed how their parents struggled to pay their school and college fees on time and how they pleaded with time from authorities to gather the required fees and expenses on time.

Radhika remembers how she and her brothers used to study under the light of a kerosene lamp or candles to do their homework. Their parents used to pester them not to study at night because of soaring kerosene prices. Some of the youths have access to electricity, but the problem affecting their study is power cuts faced by rural areas in India quite often. Fifty-six per cent of the sampled employed youths lacked electricity at home or experienced power cuts often when they were in schools or colleges. Forty-five per cent of them lacked a table and a chair to read and write at home.

Nirupam Das works as a security guard in a technological institution in Assam and belongs to the Nagaon district of Assam. He is 30 years old and unmarried. He belongs to the OBC caste. His father is a farmer with a small holding of land, and his mother is a housewife. He has three brothers younger than him.

Nirupam did his primary schooling at a government school. He was shifted to another school for secondary schooling as the previous school did not provide for secondary schooling. His parents selected the school based on the distance to home. They did not believe in sending him to a better school far away. After passing matriculation in the second division, he enrolled himself in HS (higher secondary) course at a nearby college. He preferred the Arts stream over science because, firstly, he saw himself as a mediocre student; secondly, he believed his family's economic condition discouraged him. His parents could arrange the fees for the HS course. But he said that the principal of the college was kind enough to exempt the fees whenever

he was unable to pay it. With guidance from the principal and teachers, he was able to secure first division in the final exam. After clearing the Higher Secondary exam, he was planning to pursue a Bachelor's course, but his father advised him to search for a job instead as he was ageing. Circumstances discouraged him from pursuing higher education. He migrated to the city looking for a job.

Nirupam migrated from Nagaon to Guwahati for a private service sector job. His primary aim in life was to clear the civil service exam. It requires time and effort, which he could not afford because he had household responsibilities.

He had spent two years in this job. He earned an income of Rs. 617 per day. They look after the departments as guards and open and close the labs. They maintain the office and lab keys. They also look after missing things. It is an 8-hour job with intervals in between. He said this was not the job he aspired to do while studying in college. His primary aim was to clear the civil services.

His family earn an income of Rs. 75000 annually, mainly from farming. So, during droughts or floods, the chances of earning are less. He enrolled in a primary school near their house when he was four years old. While he was growing up, there was no table or chair to read and write on. He used to study on his bed. During festivals, they were visited by relatives and the beds used to get occupied. Even during exam time, visitors' presence used to distract his studies. The number of beds was less for the number of rooms in the house was also small. They had three rooms- 1 kitchen, one bedroom, one drawing room, and two beds.

Being a farmer, his father could not send him to a ‘good’ private school. Going to a private school, he believed he could have accessed better education which would have become an asset in providing him with a better job or a job he desired to achieve in life. He wished to better the socio-economic condition of his house with the help

of his aspired job. His present earnings are insufficient for him to live a decent life for himself and his family.

When asked what stops him from achieving his aspiration, he said clearing the civil services is tough. When he had time for preparation before the job, there needed to be more guidance. His parents need to be educated more and have the time, money and resources to guide him towards a better future. Another reason was that his father had to raise four sons, which affected their education, given the limited resources.

There was a time when he hesitated to apply for government jobs. The fees of application were high. He used to spend that money on buying essential things for home while giving up applying for exams. He also said that applying is pointless since there will be job fixing in recruitment.

It is seen how the socio-economic condition is deterministic of a person's ability to perceive education and occupation goals. Nirupam is not so satisfied in his present job as he aspired to clear the civil services. He never aspired to become a security guard. He said that had he been admitted to a better school or had their economic condition been better, he could have fulfilled his educational and occupational aspirations. He had not forfeited his goals. He is continuing his bachelor's degree in arts privately and hopes to clear civil services soon.

Raju is an ‘Assistant Cook’ in a restaurant in Guwahati. He is 28 years old and graduated in Assamese from a regional college in the Lakhimpur district of Assam. His father was a ‘pan-bidi'shop owner who admitted him to a low-fee private Assamese medium school. He was admitted into a government school where children had no desks and benches. The school was in a dilapidated condition. They were required to sit in plastic bags used for carrying rice, and classes happened irregularly.

The teachers frequently remained absent from classes. The students were scared to ask any question that they doubted about. However, when he was shifted to another school for secondary education, his life changed. It was a good ‘Assamese’ medium school. The teachers were encouraging. They used to visit his home and provide free guidance in every subject. This support helped him secure first division in the matriculation examination. After that, he cleared the higher secondary exam in 2nd division. He mentioned that he worked very hard to achieve 1st division, but his parents could not provide him with the required books for the HS course. The annual income from his father's pan-bidi shop is not much. Besides, his parents were required to invest in the education of his two sisters. Later, he could not further his education because of his father's death. The economic condition deteriorated afterwards, which forced his search for a job.

It is seen that the parents' education level is primarily under matriculation, and those who have not cleared their matriculation; succumb to unavoidable circumstances like economic disadvantages or the death of parents. Youths are sure about their fathers' literacy but don't know their mothers' education level. Rural literacy in Assam is 69.34 per cent. So, a huge number of people are illiterate. The number of respondents whose parents have not been to school at all is 39. But the respective fathers have been to school, but some dropped out in the middle.

Parents from such background cannot guide their children due to lack of school knowledge. Their socioeconomic condition also hinders their capacity or freedoms (Sen, 2001) and ability to grasp the education received from schools.

Nibir, 29 years old, is an ST who belongs to the Deuri community. His father is a farmer, and his mother is a housewife. He said,

"I belong to a poor farmer family. When I was young, I remember how I helped my father in the fields, which used to consume study time. We had money just enough to feed our stomachs. How could we afford 'good schools'. Our school had one single teacher for all subjects. Besides, he also used to cook mid-day meals for us. So, he was irregular in his teaching."

Seema, 24 years old, works as a sales executive in a shopping mall. She talks about her educational conditions at home and school.

"Our family was a joint family, and the number of members to feed was huge. So, our priority was feeding the family. Education was not that important for parents. My siblings and I had no table or chair to study. We used to sit on the floor. Sometimes, there needed to be more resources for study. The teachers were reluctant to listen to our doubts."

The family background of the respondents needs to carry a bright picture for the future of the respondents. Firstly, their parents are not educated enough to help and guide them towards a secure future. Parents themselves deal with insecure life every day. The produce from the farms is sometimes too little to feed the whole family throughout the year since farm produce is dependent on external conditions like the weather. Besides, the yield from unorganized businesses is sometimes insufficient to feed and for other expenses. Parents drop out of school early and join the labour force. Some help from the government had been received, like farm loan waivers or minimum support prices for immediate relief, but whether it is working or not is a debatable issue. Though there are various schemes for the upliftment of the rural poor like Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme, National Family Benefit

Scheme, Annapurna, Chief Minister's Assam Bikash Yojona, Backward Region Grant Fund, IAY(Indira Awas Yojana), MGNREGS(Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Scheme); respondents talked about the corruption that takes place in the rural department dealing with those schemes.

According to research, the academic achievements of students is influenced by the background and socio-economic status of their parent (Coleman et al.,1966). The parents of sampled employed youths are excluded from formal education for various reasons. They are dropouts and are engaged in occupations where not much reading and writing is required. Not being satisfied with their lives, they expect their children (sampled educated youths) to derive outcomes from the education system.

In my study, youth attributed the lack of parental guidance as one factor negatively affecting their educational achievements. Not much emphasis was on tuition or coaching classes which they believe are essential to qualify for professional examinations. Youths believe an educational ambience at home is necessary to do something achievable which is lacking at home. According to Abinash, an upper-caste-educated youth, *"We struggled a lot while growing up. My father is an agricultural labourer; my mother is a housewife. Both are school dropouts. I have four brothers and three sisters. So, we are a family of ten members. With my father's meagre income, it's hard to manage household expenditures. We can save only a little money for education. When we were young, we used to ask our parents why they sent us to school despite our meagre income."*

Youths' household conditions may affect positively or negatively the educational or occupational choices of the youths. Even though the household condition is dilapidated, parents' ability to motivate children for a better future can boost the achievements of the subsequent generation.

3.4.3 Higher Education Exclusion and Aspiration Challenged

Scholars in the postcolonial context have referred to the importance of money, social contact, and cultural resources in making educational and occupational choices in life (Jeffrey all, 2004, Cole 2004, 2005). Lack of opportunities to make such choices leads to poverty. Education is seen by marginalized communities, whether by caste or class or religion as a pathway to overcoming poverty (Marsh, 2011). Bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption characterize the state-run public education system. There is an utter lack of equity in access to education for the lower class. Deprivation of education certainly further deprives marginalized classes of upward social mobility (Tilak, 2018). 85 % of the sampled respondents have BPL cards. They live below the poverty line. All caste backgrounds- general, SC, ST or OBC belong to the BPL category. World organizations have recognized the lack of educational capital as a poverty of educational needs. Poverty of education has become an essential factor in education exclusion in the higher education sector. Respondents blame their household's economic condition for not being able to continue higher education. They believe that higher education is vital to come out of the grip of poverty. However, flexible and volatile jobs instead become a priority for them rather than continuing higher education.

In my study, sampled employed youths earn an income ranging from Rs. 6500-Rs. 13500, which is not fixed. The income depends on certain situations and contexts and keeps fluctuating. Such low income becomes insignificant in a city area where living expenses are high. Therefore, we can see a retrenchment to poverty. Bourdieu and Passeron (2000), Skeggs (2005), Reay, David, and Ball (2005) and Reay (1998, 2001), among many other notable sociologists, have all identified the reproduction

of class relations through education. Reproduction of class relations, thus, takes place through higher education exclusion (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Reay, 1998,2001; Reay, David and Ball, 2005). Education leads to mobility and higher wages. Access to higher education is necessary for the desired mobility sought after by low-income families to be achieved. Higher education exclusion in particular seen in socially disadvantaged communities (Nambissan, 2015). Participation in higher education has been lower among Dalits (Chamars) and Muslims than among upper-caste (Jeffrey, 2004). In my study, economically disadvantaged(BPL) communities are seen to be excluded from higher education. The STs and OBCs have not been outspoken about caste discrimination. They blame higher education exclusion on their economic condition rather than their social condition. Caste has been politicized with reservation discourse, as per one ST respondent.

Arjun Appadurai (2004) argues that the capacity to aspire remains relatively less developed for the poor. Even though they have fully developed the ability to desire, it remains challenged by their circumstances. To aspire is a conscious decision; anybody can aspire for something in life. In my study, the youths informed me that they had high aspirations for themselves in schools and colleges. Some of these aspirations were achievable, but some unfortunate incidents in their life stunted their aspirations. Unanticipated hardships like sickness, accident, sudden death of an earning member or repeated failures typically prevent these aspirations. Youths are forced to abandon their interests and aspirations.

In her early twenties, Neelam is from the Nagaon district, Assam. She belongs to one of the Scheduled Tribes. She has four siblings, two brothers and two sisters. She is the eldest in the family. Her family is working hard to save for her and her sisters' marriage. Her elder brother is studying in a college, and her younger brother is in school. Her two sisters are in school too. Her father has land where he engages in

farming, and her mother owns a tea shop. She is a graduate and aspired to become a college professor when she was in college. When she was in the final year of her graduation, her father met with an accident and died a few days after the accident. After the death, the family had to toil hard economically. She says,

"I liked going to school and reading for exams being a good student. The teachers had high hopes for me. I did well in matriculation and graduation. When I was graduating, I decided to become a college professor. I used to admire my college professors a lot. They inspired me to pursue my dream. After the death of my father, my dream shattered. My reality turned upside down. My mother asked me to discontinue my education and look for a job. Even though I applied for post-graduation studies, I quit the intention with a heavy heart and moved to the city. Household responsibilities were now upon me. Even my elder brother, who had just passed his first year of graduation, left his studies and came to the city after me. Earning money became a priority for us rather than pursuing higher education. We had to pay for the education of our siblings. We are now determined to fulfil the education and aspiration of our siblings. Since I could not become a college professor, I want my siblings to become one."

Not being able to fulfil her dream keeps her unhappy at her workplace. She does not get job satisfaction. Neelam works as a salesgirl in a shopping mall in Guwahati. Her employer was quite impressed with her results in exams. He even suggested she pursue her dream rather than work at the mall. However, she had no option. Now she earns an income of Rs. 8500 per month. Her job is to take care of the customers' needs and increase sales, arrange products and meet superiors' expectations. She further said that nobody in society aspires to work in a mall as a sales executive. These jobs are for people who did poorly in exams or faced some disadvantaged situations like the death of earning members or some economic issues. But she

certainly likes talking to her coworkers and her superiors, who are very caring and cooperative. She wants a collaborative and understanding husband who lets her do her job because it gives a sense of independence to her even though the expected satisfaction is absent.

Rajesh is working as an attendant in a fast-food restaurant. He had a great interest in sports and wanted to join the army. When he was graduating, he was also preparing for the defence exams. He used to exercise regularly and run. His father is a priest in a temple and also an astrologer. He has two younger brothers who are studying in school. He tells,

"I am a true patriot and had an intense desire to serve the country by joining the army. My uncle works in the military, and I was fascinated by the stories we heard from him when we were children. I used to watch a lot of patriotic movies when I was growing up. That also influenced me to a significant degree. Throughout my education, I was an average student. I cleared my matriculation and higher secondary in the second division. However, I was pretty confident that I will be able to pass the defence exam. I had a good physique. I woke up early and ran for 7 or 8 km daily. But life does not always work out the way you want. My mother's health deteriorated due to cancer. All our savings were spent on her treatment. My father did not earn much to handle our younger brothers' household expenses and educational expenses. So my father suggested I move to the city looking for a job. In the city, I did a short course in cooking at an institution and was finally recruited as an attendant in a fast-food restaurant. I am not happy because this is not what I imagined myself doing for the rest of my life."

Youths rely on resources from parents, neighbourhood groups, and the government to fulfill their hopes and aspirations. Youth despise their inability to reach higher education. They aspire to complete their bachelors and masters and, if possible, go for further education.

3.5 Women and their Background

Rural women in Assam take an active part in rearing crops, transplant paddy seedlings, and reaping the harvest when ripe (Barua, 1954). Here, women do fishing, weaving silk and cotton, cattle grazing and basket making. Meeta Deka (2013) writes that rural women in Assam must do all the regular household chores. She takes care of the needs and requirements of the man of the house. She weaves twice a day, socializes in the 'namghar' [9]and takes care of animals like cows and goats. This situation indicates subordinated status of rural women in Assam. In my study, most girls were from rural Assam (83 %). Some examples of their background are detailed below.

Jonali came to Guwahati from the Dhemaji district two years ago. She is from a remote village far away from Dhemaji town. Her father works as a farmer and a teacher in a venture school. Her mother rears pigs and chickens. She belongs to the 'scheduled tribe' since she is from the Mising [10]community. Her village is backward and lacks electricity, proper housing facilities, clean drinking water, good schools, all-weather roads, and proper transportation to schools and colleges. Flood was another major factor for underdevelopment in her area. Due to the lack of electricity, her studies were hampered. There was frequent power cuts which was a setback for her. She used to study under kerosene lamplight when a power cut happened. Nevertheless, her father discourages this due to the rising prices of kerosene oil.

[9] A common place of meeting for worship of God particular to Assam.
[10] Mising is a tribal community in Assam enrolled in the scheduled tribe list.

Instead, he asked her to help her mother and let her two brothers share the lamp for their studies. Several times, she could not correctly revise for her exam because of the power cut. She remembered how the lack of electricity made her study time unproductive. Her house was made of mud and thatch, so staying at home was unsuitable during floods. The floods damaged her books and copies. She also said she lost some valuable books in the floods. She lamented that floods carried away books that her father bought for her with all the savings she saved to buy a bicycle. Her parents were economically humble to buy her school or college books at the time.

Jonali's life is not different from many girls who have migrated to the city for employment. Sahida says, *" My school is located ten kilometres away from home. My father wanted me to study. At the end of school, my father would wait for me to take me home. My father had a tea shop near our house. Sometimes during peak hours, he remained busy and arrived late to pick me up. I have seen him work so hard for my education. After a few years, when I was in the seventh standard, his health deteriorated, and he could not work in the tea shop. My brother, who had just passed his HS, decided not to continue further education and came to the city searching for a job to look after the household finances. He searched for a job for one year but could not find one. He learned to drive from a friend and found employment as a driver. After I passed my matriculation, I also decided to go to the city as my father's health expenses increased daily."*

Most of the girls (83%) in my study are from rural backgrounds and belong to the lower middle or lower class. The majority of their parents (78%) are either matriculate or school dropouts. The rest are either matriculate or HS pass.

They are from rural areas or remote village areas far away from the town. Their parents are employed in the informal sector, working in precarious conditions and earning insufficiently to provide quality education to their children. Many girls have migrated to the city from far away districts like Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar. About 58 % per cent of the girls say they have household responsibilities due to their poor socio-economic condition, death or illness of a parent. Their parents, brothers and sisters rely on their money which is only a meagre amount. Parents are not very much supportive of their decision to live in the city. Girls like Jonali and Sahida believe that their parents are not very supportive of their decision to migrate to the city because of their rural background and orthodox mindset.

3.5.1 Negotiating Gendered Practices at Home

Gender discrimination is prevalent in India. In India, it is found that a girl child is discriminated against in food distribution in a family, and they lack safe sanitation and a clean environment. It is also found that parents who cannot afford to send all their children to school usually prefer to educate their sons and not daughters (Mitra, 2014). Household works burden a girl child, and such activities compel a girl to drop out. In my study, some examples of gender discrimination expressed in their households are- *"When I attained puberty, I was not allowed to play with boys or laugh or interact with boys other than those whom my parents trust."*

" My clothes were cheaper than my brothers. Sometimes my mother asked me to wear old clothes that were torn while my brothers got new clothes."

" I had a deep interest in games and sports. But my parents consider it a masculine affair. They never allowed me to play".

“ I don't like to do household chores. But my mother pressurizes me to do it. She never asks my elder brothers to do it.” “My parents ask me not to take my studies seriously. Because marriage is my final destination.”

In the context of their education and service employment, women respondents in my study were asked whether they faced gender discrimination at their homes. About 73 per cent of girls said they face discrimination at their homes; the rest were either unaware or have not encountered it. These girls face gender discrimination at home in some way or the other. It affects their desire to do something they want to do for themselves. This way, women respondents gave an account of experiences of inequality, inferiority and liability at home and in society. Their narratives revolved around how they were brought up in comparison to male members of the family. These experiences are reflected in their educational attainment. This section discusses a few instances of gender socialization and experiences of inequality or inferiority in making educational decisions for young girls. Society's gendered perspective conditions the dependence of these educated girls on their parents and families. In cases where girls are sent to co-ed schools and colleges seems progressive, parents and girls' male relatives keep an eye on their spatial mobility and make sure they dress appropriately and don't mingle with boys much. In cases where girls are allowed to study and work independently, their marriages are still controlled by their family and relatives. In cases where parents provide freedom and independence to their daughters, their husbands won't. There were several such instances from the field.

Formal education helped the women participants in my study identify themselves as better educated than their parents or any uneducated village people. So it gave them the confidence that they could handle any gendered situations better than their elderly counterparts. They believed they didn't need to listen to their husbands or bow down to their demands like the uneducated women of the village. At the same

time, they expressed how they needed to be treated differently from a boy or a girl less educated than them. They narrated various circumstances where they were shown that they were dependent on the men of their area. They narrated their events along with their perceived reasons.

Case # 1 -Priyadarshini Priyadarshini was working as a team leader during the period of her interview. Her father is a low-fee private school teacher, and her mother owns a tea shop in her village. Her parents have been very supportive of her since childhood. They tried to fulfil all her wishes and of her brothers and sisters. However, she did not like her uncles. She recalled how they interfered in her affairs and tried to influence her parents.

"I hate my uncles. Since childhood, they discouraged my parents from spending money on us, my two elder sisters and me. My uncles suggested my parents buy the cheapest things for us available in the market. They keep demanding money from my father for cigarettes, alcohol, and gambling. They are self-employed and reluctant to work hard for money. We have grown up seeing them fighting with my father if he refused the money. My father was saving money for a bicycle for my elder sister to go to college. My elder uncle came to know about it and demanded money from my father on the pretext of his wife's illness. My uncle got angry when my father informed him that he was saving money for the bicycle. He suggested that my parents prepare for her marriage rather than further education. My uncles were jealous of my father since he was employed and did not like us at all. They used to report my parents when they saw us roaming around with our male friends after school and college. I don't need to listen to my uncles about where to go and where not to go. They cannot treat me the way they treated their daughters, who married very early. I am an educated woman and don't deserve to listen to that. They cannot treat me

the way they treat any village woman. He has to treat me with respect because of my education. I am a first-division holder in Matriculation and HS. I have done graduation in Assamese with honours. I deserve to be treated differently because of my education."

Case #2 -Padma Padma is employed as a security guard in Guwahati. She has one elder brother, and two younger sisters. She lives in a joint family, including her parents, grandmother, grandfather, siblings, paternal aunt, uncle and their children. She remembers her childhood days and says, *"We belong to a BPL (below poverty line) family, and since we are a joint family, there are a lot of people to look after. More people means more expenses. Though we have farmland, which my father and uncles cultivate for money, the income is not enough for our large family, so our education-related expenses suffer. We have heard from our grandparents and relatives that my two younger sisters and I are a burden to the family. They used to say that if we were born boys, the expenses on us would be worthwhile. For them, it's no use in educating us because one day we will get married and look after my in-laws' family. Rather my parents should save money for our marriage and spend money on the education of male siblings". So, the decisions of our lives are taken by my father and my paternal relatives. They don't let us mingle with boys in school or the neighbourhood. After 10th standard, I was admitted to a girls' HS school so I don't mingle with boys, for if I eloped with a boy, it would affect my marriage and my family's honour. They won't let me wear fashionable clothes but emphasizes wearing traditional mekhela-chador*[11]*. Due to such restrictions, I ran away with my boyfriend to Guwahati and started working here. I think my education empowered me to take this decision."*

[11] Mekhala-chador is a traditional Assamese wear for women

Case # 3 -Neelakshi Neelakshi, a private mobile company sales assistant, talked about her gendered experiences throughout her academic life. She narrated,

"*My father is an unemployed person who sits at home and does nothing rather than complain about how our home's expenses are increasing daily. He did not favour sending me to a school but had to send me because of my mother. She wanted me to become educated so my life would become less difficult than hers. My mother worked as an Anganwadi worker and owned a pan-bidi shop in my village. My father always tries to convince my mother that educating me will waste their money. My mother was adamant, and not only she admitted me to a school, but a good school with a reputation for good results every year. Because of my mother, my interest in studies increased day by day. However, my father tried his best to demotivate me. He used to make me do household work after school, which hampered my time for homework. Again, he used to demand money from my mother for alcohol which she saved for household expenses and my education. Because of such difficulties in studying at home, my mother, after matriculation, sent me to my maternal uncle's home for further studies. There I was admitted to an arts college. I did well in my intermediate exam and wanted to pursue further education after graduation. However, my father got ill then, and my mother had to spend a lot of money on him. She wanted me to pursue further education; however, the household expenses were putting a strain. My father also tried to take advantage of his situation and influenced my mother to stop educating me and focus on my marriage so that money can be saved. Since I was not courageous enough to pursue graduation at the cost of my father's health, I decided to discontinue education and seek a job eligible for an HS graduate. Since my mother engaged herself as a full-time caregiver for my father, I asked my boyfriend, working as TET teacher at the village, to look after my parents and left for Guwahati in search of a job."*

A job in Guwahati meant more money for her.

Case # 4 Dalimi Dalimi's parents are self-employed and work as agricultural labourers. They admitted her to a government school which provided government entitlements like midday meals, books and bags. She narrated how she liked going to school because she got to meet her friends, and going to school was fun for her while she saw it and dreaded other students. She disliked staying at home for a long and hated the holidays because she was confined to home during the holidays by her parents reminding her that she was a grown-up now.

"During my childhood, my parents allowed me to go anywhere I wanted. I used to roam around with my male and female friends and play all day long. After I started taking study seriously, the time for playing got reduced. However, I tried to save time for games and play. During 7th standard, things changed with the onset of my menstruation. Restrictions were imposed on my mobility. I was not allowed to go out of home without a purpose of my parent's choice. I was advised to stay away from male friends at school. Whenever they saw me with my male friends roaming outside the home, my parents threatened me that they would discontinue school. This threat increased from the 9th standard. However, I wanted to finish my matriculation for a better future. Since I was the only child of my parents, I wanted to do something for a better future. So, I had to listen to them."

Dalimi's restrictions on mobility continued throughout her education. After her HS was over, she was persuaded into an arranged marriage, and they suggested that she discontinue further education and prepare for married life. However, she refused to listen and conveyed her desire for further education. Her parents stopped financing

her education which compelled her to find a job to gather the required money for further education.

The case studies mentioned above are examples of gendered practices at home. Family members or relatives did not favour girls' education reflected in the cases of Priyadarshini, Padma, Neelakshi and Dalimi. Household economic conditions also put a setback in their studies. Parents focused on the marriage of their girls rather than education which compelled them to seek alternatives for their future.

3.6 Impact of Gender Discrimination on Learning

Countries worldwide have a human capital approach towards women's education and empowerment. Therefore, a global emphasis on female education and employment has been seen over several decades (Das & Desai,2003). At the individual level, millions of parents send their daughters to get educated for various reasons in developing countries. Contrary to that, studies show that low returns to education for women discourage families from educating their daughters (Kingdon & Unni, 1997; Dreze & Gazdar, 1996). Gender discrimination is the most prominent factor for gender inequity and inequality in education (Singh & Rabindranath, 2019). No matter how much gender parity is achieved in school enrolment, the girl child carries a significant educational disadvantage (UNESCO,2010). In research on girls' and women's education in Kenya, Chege and Sifuna (2006) writes that levelling off the enrolment rates between girls and boys does not ensure higher chances of reaching higher levels of education. They further note that parents prefer to invest in their son's education when money is scarce because of the anticipated economic returns. The patrilineal nature of inheritance which favours boys; the high opportunity costs of girls' education, the thinking that daughter's education investment is futile since they will get married

and serve another family and the view that educated girl will repel a suitable husband are factors influencing girls' access to formal education. Sanitary facilities and gender-insensitive environments also inhibit girls' dedicated participation in schools. A result of gender stereotyping is that they identify with soft disciplines like arts, home sciences, dancing or music (Das & Desai, 2003). Vocational and technical fields have been male-dominated.

In the field, respondents were asked how they perceive the formal education system and whether it has helped further their aspirations and wants or contributed some benefits. It is seen that while pursuing formal education, these girls have both similarities and differences in their educational trajectories with boys. Girl respondents interviewed carried positive attitudes about the education they received. They believe that they are educated enough for a white-collar job. Almost all of them aspire to a government job to remedy their problems. In case of a failure to achieve a government job or a desired job, they seek alternatives like a low-paid private-sector job in which they are currently employed. They expressed their unwillingness to consider this job as their permanent destination. Those girl respondents give an account of their gendered experiences of educational trajectory. Cited below are a few instances of it.

Case #1 -Spriha

Spriha is a desk receptionist in a café in Guwahati. Her parents are agricultural labourers on the farms of other people. Her father is under matriculate (6th pass), and her mother is illiterate. She has one younger brother and one older one. She has done her schooling at a government school nearby her home. Since her brothers are more 'meritorious' than her, they were admitted to a better government school with better facilities. Later she clarified that her brother's teachers told her parents that

their sons are very good at studies. She remembers her parents saying to her jokingly, *"No need to study so hard. What's the use of education after marriage?"*. However, she has equally excelled in exams like her brothers. She reiterated that just as her brothers achieved first division in science, she is a first division holder in arts in their matriculation exam. She also excelled in her HS exam with letter marks. However, when her brothers earned a scholarship for graduation, preparations were made to send them to Guwahati. She also pleaded with her parents to send her to Guwahati for education. Her parents refused and instead asked her to find a partner and marry since they were growing old. She said*, "I prayed to my parents to let me study at least in a nearby college. But they told her they could not afford her college fees as it was costly and that they were also saving for my marriage. I was devastated as I desperately wanted to continue my education. It is sad when you know that you are excellent in studies and can become something in life, but then your talent becomes valueless just because you are meant to get married, satisfy your husband and produce children. Then after one year, I got married to my friend. He had done his master's at a local college. He was also searching for a job and suggested moving to the city. Now he is a sales boy in a supermart and because the expenses of living in a town are more my husband asked me to find a job. I applied for this receptionist job. The employers were impressed with my educational background and recruited me for the job. Though I contend that I am doing a job and earning money for my needs, I feel this is below my capacities or capabilities".*

Case # 2 -Nandini

Nandini works as a desk receptionist in a company. Talking about her gendered experiences of schooling and college life, she said that household work was an obstacle to her education. Her father works as a convenience store owner in her town, and her mother is a housewife. She narrated,

"When I was in 8th standard, her mother gave birth to my brother and her time was required to look after her son. So, household work like cooking, washing dishes, and cleaning became my responsibility. I was fifteen years old then, and my mother considered my age appropriate for taking household responsibilities and jokingly asked me to consider this period a training period for my marriage. Household work hampered my study, and I struggled to concentrate. The final results of the 8th and 9th standards suffered because of this. My school is a government school where classes happen irregularly. My friends from private school suggested that I should not depend on my school classes and make more effort to learn at home or try to take tuition to understand my chapters since they know that classes are irregular here and that I am not getting enough time for study."

Case # 3 -Kabyashree

Kabyashree is a small-town girl who lived with her mother and two elder brothers before coming to Guwahati. Her father passed away when she was in the tenth standard. His father was the household's sole breadwinner and worked as a teacher. So, after his death, her mother became a pensioner. She told,

"After the death of my father, my mother became a pensioner and earned half of what my father used to earn. A teacher in Assam doesn't earn much, so since her pension was a small amount, she decided to concentrate the pension on the education of my two brothers. Sometimes, when I needed some books and copies,

she used to say that her saving was less and she spent the required money on the education-related expenditures of my brothers. Whenever I argued that she should equally focus on my education, like her brothers, she reasoned that they needed a job to start a family and a good education. But girls like me don't need a job to start a family, and when I am supposed to get married and go to another family, more money spent on my education will be a waste. She also meant that since my father is no longer with us to look after my mother, it will be my brothers' who will look after her and that I won't be here after my marriage to take care of her."

In her study on higher secondary college girls in rural Bangladesh, Nicoletta Del Franco (2012) writes that the family's socioeconomic condition greatly concerns their schooling, marriage, and aspirations. Family-related factors and societal and gendered norms determine where a girl will reach in the future. As per UNESCO & United Nations Girls Education Initiative (2015) report, though parents send girls to schools, they drop out after some time which later affects their lives. The context is such in many low and middle-income countries. As per the UNESCO report (2014, 2011), girls' schooling is affected by their family's socioeconomic condition and gender inequality in society. Research also shows how violence at home affects children's secondary schooling. Daughters' gendered education experiences at an adolescent stage intermingle with the household's economic condition and patriarchal norms (Patton et al., 2016). India has one of the highest proportions of out-of-school girls children at the primary and lower secondary levels (UNICEF &UNESCO, 2014). Fewer girls manage to complete secondary education in India. United nations organisation reports suggest that girls from rural low-income and lower caste (scheduled caste/scheduled tribe) families face the most challenges in accessing education. Studies also show that though formal education postpones girls'

marriage, parents' decisions are always influenced by social norms (Hossain 2005; World Bank 2008).

The female respondents in this study perceive education as a means to gain autonomy and equality in society. Belonging to lower-middle and lower-class families, they also see education as a hope for a job. Family responsibility has been the dominant factor in their aspiration for a job after completing their education. In cases of parents' death, a parent or the earning member of the family, girls are seen taking responsibility for their family financially. In most cases, it is the independent decision of the daughter to help the family out of the ongoing crisis financially. Parents are reluctant to depend on their daughters financially. They prefer their sons to help them out rather than their daughters. They instead want their daughter to get married and nurture a family. Though parents admit them to schools, their expectations of their daughters are gendered.

In most cases, school and subject choices are made by either parents or brothers. In cases girls expressed a preference to join a science discipline, they were discouraged. Jonali, who liked science and mathematics, was not permitted admission to a reputed science college in a nearby town. Her brothers believed she wouldn't pass the HS exam with science as her subject. Jonali said, "*When I reason with my brothers that I have done well in science and mathematics during my matriculation examination, they argue that HS level of toughness is no match to matriculation. People who require coaching to do better in HS with a science background. We cannot afford tuition for you. The arts are a safe and convenient choice for you.*"

Most girls who opted for an arts background in HS and graduation believe that girls are not capacitated for the science stream. Their brains are not equally capable to

that of boys. They think that science streams are meant for gifted, hardworking, talented, deserving or those who can afford coaching or tuition.

A respondent, Geeta believes that belonging to a low socio-economic position, problems in buying uniforms, books, copies, payment of fees and the related hurdles are not as significant for girls as for boys. She said it is alright for girls to fail an exam or earn poor marks. People won't point fingers at them. Because society doesn't expect girls to have a career, look after the family financially or earn for themselves. They have their parents, brothers or husband to look after them. But economic problems or other crises like the death of a parent take a toll on boys' future. Because they are expected to look after their family financially. Due to lack of finances, Geeta's family could not admit her brothers to better colleges after their matriculation. The science college was expensive. So, her brothers opted for arts in a low-fee college nearby. Girls like Geeta have adapted to the gendered notion boys deserve better education and are meant for the sciences. Research indicates South Asian societies are characterized by gendered ideologies (Dube, 1997). Education is meant for the empowerment of girls in our society. But educational trajectories have shown how traditional discrimination has been reproduced again in the micro-processes of schooling. Gendered practices get reflected in schooling and further education.

Female respondents talk about how preferences are given to their brothers regarding investment in education. Parents don't see the money spent on daughters' education as an investment. Sometimes the daughter is sent to a low-cost government school, and their brothers are sent to 'better' private schools. Only a few of those girls said their parents wanted them to focus on their education and career. Even though unfortunate circumstances have discontinued their education, their parents support them in whatever path they choose. However, no matter how supportive the parents

are and how independent the girls are, parents believe that life will be difficult for their daughters without an earning husband. Jeffery's (2004) study reflected the views of the parents and society, not the daughters. Because their daughters were not allowed to be interviewed. Girls' perspective on education differs from their parent's perspective in the context of schooling or education (Franco, 2014). In my study, girls see education from the perspective of autonomy and empowerment. A cent per cent of the girls have a human capital approach to education that is the medium to get jobs and required employment. In my study, many girls expressed that when they were in school, they hoped to become something in life. They felt that they were on par with the boys. Navami remembered her schooling days as the best days in her life. She had a deep interest in her studies. She said, *"I was the topper in my class from seventh to ten. It was a government school, and the teachers were learned and hardworking. Though my father was a school dropout because of family economic problems, he ensured that I studied and did well in exams. My favourite subject was mathematics and social sciences. From the ninth standard, I aspired to become a teacher in mathematics".*

Navami had the support of her parents in her educational journey. There were several instances where girls single-handedly took a stand for their education, job, or any other independent decision. The most commonly aspired professions were teacher, clerk, a government job or nurse. A few want to open their businesses like a beauty parlour, tailoring shop, stationery shop or restaurant. So, rather than marriage, they use their education for a secured future. A secured future and economic independence are what they seek through their education. Again, a large percentage of the girls believe that education enhances the respect of their families. Their parents are not highly educated. They are either secondary education drop-outs or matric passes. In rare cases, parents are an HS pass or a graduate. They are

employed as farmers, agricultural labourers, shopkeepers, mechanics or clerks. Neelam said, 'Since childhood, I have seen that professions like the teacher, professor, doctor, and engineer are important in society. My friends proudly say they want to become teachers or doctors, engineers or professors, police or army. I have never heard anyone saying they want to become a farmer, manual labour, vegetable seller, or a small tea or paan shop owner. It appears to me that these are for uneducated people. Educated people earn more money and live a life of comfort and luxury. In a focus group discussion, Reena, Chitra, Parashmoni and Dimpi, who works as security guard in a reputed technical institute of Assam, told me the importance of education in fulfilling hopes and aspirations of life. Reena says, 'Since my young age, I have heard my father telling me that education is important and will make me 'dangor manuh'[12] (great person). Chitra agrees with Reena and says that education is important to become 'val manuh'[13](a good person). Parashmoni and Dimpi remembered how her parents encouraged her to study to become 'great person' and 'good person' later.

Society's gendered perspective conditions the dependence of these educated girls on their parents and families. In cases where girls are sent to co-ed schools and colleges seems progressive, parents and girls' male relatives keep an eye on their spatial mobility and make sure they dress appropriately and don't mingle with boys much. In cases where girls are allowed to study and work independently, their marriages are still controlled by their family and relatives. In cases where parents provide the freedom and independence to their daughters, their husbands won't. There were several such instances from the field.

[12] Dangor manuh- In Assam, an educationally acclaimed person, famous person is called dangor manuh where dangor means great and manuh means person.
[13] Val manuh- In Assam, a person of good character is a 'val manuh'.

3.7 Conclusion

Social inequality is pervasive in higher education which is evident mainly in this study. Lack of parental educational experience is a push-out factor from higher education. Uneducated parents are feebly capable of providing the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) to their subsequent generations. If we look at the history of generations of people excluded from education, we will see that social, political, economic discrimination has been the result of exclusion from the education system. A majority of them reside in rural areas. In this study, the sampled youths belong to rural areas. The majority of their parents are engaged in the agricultural sector as farmers and rural labour or are self-employed in low-income work. Interlocking inequalities of caste, class, religion, gender and ethnicity call for a complex understanding of what schooling may mean for parents and youths in poverty. These youths at the bottom of the hierarchy were educationally at risk in the state-run public school system has survived the system, which they attribute to teachers who personally took care of them despite belonging to low socio-economic condition. There were stories of teachers who passed the students in exams through grace marks despite poor performance. They used to motivate their parents to encourage and support their children to do better in school exams. Teachers have projected education as a pathway out of poverty in school classes. At home, they are deprived of environments that enable learning. They need more basic necessities, convenience, and proper nutrition, which is required for a learning atmosphere. There need to be more proper desk-benches, blackboards, and toilet facilities for girls in schools. The lack of extra-curricular activities in schools has been a significant complaint by these youths. By the time they reach college they need to improve in participating in co-curricular competitions. Rural poor have access to poorly funded elementary and secondary schools and have less access to the

resources or knowledge about the whole process of continued education. However, different groups of people may motivate and guide rural youths towards their destination. As a group of first–generation educated youth, they face difficult transitions to college in contrast to their peer with an educated parent. The former represents an important group to understand the social mobility process.

There has been an increasing emphasis on increasing enrolment or enhancing the GPI (gender parity index) rather than giving policy attention to finding problems in curriculum and pedagogy and making the same more gender-sensitive. The government should focus on reducing patriarchal pressures regarding norms and values in society, which acts as a medium of disempowerment for women. An analysis of the whole chapter shows how intersectionality, the nature of the education received, and the determinant socio-economic factors influence the nature of empowerment. We have seen how female household members suffer because of the scarcity of resources, and guardians tend to favour male members under such circumstances. Because of various reasons, girls could not get access to higher education. A secured job becomes a priority over completing education because of time constraints. They don't have the required time for the completion of higher education. The sense of responsibility becomes more elevated than their personal goals. However, suppose the right conditions arise in future. In that case, they express their desire to complete their education to whatever level feasible, and simultaneously they continue to search for a secure and safe job opportunity.

CHAPTER IV

Transitions, Waithood and Prolongation of Youth

Abstract

This chapter examines the interrelationship between formal education and aspiration and its interlinkages with the waithood and prolongation of youth based on the data collected from the field. It further accounts for the experiences of youth respondents' hopelessness, despair and anxiety associated with underemployment and job dissatisfaction. Their constant efforts to overcome the state of limbo or wait for a secure or stable job in the future are brought forth. This chapter is an account of adulthood pressures youth face, the transition from formal employment to the labour market at a very young age when they decide to exit schooling and higher studies in search of a job.

4.1 Introduction

Neoliberal economic policies, particularly structural adjustment programmes, create a gap between the aspirations of youth and economic realities. The lack of middle-class jobs has created a gap in life chances, resulting in income inequality in society. Commitment to the meritocratic ideal contributes to an advantage gained by children from privileged families (Young, 1958). New forms of privileges based on neoliberalism have joined this ideology in excluding children from having an equal chance to compete. James Heckman (2006) argues that a group of people are educationally disadvantaged due to income inequalities, poverty inducing lower educational aspirations and lower achievements characterized by poor living conditions and a sense of hopelessness.

Research (Leavy & Hossain, 2014) speaks that the number of youths aspiring for the same life journeys depending on educational and occupational achievements is

increasing because of changes induced by various global happenings. With the increasing number of college graduates entering the job market, the demand for graduation requirements is very high to eliminate the maximum and keep the required minimum. As employers are swarmed with graduates with the same qualification, they change or adjust the hiring criteria accordingly. This credential inflation has reduced the value of credentials in the job market, contributing to the aspiration gap among youth. As Collins (1979) writes,

" If in the future everyone had a PhD, law degree, M.B.A., or the like, then these advanced degrees would be worth no more than a job in a fast-food restaurant, and the competition would move on to still higher degrees" (Collins, 1979,p.146).

The demand and supply of graduates play a significant role in recruiting and eliminating many in an economy. It has substantial influences on the life trajectories of youths. It affects aspiration and hopes that youth nurture. Aspirations is a crucial modality through which youths in Assam forge their aspirations. Economic liberalization has created a demand for more professionally trained engineering and computer science workers. From regional Assamese language newspapers, it is seen that youths complained about how local colleges could not offer fully developed professional degrees to prepare students for careers in these sectors. Similarly, the participants in my study

complained that their post-secondary or college institutions should incorporate a job-oriented approach to the curriculum and pedagogy. Believing that their colleges will not provide transitions to secure employment, many youths with professional aspirations desire to leave Assam for tertiary education or a white-collar job. When Assamese youth complete their education, they find few local opportunities for secure employment relevant to their qualifications (Xaxa,2004). Government

positions are the preferred employment option for educated youth. More significant numbers of youths have primary access to education, but this access is different from that of quality education. While access to education has given Assam youths high expectations for respectable employment and secure earnings, these expectations can rarely be met (Xaxa, 2018).

This chapter examines the relationship between the aspirations of youth respondents, their struggles to achieve those aspirations in a precarious market situated, and the resultant prolongation of youth that brings in its wake anxiety and hopelessness & compulsory waithood. It tries to document the trajectory of aspirations and educational attainment to understand the nature of waithoodness, hopelessness and their day-to-day encounter with uncertainties, and how they navigate such uncertainties, believing they are steering towards the fulfilment of aspirations. Important in Arjun Appadurai's (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69) framing of aspirations as a navigational capacity is the understanding that everyone aspires but that circumstances can enhance or diminish the ability to navigate where we are to where we would like to be. Aspirations do not just deliver us from a start point to an endpoint; instead, they require an understanding of navigating the "dense combination of nodes and pathways" between the present and an imagined future. The more we get to practise and explore our aspirational maps, the more robust and realistic our capacity to navigate the future. Those who have less opportunity to develop their capacity to aspire – such as marginalised and disadvantaged students – have "a more brittle horizon of aspirations" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69) that can tend towards the ideal rather than the realistic aspiration (St. Clair, Kintrea & Houston, 2013). This approach invalidates deficit notions that see a lack of aspirations as an individual failing (Prodonovich, Perry, & Taggart, 2014). The people around us help define what is meaningful to aspire to (Prodonovich, Perry, & Taggart, 2014).

Structural, social, and access issues are significant constraints on the capacity to aspire. Restrictions can manifest in several forms, including poverty (Appadurai, 2004), financial and performance factors (Looker & Thiessen, 2004; Eccles, Vida & Barber, 2004), inadequate academic preparation (Conradie, 2013) and adverse terms of recognition, which is often evident in the incongruence between individual (or specific group) aspirations and state or institutional aspirations. Constraints such as those generated by poverty result in a "diminishing of the circumstances" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69) in which aspiring can develop.

4.2 The Prolongation of Youth

Rural young people, in particular, and youth in general, experience longer delays in their school-to-work transitions. They are 40 per cent more likely to be in casual work without a contract than their urban counterparts (ILO, 2017). The human capital theory does not work when there is an over-supply of secondary and tertiary graduates on the one hand and a lack of job on the other. Literature on adulthood (Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., Rubén G. Rumbaut, & Richard A. Settersten, Jr.,2016) suggests that though a particular age signifies entry into adulthood, the onset of adulthood is postponed. Generally, in different countries, ages 18 and 21, young people are considered adults and entrusted with some rights and privileges. Adult-like characteristics is leaving home, completing school, starting a job, getting married and having children. Global neoliberal changes are acting upon youth's intention to move into adulthood. Adulthood is extending; youths stay at home for a longer time, marriage and having children are postponed, lack of jobs in hand, making entry into adulthood longer, more ambiguous, and complex than in the past. Youths are gripped with debt, inadequate employment, career instability, and late marriage, making it difficult for people to cross the threshold and be considered adults genuinely. Western models of adulthood follow Stadialism, a theory of set

stages, that is, certain things in life happen at certain stages(Brown et al., 2010). Against this, Jennifer Johnson-Hanks(2018) has argued that life does not follow neat trajectories. Life is unstable and shaped by individual choices and by contextual ones, in what she calls “vital conjunctures” (Johnson-Hanks, 2002). Youths worldwide are finding it difficult to move into adulthood because it is hard to determine the material means to marry (Ghannam, 2013; Jeffrey, 2004). Adulthood is elusive, and people are unable to attain it because of limited financial resources. Sociological studies in the West have found people associating adulthood with things they have recently possessed or bought from the market. The same is reiterated by Deborah Durham (2016, p.535) that consumption is a form of self-development and has all the hallmarks of youth.

Aspiration revolves around attaining things that signify adulthood. Respondent youth's anxieties and hopes around finding suitable employment were inextricably tied to their ambitions to acquire a particular version of adulthood. They believed adulthood would be achieved through education and securing a stable white-collar government job. Dhana Hughes (2016, p. 1463) found that educated young Sri Lankans from marginalized backgrounds find themselves in a perpetual state of “ anxious liminality” and struggle to secure appropriate employment commensurate with their education and associated with the status of respectable adulthood. As the adulthood youths from Sri Lanka aspire to becomes more and more elusive, they respond by further investing in “skilling up” to stay on the path to adulthood that they envisions for themselves. Similar is the trajectory in my research site.

In my study, educated youth employed in the private sector was seen preparing for attributes that will prepare them for adulthood. The following case studies substantiate how some of my respondents prepared for their adulthood stage and what challenges they faced.

Rahul is a sales executive in a shopping mall. He is a Hindu SC who belongs to a marginalized community. He came to Guwahati five years ago after graduating for a job. He was then 22 years and hopeful about his future, but not earning enough at this stage of adulthood has become a matter of concern. He said,

"I came to Guwahati a few years ago, and I managed to find a job because of my education. After graduation, my parents suggested that I start realizing my responsibilities towards them. They were ageing, and they expected me to look after them when age don't allow them to work. They also asked me to earn some money so that I could save money for the marriage of my two younger sisters. Such pressures discouraged me to pursue further education. Though I wanted to become a professor in a college like my uncle, circumstances did not favour my dreams with the onset of adulthood pressures. As a male Assamese boy, and a boy who belongs to a poor household, expectations are built from parents and siblings that their son or their brothers will take care of them when needed."

Diganta came to the city looking for a job three years ago and is working as a security guard in an educational institution said, "*This is a stage of immense pressure for me since, as a boy, I am held responsible for looking after my family in terms of finances. All my savings goes to my parents and siblings. My parents have aged, and their health related expenses are increasing. I am also required to look after the education-related expenses of my siblings. At this stage, I am really concerned I am worried whether I will be able to save enough for my marriage. Nowadays, with the rising cost of prices of items in the market, one has to be concerned about his future life. If I don't earn enough and don't manage to find an employed wife, how can I afford to maintain a happy family and finance quality education for my children."*

Rituraj is 26 years old and whose parents work as farmers, he said

"I have been staying here for almost four years, and every day I look for better opportunities. I prepare for exams whenever I manage the time after the job. Because my parents want me to work as a government officer, these past years have gone by, and I have realized the importance of money and secure employment. When I was a teenager, I came to Guwahati for the joy of it, the freedom to live a life on my terms. However, as time has passed, I have realized that if I do not earn enough, I will not possess the quality in my life that an educated person is meant to live."

Rahul, Diganta and Rituraj's story does not represent a universal "Assam youth" experience. However, it resonates with the hopes, concerns, and struggles of many young people I spoke to with a similar background, particularly concerning their search for secure employment and connected aspirations for adulthood in the period of neoliberalism. The search for suitable employment is characterized by hopes and anxieties, which are inextricably tied to his ambitions to attain a particular version of social adulthood. Middle-class adulthood could only be achieved through education and a stable white-collar government job.

They interpret adulthood in terms of upward social mobility. They struggle to secure meaningful employment commensurate with their education and associated with the status of respectable adulthood. Becoming more skilful becomes an option to attain the envisioned adulthood for themselves. They have a particular vision of successful adulthood, and the difficulties faced in achieving the same are frustrating for them.

Employment, financial independence and marriage are essential markers of entering adulthood (Hettige & Mayer,2002, p. 1486). In India, the post-independence state's provision of universal free education and health care produced generations of well-educated, aspirational youth from the 1960s. The introduction of free education and youth literacy rate raised hope among youth from poorer backgrounds, like the

youths mentioned above. The aim is to escape from poverty and attain social mobility. Youths like them, who belong to poor backgrounds, receive their education in under-resourced vernacular schools. They consider English-medium educated children as privileged than them. Neoliberalism from the 1990s has resulted in economic and social inequalities. The private sector has failed to create secure employment opportunities to meet the aspirations of youth. Like Rahul, Diganta and Rituraj, Shubham was another case who exemplified adulthood struggles. Shubham, who works in a company as a team leader, continues to nurture his desire for a white-collar or government job. So, while working as a sales executive in a shopping mall in Assam, he continued seeking government employment. He earns a meagre sum of money, Rs. 8500 a month. He spent the money on his board and lodging, another sum to his family and a little remaining sum he saved himself. He barely had enough time for leisure activities. On rare occasions when he had the time to spare, he would go to a movie with his friends or go on a date with his girlfriend. His social circle comprised youths who had migrated from the rural areas of Assam, searching for stable employment and are engaged in different jobs in cities. As a teenager and youth, Shubham faced difficulties in his life. He and his parents anticipated his transition to adulthood to be convenient by dint of his education. Adulthood is seen as a fixed destination, which promises the rewards of socioeconomic stability and a life of relative ease, free from his childhood and youth struggles. Adulthood is a stage of hope that promises a better future, ensuring social status and respectability. Simply getting a job is not the goal of these youths. Hierarchy is seen in the categorization of jobs (Roder, 2015). The job should be suitable for the youth's family community. Youths believe that a government job would bring them a salary, security, a pension, decent employment conditions, job stability, social status, and respectability, which are characteristics of the urban middle-class family. Such characteristics increase the prospects of marriage and ensure intergenerational social

mobility. Shubham told me that he could not plan his wedding because of his uncertainty. First, he needed a stable government job because the long-term economic security and social status that it symbolized would render him more marriageable. These youths from poor background value long-term stability, security, and enhanced social status offered by the white-collar government. A government job was considered desirable if it was white-collar and involved working in an office. They believed this would confer respectability and social status on the educated young person and, by extension, her/his family in the eyes of their rural Assam communities.

The responsibility for intergenerational mobility sat on Shubham's shoulders. To them, formal education will provide promising new opportunities for the future. Nevertheless, the hope they held out for secure employment and a better lot was also tinged with a sense of dejection. Shubham identified unemployment combined with the soaring cost of living and economic hardship as the most urgent problems facing young people in Assam and India. Education appeared to them as a tool in their fight against poverty while investing their hopes for social class mobility. Shubham faced a series of disappointments in his life. Education had failed to yield aspired white-collar employment and entry to middle-class adulthood. The future is uncertain, and hope is crushed, followed by anxiety. He cannot pick up any job as there are certain expectations of the village and family. So, in Assam, also, a government job means social acceptance or status.

Youths like Shubham maintained that weak English prevented them from finding white-collar work in the private sector. English is a marker of social class. State schools in rural and marginalized areas suffer from neglect and chronic resource shortages, most prominently the lack of qualified English teachers. State employment is characterized by political patronage and rampant corruption. White-

collar job in the private sector is dominated by English-speaking, privately educated, multi-ethnic urban youth of privileged backgrounds. Moreover, the families of urban elite youth utilize their class networks as leverage to access employment in the private sector for their children, which puts young graduates like Shubham, who need more relevant social and cultural capital, at a disadvantage.

4.3 Waithood and Hopelessness

Though youths work in the service sector, they feel like they do nothing in their lives. They compare and contrast lives better than theirs. Their definition of a better life is not singular. For instance, Anirudh works as a security guard in an educational institution in Assam. Throughout his educational journey, Aniruddh's parents taught him the importance of ‘waithood’ to achieve certain things. First, he had to wait to complete his matriculation, then HS, and then higher education. According to him, clearing each exam increased his prospects for a better job. Each year, he waited for better teachers within the classroom than in previous years, for better friends than previous ones, for better institutions than the one of his school, waiting for exam results. This is how he learned the importance of waiting for a better future in adulthood, like having the aspired job, building his dream house, getting married on time, having children and taking care of his family. He feels he does not earn enough to express his adulthood. The fear of losing a job is rampant in the service sector. However, they do not just sit around waiting for things to happen. Their life in formal education and life after exiting formal education is different. Continuity in the effort at the labour market for a job is seen to overcome anxiety and hopelessness. The period of waithood is also a period of hope for them. They are waiting for a hopeful future means they are not giving up. They are young and have the time to figure out

their future. Waithood has been indoctrinated in youths' minds since childhood within the school system and from families. Some are positive about their waithood, and some doubt their waiting. They are made to believe that their education will pay off in a paid white-collar job. They identify jobs with statuses (Roder, 2015). These youths are reluctant to do farming.

Agricultural activities are never the first choices for them. In society, farmers and farming are perceived as lower down in the social hierarchy. Such options are just to be taken up under compulsions while they wait for a better scope. Such jobs are just options for them while they wait for a better scope. Training in schools inculcates the distinction between manual labour and mental labour, and places them in a hierarchy. The school distinguishes between manual labour and mental labour. Frustrated youth is characterized by economic and social uncertainties, in which marriage and other expected responsibilities associated with adulthood are postponed and delayed (Jeffrey, 2010; Mains, 2013; Ralph, 2008; Singerman, 2007; Sommers, 2012; Utas 2005). Honwana (2012, 2014) uses the concept “waithood” to describe the suspended period between childhood and adulthood in which youth wait for adulthood. Youth or waithood is often a period of experimentation, creativity, and frustration, which may be perceived as a suspended period, similar to how liminality is often conceptualized as a period of creativity (Turner,1987). According to Daniel Mains(2004), the journey towards adulthood is not easy. Youth have become an extended phase due to unemployment. Temporally they have entered adulthood, but they don't feel adulthood as they don't have a job, still live at home with their parents, and are unable to marry and start a family of their own. In my study, male and female youths expressed the social responsibilities they have as an adult. They feel hopeless if they fail to fulfil adult responsibilities. Their hopes and

aspirations surround material life pursuits like having their own house and car, supporting family and becoming a responsible member of the community.

Low-status and low-paying positions are acceptable to these youths rather than opting for unemployment while they wait in the hope of obtaining a white-collar job in the coming future. These periods of waithood are the period of effort, anxiety, hopefulness or hopelessness, planning, strategy and a hectic schedule. Work and study have to go hand in hand. Besides white-collar jobs, they also aspire to other activities and are willing to carry on their passion.

It is common in the global South that youth are underqualified and without work (Cole 2004, 2005; Demerath, 2003; Jeffrey, Jeffery & Jeffery, 2008; Weiss, 2009). In my study, these youths are engaged in unsatisfactory jobs while they wait; there is a gap between expectations for the future and economic realities. There is a slight difference in their class background. Most of them had finished secondary education and could not pursue further education due to various circumstances. They belong to families that could be considered lower-middle or lower-class. These youths saw themselves in the future living at their parents' home and considered marriage and starting a family as a struggle with the meagre income they earn.

Their goals and aspirations are not neutral. These are influenced by the superstructure of structural adjustment policies associated with neoliberal economic restructuring. Modernity brought by urbanization, discourses on development, and the proliferation of images of progress in social media are changing the values that guide youth's aspirations and economic behaviour.

4.4 Underemployment and Youth

The faith in formal education has been increasing the gap between aspiration and aspiration realization. ILO data 2016 says India has underemployment youth of about 86 lakhs approx. The mismatch between an academic individual's field of education and their field of occupation is known as either job-field underemployment (Burke, 1997; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011) or horizontal mismatch (Nordin et al., 2010). Out of all the above phenomena included under the term "underemployment," job-field underemployment receives relatively little reference in the relevant literature. This is particularly true regarding the scope of the phenomenon and its consequences for the individual. This phenomena's societal problem provided by the literature is that underemployment is increasingly seen as a signal that the labour market works inefficiently, with suboptimal educational investments' returns, not only at the individual but also at the societal level (Verbruggen et al., 2015).

There is a constant tussle between low-quality work and unemployment among youths all over the world. Assam youths' situation is not different from this. This is due to the precariousness youths face in the labour market. In general terms, underemployment means working below the worker's full working capacity. Underemployment is a state where the worker is engaged in a part-time work while desiring for full-time work. Underemployed workers are labeled as inadequately employed, underutilized, underpaid, overeducated, over skilled, and overqualified or as having low skill utilization or reemployment quality. Feldman (1996) argued that underemployment could be broken down into five dimensions:

1. More education than required by the job
2. More skills or experience than required by the job

3. Involuntary employment in a field outside of the area of education
4. Involuntary employment in part-time, temporary, or intermittent work
5. Low pay relative to either a previous job or to others with similar educational backgrounds

Mason (1996) found that underemployment is positively correlated to the education level of workers. Underemployment levels will be higher if education levels are higher and job is unsatisfactory. In my study, youths expressed boredom in their job and felt that their knowledge, skills, and abilities were underutilized which made them feel underemployed. They consider themselves overeducated for the jobs that they hold. Raju is a security guard working in a technical institute in Assam. He never aspired to become a security guard. He says,

"My highest qualification is graduation. My background is science. Whatever I studied in my school and college is now irrelevant to my job. No one studies science, mathematics, history and geography to become a security guard. If someone specializes in science he wants to become a scientist. If someone specializes in biology he wants to become a doctor. The reality is that there are no jobs related to our education qualification. What is the value of a graduate in this country? Millions of graduates in this country are searching for a job after discontinuation of education due to some household problems. Those who manage to get a job realizes that their education is just a ticket to a job and their knowledge is just a wastage with no utilization. This is not the job I should be doing with the knowledge base I have. Because even a matriculation fail can do the job of a security guard in a better way."

Neelesh is a sales boy in a shopping mall in Guwahati. Both his parents are agricultural labourers. He says,

"I am desperately looking for a full-time job. I am not satisfied with this job. There is no security in my life. The income that I earn here is not sufficient. I have not been able to plan for my marriage yet. The work that I am required to do here is very simple. No special training is required to do such jobs. Pleasing the customers, unboxing goods and clothes, arranging them in stacks, and again rearranging them does not require high qualification. Nowadays it's difficult to find jobs that are suitable to our qualifications."

Youth like Raju and Neelesh think there has been a job-qualification mismatch and their educational investment is unproductive and worthless. They have low level of satisfaction at their job. They believe strongly that their job should match their education. According to Francis Green and Steven McIntosh (2007), part-time jobs involving shift work, small workplaces and private sector jobs are strongly associated with the likelihood of being over-qualified. As per the different dimensions of youth underemployment, Assam youth think they possess more formal education than the job requires, and the job requirement does not match their field of education.

4.5 Women, Agency, and the City

Education helped the girls think about alternatives rather than following the dictates of the family and society. In most cases, the decision to come to the city and work was their own, where they exercised their autonomy and agency—independence, freedom, free from the shackles of rules and regulations of society. Radhika says, "*We can live a life of our own. It makes us open-minded and liberal. We are not like orthodox village people who keep reminding us about what to wear, what not to wear, where to go, where not to go, what to do, what not to do, whom to marry, and*

whose company to avoid. We are free birds in the city." Geeta says, *"Here in the city, we are free from the shackles of society. Everyone here minds their own business and doesn't keep an eye on others' business. Here we are not answerable to anyone".* Most of the girls talked about the advantages of living in the city. They believed that people living in the city knew the value of education and work. They are not narrow-minded and do not judge. Radhika talks about her landlady who works as a professor in a college in Guwahati, *"My landlady is a nice woman. She encourages me to continue my education and manage the same simultaneously with my work. Since I am an HS pass, she has kept motivating me to complete my graduation and master's study. On the contrary, if I were staying in my village, my villagers and relatives' only concern would be my marriage as early as possible. So, this city is a blessing for girls like me who works not only for themselves but also contribute to the family, try to complete education and enjoy the freedom and autonomy this city showers upon us."*

A small number of girls did not have the desire to complete their education after HS or graduation. They expressed that they have lost interest in education. They opined that they hated studies and never enjoyed them. They somehow completed their education because it was a matter of respect for the family. If they fail their exam, their family will be looked down upon. They believed that it was their obligation to pass the exam. However, in most cases, education was valued and finding a good quality education and the desired job was a matter of self-esteem and self-worth for them. Though they are excluded from higher education, they still search for opportunities or ways to complete their formal education or do vocational courses. These girls feel they have not completed their education. They consider it as a break from education. They think that circumstances do not favour them when they hear

that their friends have completed their masters. Lack of options is why they flock to the cities in search of better opportunities. They like to wait for better opportunities.

These respondents also value responsibility, and their inability to fulfil it is the mark of failure. A respondent says, *"We don't have the time, patience, or resources because we are burdened with responsibilities for our family or siblings. Take medical or engineering courses. Who takes these courses? Children from privileged backgrounds, right? They get the best education because they can afford quality education. We are economically unable to manage and complete general education, let alone professional courses. Besides, suppose the earning parent in a family like mine dies. In that case, the household responsibility like money for the food or education of the siblings or general care transfers on the elder siblings."* Rural areas are characterized by deep social connections within families and communities. So, rural youths express attachment and social responsibility towards their families and communities (Crockett et al., 2000). Several youths on the field had to leave higher education to look after the family and the finances.

Navami is 26, and she belongs to the OBC category. Her father is a teacher and mother is an anganbadi worker.She has two brothers and one sister. She comes from a rural area in the district of Tinsukia. She remembers those days when they struggled for school uniforms, fees, books, copies and adequate three meals a day. Though her father was a teacher, his income was not regularized. Realizing the situation at her home, she always aspired for a life better than they were living presently. She said there was not a single day when she did not think of ways to improve it. But she could not think of any other way than education. However, for them, education was becoming costlier and luxurious. Navami was the elder sister of all the siblings. So, she felt that it was her responsibility to do something for the family. Since the beginning, there was a fear that her siblings would have to face the

same struggle if they didn't qualify for a job. When she completed her HS, she decided not to pursue further education despite securing first division in the exam. She informed her father of her desire to find a job in Guwahati to look after household expenses. Her parents initially hesitated because they believed cities are unsafe for girls. They finally allowed it when she informed her that her friends in Guwahati would take care of her. On her aspiration, she said that she knew that an HS degree was not enough to qualify for a job of her choice. When asked about aspiration for a profession, she said that she had always been attracted to the army since childhood, and somewhere in mind, she desired to join the same. She considered herself physically fit for the job. Since the circumstances at her home did not favour her aspiration, she decided to finance the education of her two younger brothers and her sister. Her brothers and sister are doing well in their studies and want to join the army.

After coming to the city, she rented a room near her friends' room. Her friends referred her to HR for a sales girl job. After interview, she was selected for the job. She was elated about her first job. It was a cloth store located only a few kilometres from her room. So, every morning she wakes up early, prepares breakfast, wears the uniform and arrives at the bus stand for the bus.

Several girls like Navami had to sacrifice their personal educational and aspirational goals for the sake of their families, their parents, or their siblings. Chitra, a salesgirl in a mart, told that working in her job was not her choice. However, a graduate like her could not expect more. She said, *"My father is a farmer on a small plot of land, and my mother owns a tea shop. I have five siblings. They are much younger than me. The elder twin boys are studying in the seventh standard. The two younger sisters are in the lower primary level. The youngest child has not been to school yet. I am the eldest in the family, and after graduation, I realised that my parents were*

under great stress and anxiety about the completion of the education of their children. I had to halt my personal goal of completing my masters and pursuing higher education further. I heard Guwahati has many possibilities of earning money even by minimum graduation. So, now I am employed as a sales executive and simultaneously pursuing my masters through distance education. At the same time, I am applying for different government jobs and teacher eligibility tests. I am looking forward to becoming a teacher."

In maximum cases, it was household responsibility or death of parents that caused respondents' exclusion from higher education at the higher secondary or graduation level. Personal ambitions take a backseat, and social responsibility becomes a priority for individuals. It is positive that parents allow girls to take responsibility for their household, which is generally considered a domain of men. Respondents also have expressed the concerns and hesitations of their parents as a hurdle to their decisions. In numerous cases, parents believe that girls are not safe in the city. Girls are advised to be very careful during their stay there. Usually, they are accompanied by their brothers or male friends unless they settle and find friends or people to feel safe with.

A small percentage of girls also expressed their distaste for education. They explained how they hated going to school and read and preferred to stay at home and help their mother with household chores. They jokingly told me they somehow managed to clear matriculation and intermediate exam and after that expressed reluctance at home for further study. At the same time, they begin searching for employment to avoid boredom at home or something significant like early marriage.

Various causes influenced the transition from schooling to employment. To escape marriage at home was one of the causes. A few of the girls wanted to escape arranged

marriage at home. Jamuna and Neelam say that they have seen their friends' lives ruined by husbands selected by their parents. After they passed HS, in Jamuna's case, and graduated in Neelam's case, they decided it was early for their age to get married and settle. Again, their concern was that their husband may not allow them to work in an arranged marriage. So, after Jamuna and Neelam passed their examination, they decided to come to the city to find a livelihood. At that time, they were willing to do any job to escape marriage at home. Jamuna said, "*There is no life after marriage. The husband will not allow me to work outside. He will expect me to give birth to his children, cook for him, wash his clothes and serve him whenever needed. I am an educated girl who cannot just sit at home and do these things for him. I will only marry the person who allows me to live my life on my terms."*

When asked how she wants to live, she replied that she wants to work besides caring for her children and her husband's home. Her husband should not have a problem with that. Her husband should not have a problem with her going outside and meeting her friends. No matter how independent she lives, she does not want her husband to interfere in any issues. Therefore, she is avoiding a marriage situation. Neelam also intends to prevent arranged marriage because she is in a relationship with a boy not from her caste. Her parents are very particular about caste. She fled home with that boy and got married in the city.

Another cause of the transition to employment with incomplete education was apathy and reluctance towards study. They were more interested in doing a job. Sunita said, *"I had no particular vision of a career since childhood. But I always aspired to do the job and earn income. I was mentally prepared to do any job. After graduation, I asked my parents to permit me to live and work in the city. They agreed and sent me with my elder brother, who was sitting at home after passing HS. My brother and I rented a room in the city. My brother got recruited for a security guard*

job within a few months through a friend's reference. There was a mall near my room. I decided to try there and applied for a sales girl position. The manager interviewed me and asked whether I had any prior experience for the job. Though I did not have any, I was recruited anyways and provided some initial training. Now it's been two years in this job. I earn an income of Rs. 9500. When the sales go up, the income also goes up. In my village, there is no opportunity for an educated person. So, I am pretty satisfied here though the salary is less."

To Deepika and Geeta, village life is better than the city due to the polluted environment. But village life is not suitable for educated youths searching for better opportunities. Deepika said, "*there are several youths in rural places of Assam who do not continue further education after HS or graduation because of various reasons. Being educated, they are hesitant to work in traditional occupations like agriculture or other manual labour. People in our villages do not respect educated youths who do manual labour. We lack the qualifications, money, and contacts to acquire a government job in a rural area. So, we have no option but to come to the city. Here in the city, people are not concerned with anyone's life. Contrary to the village, I have seen those highly educated city people appreciate youths like us working hard to make a living. They have a broad mind, and they do not judge. So, its convenient to work here rather than in the village where people always keep an eye on you."* It's been one year for Sunidhi in the city. She has recently passed graduation from her native place. Since her parents did not have the required finances for her master's admission, she was admitted to a vocational education centre near Guwahati. She did three months of the course in modern office management and was placed as an office receptionist in a hotel. She told me that the city provides better opportunities to educated youth in every possible way. Besides, it has all the better facilities to live a better life. One needs the required money to

lead the desired life here. Those youths who are working and married and have children can admit their children to schools with better sports facilities. She told me, "*I have been a sports enthusiast since childhood. But my school did not have the desired facilities. If I had strong sports background since childhood, I could have earned a job in the army through my fitness. I had the desire to join the military since the sixth standard. Because of the lack of sports opportunities in my village and neighbouring areas, I could not achieve it. Now I plan to stay and settle here with my husband and children and ensure that I admit my children into a school with good sports facilities. I want my children to do something in the field of sports."* Like Sunidhi, other girls like Pooja, Niharika, Hiramoni and Sneha have decided to settle in the city. They are willing to stay here after marriage. Sneha says, *"Its convenient to stay here after marriage. There is no shortage of work here. There is work for everyone here. No one needs to sit at home as unemployed. I want to work here for the rest of my life. With my qualification, I believe I would not land a big job. Now I am a salesgirl in this cloth store. This is not a stable job. I may lose my job. But hundreds of job openings keep happening here, and I certainly will get a job to survive in the city. My husband works as a team leader in a car showroom in Guwahati, and we are doing well here. This is where we don't need to worry about the future and live carefree lives. But if we return to our rural homes, we won't get a convenient job, let alone a position of choice. We have to sit there unemployed and will suffer from anxiety and depression. We won't be able to arrange a good school for my child. My dream of preparing my child for a sport will suffer there. So, this city gives us hope to live a better life."* Pooja, Niharika and Hiramoni have the same opinion about their future. According to them, the city gives them hope. Though they are employed in a highly volatile and temporary job, they are sure that with their experiences they will find a job and survive the expenses.

Again, family responsibility becomes a reason for searching a suitable employment. A majority of these rural youths have come to the city searching for a job because they consider it their duty to look after the family financially. 73 per cent of the girls had to leave their education at HS or graduation level because of household socio-economic conditions and responsibilities. Naheed is a security guard in a departmental store in Guwahati. She told me that she eventually decided to come to the city to look after her mother and household finances as soon as she graduated. When she was in graduation 2nd year, her father died of cancer. Her father was a teacher in an HS school. His death took a toll on family finances. Naheed said, "*We were a family of five before my father's death. I have a brother who is HS pass. He is lazy and an alcoholic. He is unwilling to work but keeps demanding money for alcohol, a bike or a mobile. After graduation, my mother suggested that I work or find a husband to look after our family. However, I decided to work and kept searching for jobs in our district, Lakhimpur. I could not find any job suitable for my education. I was willing to do a government or private sector job suitable to my education. There were some small malls or cloth stores here and there, but the salary was less. Since my brother was there to look after my mother, I decided to come to Guwahati city for a job. My friend Bharati suggested I go and asked me to stay with her. She was lonely and asked me to join her. She was employed as a KFC attendant here. I came and began search for a job. I found a position as a desk receptionist in a hotel. I worked there for one year. I earned a salary of Rs. 12000 there. I later faced some issues with the hotel authorities and was dismissed from the job. After a few months, I heard about a new mall opening and applied for a sales girl position. Since I had hotel job experience, I was only interviewed a little and was recruited for the job. Now I earn a salary of Rs. 9500 here. With this money, I pay my rent, send home money and try to save money for my marriage.*"

Girls like Naheed had to come to the city to earn money because of their parent's death or their parents' ill health. Leena is a graduate of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. She belongs to the Rabha community. Her mother suffers from kidney problems and needs a lot of money for her daily medicines. Her elder brother had a rift with her parents and had separated from them long ago. Her younger brother is in HS final year. Her father is a farmer who does not earn much from his produces. She came to the city hoping she could use her graduate degree. Initially, she did a vocational course and got placed in a call centre. She left the job because she could not bear the pressure. After that, she applied for a desk receptionist job and got selected because of her English background. She said, *"I don't earn much to look after my mother's medical expenses, but given the situation at home, I feel like I am contributing something towards the remedy of the problem."*

It is evident from the above factors that aspiration varied from personal goals towards family goals. Girls contributed towards household responsibilities while postponing their ambitions and desires. However, personal goals also took centre stage when fulfilling household responsibilities became a way to escape an arranged marriage. Aspiration is habitus constrained. Habitus informs and shapes the perception of risk and the ability and chances of achieving a goal. It is related to youths' gendered experiences of their journey from school to college and their further trajectory towards their employment in the volatile and insecure service sector. This section explains how patriarchal norms and values disempowers women's education and employment efforts and sampled respondents' consistent efforts to fight the gendered norms and set new narratives in the process.

4.6 Conclusion

Formal education is no longer a tool to develop human capital. Education implies empowerment and autonomy. Education gives wings to the hopes and aspirations of youth and parents. But formal education may appear promising, but it has yet to be able to ensure the expectations of the marginalized group of people (Jeffrey, 2004). However, formal education has ensured improvement in people's socio-economic standing. Education is essential to attain upward social mobility. In this context, this chapter shows how aspiration and education are interrelated and interdependent. The trajectory of education is a period of hope and anxiety. It is also a period of waithood to prepare for a better future. The youths belong to lower or lower middle-class groups. A significant amount of upper caste group also comes from lower middle class group. They rely on government schools or low-fee private schools rather than high-fee private schools where the quality of education could be better. For a whole lot, education is not that much of a priority than other subsistence activities. The demand for a white-collar jobs either in the private or public sector is prominent. Other jobs are an option rather than a choice, like some fallback occupations. The influence of modernity, the proliferation of images of progress through formal education, neoliberal economic changes and structural adjustment programmes are changing the nature of the hopes and aspirations of youths in Assam like in any other part of the world. These youths are reluctant to and consider a career in agricultural activities which according to them is status deprived. These youths associate different jobs with different statuses. They tend to incline towards high-status jobs. Respect and importance are what they sought from the kind of jobs they expect to get employed in the near future.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

For educationally disadvantaged groups in India, formal education has become a medium of gaining upward social mobility (Jeffrey et al., 2004; PROBE 1999). Education has been perceived by youths and their parents as an emancipatory resource. Such developments are followed by shrinking of government employment as a result of structural adjustment reforms of the 1990s. In such a context, my study is a youth narrative of longing for cultural capital and educated distinction from the formal education system. How disadvantaged backgrounds influences their efforts in gaining desired education and employment is a primary focus of the study. Category of respondents in my study are intermediate and degree holders, majority from rural or semi-urban areas. Majority of the respondents belong to the BPL (below poverty line) category. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews, informal conversation, group discussions, case studies and observation methods. The main aim of this thesis was to examine the ways youths in my study, perveive formal education amidst their aspirations for a better life, their school to work transitions and their concerns for waithood. Both men and women within their spatial and temporal mobility, relied enormously on educated distinction, educated consumption and education credentialism. Formal education was an opportunity for them to avoid the traditional occupations and other aspects of rurality for yearning of more finances, more value or respect and attainment of socio-economic status.

The study enquires about the importance of formal education in the lives of educated youths. These youths belong to marginalized backgrounds, that is, below poverty line (BPL) youths. It is studied in the context of failure to obtain government jobs, how youths perceive formal education. Youth narratives perceived formal education in a positive manner. My study is a youth narrative of longing for educated distinction and being valued than their predeccesors. These youths identity and struggles is structured through the process of transition from formal education to employment and their attempt for entry into formal employment. Two groups of youths were found one of age 19-27 who still nurtured hopes of entry into formal employment or white-collar employment, one of age 25-32 who gave up hope and made effort for adjustments into aspirations, hopes and future employment. They relied on their credentials to generate capital. These youths don't either overestimate or underestimate the role of formal education in the context of failure to attain formal education, but rather nurtures the hope of a better system of formal education and employment. The concern for more finances is intricately related with - sense of responsibilities towards family and relatives; adulthood responsibilities and pressures, social security, a secured future and personal ambition and growth.

5.2 Major Arguments of the Study

A framework has been advanced about whether formal education acts as a emancipatory or contradictory resource. Formal education as a site of (re)production of inequalities has been emphasized. The starting for this is the approach of Pierre Bourdieu on capital. 'Capital' in cultural and social capital has a broader meaning than a narrowly defined economic category of form of exchanges (Bourdieu,1986). There are different forms of capital mentioned by Bourdieu. They are cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital, and, specifically linguistic capital (Reay,2004). Bourdieu applied his concept of cultural capital differently in his

different works. Therefore, cultural capital consists of informal knowledge and academic standards, creativity, brilliance, attitude, manners, personal style, aptitude for grammer, and taste for high culture (Lamont and Lareau,1988). Culturally based resources such as cultural awareness, knowledge about educational institutions (schools), educational credentials, and aesthetic preferences (such as taste in music, art, or food; and also skills, abilities, or mannerisms which are primarily habituated, can act as a "power resource" (Swartz,1997). The empirical chapters of this study have demonstrated how young men and women drew upon their credentials to generate capital. Their presentation of their selves in the public arena in terms of dressing and appearance can be attributed to the concept of habitus. Bourdieu(1966) defines habitus as

"a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks…."

In my study, job searching activities like "group discussion skills", personality development were also part of the habitus and its pursuit helped in gaining cultural capital. Similarity of findings can be found in Deuchar's (2014) study. He found that his respondents were particular about their dressing and presentation of their selves in a modern way. He said,

"Many young men comported themselves with a sense of educated distinction. Those who created work for themselves, for example, always dressed in a business shirt and pants, which was quite unlike how students and those who worked in manual occupations presented themselves." (Deuchar, 2020, p.235)

Formally educated youths in my study associated themselves with educated distinction and they are not ready to return to manual occupations of the traditional

sector. They perceive such jobs as fall-back occupations. They have exited from higher education because of various socio-economic problems and planning to pursue the same if their situations permit. Thus, they distance themselves from forms of work undertaken by manual workers. In their opinion, traditional rural jobs are redundant and backward and these jobs are not meant for educated people and for those who want to avoid unemployment. These modern-job oriented youths believe in education credentialism which is a certificate or qualification earning activity. To gain education credentialism and educated distinction is a modern phenomenon and, therefore, modern jobs are meant for educated youths. Such efforts are attempt to attain intergenerational mobility and reach the middle class level. Youths' accounts of educated un/under-employment is related to notions of 'modernity' and 'tradition'. Bara (1997) has shown how new identities and confidence to stand for the cause of previous identities like tribalism were formed with the introduction of modern formal education. The introduction of modern education reduced the tag of 'uncivilized' 'primitive' or 'untouchable.' In my study, youths expressed 'new' educated identity as distinct from traditional ones. Youths in my study valorizes middle-classes, urban-based notions of work and identity

The empirical chapters have drawn on Bourdieu's insights to showcase lower classes marginalization. Besides Bourdieu, Amartya Sen's insights has also been reflected in many arguments made in this thesis. Sen's approach has been institutionalized as the human development approach. The human development index is a list of indicators of development which also include the formal education system. According to Sen (2000), education expands the freedom available to an individual. In my study, youth narratives were documented to derive empirically from their marginalized socio-economic background. Belonging to BPL category these youths faced immense problems socio-economically from access to schooling, further

education, and transition to further employment. After exit from formal education system, they seek for employment. Otherwise, they will be grappled with unemployment. They have family responsibilities and they need money for their personal expenses.

Given their educational degrees they were interested to be employed in white-collar jobs and not work in traditional agricultural sectors or other rural economies. Their inability to find a government job motivate them to migrate to the city. Here, they are employed as sales boy, or a security guard, or a café attendant. Such volatile jobs don't require higher qualifications. Any intermediate pass student can apply for these jobs. Every year a huge number of such students apply for these jobs and only a few are selected for the jobs. The other students continue searching for jobs and plan to enrol for vocational courses. Again, a few return to their villages in search of traditional jobs as a fallback occupation. Uncertainties gripped these youths' future as the competition of acquiring a job was high. Because of low socio-economic backgrounds and lack of social capital, educated men in my study struggle to sustain at their volatile jobs.

Youths in my study is seen to have failed to convert cultural capital into secure employment. However, they are in the trying phase and a few of the are hopeful to gain a secured job. Two groups of youths were found one of age 19-27 who still nurtured hopes of entry into formal employment or white-collar employment, one of age 25-32 who gave up hope and made effort for adjustments into aspirations, hopes and future employment. The number of youths in the 25-32 age group is more. They came to city at the age of 18-19 in search of a job because of financial constraints. They were employed in the service sector. They were not satisfied in the jobs because the salary was not sufficient and because of precarious conditions. These youths appeared to be highly disappointed state. They were thinking of alternative

jobs attainable with their minimum qualification or leaving the city for home and search for a fall occupation. However, youths in the group of age 19-27 appeared enthusiastic and hopeful about their future. Besides their job they managed time for applying and preparing for a secured government job. The narrative and accounts of these youths are structured with their longing for enhancing the quality of their life, enhancing their functionings and capabilities (Sen, 1999) and social security which is why they perceive the formal education system as an opportunity and a resource. Discourses of inequality and inequity in education and socio-economic discrimination substantiate their struggles throughout the process of transition to future employment and clarify how these youths vision their future amidst their concerns of adulthood, waithood and gendered experiences.

My study provides evidence to how education is interrelated to social capabilities (Sen, 2000). Education provides confidence to take independents decisions especially by women in my study (Dreze and Sen, 1995). For men, employment in volatile jobs is facilitated by their minimum qualifications. Even though they earn bare minimum from their jobs for their sustainance and of their families or these youths have failed to obtain a meaningful white-collar job or a government job , still they consider formal education as emancipatory resource. However, structural reasons like proliferation of graduate and post graduation holders, education-job mismatch have challenged their efforts for a aspired job. Further a new definition of dignity distinct from caste, class, creed, religion, sex is built up through education credentialism and educated distinction. Youths were asked whether formal education was successful in raising their social and economic position. They replied that the education system provided them with educated distinction and respect as an educated person. However, in terms of economic growth answers were pessimistic.

In Jeffrey's (2004) study it is seen that relatively advantaged Jat families is much more likely to be enrolled in quality schools and move into higher education earlier than disadvantaged Chamar boys. Similarly, in my study, all BPL youths are educated from low fee government or private educational institutions due to low financial status of their families. Here, parents were not able to enrol these youths in quality schools. They were not able to pay for private tutor. Majority of these parents were school drop-outs. Almost all these youths are from low-fee regional medium schools. These youths said that their friends belonging to advantaged households could afford high-fee English medium schools. Thus, like the Chamar boys of Jeffrey's study respondents of my study too faced hindrances to their access to quality education, which further marred their employability in general and quality of employment in particular. Despite this, respondents of this study did not see formal education as a contradictory resource. They believe that, formal education provided them with cultural capital, and the required confidence. It is what they see as disadvantaged schooling that they could not reach jobs that could have provided them with social mobility and financial stability.

Formal education becomes a source of human dignity and benefits of adulthood. All these comprise image of an educated employed person which is different from an unemployed person. All the youths in my study, reiterated that they don't want to become an educated unemployed person. Falling in this category will be unfortunate for them. The unemployed people they know are not confident or empowered, helpless and awkward. They resort to manual labour as a fallback occupation or sits at home in the context of them unable to find an employment. The educated and the educated employed reflect different nature of educated consumption (Miller, 1995). Educated consumption also provides for the educated and the employed greater confidence in the public place. Without proper education and employment, it is

impossible to possess educated cultural distinction. New interpretations of self worth based on educated distinction and educated consumption, has helped these youths in my study to find a new identity distinct from their traditional identities where their self-worth was based on caste, religion, creed or sex.

Respondents' employability is a serious concern for them while entering the labour market as a new entrant. Their general education does not bring the prospect of a desired occupation. So, they depend on vocational or professional education after exit from formal education system. Marchang's (2017) study of out-migration of North Eastern Region's (NER) youth shows how educational development of NER is strongly associated with out-migration. In her study (Marchang, 2017) youths are educated people who have completed matriculation and above education. Similarly, youths in my study have exited formal education after HS and graduation. In my study also educated aspirants are increasingly migrating to Guwahati, a place of greater prospects of opportunities. Primary data underpins how youths deal with the condition of lack of industrialization and inflated service sectors in their inhabited areas. These youths migrate for better employment and to fulfil their aspirations. They initially settle for a service sector volatile job in order to support their families financially and pass valuable information of the received exposure to prospective migrants. This showcase their preference towards urban employment. However, acquiring a white-collar employment or a government job is the major aspirations of youths. Youths in my study is seen to have failed to convert cultural capital into secure employment. However, they are in the trying phase and a few of them are hopeful to gain a secured job. There has been a gap between aspirations of youth and their acheivements, the struggle of youths to achieve those aspirations and their failure in achieving desired employment. According to Appadurai, aspiration is a navigational capacity which means that everyone aspires, but only a few based on

their circumstances reaches their goals. In my study marginalized students have “a more brittle horizon of aspirations” (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69) which means that they see their disvantaged situations as an individual failing. The capacity to aspire of these students is dimished by their circumstances. The school to secured work transitions of youths in my study appeared to be longer in duration because of their circumstances. This is also because of over-supply of secondary and tertiary graduates in the job market. Because of such issues the onset of adulthood is postponing. Youths in my study are unable to attain adulthood because of limited financial resources. Because they are employed in precarious and volatile jobs. They are seen preparing for onset of adulthood. Though adulthood is the stage of being responsible, youths in my study facing extension of adulthood: postponement of marriage and having children which makes it difficult for them to be genuinely considered as adult. According to them, securing a white-collar government job is also a part of their characteristics of adulthood. So, adulthood is seen as a fixed destination which promised social mobility and socioeconomic stability.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Almost all the respondents I interviewed either migrated from rural, semi-rural, or newly emerging towns of Assam. Therefore, a dominant theme in my study has become rural education in India and rural youths. One of the lacunae, therefore of this study is the absence of educational experiences of marginalized youths from urban areas and if it is different from that of rural areas? A holistic understanding of formal education, aspirations and mobility linkages will be understood if similar studies are done among youths originating from established urban centers of Assam.

There is also no representation in the sample of my respondents that of class of youth who belonged to strong and stable financial backgrounds.

5.4 Scope for Further Research

The study is situated in specific setting of migrated youths in Guwahati city. Conducting similar studies of educated youth in rural formal and informal sector or study about rural and urban youths employed in rural and urban areas could be taken up.

5.5 Policy Suggestions

- Youths in my study were not able to continue higher education because of various reasons. Effort must be taken by government to help students from humble backgrounds, so that they do not exit higher education.
- Youths in my study emphasized a job-oriented curriculum, so that their education credentialism becomes fruitful.
- School infrastructure and quality of education were major concern for sampled youths.

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ANNEXURE I

LIST OF TABLES

Tables designed based on data collection

Table I: Number of males and females

	Number	Percentage
Males	113	53.05
Females	100	46.95
Total	213	100

Table II: Table for occupational background

	No of males	No of females
Security Guards	30	37
Sales executives/Desk receptionist	50	40
Restaurant and Cafeteria waiters	33	23
Total	113	100

Table III: Religious compositions of youths

	Males	Percent	Females	Percent
Hinduism	66	58.41	54	54
Muslim	19	16.81	14	14
Christianity	18	15.93	32	32
Total	113	100	100	100

Table IV: Caste background

	Males	Percent	Females	Percent
UC	46	40.71	39	39
OBC	33	29.20	20	20
SC	12	10.62	10	10
ST	22	19.47	31	31
Total	113	100	100	100

Table V: Types of occupation of parents

Occupation	*Father*	*Percent*	*Mother*	*Percent*
Farmer	*69*	*34.85*	*25*	*9*
Labourer (unskilled manual)	*63*	*31.82*	*34*	*15.56*
Unorganized sector (con - venience store, pan bidi shop	*52*	*26.26*	*33*	*6.67*
Teacher (irregular, venture)	*12*	*06.06*	*00*	*00*
Fishing	*02*	*01.01*	*00*	*00*
Housewife	*00*	*00*	*104*	*53.06*
Total	*198*	*100*	*196*	*100*

Table VI: Annual income of household

Income	*Household*	*Percent*
Below Rs. 30000	*75*	*31.25*
Less than Rs. 50000	*86*	*28.75*
Less than Rs. 100000	*52*	*40*
Total	*213*	*100*

Table VII: Educational background of respondents

	No of males	No of females
HS pass	49	41
HS fail/not appearing	21	11
Graduate	43	48
Total	113	100