

Abstracts

Research Study I – Dream Deferred: Girl Child Education in post-Covid Kolkata by Poushali Basak

The research study aimed at understanding the reason for drop-outs of girl children in government schools and the current situation of public schooling in Kolkata. Research studies on ‘girl child’ education indicate the high level of drop-outs, even after introduction of several government welfare schemes in West Bengal in the last 10 years. National Family Health Survey - NFHS-5 (2019-21) indicates how child or early marriage percentage remains the same in West Bengal, which is 41.6%, similar to NFHS-4 in 2015-16 (Ahamed, 22 March 2021)¹. However, most of these studies are conducted in the districts and there is hardly any research on the educational situation in the cities. Public education, especially public schooling in the context of Indian cities become more complex and contentious as it is about the dreams and aspirations of the urban labouring classes. At this juncture, the study tried to map out the needs, aspirations vis-à-vis the situation of public schooling of the ‘girl child’ in post-Covid Kolkata. The questions asked were – What is the pattern of enrolments and drop-outs in state government schools in the city in last 10 years? What are the educational aspirations and needs of young women in the city? What are the challenges faced by young people from marginalised communities in continuing school education and why?

Through some qualitative interviews with teachers in government schools, representatives of women’s organisations, community schools or *Pathshalas* working with adolescent children and a quantitative analysis of the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) data, from 2011-12 to 2020-21, this research discusses how government school system is not able to meet the needs and aspirations of young adults from poor and marginalised communities. The present public education system though functioning through various welfare measures is not able to retain children in schools due to scarcity of teachers and teaching-learning facilities and infrastructures. Socio-economic shifts in the post-Covid Kolkata also creates economic hurdles, where young adults dropped out of schools in search of jobs. Especially for girls, several interlocked factors of patriarchal violence in family, male gaze and surveillance in neighbourhood and attractions of the neo-liberal digital market play at intersections. Schools though initialising online classes, making mobile phones accessible through welfare schemes, lack of guidance about how to navigate the digital world, immediate attraction of fame, social capital, romantic pursuits and money making become more important through mobile phones than using it for educational purposes. In such a situation instead of instituting inspection, monitoring of schools, evaluation of curriculum and investing in public education, the State is somewhere reclining and creating space for private players in primary, elementary, secondary and higher secondary school education.



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¹Ahamed, Sabir. “Bengal’s Child Brides”, *The Telegraph Online*. 22 March 2021.

work is about affective histories of autonomous women's collectives in India and MPhil work is on the history of sex-workers' organising, negotiating developmental governance. Her research and publications are on the political and the urban, right to the city, feminist and social movements, gender and education, queer lives and liveabilities.