Social Mobility and Youth Aspirations: An Analysis of the Conditional Convergence of Aspirations in India

Shirin Akhter [a++*] and Vijender Singh Chauhan [a++]

[a] Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi, India.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

This article examines the complex interplay between social mobility and the aspirations of Indian youth within the context of India's modest ranking on the Global Social Mobility Index. Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach, the study synthesizes empirical data and theoretical insights to explore how socio-economic backgrounds, government policies, societal attitudes, and individual actions shape aspirations. Central to this analysis is the concept of "conditionally convergent aspirations," which describes how socio-economic and cultural barriers lead to a narrowing of aspirations within homogeneous groups, thereby limiting the potential for upward social mobility. The findings suggest that effective policy interventions must address these foundational disparities through comprehensive educational reforms, robust social equity measures, and economic empowerment initiatives. By offering a detailed review of the literature and proposing targeted policy recommendations, the study aims to contribute to the discourse on social justice and economic development, advocating for a strategic approach to foster a more equitable society where the aspirations of all Indian youth can be realised.

_____

[++] *Associate Professors;*
Corresponding author: E-mail: shirinakhternaqvi@gmail.com;

1. INTRODUCTION

Positioned at a poor 76th on the Global Social Mobility Index[1], India's score of 42.7 out of 100 points a somber picture[2] of the challenges its youth face. This number is a reflection of millions of dreams deferred, talents undiscovered, and potential unfulfilled. As the country strides forward[3], laying various claims on economic development, bridging the gap between the world of opportunities and the reality of its young citizens remains one of its most pressing challenges. This article is an attempt to bring out the factors that tether aspirations to the rigid socio-economic realities of birth, an examination of how social (im)mobility[4] determines aspirations.

In this article, we explore the stark realities of social mobility in India, juxtaposed against the global framework of opportunities, through an analysis of India's performance on the Global Social Mobility Index which highlights the profound disparities faced by Indian youth and underscores the vast chasm between their aspirations and the socio-economic realities dictated by their circumstances of birth. The narrative of economic growth and progress is often marred by the entrenched socio-economic divisions that curtail the potential and aspirations of many. Through a critical examination of the interplay between socioeconomic factors and individual aspirations, this article seeks to unravel the complex and multifaceted dynamics of social immobility in India.

Aspirations[5], in the article, refer to individuals' desires and goals for their future well-being, which influence their economic decisions and behaviour. They go beyond material possessions, including social status, relationships, and personal achievements, affecting how individuals make decisions

regarding education, career choices, savings, investments, and labor supply decisions. Several factors like the socio-economic background, cultural norms, and peer influences, shape individuals' aspirations. For instance, being born into families with higher income or wealth can influence aspirations by expanding the range of possibilities and opportunities available to individuals, education can play a crucial role in shaping aspirations by providing individuals with information, skills, and exposure to different possibilities.

Thus the article aims to illuminate the pivotal role of circumstances of birth[6], government policies, societal attitudes, and individual actions in shaping the aspirations of young Indians and the collective need to address these gaps in pursuit of a more equitable society. This discourse invites a deeper reflection on how India can transform its approach to social mobility, ensuring that the aspirations of its youth are not just dreams but attainable realities, fostering a future where economic and social equality are not aspirations but assured realities.

The article is organized to address the multifaceted aspects of social mobility in India, guiding the reader through a systematic exploration of the socio-economic challenges that shape the aspirations and realities of India's youth. The introduction presents India's ranking on the Global Social Mobility Index and outlines the central thesis: the profound disparity between the aspirations of Indian youth and the socio-economic realities imposed by their birth. It establishes the significance of examining how social immobility affects these aspirations.

Exploration of Social Mobility Realities analyzes India's performance on the Global Social Mobility Index, highlighting the disparities faced by Indian youth. The narrative of economic growth and progress being marred by entrenched socio-economic divisions is emphasized, laying the groundwork for a deeper investigation into the factors influencing social mobility. The next part discusses how various factors like socio-

---

[1] Available: https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/social-mobility-by-country

[2] Available:https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/business/india-ranks-low-at-76-on-social-mobility-index-29338

[3] Available:https://www.forbesindia.com/article/explainers/top-10-largest-economies-in-the-world/86159/1

[4] Available:https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/11/28/a-lack-of-mobility-undermines-the-aspirations-of-millions-and-may-threaten-stability-and-growth

[5] Available: https://academic.oup.com/jeea/article-pdf/17/6/1687/31558689/jvz057.pdf

[6] Available: https://time.com/6961171/india-british-rule-income-inequality/

economic background, cultural norms, and peer influences shape these aspirations, stressing the importance of education in expanding the range of possibilities available to individuals.

The next part of the article features a comprehensive review of selected studies that examine the impact of social mobility on aspirations. This section synthesizes key theoretical and empirical contributions, discussing foundational works by scholars such as M.N. Srinivas, André Béteille, and contemporary studies by authors like Banerjee and Duflo. It also introduces the concept of "conditionally convergent aspirations," where socio-economic and cultural barriers lead to a narrowing of aspiration ranges within similar socio-economic groups. It utilizes a theoretical framework based on the works of Amartya Sen, Pierre Bourdieu, and Arjun Appadurai. The analysis further leverages empirical data from the Global Social Mobility Index to illustrate how the interplay between socioeconomic factors and government policies affects individual aspirations and social mobility.

The section on Policy Analysis and Recommendations discusses potential interventions that could enhance social mobility. Drawing from the literature review and theoretical insights, it proposes specific policies targeting education, anti-discrimination laws, and economic empowerment, aiming to broaden the spectrum of aspirational choices for the youth. Finally, the conclusion ties together the findings and discussions from the previous sections, emphasizing the critical need for addressing the aspiration-reality gap through inclusive policies. It reiterates the significance of fostering a society where social mobility is enhanced, ensuring that the aspirations of India's youth are supported by a reality that promotes and celebrates their potential.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The discussion on the impact of social immobility on the conditional convergence of aspirations among Indian youth draws on a variety of theoretical and empirical studies that explore the interplay of socio-economic factors, cultural dynamics, and institutional frameworks. This literature review presents key contributions to the field, highlighting the complexity and diversity of experiences that shape social mobility and aspirations in India.

Srinivas introduced the concept of Sanskritisation in his ethnographic work, providing a cultural anthropological perspective on how lower castes adopt the practices of higher castes to improve their societal status. This concept is pivotal for understanding the mechanisms through which individuals and groups seek to enhance their social mobility within rigid caste structures [1]. Béteille's examination of social stratification in a South Indian village offers insights into the microcosmic shifts in social mobility influenced by education, land ownership, and political power. His findings suggest that social mobility is not merely an economic transition but also a function of changing social relations and cultural capital [2].

Through their empirical research, Banerjee and Duflo illustrate how economic constraints shape the decision-making processes regarding education, savings, and other economic behaviours among the poor in India. Their work underscores the restrictive impact of limited economic environments on individual aspirations [3]. Deshpande explores the extension of caste-based discrimination into economic spheres, affecting individuals' access to opportunities and thereby influencing their aspirations. This study highlights the persistent barriers imposed by the caste system, which hinder social mobility and lead to a convergence of aspirations within caste boundaries [4].

Kapur and Prasad discuss the significant role state policies play in shaping educational and economic opportunities. Their analysis points to the ways in which governmental actions can either facilitate or obstruct social mobility, affecting the broad spectrum of aspirations among youth [5]. Majumdar, Manabi, & Mooij, Jos' work on the disparities in educational quality across different social groups in India reflects how socio-economic inequalities are mirrored in the educational sector. Such disparities crucially affect the aspirations and potential mobility of students, contributing to a conditional convergence where aspirations are shaped by the available quality of education [6].

Appadurai's concept of the 'capacity to aspire' is instrumental in understanding how cultural factors and media exposure shape and sometimes limit the aspirations based on socio-cultural environments. This framework is essential for analyzing how aspirations are not only formed in response to material conditions but are also significantly influenced by cultural

narratives and expectations [7]. Bourdieu's discussions on social and cultural capital provide a deeper understanding of how non-economic forms of capital impact an individual's potential for social mobility. His theory emphasizes that aspirations are deeply embedded in social practices and the availability of cultural resources, which can lead to a convergence of aspirations within similar socio-economic groups [8].

Sen, Amartya [9] in his seminal work "Development as Freedom," Sen argues that development entails the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency. The central thesis of Sen's work is that freedom is both the primary goal of development and its principal means. By enhancing freedoms, individuals can expand their aspirations beyond the immediate constraints of their socio-economic conditions. Sen's perspective is crucial for understanding how increased access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities can significantly broaden individual aspirations and facilitate social mobility [9].

In "Fault Lines," Rajan argues that unchecked economic inequalities can lead to systemic crises, akin to geological fault lines leading to earthquakes. He asserts that such disparities, if not addressed, can create severe economic and social turbulence, which resonates with the theme of social mobility and the risks associated with the conditional convergence of aspirations. This perspective is crucial for understanding the broader implications of failing to address structural inequalities, which can culminate in the collapse of socio-economic systems [10].

A recent study on Multigenerational Educational and Occupational Mobility examines the educational and occupational mobility across three generations in India, revealing significant insights into the intergenerational transmission of socio-economic status. It highlights that while educational mobility has seen some improvements across generations, occupational mobility remains largely stagnant, suggesting that educational gains are not fully translating into better occupational outcomes, emphasising the complexity of social mobility in India and the need for policies that enhance both educational and occupational mobility to ensure sustainable socio-economic development [11].

Focusing on disadvantaged groups, a paper on Social Mobility among Disadvantaged Groups in India explores how affirmative action and other social policies have impacted the social mobility of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Muslims in India. The findings suggest that while there has been some progress, significant challenges remain, particularly in achieving upward occupational mobility for these groups. The study calls for a multifaceted policy approach that addresses both educational and occupational mobility to dismantle entrenched inequalities [12,13-15].

A paper entitled Education and Social Mobility in India provides a comprehensive analysis of how education influences social mobility in India. It discusses the role of education in breaking the cycle of poverty and enhancing upward mobility among youth. The study emphasises the need for quality education and access to higher education as crucial factors for improving social mobility, particularly for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds [16,17,18].

The study is based on established theoretical frameworks derived from the seminal works of scholars such as Amartya Sen and Pierre Bourdieu, alongside contemporary insights from Arjun Appadurai. Specifically, it employs Sen's ideas on capabilities and freedoms to explore how systemic restrictions influence individual aspirations and potential for upward mobility. Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital are utilized to examine the socio-economic barriers that individuals face within their environments. Furthermore, Arjun Appadurai's notion of "the capacity to aspire" is central to our analysis [19-21]. This concept provides a lens through which the impact of cultural factors on individual aspirations can be assessed, highlighting the constraints imposed by existing socio-economic structures and policies.

This literature review reveals that social immobility leads to a conditional convergence of aspirations among Indian youth, where aspirations are not only constrained by economic limitations but are also significantly shaped by cultural, educational, and policy-related factors [22-24]. The synthesis of these studies offers a comprehensive picture of how aspirations are formed, constrained, and often standardized within certain socio-economic and cultural confines. This conditional convergence is a strategic response to perceived barriers and opportunities, reflecting a broader socio-economic phenomenon where systemic

constraints shape individual and collective outlooks on possible futures.

3. METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a comprehensive analytical framework to investigate the multifaceted issues of social mobility in India. Drawing on empirical data from the Global Social Mobility Index, it explores the dynamic interplay between socio-economic backgrounds, governmental policies, societal attitudes, and individual actions that shape the aspirations of young Indians. The empirical analysis utilizes data from the Global Social Mobility Index, which provides a quantitative foundation to evaluate and discuss social mobility across different contexts in India. This data is analyzed to correlate the theoretical discourse with observed patterns in social mobility, examining how variations in social mobility indices relate to the broader socio-economic and policy landscape in India.

A key conceptual contribution of this article is the introduction of "conditionally convergent aspirations." This concept elucidates how socio-economic and cultural barriers facilitate a convergence of aspirations within homogeneous socio-economic groups, effectively narrowing the scope of perceived possible futures. This convergence is termed 'conditional' as it is contingent upon the socio-economic strata and the cultural context of the groups being considered. The conditional nature of this convergence suggests that while aspirations may be uniformly high within certain groups, they are simultaneously limited by the structural opportunities available.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interplay of economic, social, and structural barriers is crucial in understanding the restricted social mobility in India, where different levels of economic security and social status influence aspirations and mobility differently. The aspirations are formed and deformed at various stages and as a result of intersectionalities of multiple factors. Besides the individual's micro traits of class, caste, religion, gender, the macro attributes of the society like how the media and the state function, also work to influence how individuals perceive possible futures and their own potential for mobility. This study brings forth a very important concept of conditionally convergent aspirations, wherein we discuss how stratification of society causes individuals

belonging to different groups to form very similar aspirations within the group. However, these aspirations differ with the group, with individuals belonging to different social groups aspiring for upwards socio-economic mobility but only within the limited confines of their perceived reach.

The media[7], especially the social media[8], plays a significant role in shaping aspirations, while the exposure that media gives can broaden individuals' horizons, expand their awareness of possibilities, and inspire new aspirations based on diverse role models and success stories it can also lead to a dissemination of misinformation, unrealistic standards, and harmful ideologies. The state[9] also plays a crucial role in shaping aspirations through its policies. Access to quality education, opportunities for skill development, and exposure to diverse experiences can significantly impact individuals' aspirations. Policies related to employment, entrepreneurship, investment in infrastructure, industry development, and access to credit can either stimulate economic growth and aspiration-building or contribute to stagnation and limited opportunities.

The aspirations of India's youth[10] however, are not merely about acquiring wealth or status; they also include breaking free[11] from the chains of their birth, achieving upward social mobility along with the universally sought after economic mobility. Yet, the path to these aspirations is often fraught with barriers, economic, social, and structural, that many find insurmountable [12] . Further, the social barriers like caste, religion, gender, limit the economic mobility and the interplay of all these barriers ensure that an individual belonging to the intersection of lower economic strata and vulnerable social group finds it impossible to overcome the barriers to social mobility. This is where the structures and the state become important, it is the responsibility of a welfare state to ensure that

---

[7] Available: https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/7946
[8] Available:https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374125694_The_Role_of_Social_Media_in_Shaping_Public_Opinion_and_Its_Influence_on_Economic_Decisions
[9] Available: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_755248.pdf
[10] Available: https://scroll.in/article/880627/a-chasm-between-education-and-expectations-leaves-indians-unprepared-for-their-countrys-realities
[11] Available: https://www.oxfam.org/en/india-extreme-inequality-numbers
[12] Available:https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/misleading-analyses-of-poverty-complacency-from-policymakers-will-worsen-indias-inequality-crisis-9270216/

structures are created such that they work to weaken the aforementioned barriers to mobility and not strengthen them. States that prioritise social welfare, inclusivity, and equality tend to foster higher aspirations among their citizens. Conversely, policies that reinforce stereotypes, discrimination, or social divisions can stifle aspirations and limit opportunities for certain groups.

Structural inequalities [13] can erode individuals' self-esteem, confidence, capabilities and belief in their own abilities, leading to feelings of hopelessness, resignation, and diminished aspirations [14]. This can contribute to a cycle of low expectations, underachievement, and severely limited socio-economic mobility. Further, in an environment characterised by social immobility, aspirations tend to be constrained not by a lack of ambition but by a practical response to the limited pathways available proving that social mobility or the lack thereof, is an important determinant of the aspirations that the youth hold.Besides a general dip in the levels of aspirations, the aspirations of youth often converge into a singularity, driven by the desire for social and economic advancement. This convergence occurs when the pathways to socio-economic mobility are arduous, riddled with systemic barriers that impede progress for many.

In such cases, limited avenues for advancement, coupled with unequal access to resources and opportunities, amplify the allure of upward mobility, creating a scenario where aspirations converge around securing financial stability, along with breaking free from the constraints of inherited social status. Further, this convergence is not unconditional, it takes the form of conditional convergence, where aspirations are determined by existing inequalities. Further, the aspirations are not only limited by these inequalities but are also bound by an internalisation of these inequalities. As a result, the dreams and ambitions of young individuals belonging to similar strata of class, caste, religion, gender, or other vulnerable groups, become strikingly similar, revolving around the pursuit of upward mobility, as a means to transcend societal constraints. [15]

This phenomenon of conditionally convergent aspirations is not necessarily indicative of passion, but is rather a strategic manoeuvre to achieve the desired socio-economic mobility within the structural confines of the job market, and the limited opportunities at hand. The societal glorification of certain professions that yield more power over others, add to the clamour for these limited jobs. This clamour opens up space for a market that sells promises of getting these aspirations met, and the intangible aspirations are turned into a marketable commodity. The gap between the number of people who aspire for these jobs and the number of people whose aspirations can be fulfilled is determined by the availability of these jobs. Since the number of jobs available is few, and the demand high, the willingness to pay for the aspirations of getting these jobs is high. Like any other commodity, the rich are better equipped to pay for aspirations as compared to the poor, which they do, perpetuating existing social inequalities.

In the Indian society, religion, gender, caste, and economic status intertwine, the aspirations of the youth are continually shaped and reshaped by this intersectionality, deeply influencing social mobility and the aspirations of marginalised groups. Gender in India carries the weight of historical and cultural expectations that often dictate the roles deemed appropriate for women, confining their aspirations within the domestic sphere or limited occupational roles. This societal imposition not only restricts women's access to educational and vocational opportunities but also subtly engrains a belief system where aspirations are adjusted to fit the mold crafted by patriarchal norms. Similarly, the shadows of the caste system cast long and dark over the aspirations of those born into its lower tiers. The stigmatisation and limited access to resources faced by lower castes are not merely about economic deprivation but a social ostracisation that narrows life's possibilities to a preordained path, seldom leading upwards.

Economic status, or the lack thereof, further complicates this confluence of barriers. Poverty curtails not just access to material resources like quality education and health care but also the very ability to dream beyond immediate necessities. The youth in economically disadvantaged settings often find themselves forsaking long-term educational pursuits for immediate economic contributions to their households. The tragic irony here lies in the

---

[13]Available:https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC83
53929/
[14] Available: https://www.cnbctv18.com/personal-
finance/aspiration-index-decline-rising-cost-inflation-high-
interest-rates-loan-expensive-emi-bankbazaar-17748241.htm
[15]Available:https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC37
69688/

cyclical perpetuation of poverty and restricted social mobility, a self-fulfilling prophecy that reinforces itself across generations. The interplay of these factors, religion, gender, caste, and economic status, creates a complex matrix of barriers that can seem insurmountable. Consider a young woman from a lower caste or a discriminated against religion, who by sheer misfortune also has economically poor background. Her trajectory is doubly bound by the societal chains of gender and caste, while her economic reality shackles her aspirations to immediate survival rather than future flourishing. This convergence of constraints not only externalises barriers but also internalises limitations, leading to what Pierre Bourdieu might describe as symbolic violence—a state where the oppressed accept their social order as the natural order.

To dismantle these barriers, a multifaceted approach is essential, one that acknowledges and addresses the compounded nature of these challenges. Educational reforms must be inclusive, not only providing seats for marginalised groups but also ensuring that these seats lead to real educational attainment through comprehensive support systems. Economic policies should be crafted with an eye towards empowerment, targeting not just general economic growth but specific initiatives that elevate the marginalised, microcredit schemes for women, entrepreneurial training for lower castes, and robust job creation that cuts across traditional caste occupations.Moreover, the legal framework must be fortified to enforce anti-discrimination laws vigorously. But beyond legal measures, a cultural shift is imperative—a shift towards a society that recognises and actively rejects the discrimination woven into its fabric. This involves not only policies but public awareness campaigns that challenge and change how society views gender roles, caste distinctions, and economic inequalities.

The constructed dichotomy between success and failure, amplified by societal norms and a market dominated by a highly competitive industry exploiting these aspirations, generates a precarious situation where unfulfilled ambitions lead to frustration and disillusionment in many, especially the weak, the vulnerable, the marginalised and the women. When the weaker and the marginal groups face systematic disillusionment, individuals belonging to these groups internalise these lack of fulfilment of aspirations and begin considering a failure to raise upto the societal expectations as a personal and not a systemic failure. This false narrative of personal failure leads to discontentment, unrest and chaos in the society. Social unrest and chaos, besides having a negative face value also has an intrinsic negative value, that is a potential to slow down economic growth in the long run. Social capital erosion that ensues thus, can erode trust amongst groups, undermining the effectiveness of institutions and hindering the collaborative efforts needed for economic growth and development of a society.

The problem of lack of aspirations [16], or of conditionally convergent aspirations [17], necessitates a multifaceted approach to allow social mobility, which goes beyond income mobility and cuts into the caste, religion, gender, based societal fabric. Policies aimed at expanding the economy, diversifying industries, and regulating the informal sector are necessary but not sufficient. These economic reforms must be complemented by policies that equip the youth with a broad spectrum of skills and knowledge, preparing them for a variety of career paths. Moreover, there needs to be a concerted effort to shift societal perceptions, valuing all forms of work and recognising the dignity of labor in its diverse manifestations, which will be a result of education in its truest form. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that focus on improving opportunities, reducing inequality, promoting social mobility, enhancing governance and accountability, and fostering inclusive economic growth.

Failure to address aspiration-reality gaps effectively can create conditions akin to a 'ticking time bomb', where underlying social tensions and discontent may escalate into more severe crises. The role of the state is pivotal in shaping the aspirations of individuals and societies. Depending on its policies, governance, and institutional framework, the state can either contribute to the building of aspirations or inadvertently foster a lack of aspirations. Since the aspirations of youth are not just individual dreams but blueprints for our country's future, they should be carefully moulded to embody the potential for innovation, progress, and build a society that thrives on diversity and equality.

---

[16] Available: https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/poverty-inequality/lack-of-aspirations-as-a-poverty-trap.html
[17] Available:https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w19976/w19976.pdf

Addressing the aspiration-reality gap is not merely an act of social justice; it is an investment in our collective future, a step towards unleashing the boundless potential of India's most valuable asset—its young minds.

4.1 Policy Suggestions

Several policy recommendations emerge from the study, the aim of which can be to potentially enhance social mobility and empower the aspirations of Indian youth. This study is a call to Implement policies that ensure equitable access to high-quality education for all socio-economic groups, especially in rural and underserved urban areas. This includes improving infrastructure, increasing teacher training, and integrating technology in classrooms and revising the educational curriculum to include more emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical skills that align with current job market demands. Incorporate lessons on social equality and mobility to raise awareness and foster a more inclusive societal outlook.

Increased funding for vocational training and skill development programs that are aligned with emerging industries is also important. This can be achieved through public-private partnerships and by incentivizing companies to offer apprenticeships and training. We also need to Develop programs that support young entrepreneurs with subsidies, grants, and low-interest loans. Focus particularly on those from marginalized communities to stimulate economic diversity and innovation.

Besides improving education, skills and innovations, measures to strengthen and rigorously enforce anti-discrimination laws within educational institutions and workplaces is important. This should include measures to combat caste, gender, and religious discrimination, Involving diverse community representatives in the policy-making process to ensure that the voices of all socio-economic strata are heard and considered when formulating policies that affect their lives. Policies should encourage transparency in recruitment processes by implementing fair hiring practices that are monitored by independent bodies to prevent bias based on socio-economic background or identity. It should be ensured that there are sufficient media and cultural promotions of stories and role models from diverse backgrounds of having successfully achieved social mobility.

These policies, if implemented effectively, could significantly mitigate the factors that contribute to social immobility and help cultivate an environment where the aspirations of all Indian youth, irrespective of their socio-economic status, can be nurtured and achieved. Such comprehensive approaches not only address immediate disparities but also lay the groundwork for sustainable, long-term social and economic development.

Before we touch upon the final section of this paper let us take a look at social mobility from a global perspective, consider the following cases: South Africa, In the post-apartheid era, despite reforms aimed at increasing educational and employment opportunities, historical inequalities continue to impact social mobility significantly. The country's efforts in education reform and affirmative action in employment share similarities with India's reservation system, illustrating the challenges of overcoming entrenched social divisions.

Often perceived as the land of opportunity, the U.S. has seen declining social mobility over recent decades. The persistence of economic disparities, exacerbated by a market-driven approach that does not adequately redistribute economic gains, presents a cautionary tale for India. The American experience highlights the necessity of ensuring that economic growth benefits all segments of society to foster genuine social mobility.

The Bolsa Família program is a cornerstone in Brazil's approach to enhancing social mobility among its poorest citizens. By providing financial assistance tied to educational and health conditions, such as ensuring children attend school and receive vaccinations, the program aims to break the cycle of poverty. This strategy not only addresses immediate financial needs but also invests in the human capital of future generations, which is crucial for long-term social mobility [25,26].

Known for its high levels of social mobility, Sweden's model is underpinned by a robust welfare state, with significant public investment in education and healthcare. The country's approach provides a stark contrast to India's, emphasising the role of government in levelling the playing field from an early age. This proactive involvement helps to minimise the impact of economic background on educational outcomes and long-term social mobility.

These examples show that while socio-economic barriers to social mobility are a universal challenge, the strategies to overcome these barriers vary widely. Successful approaches typically combine direct financial support with comprehensive educational reforms and robust anti-discrimination laws, tailored to the specific cultural, economic, and political contexts of each country. While Brazil and Sweden mark the success stories, the case of the U.S. shows that in face of lax policies the social mobility can actually dip.

5. CONCLUSION

The narrative of India's development is intricately linked to the aspirations of its youth, which are profoundly influenced by their social mobility or lack thereof. As illustrated throughout this article, the challenges posed by entrenched socio-economic divisions not only limit individual potential but also curtail the collective progress of the nation. Addressing these barriers through thoughtful and inclusive policies is not merely an act of rectifying historical injustices but a crucial investment in the future of India.

To bridge the wedge between aspirations and the socio-economic realities that many Indian youths face, a multi-faceted strategy is essential. This strategy should encompass comprehensive educational reforms, economic empowerment initiatives, robust social equity measures, and substantial investments in health and infrastructure. By doing so, we can create a foundation that not only supports but actively elevates those from disadvantaged backgrounds, offering them the genuine opportunity to change their destinies through their efforts and talents.

Moreover, it is imperative that these efforts are supported by transparent governance and inclusive policy-making that considers the voices and needs of all segments of society. Only through a collective and committed effort can we ensure that the dreams of India's youth are not deferred but are instead supported by a reality that encourages and celebrates their aspirations. As the economy lays its claims on economic growth, it is important to distribute the gains from that growth, ensuring that growth culminates in to development. Fostering social mobility is not just about economic gains but about nurturing a society that values equality, justice, and human dignity. It is about building a nation where every individual has the space, opportunity, and

support to reach their fullest potential. This is the path to a resilient and vibrant India, marked not by the constraints of birth but by the boundless possibilities of merit, effort, and aspiration.

the story of India's progress must be one of inclusivity, where social mobility is not a privilege but a norm. Where the dreams of the youth are not constrained by the circumstances of their birth but nurtured by the opportunities afforded to them. Let us commit to building a nation where every aspiration has the soil to take root, the water to grow, and the space to blossom into reality. Our journey towards economic and social equality is long and fraught with challenges, but it is a journey worth embarking on—for the sake of every dream waiting to take flight.

6. LIMITATIONS

While the study extensively examines the factors affecting social mobility and aspirations in Indian society, there are certain limitations in the study; for instance, the article might not fully address the dynamic nature of social mobility and aspirations, which can change over time due to technological advancements, economic shifts, and policy changes. The longitudinal impact of these factors is crucial but remains under explored in the present study, which might require longitudinal studies to fully understand trends over time. Further, the practicality of implementing suggested policies, given economic constraints and political feasibility, is not thoroughly examined. The economic implications of large-scale educational reforms or social welfare programs are significant and require detailed cost-benefit analyses.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To enhance the comprehensiveness and relevance of social mobility research in India, there is a need for robust longitudinal studies. These studies should aim to track individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds over many years to observe the direct and indirect effects of specific policy interventions like educational reforms, economic assistance programs, or affirmative action measures. Such research could examine various dimensions of social mobility, including educational attainment, employment outcomes, income levels, etc. Employing a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods to capture a broad spectrum

of impacts can also add value to this study. Quantitative data can come from governmental and non-governmental databases tracking educational, financial, and occupational outcomes. Qualitative insights could be gathered through interviews and ethnographic studies to understand the personal and community-level impacts of policies.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

1. Srinivas MN. Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India. Clarendon Press; 1952.
2. Béteille A. Caste, Class, and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village. University of California Press; 1965.
3. Banerjee AV, Duflo E. Poor economics: A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty. PublicAffairs; 2011.
4. Deshpande A. The grammar of caste: Economic discrimination in contemporary India. Oxford University Press; 2011.
5. Kapur D, Prasad CB. Social mobility in India: Concepts, research, and results. Oxford University Press; 2018.
6. Majumdar M, Mooij J. Education and inequality in India: A classroom view. Routledge; 2012.
7. Appadurai A. The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition. In V. Rao & M. Walton (Eds.), Culture and public action. Stanford University Press. 2004:59-84.
8. Bourdieu P. The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education. Greenwood. 1986:241-258.
9. Sen A. Development as freedom. Oxford University Press; 1999.
10. Rajan RG, Zingales L. Saving Capitalism from the Capitalists. Crown Business; 2003.
11. Kundu and Sen. on multigenerational mobility; 2023. Available:https://globaldev.blog
12. UNU-WIDER. on social mobility among disadvantaged groups; 2023 Available:https://www.wider.unu.edu
13. Pande A. Not an 'Angel', not a 'Whore': Surrogates as 'Dirty' Workers in India. Indian Journal of Gender Studies. 2009; 16(2), 141-173. Available:https://doi.org/10.1177/097152150901600202
14. Shah G. Caste and Democratic Politics in India. Permanent Black; 2002.
15. Stahl G. Aspiration paradoxes: Working-class student conceptions of power in 'engines of social mobility'. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education. 2018;31(7):557-71.
16. International Journal of Social Impact (2023) on education and social mobility. Availablehttps://ijsi.in
17. Drèze J, Sen A. An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions. Princeton University Press; 2013.
18. Hoskins K, Barker B. Aspirations and young people's constructions of their futures: Investigating review form. social mobility and social reproduction. British Journal of Educational Studies. 2017;65 (1):45- 67.
19. Agarwal B. A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia. Cambridge University Press; 1994.
20. Banerjee AV, Duflo E. What is middle class about the middle classes around the world? Journal of Economic Perspectives. 2007;22(2):3-28. Available:https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.22.2.3
21. Das V. Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary. University of California Press; 2007.
22. Kingdon GG. The progress of school education in India. Oxford Review of Economic Policy. 2007;23(2):168-195. Available:https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grm014
23. Mehta PB. The Burden of Democracy. Penguin Books India; 2003.
24. Munshi K. Networks in the modern economy: Mexican migrants in the U.S. labor market. Quarterly Journal of Economics. 2003;118(2):549-599. Available:https://doi.org/10.1162/003355303321675455
25. Hunter, Wendy, and Natasha Borges Sugiyama. Transforming Subjects into Citizens: Insights from Brazil's Bolsa Família. Perspectives on Politics. 2014; 12(4):829. Available:https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-

politics/article/abs/transforming-subjects-into-citizens-insights-from-brazils-bolsa-familia/44E9F7 3B5CDEE7989A138C36FDC09AC5)

26. Centre For Public Impact, Bolsa Família in Brazil. Available:https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/bolsa-familia-in-brazil)