A PRELIMINARY APPROACH TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING MIDDLE CLASS PARENTAL CHOICE IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

A CASE STUDY OF AN URBAN SPACE IN ASSAM

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

RESHMI CHAKRABORTY

ZAKIR HUSAIN CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
INDIA

2010

ZAKIR HUSAIN CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067

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DECLARATION

This dissertation entitled, 'A PRELIMINARY APPROACH TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING MIDDLE CLASS PARENTAL CHOICE IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF AN URBAN SPACE IN ASSAM', submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is my original work. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree in this or any other University/Institution.

Reshmi Chakraborty

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of Master of Philosophy degree of this university

Prof. Deepak Kumar
(Chairperson)

Associate Prof. Saumen Chattopadhyay
(Supervisor)

Tel. : +91 (011) 26704416 Fax : +91 (011) 26704192/ 26717580/ 26717586
e-mail : chair_zhces@mail.jnu.ac.in

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Few years back I happen to read Charles Dickens',

> *"It was the best of times...the worst of times; It was the age of wisdom... age of foolishness; It was the epoch of belief... epoch of incredulity; It was the season of light... season of darkness; It was the spring of hope...winter of despair; We had everything before us...had nothing before us".*

My journey through this dissertation has witnessed every moment of this, every moment of the enthusiasm and many such moments of loss and restlessness. And every time I failed, every time I lost hope, all those moments of un-accomplishments, I was rendered help and support from three beam of strength into my academic and personal life.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The ambiguity of middle class aspirations and education: Rising from the unequal core

There is a continuous dilemma with which this work seeks to begin itself by involving in a constant dialogue with my conscious and sub-conscious being. The title of the project suggests it is going to be a journey into an extremely volatile and hitherto unspecifically defined social group or more precisely a class called the *middle class*. A thorough reflection into why this topic would be different for a dissertation work only made this journey more challenging and complex. While most contemporary work on school education is trying to reach and decipher the problems of the lower/marginalized/exploited/deprived (in multiple ways) section of the society, this work tries to look the other way round at the perplexity of education, choice and the related aspirations attached with middle class. Simultaneously it has been challenging to reconcile between what could be purely called an academic/professional/detached work and a work emanating from pure life experiences of being a part of the same aspiring- anxious middle class. There is a steep tendency to propose a biased work almost originating as a case history. However, instead of demarcating a definite boundary of the professional milieu and personal experience, the work tries to bring forth the ambitious middle class aspirations and dilemmas in relation to schooling and education[1] also wishes to draw a relational discourse between the middle class practices and educational space[2]. The excitement and energy of the journey entails from this non-comprehensive understanding of middle class which has kept many a theorists away from problematizing the emergence and existence of a social class of such nature vis-a-vis their behaviour in a

[1] It is also a preliminary effort to explore the effect of RTE act upon private schools and hence after the choice variation among the middle class.

[2] This involves impact on education policy making, schooling of the child, and academic practices with in the school.

competitive educational market at school level. Before describing the nature and character of middle class in particular, it will be wise to situate them in general in the social strata of a modern/industrial/globalised/unequal society and make sense of their relative character with respect to the highly privileged and the underprivileged sections of the same.

The pertinent and unresolved discourse on inequality exhibit the cleavage a modern-secular-democratic society has in its existing social order due to unequal form of achievement and reward. While the macro perspective on equality and inequality can only enrich the philosophical debate existing for decades together, in debates within the micro perspective, it is time to challenge and interpret the unfair forms lying beneath the super structure that is society. Inequality in modern time has not only affected individuals but also groups who at times behave like a monolithic whole to safeguard their rights in a democratic society. However with the middle class per se, it is not only awareness of their rights which quite naturally follow from their conscious upbringing but also maintaining a special character which determines their social existence different from others. It is this special character and attribute which eventually leads to their choice making ability. Many proponents in the field of education like P. Bourdieue, B. Bernstein, M. Apple, S. Ball, etc., have discussed this nature of the class conscious people elaborately in their writings for past half a century and will be dealt with in the theoretical discussion in the chapters to follow. In this context the rise and continuation of the expanding middle class is contextualized in the present neo-liberal/competitive milieu. The modern-competitive society while upholding high values in individualism, achievement, free and fair competition and just social order with law in place is rather challenged to establish equal chances for each individual in the society to choose better life for themselves. However, even with the higher forms of inequality embedded in the society within spaces and structures, it is unfair to discuss things from singular vantage point, of that

from below always. Ongoing debates on the existence of a class in between the extremes as lived by the rich and the poor have strengthened this voyage, only to find that this follows a cautious way of questioning the whole issue. Primarily the issue is much more than the reason for existence alone, "for the middle class it is the best of times and the worst of times" as put by Ball (2003: 4)[3], "a time of affluence and risk, opportunity and congestion, celebration and anxiety". They have overcome their contentment and easy going attitude, they are anxious because of the uncertainty in which their life is embedded. In reality this can be described as a reflection of their present self and consciousness of their class. Lewis and Maude (1950: 273, cited in Ball 2003)[4] further explain that they have moved ahead of mere individual breadwinning attitude, it is their dread and confidence which simultaneously works for the class to behave with uncertainty.

Middle class as argued by scholars are not a monolithic class, neither a substantive whole, they are as passionately emphasised by Beteille (1996)[5] and Ball (2003)[6], a phenomenon, a process, in search of something better and more than what they have. They are in constant flux and more precisely they *exist*. Their dynamism and prowess to challenge the existing and build a new form of social order because of their perpetual dissatisfaction with what they have in hand, alarms every authority in position. In the institution of education, similar is the story. While policies are made, amended and restructured to suite those who are consciously or subconsciously exempted to avail the basic amenities of life, it is imperative to take a note of the middle class who are politically, socially and economically more in control of their identity and directly or indirectly govern the course of these policies.

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[3] Stephen Ball, *Class Strategies and Education Market: The Middle Class and Social Advantage*, London: Routledge, 2003.
[4] Lewis and Maude, *The English Middle Classes,* London: Phoenix House, 1950.
[5] Andre Beteille, The Mismatch between Class and Status, *The British Journal of Sociology,* 47(3), Special Issue, pp 513-525, 1996.
[6] Ball, op.cit, 2003.

Transgressing further from super structure to base, Ball (ibid) has made an effort to draw our attention towards the need to look into the family as the site for the rooted inequality in the society. Education for the middle class is not merely a drive for their children to excel in profession but it is engrained with a deep vested interest to maintain the ethos and class identity for which they strive (Bourdieu, 1988)[7]. It is a certain type of symbolic and cultural capital that they acquire in their life process and wish to maintain through various forms and stages of socialization. According to Ball there has been a persistent neglect to account the role of families in perpetuating the educational inequality. It is in this context that middle class needs to be studied *"as their actions produce or contribute to the perpetuation, inscription, and reinvention of social inequalities both old and new. They are the new forms of old inequalities and new forms of inequality"* (opcit: 5). The seriousness to undertake research on middle class and education emerges out of the relatively limited pragmatic and theoretical development around middle class practices. Savage and Butler (1995)[8] however have majorly contributed to the literature on middle class through their empirical explorations.

A small study of a sample of middle class families in a district town in the state of Assam in India will help decipher this project of analysing middle class aspiration in a choice market in the 21st century to a certain extent. The situation has changed since the time this project was designed and the time it is under completion. The era is post Right to Education Act, a fundamental right added to the Indian Constitution by the 86th Amendment Act, 2002. Education for all children between the ages of 6 to 14 years is compulsory from 1st April, 2010 inserted in Art 21 of the Indian constitution. Thus the status of elementary education in India by law has been clearly divided between pre and post education-as-fundamental-right period for 6-14 year old

[7] P. Bourdieu, Homo Academicus, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.
[8] Savage, M and T. Butler, *Assets* and the Middle Classes in Contemporary Britain. In T. Butler and M. Savage (eds) *Social Change and the Middle Classes,* London: UCL press, 1995.

children, for parents and for schools (especially the private ones). It has many more legal obligations embedded within the act. However one of the most important and controversial clauses of this act is that in private schools, out of the total new admission at the entry point 25 percent of the children are to be necessarily inducted from economically backward families.

Hereby it is imperative to unfold the process of growth and continuity of private schools in the education market which is contingent upon a large number of children from middle class families. Nogueira (2010)[9] points out the inception of this growth and continuity of private institutions including schools. The market grew in magnitude with the economic re-structuralization pregnant with seeds of uncertainties and risks especially creating a gorge in jobs to be filled with skilled manpower. The state shrunk post de-regularization, undertook reforms in the public sector and allowed free choice by the users. The consequence of the revitalization of the economy is felt in mounting individualism in to the mentalities of the people and personal interests conquered collective values. The investment in education is seen to be on a rise among certain section of the society. While Krishna Kumar (1996)[10] a leading educationist of India expresses his worry of the educational imbalance created by the proliferation of the private schools by saying that its growth increasingly drained off children of the better sections of urban society from government schools. As also Nambissan (2010)[11] feels that the unregulated private sector sees this gradual demand of private schools as a business opportunity. The 'which' and 'why' of private schools or any school per se is determined by the parents. There is a latent but firm mutual dialogue between these aspiring/choice-conscious middle class families and the schools.

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[9] Nogueira, Maria A., 2010, A Revisited theme: Middle Classes and the School, in Apple et al. The Routledge International Handbook of Sociology of Education, New York: Routledge.

[10] Krishna Kumar, *Learning from Cconflict*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1996.

[11] Geetha B. Nambissan, The Indian Middle Classes and Educational Advantage; in Apple et al. *The Routledge International Handbook of Sociology of Education*, New York: Routledge, 2010.

While trying to locate the same middle class in the contemporary milieu, political sociology has to come to rescue of our understanding of the middle class. Educational aspiration, choice and demand are not a phenomenon in isolation. There is a serious interplay of 'classes', only as said earlier, the vantage point is different.

A study of choice behaviour becomes interesting for the middle class compared to the rich and the under privileged because they can exercise their discretion over spending, their aspirations to ascend up the hierarchy of society through investment in education. Rich can spend enough. The poor cannot. They are not faced with the kind of issues as the middle class confronts. The middle class encounters constraints of various kinds are under continuous dilemmas and manage crucial tradeoffs in various spheres in their life. The govt seeks to simulate a market like situation as the consumers' sovereignty assumes salience in this era of rising dominance of neo-liberalism.

The neo-liberal ethos in the contemporary milieu, as it emerges has diffused into every possible socio-political institution in a developed and developing nation. The fact that there is a considerable influence of privatization, liberalism and neo-ideas on middle class families concocted with assertive/ competitive individualism in a market situation only justifies its strong hold on a society (Ball, 2003). While family is a primary unit of study in a social structure, their actions leading to group behaviour will indeed add rippling effect in to the society. The project therefore entails to evaluate their intra class variation in the *space* of education. As well as see how schools under different management in a neo-liberal market like situation mushroom to cater to the need and choice of the urban/middle class parents. It is a complex situation to draw any severe distinction between these two processes, they are not disjoint sets but is superimposed phenomenon occurring together in the society. Schools are part of this market process trying to maintain equilibrium for parents as

choice makers, between supply and demand of quality-education. Elementary school choice is by no means a part of the decision of the children. It is purely through the state intervention and through mediation of the parents. The parent's choice of school is not merely an act of sending the child to learn how to read and write. It is a lot more than that. Elementary education is a public good supposed to be of equal nature and ever available to all by the state. However this is not the reality. Post welfare era has seen rapid growth of neo liberal ethos into the social, political and economic system of the nation. There is a compelling tendency to emulate market like situation in every possible sphere of society. As if market is absolute, fair and equal resource allocator and generator, the products are uniform and open to everyone. Reality is far from this, especially in the field of education. The inputs are children and the outputs are also children. While the raw materials are injected into the education market, the finished products have a greater onus to perform. This is where the choice of the middle class families comes into play. They want their children to be a certain type of finished product who can perpetuate their own cultural, political and social values distinct from other classes for generations to follow. The idea of value retention is so strong that families cannot but choose and programme the future course of action by choosing particular schools for their children. Intermingling within a particular section of people and socialising only within the in-group is as strong as not choosing a low quality government school for their children's education. The debate leads to indicate that middle class families may be governed to behave as consumers of education and leave the market of education or space of education in such a position that a need may arise to look beyond the reason to establish education as a fundamental right as in the case in India.

Another dimension to the conceptualization of middle class behaviour is with respect to school education but primarily mapping the choice experiences in the contemporary market. The debate of choice is age old with the advent of liberal

theorists promoting the role of individualism and competitiveness as the mark of the modern/capitalist/democratic/society. Choice in education as understood as policy intervention in the west, has not gained enough momentum in case of developing country such as India. However in the west and first world/developed countries it is an established pathfinder for education for all. The policy has found its advocates, critiques, successes and failures. To dwell further, the real argument for parental choice and school autonomy is reduction of inequality in order to access education and fulfil the goal of universal elementary education for all. Parental choice is a debate which goes along with the neo liberal policies of the state. The advocates of neo-liberal ideology seek "a fully privatized system *in education* [word added] with vouchers" (Whitty, 1997)[12]. However what matters most is to engage with the understanding that policies are part of the political reflection of the same society or more precisely of the same stratified society. Class stratification is one out of many ways stratification is explained of a particular society. With stratification of the society among the classes varying in order and degree in the realm of economic, cultural and social, research involving policy making debates cannot be understood without the subtle involvement or influence of the above. In this context, cited by Ball, Poulantza (1973)[13] has expressed way back that the state and thereafter its policies is a condensation of class struggle, whereas according to Parkin (1979)[14] "...it is the distillation of class antagonism". Mostly the parent's influence is visible at the institutional level through their intervention for demand of either a particular type of course, pedagogy, extracurricular and a high degree of competitive environment in school. Schools are bound to compete with each other, project their reputation contingent upon the examination performance. Students who are product of good reputation school are valued more in the market than others. And it is not ironical

[12]Geoff, Whitty, Creating Quasi-Markets in Education: A Review of Recent Research on Parental Choice and School Autonomy in Three Countries, *Review of Research in Education*, 22, pp. 3-47. 1997,

[13] N Poulantza, *Political Power and Social Classes,* London: New Left Books, [cited in Ball (2003)], 1973.

[14] F Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A bourgeois Critique,* London: Tavistock, [cited in Ball (2003)], 1979.

that the most sought after and highly valued are the middle class. This is the classed nature of policy. In what Ball (2003)[15] prefers to describe "the logic of the market is that schools will develop policies which are attractive to and serve the interest of the middle class families" (p.46). And thus the mutual dialogue is complete as mentioned earlier. Family background, which generation learner and quality of parents' education are all important criteria for selection of a child. Not to forget that English is most sought after medium of education in schools and parents are unwilling to forgo this attribute for any other offer. English is a must; it is a global language, a language of competition and key to the future profession. Also parents are conscious of the background of other children studying in the same school. While interviewing the parents for the project, it was explicitly mentioned by parents that school discipline and intermingling of children with particular set of pupil was mandatory for better personality development. It is probably the second most important criteria parents seek, when they review the education space within the school as Walzer (1984)[16] write "parents take a much livelier interest in the schoolmates than in the school books of their children" (p.215). Thus choice is an antagonistic and romantic affair between both middle class families and schools who wish to provide education to this section of the society.

It will be however a challenging time for the schools (*private schools!*) as well as parents to come to terms with the recent policy change in order to bring right to education in effect. Schools are disinterested to compromise with their professional attitude and do not want to lose education consumers they find in middle class parents. Middle class parents laden with own socio-cultural values and inhibitions, and strong competitive ethos will not like to give anything less to their children, it is more like what they missed out, their child should not. This time is to revisit the idea of

[15] Stephen Ball, *Class Strategies and Education Market: The Middle Class and Social Advantage*, London: Routledge, 2003.
[16] M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A defence of pluralism and Equality*, Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1984.

education, growth of middle class, embedded aspirations, schools as social institutions and their interplay in the education market along with the pervasive neo-liberal policies in education at the same time what do they want and what do they achieve, how do they assess the govt school and the factors which guide them in making the right choice would have implications for the policy makers, the future of the govt and the private school.

Chapter two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Part I- Theoretical Discussion

The conceptualization of this work entails to divide the argument into three broad sociological and educational theories; the conflict theory to understand the social division, theory of social stratification to review the structural inequality and class and functionalist theory to understand the role of education and school. These strands of thought will converge when the discussion builds to argue the development of middle class, its behaviour and how school as an institution to impart education is perceived to perform in a liberal, democratic, globalized society[17]. Second important dimension of the argument is the theories of cultural reproduction which considers the existence of both social and economic attributes along with cultural values to maintain class status with the middle class. And the third important aspect of the discussion is school choice, its voices in a neo-liberal economy and existing market forces which shape the thinking and the behaviour of the middle class. In this sense it is to follow how spaces are negotiated that alter the nature of the governing classes in a particular society, more so when the social mosaic is multicultural, democratic and globalized.

Social stratification and inequality

Cause and reason of inequality exists mainly in two forms; one is the natural inequality and other is the social inequality. It is in these two dimensions that inequality exits per se. The causalities of inequality had drawn attention of early philosophers and thinkers who also crafted the edifice of modern thinking. Several thinkers argued the form in which inequality existed and attempted to provide an appropriate definition of it. Tocqueville was one such thinker for whom society

[17] Globalized Society is here referred to as society laying special emphasis to universal goals.

mattered much more than any general perception to identify how inequality subsists. Thus for him within a democratic society the idea of equality should come naturally to regard law and order in the society which cannot be the case for an aristocratic society. Because in an aristocratic society inequality is inherent as it is a society based on the principal of hierarchy. The thrust of the proposition is in the idea that with the society progressing towards a democratic set up from other forms of statehood, the nature of equality changes from unequal to more equal forms of access and opportunity (Beteille,1983; pg 9)[18]. However this progress to attain equality is not without some limitations which have its natural existence. 'Equality' quite often in contemporary philosophical thinking and writings has been equated with individualism. The statement further dwells on the fact that individualism with high achievement and rewards is possible *(if any)* only if *(and only if)* there is equal chance for an individual to compete and succeed. The idea of unequal rewards only pushes the case of natural inequality further. This argument has been debated by Davis and Moore in *Some Principles of Stratification: The Functionalist Position*[19].

Rousseau has drawn contrast between natural and social inequality by postulating that the former is bestowed by nature itself between men and the later is what men have created (ibid, pg.11). A very grim hypothetical situation arises while arguing that some sort of inequality always existed up to the time one can imagine i.e. since the time social world was created, thus almost nullifying the effect of natural inequality among men. In fact it so became the order of his thought that forms of inequality was meant to be both in a state of nature and in a state of society (ibid, pg.11-12), the two platforms which may explain inequality.

[18] Andre Beteille, *The idea of natural inequality*, New delhi: Oxford, 1983.
[19] Davis and Moore, Some Principles of Stratification: The Functionalist Position, in Dipankar Gupta (ed), *Social Stratification*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.

The general belief that industrialization bore the fruit of equal educational opportunity and attainment has been contested by empirical researches since the time the notion existed in the academia. Sheer merit can take over the personal background of the pupil to determine his/her educational achievement could not stand by its statement for long. The inequality in time and space and in practice existed-it behaved more in the relative sense than in the absolute and which has been debated fervently by Amartya Sen[20] in his writings on relative deprivation and achievement.

Conflict Theories of Class

The division of social strata on the basis of class occurs as the society progresses from what Marx observed feudal to capitalist and the change in the relationship shared by the units of that society. It was in these early writings of Marx on historical materialism that the notion of 'class' in particular shaped up having its own definite characteristics, distinguishing itself from its other forms in other types of society and social relationships. With the march of capitalism and change in the forces of productions there developed a distinct class strata distinguished from others by material gain and power in the form of ownership and profit from the system of production. For Marx, that human being is distinct social being is because of their conscious awareness of themselves and their situation. They are characterised by the capacity of self-reflection and thus knowledge of their position in society. It is reflected in people's daily existence and incorporated in the material world as well. And these conception are produced relative to the social structures in which they are 'born', 'raised' and 'live' (Turner, 2005: 133)[21]. It is extremely important to note here that even if Marx's' writings had had strong economic overbearing in interpreting social positions of individuals, he did not exempt the fact that individuals position is

20 Amartya Sen, Development as freedom, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 2000.

[21] Turner, Jonathan H. (1987) *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, Jaipur: Rawat Publication. Reprinted ed. 2005.

also governed by the social structures and their personal history in a way, when he goes on to say that time and space both matters in shaping of individual consciousness. Thus it is in ones capacity to use mediums such as language, ability to think/reflect/analyze that eventually allows one to alter one's environment (*in/against ones favour*). It is as argued further by Marx that this is not some mechanical relation in conformity with the material world but by virtue of the innate abilities which people posses can create 'new material conditions' and 'corresponding social relations' (ibid: 133). While theory of Marx spoke about clear division of class into those who own the means of production and those who do not, however he did not ignore that the class system is highly complex system than mere stark division of society in to two. He mentioned a third class, called the transitional class. Hodges (1961)[22] interpretation fits best in order to elaborate further on transitional class mentioned by Marx. They comprise (a) *'artisans'* who employ no-one and are not themselves employed, who because of this might be seen as lying outside the capitalist system and hence also outside its system of classes; (b) the *petty bourgeoiseie*, i.e. those relatively small employers who are relatively limited users of capital and are themselves often 'politically oppressed' under capitalism; (c) *commercial and supervisory intermediate class groups* 'realizers' of capital on behalf of capitalists, rather than producers of surplus value; (d) *the new middle class:* professional and technical workers.

Weber on the other hand not only imported insights to his own work from the writings of Marx but also transcended the theoretical discourse. At the economic level Weber sees it beyond ownership/non-ownership of means of production. It is resources such as those which include skills and credentials or qualifications and ensure some position to the individual in job market. Earnings of these individuals are higher because of the intangible assets they have earned instead of some tangible property. These ensue in to a better market position for the individuals as they are

[22] Hodges, D, (1961) The Intermediate Classes in Marxian theory, *Social Research,* 23.

more marketable than others who lack such intangible attributes. Thus occupation is considered as an important economic category based on which class divisions were initially made in capitalist and modern society. But the contribution made in the form of the *status* group by Weber changed the range of understandings developed hereafter of class. Instead of compromising and deliberating on the existence of two class systems in the society, he moved ahead to theorize that it is also about status situation of groups and individuals which mark one class distinct from another, though his proposition on status is independent of class divisions. According to him, it is the social esteem irrespective of the economic well being of a family. "It depends upon peoples subjective evaluations of social differences; it is governed by the varying styles of life groups follow". Linked with this are expectations of restrictions on social intercourse with those not belonging to the circle and assumed social distance toward inferiors (Giddens, 1989: 211-212[23]; Coser, 1977:228-230[24]).

In Weber's another set of writings on class and education, it is argued that the primary activity of schools is to teach particular 'status culture'. According to him 'power relationship and conflicting interests of individuals and groups in society influence educational systems for it is in the interests and purpose of the dominant groups in society that shape the schools. Within school, the "insiders" whose status culture, is reinforced and the "outsiders" face barriers' (Ballentine, 1983: 9)[25]. These groups differ in cultural status such as ethnic group, power derived from position in government or other organization. In relation to Marx's' interpretation on conflict theory, education is a means to produce disciplined labour force for many functions the society has to perform. Conflict theorist such as Willard Waller (1965)[26] declares mass education as a tool of capitalist society, "controlling entrance into higher levels

[23] Anthony Giddens, *Sociology,* Oxford: Polity Press, 1989.
[24] Lewis Coser,
[25] J H. Ballantine, *The Sociology of Education: A systematic analysis,* :New Jersey: Prentice hall,1983
[26] Willard Waller, *The Sociology of Teaching,* New York: Wiley, 1965

of education through the selection and allocation function and manipulating the public". Schools are thus in the state of continuous disequllibrium; teachers and authorities are in continuous threat of losing job, or under pressure by students, parents, schools boards, etc. There are competing interest groups within the school itself.

Reproductionist Perspectives

Situating the discussion on the theoretical understanding of Michael Apple (1995)[27] on the relationship shared between class and school system, will help us decipher the intra-structural variations between the state and the society. In a way he belongs to the reproductionist school of thought expressing that schools play the role of ideological state apparatus a concept propounded by Louis Althusser. He says "schools produces agents with the appropriate dispositions, values and ideologies taught through a hidden curriculum. Its major role is to fulfil the needs of the social division of labour in the society. And educational institutions are the *spaces* producing the particular knowledge and cultural forms 'required'[28] by an 'unequal society'[29]" (ibid 1995: 83). Thus there is continuous form of exchange between those who are part of this unequal system and also feel the 'requirement' to reproduce their cultural status through state social apparatuses, school being one of them. Thus he says as schools are involved in commodification of culture, there are specific class cultures lived out in schools, class cultures which are desires of certain class groups. It goes beyond mere interpretation on the basis of economic or occupation factors (*contrasting Marx and extending Weber*), that one can comprehend the class dynamics/conflicts shared in the society. What constitutes this magnum is, as Apple puts, "one's relationship to the control and production of cultural and economic capital. More importantly it connotes a complex and creative cultural process as well

[27] Michael Apple, *Education and Power*, New York, London: Routledge, 1995
[28] Essentially needs elaboration on the basis of class gratification
[29] Has its own law of structural existence based on class division of the society.

including language, style, intimate social relations, wishes, desires and so on." (ibid: 84).

While we talk about class relations in general it is imperative to know the social division of the class system as exits in the modern society. Emergence of Middle class in the contemporary time is witnessed with the rise of industrialization. It is a vast category and in Britain it is found to be the largest social group. Further fragmented into higher-middle class, middle-middle class and lower-middle class, the gap between the higher and the next two is more distinct than the gap between middle and the lower in terms of education, occupation and *weltanschauung*. The middle-middle class and lower-middle class are overlapping categories marked by difference in profession and education. However both sub-classes hold liberal views on social and political issues and uphold common attitudes towards the working class professional people doing blue collar jobs. It is argued that middle class are mostly the professional class but find themselves in contradictory situations of 'dual closure' that is they are caught between conflicting pressures and influences continuously. [Wright (1985)[30] and Parkin (1978)[31]]

Leading towards the aspect of culture and symbolic domination in society and social institutions such as school, cultural reproductionist has majorly contributed to the exposition of the education system and class. The contribution made by Michael Apple, Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein cannot probably be completely understood if read and comprehended in isolation from each other.

Sociology of education tries to examine the contribution made by the education system to the reproduction of the structure of power relationships and symbolic relations between classes. This occurs with the distribution of cultural capital among

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[30] E. Wright, *Class, Crises and the State,* London: New Left Books, 1978.
---- *Classes,* London: Verso, 1985.

[31] F. Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique,* London: Tavistock, 1979.

these classes. Bourdieu (1973)[32] lays emphasis to study the laws that determine the tendency of structures to reproduce themselves by producing agents "with the system of predispositions", who are capable of imbibing practices adapted to the structures and thereby contributing to the reproduction of the structure. Educational institution is capable of making crucial contribution to the art of the structural dynamics of class relation an aspect hitherto neglected in the episteme of sociology of power. Education system follows a routine mechanism by whose means the conservation of a culture inherited from the past takes place. However reproductionist such as Bourdieu mentions the limitations of functionalists who in the process of delineating social reproduction have overlooked the reproduction of culture in the education system. The classical theories are based upon the implicit assumption that the different pedagogic actions which are carried out by the families from different social classes as well as that which is practiced by the school, work together harmoniously to transmit a cultural heritage which is considered property of the whole society. The reality according to him is not this. What Bourdieu proposes is that

"The inheritance of cultural wealth has been accumulated and bequeathed by generations together only really belongs to those endowed with the means of appropriating it for themselves. There are codes to decipher the cultural goods as symbolic goods and possession of these goods depends on these codes...thus appropriation of symbolic goods presupposes the possession of the instrument of appropriation giving free play to the laws of cultural transmission to be added to cultural capital" (ibid). His analysis directly corresponds to one as consumer of culture with the hierarchical economic capital and power one possesses. On the

[32] Pierre Bourdieu, Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction, in Richard Brown, *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change,* London: Tavistock, 1973.

other hand Bernstein[33] (1973: 375, in Brown, 1973) expresses succinctly "for many, socialization into knowledge is socialization into order, the existing order, into the experiences that the world's educational knowledge is impermeable". However only few with their successful socialization have access to such permeable, flexible knowledge which can be used for higher studies or even aspire for it. The argument here is that the transmission of knowledge to the child from one domain to another like from family to school and to the occupational world and hence the virtuous cycle can only be successfully completed if all the structural domains are functioning in coherence and are complementary to each other. That is knowledge gained from family is successfully put to use in school for higher learning and eventually after successive educational accomplishments is confidently used in jobs and transmitted to the next generation for the perpetuation of the same knowledge and values. This occurs with the specific cultural training and socialization of the individual in a particular way of life style. Theoretically the different classes or sections of classes are organized around three major positions from reproductionist school of thought:-

1) The lower positions: agricultural professions, worker, small trades people)
2) Intermediate position: heads and employees of industry and business, intermediate office staff
3) Higher position: higher office staff, professionals. (Bourdieu, 1973)[34]

The Middle Class and Education

Class has been discussed by many theorists who added to the work of Marx and Weber or drew limitation of their work and proposed other episteme to understand the class variation in an industrial, modern, capitalist society. Rejecting

[33] Basil Bernstein, On the classification and framing of educational Knowledge, in Richard Brown, *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change*, London: Tavistock, 1973.
[34] Pierre Bourdieu, Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction, in Richard Brown, *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change*, London: Tavistock, 1973.

the theory of 'end of class' among the class analysts, Ball and Vincent (2001)[35] proposes it to be an untimely pronouncement and appeals to look at the phenomenon closely for the transition that it is undergoing. Middle class expansion in the present time is immense and its behaviour in the education market has to be addressed to develop education policy suitable to the democratic governance system that seeks education for all. According to the scholars "material, discursive and psychological class differences remain a crucial explanatory component of persistent social inequality" (ibid: 180). That it is important to address the continuity and change simultaneously is what Savage and Butler (1995)[36] and Reay (1998)[37] emphasise in order to make sense of the reality, a reality which is undergoing transition with respect to change in the social, economic and material paradigms.

Where on one hand Ball (2001)[38] persists with his view that middle class parents are intervening in the education practices to preserve their own class interests, Bourdieu says they are able to do it because "these are largely an expression of the system of explicit or implicit values which they have as a result of belonging to a particular social class" (Bourdieu, 1966: 33)[39]. And that different social classes send, despite equal talent, a different proportion of their children to lycèes[40] can often be an expression of their 'parental choice' (ibid, 1966). Argument extended by Bourdieu contests the statement that parental choice is in most cases determined by real possibilities alone. He lays emphasis to the fact that objective conditions of the parents are not the sole determinant of choosing a particular type of education.

[35]Stephen Ball and Carol Vincent "New Class Strategies in education: The Strategies of the Fearful Middle Classes" in J. Demaine, ed. (2001) *Sociology of Education Today,* New York: Palgrave, 2001.
[36]M. Savage and T, Butler, Assets and the middle class in contemporary Britain, in T. Butler and M, Savage (eds), *Social Change and the Middle classes,* London: UCL Press, 1995.
[37] D. Reay, Rethinking Social Class: Qualitative perspective on Class and Gender, *Sociology,* 32:2, 1998.
[38] Stephen Ball and Carol Vincent "New Class Strategies in education: The Strategies of the Fearful Middle Classes" in J. Demaine, ed. (2001) *Sociology of Education Today,* New York: Palgrave, 2001.
[39] Pierre Bourdiue: " The school as a conservative force: scholastic and cultural inequalities", translated by J C Whitehouse, Reprinted from, Pierre Bourdiue, 'l'école conservatrice', Revue française de Sociologie, 7, pp 225-6, 330-42, 346-7 with permission from author and publisher, 1966.
[40] Type of School in France

Elsewhere he exemplifies how various strata of privileged class families exercise cultural habits and dispositions such "as reading, and theatre, concert, art cinema and museum attendance" (Bourdieu: 75; in Brown, 1973)[41]. He goes deeper in to the debate and exposes the concept of real chances tailored by the middle class a transitional class, through education who thereafter is in a position to achieve what they want by integrating the values of social success and cultural prestige. With the middle class children there is interminating support coming from the parents in the form of encouragement and urge to perform better in school work, as well as getting on in the society through school and fulfilling the gap of cultural poverty. Bourdieu underlines the fact that children and families make their own choices by their governing attitudes and considering the constraints which determine their existence. According to him the structure of "objective chances of social mobility" and "subjective hopes" that demand conformity towards the group, shape their wishfulness to gradually go up the ladder of success and become part of the upper culture. For them it is always to strive for better (ibid). Here we need to juxtapose the reality against which Bourdieu has extended his analysis of the cultural and social reproduction. For him the reference point was the working class people, their various forms of deprivation and their under achievements. The discourse extended by him is that aspiration of individual is essentially dependent on the probability to make their desired goal a success (ibid). Bringing in what Marx had proposed that the consciousness of one's self and external situation is essential for a good standard of life. The middle class drive is unstoppable in the present neo-liberal era when opportunities are democratically distributed and rights exist to mitigate any form of exploitation. The point of deviation using Bourdieu's work emerges when the current work hopes to delineate the already existing dispositions with the middle class in the form of cultural ethos and social achievements to be viewed in comparison with their

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[41] P. Bourdieu, Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction, in Richard Brown, *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change: Papers in Sociology of Education*, London: Tavistock, 1973.

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future choice making behaviour in the present system of schooling especially in the case of India.

The milieu in which one can situate Bourdieu has undergone transition over a period of time with the massive expansion of the middle class and change in the educational structure. What once upon a time could have been a choice of the privileged classes is now a possibility envisaged by last two strata of the segregated middle class. The proliferation of private schools which provide English education and cater to the rising demand of various kinds so as to fit the competent children in this highly competitive world with the required exigencies is one approach of grasping the change. There is disappearance of elite public (government) school from the education market giving way to more private local/regional/ and private international schools. Thus what culminates into an excellent career of an individual belonging to a middle class family is a reflection of parental information on subjects of study and careers and crucial decision making ability at a very early stage. Therefore factors and alternatives available with the parents to make a conclusive choice have to be discovered at numerous social contexts to expose the specificity of class behaviour, especially with regard to the middle class.

The Neo-liberal context and choice

Neo-liberalism arises with those theories that advocate an extension of market rules and principals to public and private sector organizational restructuring (Olssen et al. 2004)[42]. Along with the liberal elements of the state, "the postulates of such a state were the self-interested individual i.e. universal egoism, invisible hand theory i.e. individual interests were interests of the society as a whole and political maxim of laissez-faire, neo-liberalism added more to it. This shift was registered in the subject position from *homo economicus*, who naturally behaves out of self interest and is

[42] Mark Olssen, John Codd, Anne-Marie O'Neill, *Education Policy: Globalization, Citizenship and Democracy*, New Delhi: Sage, 2004.

relatively detached from the state to *manipulatable man* who is created by the state and who is continually encouraged to be 'perpetually responsive'" (ibid: 137). The state seeks to see an 'enterprise in ourselves'. The neoliberal lobby[43] vouches for commitment to individual liberty and reduced intervention of the state. With that they are trying to suggest the celebration of assumed superiority of the market mechanisms to ensure *more than* (emphasis added) economic prosperity. Market should be allowed to operate as widely as possible within the social order as it induces competition through which resources and status are allocated efficiently and fairly. Market is inherently an unequal space. It accentuates inequality as not everyone in the society can participate in the market. Those cannot, are the ones left out. According to this lobby, in education policy making there should be a reduction of state services through privatization via user charges, contracting out, vouchers and others. Also individual in a neoliberal way are rational optimizers and are best judges of their own interests and needs with freedom that they can exercise. The new middle class suitably behaves and can be contextualized within this framework of mind. Ethics is no more a state monopoly and becomes a matter of a private individual. The market mechanism and democratic conditions both govern witness to this sweeping change (ibid: 137-139). The neo-liberals argue that choice infuses competition and eventually it would usher in improvement in quality. Effective choice entails empowerment of the parents.

Middle class's desire to excel and achieve to find themselves in a beneficial and advantageous position than others forces this class to behave mostly in the neoliberal way, exercising choice which is governed by their reason and availability of social, economic and cultural resources.

[43] Widely known neoliberal proponents are Frederich Hayek, Milton Friedman, Robert Nozick, James Buchanan, Gary Becker and Oliver Williamson

The public choice theory was propounded by the neoliberals. A major proponent of the public choice approach James Buchanan was of the view that any coherent social welfare enterprise must inevitably entail the impositions of will of some other members or groups over others. Along with Hayek and Friedman, Buchanan characterizes that economics is a process where there is voluntary exchange of goods and services between competing individuals (ibid). And thus his work reflects the proposition that collective entities such as a 'society' or the 'public' does not exist as they were reducible to individual experiences. This 'methodological individualism' was central to Buchanan's approach as every possible analysis or redefining the paradigms of change becomes contingent upon the individual person as decision maker. It is important to learn here that for him it was both a method of analysis as well as norm of organising society (Marginson, 1992: 47)[44]. In the education market each middle class family if considered as single transitional unit exercise this decision making power in the globalized post-modern world. Marginson (1997)[45] has critiqued economics of education and has dealt with the power dynamics in the realm of education extending a scope to understand the kind of education that it enables values and promotes and the effects it has on the educational practices that it excludes and reworks. The argument is that no individual or group can be absolutely governed by themselves. Theories in favour of government have to be revisited. Another substantial position made against the welfare state and blind control of the state and in favour of freedom of individuals was through this axiom; "all dimensions of behaviour associated with the private sphere were off limits as far as the social policies of state action were concerned. In state's absence people will exchange in order to improve their well being. Inherently subjective that individual preference is, according to Buchanan they cannot be transformed into judgements of

[44]Marginson, S. *The free market: a study of Hayek, Friedman, Buchanan and the effects on the public good.* Kensington, NSW: Public Sector Research Centre, University of New south Wales, 1992.

[45] ----------Subjects and subjugation: the economics of education as power knowledge, *Discourse Studies in the cultural politics of education,* 18 (2), 1997.

a collective sort" (Olssen, 2004: 157)[46]. However what is brought forth in the theoretical fringe is the act of the state both in its positive and negative roles and negative and positive freedom. Buchanan's positive state does a grand work; the productive arm of the positive state effectively extracts compliance from individuals in order to engineer a market order (ibid: 159). The mind set is very affirmative and positive along with hopes of a regulated market by the positive form of state power.

Not withholding the fact that education especially school education being a public good and its changing nature with the change in the education policy making, what entails is a justified analyses of what should ideally incorporate the ideologies of the emerging but dominant social class who seek education as a requirement for their growth and what exists for them in the education market having its own positives and negative externalities. Choice theory moves ahead considering both the social and the economic factors in tandem with each other.

Choice entailed in the neoliberal theory draws directly from an understanding of the consumer demand which is not really what is understood as social need. The demands generated are skewed and determined by the family's dispositions, purchasing power and ability to ignore other needs for quality education for their children. Nevertheless market breeds inequality and needs a regulation mechanism to diminish the possibility of unwarranted neglect in availing quality education. The social ends of education justified by the neoliberal perspective seek to provide freedom of choice in schooling contested by the welfare state approach. The middle class does not any more want to remain underachievers, their values being in convergence with what neoliberal attitude believes of what knowledge and education ought to give[47]. Ball (2001)[48] argues that "school choice is a critical point of cultural

[46] Mark Olssen et al., *Education Policy: Globalization, Citizenship and Democracy*, New Delhi: Sage, 2004
[47] To be discussed extensively in the 4th chapter on Analyses.
[48] Stephen Ball and Carol Vincent, New Class Strategies in education: The Strategies of the Fearful Middle Classes, in J. Demaine, ed. *Sociology of Education Today*, New York: Palgrave, 2001.

investment in the symbolic economy. Schooling, of certain sorts, is an effective means of storing value for future realization." (pg.185). Choice of school for many families is a venture or strategy of adaptation to safeguard or augment their class ranking.

Borrowing from economic rational choice theory of consumer behaviour in the marketplace, advocates of deregulated educational choice argue that when families are given tuition vouchers to spend at public or private schools of their choice, they will act rationally, in a goal oriented fashion, to maximize their educational utility by finding the 'best ' school for their children. This demand for high quality schools will in turn force all schools to compete for students in market place where 'bad' schools attract few customers and eventually go out of business (Wells and Crain, 1992)[49].

And there is another hope which exceeds in the form of social benefits rendered through public education that is with the resurrection of the welfare state. Redefining the role of the state with power and control being de-centralized, the argument needs an extensive discussion to be dealt with the issue of right to quality education and the provision of elementary education as a fundamental right in India.

Part II- Literature Review

The Education Space: Its Philosophical debate

The current debate of the work can stand upright on the theoretical grounding unless exposed through myriad of work undertaken in similar context in India and elsewhere. What got this review undulating is a vital article by Susan L. Robertson (2010)[50] appealing to consider a critical lens to view sociology of

[49] Amy Stuart Wells and Robert L. Crain, Do parents choose school quality or school status? A sociological theory of free market education, in Jr. P W. Cookson ed., *The Choice Controversy,* California: Corwin Press Inc., 1992.

[50] Susan L. Robertson, 'Spatializing' the sociology of education: Stand-points, entry-points, vantage-points; in Apple et al. *The Routledge International Handbook of Sociology of Education,* New York: Routledge, 2010.

education. Which according to her is "seeing the difference that space along with time and sociality" creates in the realm of modernity and helps develop an understanding of contemporary knowledge making, social reproduction and constitution of subjectivities (Massey, 2005[51]; Soja, 1996[52]). The social relation of education space is something Robertson is trying to make sense of in this order of understanding. To see the epistemological and ontological premises of a critical theory, to develop a 'vantage point' to see the process of education and evaluate a 'stand point' from which there is continuous production of education space and any anticipatory change emerging through the analysis. It is further added through analysis done on leading theorist[53] (p.15) on space that space is 'social and real' and that spaces are epistemologically either 'perceived', 'conceived' or 'lived' using what Lefebre (1991)[54] proposed or as 'absolute', 'relative' and 'relational' as what Harvey (2006)[55] developed in his argument. It is evoked hereby that education space incorporates both variation of interpretation mentioned above to re-produce modern societies and entails transformations of the same system.

Ideas of Lefebvre (1991)[56] whose views as a Marxian was not constricted in the space that Marx had created to understand the social dynamics. He made an incising contribution. For him ideas are perpetually produced, histories are constructed and minds are made. And thus spaces are outcome of action/operation and are not objects which are static by its basic nature. He propels us to see the truth of space which cannot however be done by having only biased or sympathetic perspective.

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[51] D. Massey, *For Space,* London: Sage; 2005.

[52] E. Soja, *Third space: journeys to Los Angeles and other real and imagined spaces,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996.

[53] Lefebre, Soja, Harvey, Massey, Smith, Brenner and Jessop et al. cited in Robertson, Susan L. Spatializing the sociology of education: Stand Points, entry points, vantage points, in Apple, ed. *The Routledge international handbook of sociology of education,* New York: Routledge, 2010.

[54] H. Lefebvre, *The production of space* (trans. Donald Nicholsan-Smith), Oxford: Blackwell; 1991.

[55] D. Harvey, Space as a keyword, in N Castree and D Gregory, *David Harvey: A critical reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

[56] H. Lefebvre *The production of space* (trans. Donald Nicholsan-Smith), Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

While acknowledging the fact that not every phenomenon is a social fact and not every phenomenon can be put under the lens of sociological enquiry, if the society is undergoing transition it is as a whole though not necessarily at a time. Any social entity left out during the process of knowledge creation in the form of structure, group, institution, or individual, will only leave the endeavour half done. A space more profoundly created and theoretically described by mathematicians is however transcendental in nature while we try and make sense of it in real. Therefore social science provides rather practical scope to determine the epistemological creation of spaces represented by various forms of interaction, relation, practices, symbols, identities and 'utopias' as experienced in reality.

In the philosophy of education often referred to are the derivatives of the fundamental choices people make. The curriculum, pedagogy, educational objectives or organizational arrangement is analyzed and subject matter and skill development is reviewed. Thus arises some fundamental questions which deem to be addressed. Among them few of concern are what is knowledge? What is learning and how it can be measured? What is the nature of the world? How shall it be studied and interpreted? And many more such reflective questions make this journey invincible. In addressing these questions however varied philosophical, psychological, social and political assumptions are applied. The choices made and the resulting schools created are grounded in the assumptions and commitment made concerning one's own perspectives towards value system and life (Kane, 1992)[57].

John Dewey suggests that schools could provide a universal foundation for the spiritual and intellectual life. He says "....Education is the modern universal purveyor and upon the schools shall rest the responsibility for seeing to it that we recover our

[57] Jeffrey Kane, Choice the Fundamentals Revisited, in Jr. P W. Cookson ed., *The Choice Controversy,* California: Corwin Press Inc., 1992.

threatened religious heritage." (Ratner, 1970, pp 504-505)[58]. The schools of a nation constitute the primary formal institution for shaping the emerging human mind.

In the context of America, their faith in education evolves from the need for a national identity (Cremin, 1977)[59]. Their instrument to assimilate different nationalities in their country was through building a pan-American identity through common schooling system. Children in their country have gone to public schools to be initiated into citizenship. Public education in turn has gained importance in their social and political pursuit even though it has failed to churn out literate and numerate students (Cookson, 1992)[60]. Collins through his work in 1979[61] noted that the credentializing function of education not only sorts and selects students by class background but establishes a unifying ideology of group cohesion.

The Choice Argument from the standpoint of Education

What Giddens[62] would suggest is that the contemporary individual is confronted with plurality of choices because there is no fixed action plan imposed on them and individuals live in multiple life worlds simultaneously. Choice gains a new connotation which entails moving away from the traditional lessons which helped consolidate values easily. With anxiousness and uncertainty being the hall mark of modernity it is the market through which individual gains certainty of their life process. Though market inherently influxes further uncertainty however individuals can channelize this by adopting lifestyles which routinise everyday choice. In the case of availability of type of education in schools and the competitiveness thrown open by

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[58] J. Ratner (ed.) *Characteristics and Events: Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy* (Vol-2) New York; Octagon; 1970.
[59] L A. Cremin, *Traditions of American Education,* New York: Basic Books, 1977.
[60] Jr. P W. Cookson, The Ideology of Consumership and the Coming Deregulation of the Public School System, in Jr. P W. Cookson ed., *The Choice Controversy,* California: Corwin Press Inc., 1992.
[61] R Collins, *The Credential Society,* New York: Academic Press, 1979.
[62] Anthony Giddens, *Sociology,* Oxford: Polity Press, 1989.

the private players it is noteworthy to understand the emergence of role of choice in school education (Martens, 2005)[63].

Educational choice has been much in policy and academic debate in the recent times. As choice entails diversity and significant factor which will determine choice would be diversity of schools; school diversity essentially being a policy matter. The foundations of choice if argued in the philosophical sense can be situated in these multifaceted elaborations. That 'schools are a product of choice' is a fact not unknown to the policy makers and the consumers of education. But it necessitates learning and engaging in the debate of what constitutes choice and how it has been realized from one class to another and from state to state in the era of post liberalization. It is articulated that schools inherently embody in their function organization and content; judgement regarding the nature and purpose of education; assertion about human intelligence, knowledge and being as well as the supposition regarding the respective rights and responsibilities of the individual and the state. Where such judgements have not been made either explicitly or tacitly there are no schools (Kane, 1992)[64].

For example with a rapid change in the American economy, a diploma from the public schools did not provide the necessary skills to sustain in the world of economic competition. This brought down the expectation from the public schools massively. And decline of the public was accompanied by the rise of the private schools. Chubb and Moe (1988)[65] through their empirical findings have argued strongly that the private sector schools are more effective than their public counterparts because they are market driven and thus more competitive than public

[63] Lydia Martens, Learning to consume - Consuming to learn: children at the interface between consumption and education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 26 (3) pp. 343-357, 2005.

[64] Jeffrey Kane, Choice the Fundamentals Revisited, in Jr. P W. Cookson ed., *The Choice Controversy,* California: Corwin Press Inc., 1992.

[65] J E. Chubb and T M. Moe, Politics Markets and Organization of Schools, *American Political Science Review,* 84 (4), pp 1065-87, 1988.

sector schools. However family background has a definite impact on the schooling of the child and any analyses on the academic effectiveness of both types of schools is not free from this consideration. Nevertheless that difference exists among public and private schools is significant enough to initiate reform. Thus neo-liberal school reformers propose to treat education as a consumer item like any other consumer good. American families are convinced to believe that state control on education is what ails American education. Most parents thus, as argued by Cookson (1987)[66], are disturbed more by the lack of discipline in the schools and what they perceive to be poor teaching than they are by governance issues.

In a discreet definition provided by Department for Education (London) diversity in school education means the range of types of education provision, geared to local circumstances and individual need (DfE 1994a: para5, cited from Glatter, Woods and Bagley, 1997)[67]. For parents, diversity is more than a mere policy concept. Schools on the other hand also respond to the competitive market situation by aspiring to be better than others, this involves their interest to be able and willing to provide what 'consumers' want or can be persuaded to 'purchase'. It is important for schools to recognize this need and be a potential provider of what is valued by parents. Thus parents and schools become part of this competition in a market like situation, to avail better schools, quality education and optimum output. The case is however not as simple as it seems. Choice of parents for certain type of school is dependent on several factors such as their own socio-economic and educational background. Focusing the case in India, class groups already carry their ascribed status to begin with. Ball (2003)[68] argues that not adequate attention has been paid to

[66] Jr. P W. Cookson, More, different, or better? Strategies for the study of private education. *Education Policy*, 1. 289-294, 1987.
[67] R. Glatter, P A. Woods and C Bagley ed., *Choice and Diversity in schooling: Perspectives and Prospects*, London: Routledge, 1997.
[68] Stephen Ball, *Class Strategies and Education Market: The Middle Class and Social Advantage*, London: Routledge, 2003.

the ways by which social and educational hierarchies are reproduced as different groups are 'confronted by 'systematic contradictions' and the uneven distribution of resources, of different kinds, which enable reflection and choice, despite some generalisations.

The gospel of free market school choice rests on two main pillars of faith. The first declares that choice is a panacea for virtually all our educational problems and the second that only free market mechanisms can unleash human ingenuity, individuality and creativity. The work of Chubb and Moe (1988)[69] is significant in this light because they assert that they have solid empirical evidence that market-driven schools are superior to schools that are governed through ' direct democratic control'. An important quote cited from Cookson (1992)[70] of what Chubb and Moe (1990, 189)[71] think why choice is panacea "...[T]he authority to make educational choices is radically decentralized to those most immediately involved. Schools compete for the support of parents and students, and parents and students are free to choose among schools. The system is built around decentralization, competition and choice." But more importantly markets do not operate naturally but are socially constructed. The relationship between supply and demand is influenced by culture, class, and consumption (Cookson, 1992; 94). Choice is thus guaranteed to those who can afford to choose.

The ideal question is to how to get the best education. And precisely this is what parents aspire for if they have overcome the difficulty of demanding education for their children. As in the west the choice factor has already changed the shape of education and diversity in schooling has to an extent taken care of the demands for

[69] J E. Chubb and T M. Moe, Politics Markets and Organization of Schools, *American Political Science Review,* pp 1065-87, 1988.
[70] Jr. P W. Cookson ed., The Choice Controversy, California: Corwin Press Inc., 1992.
[71] J E. Chubb and T M. Moe, *Politics Markets and America's Schools,* Washington DC: Brookings Institution; 1990.

better schools in affordable price. Desirability of parents is also dependent on their affordability encompassing social capital, social class and choice. Schools will compete with each other and thus many developing nations are yet to implement this progressive provision in the education system. This is due to the fact that schools will not merely remain institutions to impart education but they themselves will become market players and will vouch for their profit. Those at loss will be those who cannot afford to send their children to such competitive schools. A very recent article on private schools refusing to take children from poor economic background even though it is abiding by law published in a national daily in India only proves the non-compatibility of the current education reform. Thus parents have to marry the idea of what is desired to the idea of school selection.

Choice in the interest of equity or privatization is in contest with each other. Discord among the educationist and economist is on diversity and opening the schools for competition. The fear is those who are not enabled with the right capital, whether they are capable to even enter the domain of choice at all.

School choice has mostly been discussed from the perspectives of parents, however there are studies which tried to focus on choice through the voices of the children and have produced insights in contrary to the prevalent beliefs of what constitutes choice. It is said that more distant subjects are from economic necessity; the more choice becomes a possibility. It is not to do with economic and material objects alone. Cultural capital and institutional and familial habitus also resonate to the choice made. Thus the findings exert the understanding that possibility of choice cannot in any straight forward way be seen as coterminous with class positioning, as it varies with respect to intra class differences as well (Reay, 2003)[72].

[72] Diane Reay and Helen Lucey, The limits of 'choice' : Children and inner city schooling, *Sociology*, 37 (1), pp 121-142, 2003.

Examples of school choice could be from places like Marshampton in UK in which schools have witnessed structural diversity. The average population in the area is professional and middle class household. The only alternative to state schooling is private schooling if public schools are not performing well in the town. Also religious or philosophical diversity is represented via catholic schools. Increasing number of admission and subscription level and successful academic orientation in terms of examination passes as also reputation of the school marks the status of the schools in own. Schools of various statures compete to increase their appeal beyond the town without compromising with its existing seats making schools more exclusive and elitist. Schools have emphasised to dwell on the aspects of discipline policy rather than religious orientation which the catholic schools feel are not attractive enough for the parents. Schools continuously prefer to improve, rather than differentiating, on their reputation, working at links with other schools and making changes along the traditional lines intended to improve academic performance and discipline. Efforts made by school are to remain less cut off from the race of reputation than massively differentiating from each other. However another settlement inhabited by working class population and people from Bangladesh offer a different set up under which schools function. Differentiation is sought in schools of this town through vocational training such providing technological boost up in the schools, the idea is to attract more middle class parents and thereby increase its intake of above average ability pupils. Another small town surrounded by rural population where schools made no move towards either differentiation or diversity because they are assured of a constant and sufficient high intake of pupils. There is a non- competitive environment expected not to be breached by any school (Glatter, Woods and Bagley, 1997)[73].

[73]R. Glatter, P A. Woods and C Bagley ed., *Choice and Diversity in schooling: Perspectives and Prospects,* London: Routledge, 1997.

A continuous debate on educational choice should not neglect the very ability of the parents to choose, thus simple indicators of educational achievement such as students performance is regarded to be contingent upon variable's such as Father's and Mother's education and measures which reflect the social and economic status of the family (Kifer, 1977)[74]. It is also dependent on right decision making ability of the parents. As 'educational decision making process is not just a path to be navigated; it is a set of values, rationales and emotional responses'. Interestingly said upon school's legitimating myths that efforts and motivation are paramount; a balance among family circumstances, individual ability, and individual aspirations must be maintained; and the 'safe' choice is the rational choice (le Tendre, 1996: p.211)[75].

Bringing in to the forefront the concerns of Basil Bernstein on relationship between school and society, it is viewed by him that the way society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control, (Whitty, 2002: 10)[76]. For him the method of transmission of knowledge and its further interpretation was dependent on the power structure of the society and on specialized principles of communication. (Bernstein, 1996)[77]

The Middle Class Debate

In the earlier section it was discussed that there has been a continuous debate and a fear of decline of the middle class. This fear had led scholars like Patrick Hutber (1976)[78] in his book *The decline and fall of the middle class and how it can fight back* deliberate that middle class somewhere has lost the battle of ideas and 'never has

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[74] Edward Kifer, The Relationship between home and School in influencing the learning of Children, *Research in the Teaching of English,* 11(1), pp. 5-16, 1977.
[75] Gerald K. Le Tendre, Constructed Aspirations: Decision-making processes in Japanese educational Selection, *Sociology of Education,* 69(3), pp 193-216, 1996.
[76] Geoff Whitty, *Making Sense of Education Policy*, London: Paul Chapman, 2002.
[77] B Bernstein, *Pedagogy, symbolic Control and Identity,* London: Taylor and Francis, 1996.
[78] P. Hutber, *The Decline and fall of the middle class and how it can fight back.* London: Associated Business Programmes, 1976.

a section of society more enthusiastically co-operated in its own euthanasia'. This proposition has been perpetually rejected throughout the discourse of class in general and middle class in particular by scholars pursuing their engagements in the interest of the study of this particular class. Power (2001)[79] emphasises referring to Butler and Savage (1995: vii)[80] that the 'gaze' of the researches has been concentrated towards the working classes, poor or the rich and powerful. But majorly in the case of education there is a void created especially with regard to middle class narratives. There is distend in the middle and it has to be accounted for is what Power suggests through her research paper. Power accounting of the middle class population in Britain shows that half the population belongs to this class with about 30 per cent in managerial or professional jobs (Mills, 1995)[81]. If a question is asked to problematize the culture of middle class, she would respond that for the wealthy the privileges could be passed down to the next generation without outside support or approval, but with the middle class, members largely depend upon the credentials earned through education and that is what they want to hold on to, to remain either in the same status position or better it. Similar accounting has been laid out by Nogueira (2010)[82]. Her emphasis lays on the importance of studies across various countries which took interest in investigating new modes of elite formation. Proposing a Brazilian account of what defines middle class there are perspectives emanating from different disciplines such as economics, anthropologist and sociologist, but what sweeps the definition away from all descriptions is the way middle class is associated with its consumption patterns, more so because consumption is a critical factor shaping the identity of the middle class (ibid, cited from Guerra et al., 2006).

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[79] Sally Power, Missing: A Sociology of Educating the Middle Class, in J. Demaine, ed. *Sociology of Education Today,* New York: Palgrave, 2001.

[80] T. Butler and M. Savage (eds.), *Social Change and the Middle Classes,* London: UCL Press, 1995.

[81] C. Mills, Managerial and Professional work histories, in T. Butler and M. Savage (eds.), *Social Change and the Middle Classes,* London: UCL Press, 1995.

[82] Maria A. Nogueira, A Revisited theme: Middle Classes and the School, in Apple et al. *The Routledge International Handbook of Sociology of Education,* New York: Routledge, 2010.

Those social groups in hierarchically positioned higher in the social strata would want to maintain their status position. And further elucidated by Bourdieu (1988: 56)[83], that in order to reproduce itself the group must reproduce the visceral form of recognition of everything which characterizes the existence of the group, its identity, its truth and its world view. Reproduction theories have contributed immensely into its analysis shaped by the debates initiated by theorists like Bowles and Gintis, Bernstein and Bourdieu. They raised question on socialization, culture and language of the privileged which has its bearing on the cultural haves and have-nots in the society.

There is greater tendency to normalize the experiences of this class within the field of education for the very fact that it has been missing from rigorous research. That with the expansion of market, specialized skill requirement for jobs there is an expansion of the credentials as well, thus raising the bar to a higher level in which one can consider oneself a middle class. And to add to the difficulty of mapping the population, as argued middle class is not a 'visible category' per se. It is contextualized that the need for research on them is similar to the need developed to study on the 'whiteness' as against the 'blackness' and the fresh focus of gender studies on masculinity together with issues on women (Power, 2001: 197)[84]. Thus the assumed homogeneity of the middle class is contested and their behaviour needs to be delineated.

There are various reasons for which educationists have appealed to undertake research on middle class and education. Way back in 1975 Bernstein argued that the effects of differentiated schooling on the internal structure and culture of middle class is something valuable for an extended study of the group. So much of expansion of the middle class has resulted in intra-vertical differentiation that it may be wise to

[83] P. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.
[84] Sally Power, Missing: A Sociology of Educating the Middle Class, in J. Demaine, ed. *Sociology of Education Today,* New York: Palgrave, 2001.

call middle classes rather than one middle class. Also Savage et al. (1992)[85] shows the scope of horizontal differentiation based on the ownership of distinctive type of asset. The classification[86] made by Savage and others (ibid) of the middle class is thus:

- The petit bourgeoisie or entrepreneurs holding property assets
- Managers holding organizational assets and
- Professionals holding cultural capital

There is a deeper interest among the founding sociologists such as Durkheim and Weber as is by contemporary scholars to know the features of the culture that distinguishes middle class culture from others. Cultural endowment is not just a matter of cognitive or symbolic knowledge, but entails an education into a socially sanctioned value system, dispositions and sensory orientations to the world (Evans et al., 2010)[87]. Family socialization among middle class children is a means to induce a sense of class position and the zeal to accomplish the desired goals, a study done by Paulsen (1991)[88] on high school reveal how urban context and moderate to high level of socio-economic status of the family influence political socialization among them.

Not only the parents continuously seek premeditated and efficacy maximising choices that can abridge uncertainty, by investing money in private education linking it to finer skills needed in educational and occupational contests (Aurini and Davies, 2005) [89]. The fear of a downfall in the inherited status forces the middle class

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[85] M. Savage, J. Barlow, P. Dickens and A J. Fielding, *Property, Bureaucracy, and Culture: middle class formation in contemporary Britain*. London: Routledge, 1992.

[86] Other classification proposed by theorists are based on sector of employment: the state and the private; based on field of production: old middle class in production and distribution of goods and services, new middle class involved in the production and distribution of symbolic knowledge.

[87] Evans et al., Schooling the Body in a performative Culture, in Apple et al. *The Routledge International Handbook of Sociology of Education*, New York: Routledge, 2010.

[88] Ronnelle. Paulsen, Education, Social Class, and Participation in Collective action, *Sociology of Education*, 64(2), pp 96-110, 1991.

[89] Fuller and Robinson, 1992; Goldthorpe, 1996, cited in J. Aurini and S. Davies, Choices without markets: Homeschooling in the Context of private education, *British Journal of sociology of Education, 26(4), pp461-474*, 2005.

conscious parents to invest in private education as an act of status-consciousness and in countries such as Canada parents have taken a step ahead to ensure their class status by providing alternative private education in the form of home schooling. Choice has thus moved out of the school system altogether allowing the educated and class conscious parents to practise their preferred education philosophy (ibid). Whatever be the form of private education, there is inherent rejection of the public education viewed inferior to other available opportunities either created or available in the education market by the parents as consumers. Such form of educational choice requires well educated, informed and conscious parents what Nogueira (2010)[90] has termed as parentocracy seeking the best education for their children. There is this rising culture of intensive parenting among the middle class parents in order to assess their child's unique talent and shape it in turn. Providing an alternative to the hitherto market philosophy of education, such parenting recognises the language of choice without adopting other components of neoliberal doctrines of mass competitive education (Aurini and Davies, 2005: 471). The expectation of child care is thus sought from schools.

Drawing reference from Max Weber who described class as a multidimensional concept which is determined by three major variables namely wealth[91], power[92] and prestige[93]. Though modern theorists are using his concept to draw difference of comparison in the contemporary times, nevertheless it is imperative to encapsulate his ides. To illustrate in the US, 75 percent of the wealth is owned by only 5 percent of the population exposing the ever said gulf between the rich and the poor. However improvement in living standards of the people in the US

[90] Maria A. Nogueira, A Revisited theme: Middle Classes and the School, in Apple et al. *The Routledge International Handbook of Sociology of Education*, New York: Routledge, 2010.
[90] P. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.
[91] Wealth reflects the property, physical capital and income status
[92] Power implies the ability to make major decisions and influence others act for one's own benefit
[93] Prestige is attached to ones occupation and education directly influences this attribute of class

has not helped to eliminate the relative deprivation which is still visible as is the case in India. For an average individual who lives an ordinary life does not have any power to influence decision making. A study done way back in the 1920's by Lynds[94] showed that "working class children do not have many of the verbal and behavioural skills and traits that are prerequisite to success in the classroom". Other Community Studies done in the United States showed schools selected students based on their potential for upward mobility and lower class children were considered incapable. Class position is a result of certain characteristics imbibed by an individual. In this order they have to follow particular lifestyle, belong to certain group, and maintain political affiliation including many other aspects of life which qualifies them to a certain position. Thus in a modern developed society class and education are in such a relation where members are socialized to follow the patterns and values of this system. Interest and attitude towards education is part of this endeavour. A lucid but important reflection from their society shall corroborate the argument, to maintain authenticity of the discussion table below has been inserted from the original source[95].

Table: 2.1 Class Aspirations

Class and Percentage of Total Population	Education	Education of children
Upper class (1-3%)	Liberal arts at elite schools	College education by right for both sexes.
Upper-middle class (10-15 %)	Graduate training	Educational system biased in their favour
Lower middle (30-35 %)	High school , some college	Greater chance of college than working class child
Working (40-45 %)	Grade school, some high school	Educational system biased against them; tendency towards vocational programs
Lower (20-25 %)	Illiteracy, especially functional illiteracy	Little interest in education; high dropout rates

[94]Cited from J.H Ballantine *The sociology of education: A systematic analysis*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 3rd edition, p-72, 1993.

[95]Daniel W. Rossides, *Social Stratification: the American Class System in Comparative Perspective*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, pp 406-8, 1990.

In India with the advent of privatization, education reforms had seen transitions from the idea of equity to inclusion, changing focus from access to quality of education, from mass enrolment drive to school choice. The larger question is pregnant with a social structure exposing a wide gap between those who are aware and those who are not, those who are informed and can access and those who cannot get a better share even if they are aware, it is about those who are marginalised and those who directly or indirectly marginalize. Ball (2003: 4) [96] beautifully argues that with social mobility, the social landscape witnesses change and churns out individuals with middle class aspirations bearing anxiety and hope for the future embedded with 'affluence and risk', 'opportunity and congestion', 'celebration, contradictions and uncertainties'. With reiteration education is the only tool for their emancipation and continuity. And thus one has to see the interplay between choice market, school choice and inequality which in turn may govern the status of education system in any society (ibid: 7). While society can be divided into several strata based on caste, class, race and gender, the "character of educational provision is itself a battleground within the middle classes as well as between middle and working classes, in which those already endowed with cultural capital are engaged in conflicts with those who have not" (Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding 1992: 152-58)[97].

That democracy and development require a comprehensive and inclusive system of education is not the complete tale of the story. The rest of it comes from the standard and quality of education provided in the state. If access to education is not any more a troubling issue to be resolved for educating the masses, quality of education definitely is. And thus materialization of numerous educational institutions, according to sociologist Andre Beteille (2008)[98] is both a cause and a

[96]Stephen J. Ball, *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The Middle Classes and Social Advantage*, London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003.
[97] M. Savage, J. Barlow, P. Dickens and A J. Fielding, *Property, Bureaucracy, and Culture: middle class formation in contemporary Britain*. London: Routledge, p. 152-58, 1992.
[98] Andre Beteille, Access to Education, *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp 40-48, 2008.

consequence of the changes in the family and the community and vice a versa. In India it is argued that the life chances were more asymmetrically distributed than any other part of the world, as it is a large country which is predominantly agrarian with diverse economic conditions. Good education may help reduce the gap in the life chances but in reality the situation is not as simple as inscribed in words. There is a definite increase in the literacy rate in India since independence, many new schools have come up finding children from every possible castes and communities and demand for schooling has also eventually gone up. What is missed here is the quality of education provided by the schools which are either managed by the state or the private players or a tie up between both. Considering that promises were made during the framing of the constitution to provide elementary education to all, India is lagging far behind in comparison to not only Western but also Asian countries such as Japan, China and many others is what concerns Beteille (ibid).

Advent of Middle class in India took place under the colonial supervision. A historical understanding of their growth and emergence will lead us to know that with the opening of new educational institutions by the colonial administrators post independence the reigns of the same rested with the Indians. They constituted the new upper strata, the new educated professional middle class. Because English was still the medium of instruction in the higher level of education the divide between those who were educated and those who were not became distinct. At the same time every educational institution was not funded by the government. The early middle class population were the offspring of those prominent people who belonged to wealthy business or landowning class and contributed in the growth and funding of the educational institution. Hereafter it became like 'circulation of elite'[99]. These institutions threw educated/aspiring middle class into the job market. They sought variety of regular jobs starting from school teachers, clerks, managers, officers, lawyers

[99] Concept propounded by Vilfredo Pareto

and doctors and in turn they along with their children became core of the new middle class. They were relatively few but the impetus to expand the education system and its credentials came from them (ibid).

The challenge and diversification became evident with the growth and internal stratification of the middle class. Education and employment became closely linked with them to secure stratified position within the middle class itself. Highlighted by Beteille (2001)[100], middle class nowhere has attended to the needs of other class before addressing their own. Thus their interest ran through the development of every sector of economy, especially in education from secondary to higher and now back to primary education.

However stratification visible in the country is not only of the social class or other social categories alone, a massive form of differentiation is meted out upon the institution of learning as well. It is argued that "this differentiation is a continuous and unremitting process and must receive serious consideration....the schools to which educated middle class send their children are only a tip of the iceberg. Beneath them lies a vast mass of institutions driven by currents that often have little to do with education" (Beteille, 2008: 44). And yet as schools choose they find their own set of consumers to attend them. The corollary of this statement is that middle class parents are also deeply conscious about the need to give their children a good beginning in education. The search for good school is only an early stage of the rest of the planning that they have done for their children for their future. In an urban area a metropolis/cities/ or big towns the most desirable schools are exclusive and expensive. This is generated by the demand created by the parents in the education market. Those children who are churned out of these schools are all ready for the next stage of education. The modern system of higher education expects a creative/innovative and critical mind to undertake further education, thus unless the

[100] Andre Beteille, Equality and Universality, *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp 3619-3625, 2001.

child has been trained into this frame of learning it is difficult to remain in the league of competition and excel. The ones most demanded by the middle classes are the English medium school who are competitive to perform. It is argued that the dynamic section of the middle class that are driving forward India's economic growth want English medium schools for their children (ibid).

The apprehension expressed in the persisting educational differentiation is clear as '...even if education expands stratification will persist because those who are in the advantaged positions will successfully implement strategies to maintain privilege' (Torche, 2005; 318)[101]. Thus it is to be seen according to the middle class what type of education is, from which type of school do they wish to educate their children, what are the implication of such schooling and what future hopes enables them to attain certain quality of learning. Not to forget the aspirations for good schools is dependent on their social and economic assets.

It begins at the family level; the family playing a primordial role in perpetuating a specific standard of choice, its composition and structure are important indicators in healthy choice making abilities of the parents ensuring academic success of the child (Cavanagh et al., 2006) [102].

In the job market middle class parents are willing to reconcile with nothing short of professional, white collar employment within the private sector, in particular within multinational corporations with the expansion of the service sector of the economy. An India Today-ORG-MARG poll shows that the majority of middle class families want their children to work in the services sector (Saran 2001: 32)[103]. And the newness of the economic sector which is being constructed as the ideal standard

[101]Florencia Torche, Privatization Reform and Inequality of Educational Opportunity: The Case of Chile, *Sociology of Education*, 78 (4), Oct., pp. 316-343. 2005.
[102] Shannon E. Cavanagh et al., Marital Transitions, Parenting and Schooling: Exploring the link between Family structure History and Adoloscents' Academic status, *Sociology of Education*, 79(4), pp 329-354, 2006.
[103] Saran, Rohit. "Growth Engine," *India Today*, February 19, 2001.

for the middle class is bringing newness, hope and aspiration to the middle class which is specifically linked to structural economic shifts linked to the liberalization of the Indian economy (Fernandes, 2000)[104].

The Schools: Public and Private Social Institution

Educational institutions are part of the public exigency and responsibility of the state, beginning with the least from school education. By far Bourdieu's contribution to cultural reproduction was discussed in the last section. He does not restrict his argument and says school plays a definite role in perpetuation of social inequalities. While the functionalists bestow the school system with its definite responsibility to produce individuals who adhere to the social norms and help in maintaining social order, the formal equity that schools aspire and which the whole education system is subject to, according to Bourdieu, is in reality unjust and that in any society which claims to have democratic ideals it protects, privileges themselves rather than their open transmission. However the theoretical strands cannot be understood mutually exclusive from each other. According to the functional view the school disintegrates into many subsystems and together these parts make up a functioning whole. Each part is dependent on the others for smooth operation, for the materials or resources it needs to function and even for its existence (Ballantine, 1983)[105].

Schools serve to achieve social goals set by the state. However on one hand the functionalists believe that social goals give direction to the schools to perform its duties in certain manner, the conflict theorists argue that the social goals itself are of the dominant power groups in the society, that they represent only one segment of the society and there are other contradictory goals held by other groups in the society.

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[104] Leela Fernandes, Restructuring the New Middle Class in Liberalizing India, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 20(1&2), 2000.

[105] Ballantine, *The Sociology of Education: A systematic analysis,* :New Jersey: Prentice hall,1983.

The above discussion is redundant if not read in tandem with what type of school one is talking about; it s public and the private feature of these social institutions (ibid).

On the other hand, in many ways the schools themselves have rendered into further differentiation of the classes by selecting children of particular class. School choice may be considered one such means to propitiate class solidarity and conformity to belong to a particular community. Thus the public (state) schools and the private schools into play.

The rhetoric of criticism within the school culture is a dimension important for understanding student achievement. For example the schools in the US follow the culture of the predominant white middle class. So is the impact of the achievement of the middle class whites, that every ethnoracial group is encapsulated to either emulate or reject the middle class cultural codes of the school. The success of the groups depends on the extent to which they are able to assimilate with the school culture and predominantly middle class society. Thus schools themselves too act as the segregators of the social class based on the dominant culture. But what needs definite mention is that the drive to achieve success through education is strong among the middle class ethos visible in their omnipresence in education system of US. Schools are however appealed to implement practices that promote inter-culturalism to yield better academic and social results among those who belong to the lower strata of the society (Carter, 2006)[106].

The social system works on the basis of some rules and requirements and each part of the society contributes to its functioning. The idea has been extended by the functionalists to the inevitability of inequality and the role of education in perpetuating stratification. Functionalists provide a functional role to the school as a

[106] Prudence L. Carter, Straddling Boundaries: Identity, Culture, and School, *Sociology of Education*, 79(4), pp 304-328, 2006.

social institution. Schools sort, and develop children according to their ability without problematising their social background. Social and cultural capital has much to do with the excellence of a child in school and outside from a lower middle class background. Reproductionist have debated on this extensively, theorising that those who are better off in the society also determine what to be disseminated in terms of culture, be it the culture of school. The conflict perspective also sees school as a problematic domain as if everything is equal inside the school. The type of school is again a matter of question in order to situate the perspectives in favour and against the role of school.

While choice advocates emphasise on freedom and efficiency, however as mentioned earlier, the realities of the actual political and social context impose structural limits to choice. It is imperative that less well off families will have fewer options. Poor people must accept their neighbourhood schools regardless of the quality. The situational dynamics takes into consideration that highly regarded wealthy schools are likely to be over chosen. In turn the schools will effectively choose its customers rather than the other way round. This is marked with corresponding increase in inequality and consequential social divisions between rich and poor schools and rich and poor communities. Wealthy schools will have little incentive for schools in wealthy areas to admit children from disadvantaged sectors of the community or from racial minorities (Olssen, 2004: 204)[107].

Some important case studies from the developed and developing countries make this debate insightful that with better governance and implementation of the proposed educational reforms the goal to achieve universal education for children up to the age of 14 years is not far away. Education Policy implications are an important source of conceptualising the condition and education market in a country.

[107]Mark Olssen et al., *Education Policy: Globalization, Citizenship and Democracy*, New Delhi: Sage, 2004.

The state of Chile (Torche, 2005)[108] provides a case to observe; it is both a late industrialized country and one that experienced a radical privatization reform of its educational system in the early 1980's as part of a market oriented transformation. Privatization reform in the country introduced full parental choice through a nationwide voucher system at the primary and secondary educational levels. However the reform was not without discrimination as qualitative inequality surfaced while providing autonomy of school choice to parents. The residue was unequal access to education. While the government thought to provide better access to good schools, the horizontal inequality of the society, more precisely among the families emerged and future achievement of a student was an outcome of processes within and outside the school. In fact schools are traced to mark them as a potential vehicle of educational stratification.

Education reform in China, the highest populous country in the world followed by India, is also an important point of reference because of their constant growth in the economy and an emerging economic giant. China is attributing its economic and national success on education reform in 1990's but has specific guidelines to follow to improve upon the existing system. In the field of elementary and secondary education major steps have been initiated with regard to policies such as 'decentralization' of the first two tiers in education, 'quality' rather than test oriented system, and other supply side reforms. Choice of curriculum is provided to the students in the country, where the state is trying to loosen control of curriculum and assessment aspects in school and secondary education. Emphasis on good result in passing out exams in an important factor in the schools as this outcome is important for their career and income potential. However for the reformers quality of education is not merely passing exams with market value but they believe education

[108]Florencia Torche, Privatization Reform and Inequality of Educational Opportunity: The Case of Chile, *Sociology of Education*, 78 (4), Oct., pp. 316-343. 2005.

for quality is the capacity to cultivate in people the ability to innovate and become the soul of education (Perus, 2007)[109].

While educational choice among the middle class is a strategy cannot be faltered, the state is also continuously working towards bringing uniformity in education provision if not achievement. Various student outcome assessment studies are done across the world, one like PISA[110] in Europe. However contrasting the end result were, what mattered most as highlighted by the author is that the socio-economic status is the most powerful single influence on students education and other life outcomes. It matters where one is born and brought up for certain level of achievement. Similar concern was being expressed on the effectiveness of schooling by Coleman and Peaker (Kifer, 1977)[111] that more than the difference among the schools it is the difference in the family background that influence students' achievement in school.

In the Indian context situation is much more complex, for the multicultural mosaic the country is. Ethnic, religious, linguistic, caste and class diversity are hallmark of the Indian society. Thus attainment of status is not only dependent on external achievements but also on the social and cultural inheritance that each heterogeneous group in the social strata has accumulated over its rich cultural heritage. The economic overbearing on the strata's behaviour is growing overwhelmingly. To assess the reach of education and awareness researches in these areas are inevitable as it has greater policy implication for the future.

UNICEF in one of their studies has compared situation of children in countries such as Canada, US and from across Europe, on the basis of material

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[109] Betty Perus, Education Trend in China and the United States: Proverbial Pendulum or potential for Balance?, *The Phi Delta Kappan,* 89 (2), pp 115-118, 2007.

[110] Programe for International Student Assessment- www.pisa.oecd.org

[111] Edward Kifer, The Relationship between home and School in influencing the learning of Children, *Research in the Teaching of English,* 11(1), pp. 5-16, 1977.

wealth, peer and family relationships, behaviour and risks besides two other indicators to assess the position of education of children in rich countries. Netherlands is ranked the best scorer at the end of the study. However a throbbing concern for any country carving education policies is to strike a balance of choice between equity and efficiency (Levin, 2007)[112]. And school education merely remaining applicable within the school space is not a desirable quality education is what most educators think. The carry over effect of school learning can ensure that a student is prepared for the practical world as well (Bracey, 2007)[113].

Study done by E. Denessen, G Driessen and P. Sleegers (2005)[114] examine the patterns of group specific reasons for school choice and their implication for segregation within the Dutch educational system. They tried to relate parental reasons for school choice to religion, ethnicity and social milieu and also the specific school characteristics such as ethnic composition and social milieu of the school. The results emerging from the study point out to the relevance of quality as the most important reason for school choice. Other important inference drawn by the researchers from the study is the demand for Islamic education for their children by the Muslim migrant parents in the country.

Another recent study done by Escardibul and Villarroya (2009)[115] have thrown light in to the practice of school choice by the middle class parents in Spain. The educational policy in Spain has taken care of those who wish to invest in private schooling by channelizing public money on to private schools. While the study has incorporated various factors to determine prevalence of choice for schools among all parents, it has taken care to view the preference for both types of schools. Factors

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[112] Ben Levin, Schools Poverty and the Achievement Gap, *The Phi Delta Kappan,* 89 (1), pp 75-76, 2007.
[113] Gerald W. Bracey, School's Impact out of School, *The Phi Delta Kappan,* 89 (3), pp 236-237, 2007.
[114] E. Denessen, G Driessen and P. Sleegers, Segregation by choice? A study of group specific reasons for school choice, *Journal of Education Policy,* 20(3), pp 347-368, 2005.
[115] Escardibul and Villarroya, The inequalities in school choice in Spain in accordance to PISA data, *Journal of Education Policy,* 24(6), pp 673-696, 2009.

such as personal, family, geographic, motivational and educational policy factors had been considered for the analyses. The finding revealed that there is higher preference of private schools with a greater proportion of families from better socioeconomic, educational and cultural background. And geographic that is access and location of the school is also a major factor for parental reasons for school choice.

Education Policies in India have seen the light of affirmative action and positive discrimination in favour of backward caste and marginalized sections of the society. However with the advent of time, Indian constitution took steps to ensure a shift from policy based to right based approach towards reservation (Beteille, 2002)[116]. In this context compulsory education which was part of the DPSP in the constitution of India moved out and made its way to the part on fundamental rights. With the help of 86th Amendment Act 2002, Right to Education by Art 21 A, is made a Fundamental Right from April, 2010 for children in the age group of 6-14 years who are entitled to receive free and compulsory education up to the upper age limit. The bill has many clauses, among which one clause is going to face rather stiff challenge from the states. As stated at least 25 % children of the weaker sections would be given free education by partially aided and unaided schools which means all types of private schools not under direct management of the state. There are sanctions on charging capitation fee and conducting screening tests for admission which according to the bill is the "method of selection for admission of a child, in preference over another, other than a random method"[117]. Such provisions and sanctions may be considered to be not in favour of the private schools for they have their own basis to be in the market. There is a tacit understanding between the parents who send their children to a particular private school and the school itself to ensure some sort of homogeneity within the school space. With most urban private schools catering to the middle class

[116] Andre Beteille, Matters of Right and of Policy, *Seminar*, 2002.
[117] The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2008, Bill No. LXV of 2008, 2nd December, New Delhi2008.

genre of the population, the reaction to the implementation of the provision is likely to be diverse and constraining if not rejectable.

The present vision of the Indian government is to focus on creating micro foundations for inclusive growth (Economic Survey, 2009-10)[118]. The major philosophy behind the vision views growth differently where the growth itself is not an end but an instrument for spreading prosperity to all ensuring mass participation in the growth process with back up policies to redistribute the gains. The idea has perforated to all sectors of the economy and has already knocked its door on to the educational system of the country. With quality of school education being the primary focus of the state as well as the parents, system to improve or upgrade the schools has already begun by introducing voucher system on an experimental basis in the country starting with Delhi. The government envisages introducing real choice with parents to select schools for their children.

On Assam

And any assessment or study has to classify the population into one form or other to decipher their nature of social and educational behaviour as against the market economy. The effort is to delineate the class behaviour and choice of the middle class especially in the context of India with respect to school education in the country and how it shall vary in a culturally diverse socio-geographical area such as Assam.

The social canvas of the state of Assam is filled with problems of identity formation and dominion status of the various groups coexisting for long period of time now. The middle class culture of the population in the state was brought in by the Bengali Hindus who were part of the state before the partition and outnumbered the original Assamese speaking population. Not before the immigrant Bengali

[118] GoI, MoF, *Economic Survey* 2009-2010, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Muslims from eastern Bengal adapted Assamese as their mother tongue in the state that Assamese became the dominant mother tongue thereby ensuring the majority status of the Assamese and defeating the 'machinations' of the Bengali Hindu to reduce Assam into a bilingual state. Thus Assamese were grateful to the immigrant Muslim for returning Assamese as his mother tongue. No doubt, for all practical purposes, Assam as claimed by the author is a bilingual state, with predominantly Assamese speaking population in the Brahmaputra valley and predominantly Bengali speaking population in the Barak valley [119](also known as Surma Valley) (Mishra, 1999; Barua, 1978). In 10 years a major shift in the linguistic population is yet to be witnessed.

The population composition of the state could thus be traced back to the historical changes during the British period. In order to reinstate the middle class culture among the people of Assam, it may attributed to what British did by establishing company's authority in the different Government departments bringing in large Bengali speaking areas. No doubt language problem existed; the positive fall out of this opportunity was imbibing of another culture superior than the culture of sustenance economy in the state. It was the middle class culture. On the other hand Assam was continuously facing influx of migrants from other states of the subcontinent as British capital penetrated the economy and started building up an infrastructure in the interests of accumulation. New skills, new ideas and immigration labour marked the exposure of this closed society that Assam was. The tea industry which required a regular supply of labour also contributed to the diversity of the population. Thousands of labourers from Bihar, Chotanagpur, Uttar Pradesh and Madras were annually recruited for the plantations from these provinces, most of who failed to return home their native land and formed the biggest migrant

[119] Udayon Misra, Immigration and Identity Transformation in Assam, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34 (21), pp. 1264-1271, 1999.

group in Assam's population. There was no native capitalist in Assam, the artisan was independent and he supplemented his income with the products of a farm he worked regularly. Thus another significant contribution was made to the social mosaic of Assam by the Marwari merchants. The economic and capitalist condition of the state explains the commercial monopoly of these merchants from western India. They easily tapped the means of money making in the state through money-lending, supplying provisions to the tea-gardens, procuring mustard and later jute for the market outside Assam, and meeting the demand for new household implements and articles-cheap and mass produced-that the Assamese soon came to adopt. (Barua, 1978: 69-70)[120]

British also set up schools in Bengali vernacular and to sustain those, services from the same community was sought. During their rule the services of the Bengalis became indispensable in the anglo-vernacular and vernacular schools, since school teachers were not available in adequate numbers in any case to impart lessons in the Bengali language, which had since become the medium of instruction. The Bengali speaking population with the sheer strength of their rich language continuously became the dominant majority in provinces like Assam, Orissa, Chotanagpur and parts of Bihar. Consequently these areas, backward in the new education and professional training came slowly to produce their own educated and vouched for a share in the opportunities snatched by the Bengalis (ibid: 69-70).

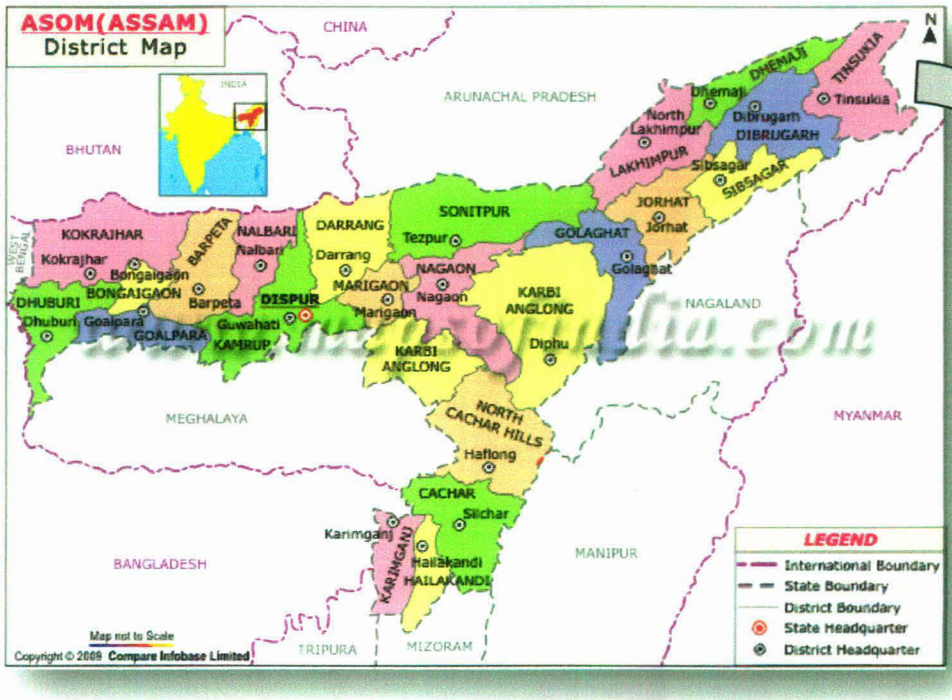
In the pursuit to trace the development of the role of education and its importance among the different population in the state, an article by B.P Singh written in 1987 gave cue to the information. Not only in Assam but over the centuries the ethnic cauldron of northeast India has been boiling by the contradictory processes of assimilation and preservation of ethnic identity. Today a number of

[120] Sandhya Barua, Language Problem in Assam, *Social Scientist*, 6(12), pp. 66-74, 1978.

tribes[121] and castes dominate education and administration, among them the prominent are Hindus and Bengalis in Assam (Singh, 1987)[122]. The mutual socio-cultural interaction, assimilation and contradictions pave the way for new emerging challenges which the people of Assam have been already facing and are willing to live up to with the advent of a neo-liberal economy in a democratic state of India.

[121] And other such as the Khasis in Meghalaya, the Bengalis in Meghalaya, and Tripura.

[122] B. P. Singh, North-East India: Demography, Culture and Identity Crisis, *Modern Asian Studies*, 21(2), pp. 257-282, 1987.


ASOM(ASSAM)
District Map
CHINA
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
BHUTAN
NAGALAND
MEGHALAYA
MYANMAR
BANGLADESH
MANIPUR
TRIPURA
MIZORAM
WEST BENGAL
Dhemaji
Tinsukia
North Lakhimpur
Dibrugarh
Sibsagar
Jorhat
Golaghat
Tezpur
Nalbari
Darrang
Barpeta
Kokrajhar
Bongaigaon
Dhubri
Goalpara
Guwahati
Nagaon
Marigaon
Diphu
Haflong
Silchar
Karimganj
Hailakandi
LEGEND
International Boundary
State Boundary
District Boundary
State Headquarter
District Headquarter
Map not to Scale
Copyright © 2009 Compare Infobase Limited

TINSUKIA
Assam
DHEMAJI
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
DIBRUGARH
Kenimgaon
Kundil Bazar
Lohit
Saikhoa Ghat
Dangori
Dighaltarang
Dum Duma (Soekerating)
Tinsukia
To Tinsukia
37
Makum
Duaimara
Pengri
Bardubi Road
Digboi
To Duliajan
38
Ledo
Likhapani
Margherita
District Boundary
River
National Highway
State Highway
Road
Railway Track
District Headquarter
Town
Map not to Scale
Copyright © 2006. Compare Infobase Pvt. Ltd.

Chapter Three:

Methodology and Preliminary Empirical Analysis

Situating the Context

In social science research universally it is anticipated to specify the social conditions and underline the anomaly the society or the social space is undergoing before that particular space is thrown open for study. If one has to say, reasons are always obvious; one is not doing any justice to the research problem. Thus Assam with its own educational drawbacks and achievements also the limited studies undertaken on the state especially with respect to education and middle class has encouraged this research problem. A district capital town named Tinsukia is selected as the locus of the study in order to develop a specific insight into the research. Initially it may seem to propose an insider's view on the whole development education of the middle class in the state, but the work is equally challenging because of the choice of urban space for the study as such space transcends the explicit cultural attributes and as Giddens (1990: cited in Pathak, p. 67)[123] argue, "social relations *here* (word added) are constructed across time and space". This space is contoured by modernity and globalization, without adhering to any territorial boundaries and its "politico-cultural aspirations-democratization of society and the autonomy of the individual" (ibid) develop into a shared worldview. Since education is the primary linkage between middle class and parental choice of school, it is important to view the current elementary education status in the state of Assam through the data presented in the next section.

[123]Giddens (1990), The Consequence of Modernity. Cambridge: Polity Press; Cited in Pathak, Avijit Modernity Globalization and Identity: Towards a Reflexive Quest, Delhi: Aakar Books, (2006)

Educational Development Index (EDI)[124] *and School Status*

The overall condition of school education in the state is not conducive if we look at the data floated by the Department of school education and literacy, MHRD[125]. Assam is one among the most educationally backward states with respect to Composite Educational Development Index (EDI) (NUEPA, 2010) and ranks one of the lowest amongst all the states and the union territories for all school types across all managements at primary and upper primary level. The latest data for the state is of 2008-09 and is compared with the previous year data. The table below will help elaborate the condition of elementary schooling in the state vis-à-vis the all India data.

Table: 3.1 Composite Educational Development Index All Schools: All Managements of Assam

Composite Educational Development Index All Schools: All Managements of Assam			
Level of Education	Year	EDI	Rank
Primary Level	2007-08	*0.461*	32
	2008-09	*0.446*	35
Upper Primary Level	2007-08	*0.568*	30
	2008-09	*0.519*	32
Composite Primary & Upper Primary	**2007-08**	***0.515***	**31**
	2008-09	***0.483***	**33**

Source: Flash Statistics, NUEPA[126].

[124] (a) The 4 components used in calculating EDI are: (1) Access, (2) Infrastructure, (3) Teachers, (4) Outcomes, each component has its own specific indicators.
(b) Indicators were normalized before the Principal Component Analysis was applied to decide the factor loadings and weights. , NUEPA (2010: 41)

[125] NUEPA (2010), The Flash Statistics: Elementary Education in India: Progress towards UEE, New Delhi: NUEPA and MHRD, GOI

[126] NUEPA (2010), The Flash Statistics: Elementary Education in India: Progress towards UEE, New Delhi: NUEPA and MHRD, GOI

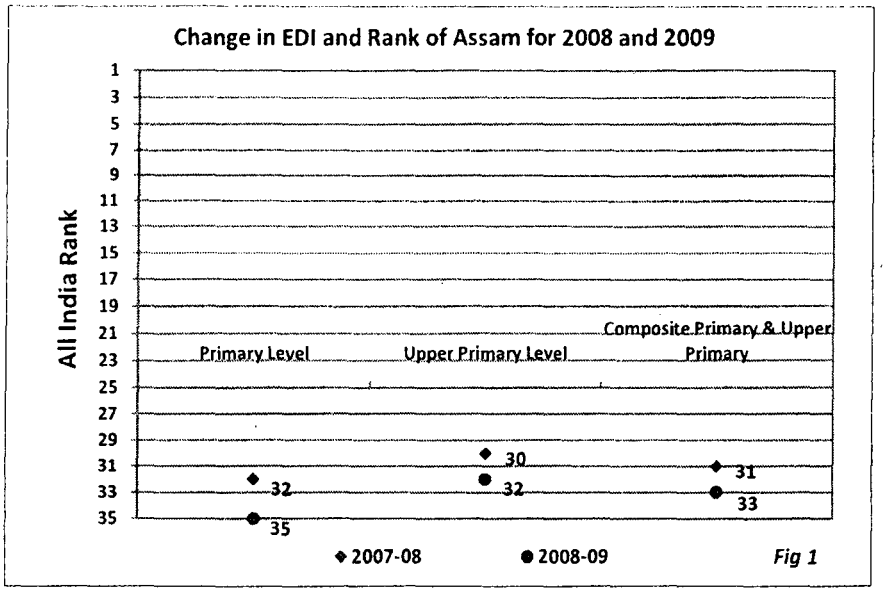
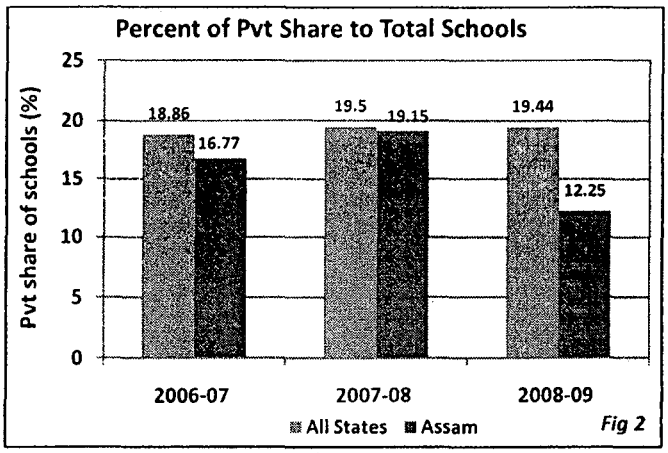


Fig 1

Out of 28 states and 7 union territories combined (Total=35), the condition of Assam is abysmal. In the primary level, Assam ranks last among all the states and union territories for the year 2008-09. There is fall of 3 points from 2007-08 ranking. In the upper primary section too there is a fall of 2 points from the previous year ranking. And finally the composite index which includes both primary and upper primary educational development index only does this much to lift Assam from its last rank to the third last with 33rd rank. Also there is a fall of 0.032 points (see table above) in EDI from the previous year for the composite index. The point to note is that the condition of elementary education in the state, which includes providers from all the management type, for all the schools is not in any healthy condition. The indicators used to arrive at the index include various school related components such as access, infrastructure, teachers and outcome indicators. Outcome indicators further is calculated by using many indicators such as enrolment, drop out and repetition rate, participation of the scheduled categories, transition rate, exit rate and results of the appearing children (ibid: p 41).

The latest data on private schools and its share to total schools shows the following:



Source: Flash Statistics, NUEPA[127].

In Assam the percentage of private schools over a period of three years has shown significant rise but steeper fall as seen in the above graph. The national average percentage of private share to total schools for the year 2006-07 was 18.86; corresponding figure for Assam was 16.77 below the national share. For next year the percentage of private share to total schools differed marginally for Assam. What is striking that there is considerable fall in the percentage of private share to total schools in Assam vis-à-vis All India percentage for the year 2008-09. And thus the next table which shows the absolute numbers in figure as against the all states figure. There is a fall in number of private schools from 2007-08 to 2008-09 and there is low percentage of enrolment to private schools run by private management in the state as against the national average.

Table: 3.2: Number of Private Schools and % Enrolment in Private Managements

Number of Private Schools			% Enrolment in Private Managements
	2007-08	2008-09	Classes I-VIII: 2008-09
Assam	**12777**	**8395**	**15.73**
All States	243895	249920	29.01

Source: Flash Statistics, NUEPA[128].

Various economic and social factors explain the present condition of the state with respect to education. From the literature analysis it is clear that aspiration of

[127]NUEPA, The Flash Statistics: Elementary Education in India: Progress towards UEE, New Delhi: NUEPA and MHRD, GOI, 2010.
[128] Ibid, 2010

the middle class does not disappear anywhere when it comes to success, achievement and an important attribute they seek to maintain their status quo is to be better educated.

Rationale of the Problem

A political state in India and its multicultural and social character makes this research process extremely complex in its own way. The social mosaic of Assam is rich with its heritage, but because of the strained political relation with the centre and internal insurgencies and militancy's of the separatist groups, the society is not in complete harmony. It is largely stratified on the basis of language and religion, plains and tribes, indigenous and outsiders, and not to forget the inevitable caste-class stratification of our society. However the trajectory of the growth of middle class in Assam according to Gohain (1973)[129] is a hundred year behind their Bengali counterpart. On a vital paper, he writes "by a process of a simple plunder from the State treasury in the name of 'development programme', the Assamese middle class has noticeably become more affluent and ambitious. But it does not hold the key to the further development of the region and the people there mainly because of its necessarily subservient relation to the Indian big capital" (ibid, p.12). Moreover the state if not officially, is by proportion of population a bilingual state as discussed in the discourse on literature, divided mainly between the Indigenous Assamese and converts and Hindu Bengalis. The essence of middle class character brought by migrant population has somewhere skewed the level of aspiration. At this juncture scarce literature on the middle class educational aspirations adds to our woe to understand the changing landscape of the education scenario with respect to the emerging infiltration of the global economy in the state. To note further the percentage of educated unemployed in the state is as alarming as is the conditibn of school education in the state. As a considerable portion of population in an urban area belongs to the middle class strata, here they consider to have somewhat overcome the existential

129 Hiren Gohain, Origins of the Assamese Middle Class, *Social Scientist*, 2 (1), Aug, pp. 11-26, 1973.

dilemma of living under the fear of separation but suffer a deeper loss of privileges. The demographic and socio-economic features of Assam and its geographical location away from the larger political land only obliquely explain the story. It is important to engage further deeply to know more about the factors contributing to the middle class educational pursuits in the state. That ethnicity and religion can play a significant role in parental reasons for school choice has been proved by studies done elsewhere in the western countries. This research is an opportunity to bridge the ideological quest in educational demand which may subsequently allow for further implication of schooling in the region. The social and cultural paraphernalia allows the middle class to choose unlike those who do not need it and those who are not aware of the need. Thus the validity of the context of choice stands true to the middle range of the social scale. Their existence, behavior, intensions and decisions are important in order to foresee the larger implications they may bring to the educational policy making in India.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study how class in general and middle class in particular as social categories determine the educational aspirations of the parents for their children in school.
2. To study the factors that influence differentiated demand for school choice among middle class parents as primary decision makers and consumers in an ethnically diverse state.
3. To analyze the economic and occupational influence on choice of school education among middle class parents.
4. To contextualize the middle class character in an era of neo-liberal reforms and market perspective.
5. To study the implications in school choice among middle class parents in the context of recent policy developments in elementary education.

Research questions:

1. Whether quality education and schooling is an important strategy to affirm middle class status in the system of social stratification based on class?
2. In what ways ethnicity, language and class culture determine the schooling pattern of the children from middle class background and to what extent it does?
3. How far reasons for choice by the middle class parents are dependent on the economic and occupations status (mapping income, assets and expenditure) of the middle class parents?
4. In what ways quality of education in government and private schools affect parental choice in elementary level?
5. Whether policies in favour of the backward class have influenced the interest among the middle class parents for their child's schooling in private schools?
6. How middle class parental choice may influence educational policy making and govern the pattern of school education?

The indicators:

The questionnaire was developed in three parts. *Part one* incorporated the socio-economic and cultural profile of the respondents. In this part indicators related to socio-cultural character, regarding ethnicity, language and religion together with caste status were incorporated in order to know their background. The second set of questions was framed to collect information regarding the respondents' education and occupation status. The education and occupation status of the spouse of the respondent was also part of the questionnaire. Education and occupation of both the set of parents were taken to ascertain the overall family educational and occupational status which would have been

incomplete with information of the respondent alone. In order to classify the sample population as middle class, questions related to their monthly household income, their location of house and their nature of work and possession of household durable goods and other assets were part of the enumeration. The third set of questions was developed to gather information to corroborate the state of educational need and consciousness of the family through education status of the guardians of the sample population, the type of education institutions the respondents went to, their social network and other economic engagements which may enable the parents to involve with a wider group to interact for any sort of decision making process whether for the family or for the child. Also respondents' relation to the child was obtained, mainly mother and father of the child was interviewed to bring the real parental choice in to the study rather than gathering information from any available member of the family though options were kept in case the child in the visiting household lived with grandparents or other relatives.

Part two of the questionnaire had questions to obtain child related information such as the grade child studies in, the name of the school the child attends, the age and sex of the child and the type of the school the child goes to i.e. private or government school. Whether the child attends a co-education school or single sex school was also part of this section of the questionnaire.

Part three of the questionnaire asked questions related to and influencing school choice of the parents. Questions were asked on the information source which helped the parents decide to send their child to the school (s)he is attending and the number of schools the parents applied to for a safe enrolment of their child to one of the choice schools that they had decided upon. A critical question on factors for school choice was developed to enable the parents to rank the choice in order of importance. Attributes such as 'access to school', 'quality of education', 'affordability', 'reputation', 'language' and 'religion' of the school were some of the factors provided for choice. However category 'others' was also kept in the reasons for school choice in case parents think other attributes are vital than

the ones already mentioned in the questionnaire. Whether the school the child is attending was the first choice of the parents, the admission criteria, factors which led to the admission, their satisfaction with the performance of the school, were some of the questions. School change for reasons personal or professional and career aspirations were incorporated in order to estimate the extent to which parents think the schools in the town could render a suitable foundation to the child for the future. Finally questions on opinions of the parents were added on what they think of government and private schools in general and particular, the importance of social network in their child's education and their perception on 25% of the reservation to the economically backward section of the society for admission in private schools.

Methodology

The research design for the purpose of the study was meticulously articulated so as to build a coherent understanding of the area under study. Thus descriptive research[130] design was found to be the most suitable design for this work (Kothari, 1985: 37)[131] for this nature of social research. This type of methodology is used to map and explain a particular social process as it is out there. It is a simple way of describing the social situation in an attempt to generalize the findings. Descriptive research includes surveys and fact findings as is done in the case of the present study. Here the researcher cannot control the variables used in the study and is capable only to report what has happened or what is happening unlike experimental design[132]. The possibilities of this nature of social research has been explained by Myrdal way back in 1944 by stating that the ideal community study should start out from a careful statistical analysis of vital,

[130] Descriptive research studies concerned with specific predictions, with narration of facts and characteristics concerning individual, group or situation.. Most social research comes under this category. (Kothari, 1985:37)

[131] Kothari, C R. (1985) *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques,* New Delhi: New Age international Publishers.

[132] C R. Kothari, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques,* New Delhi: New Age international Publishers, 1985.

social and economic data concerning the individuals and families making up the community being studied. Other abstract attributes such as cultural traits, attitudes and feelings of or towards social status should be observed and the results should be integrated in to the frame work of statistical knowledge[133]. Highly used in social sciences it can however be used in combination with other methods to derive optimum results. Moreover this survey is a cross-sectional study conducted at a specific time period only. With regard to the sampling method initially while the study was designed, it was considered to apply stratified random sampling technique in order to select the sample. Due to constraints of access and time bound nature of the study random sampling technique was used as part of sampling method after dividing the area under study in to location based strata. The primary sample of the study was households residing in main urban conglomeration of Tinsukia town. However urban town of Tinsukia and one urban settlement 8 km away from Tinsukia had been selected for the field work. The purpose was to evaluate the effect of distance and dynamic relationship that the town shares in relation to a district capital town. Households were selected in such a way that at least one child from the household goes to elementary school. Parents of such children who attend school between Class 1 to 8 were interviewed. It was a conscious effort to interview only the parents for the study, however in case of absence of either of the parents other household members were allowed to respond. Sometimes inconvenience to explain the processes related to school, parents will let the older sibling respond in case he/she is present. Cases of this nature were kept minimal as the questionnaire developed for the study sought responses directly from the parents. School choice is not only a matter of education per se; it has a wider and deeper social connotation which parents shared during the course of discussions following the interviews.

[133] Vinay K Srivastava, ed. *Methodolgy and Fieldwork,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Methods and Tools of Data Collection

At the very outset the section of the population for the study was stratified on the basis of location i.e. urban area and households with at least one child going to school between classes 1 to 8 both the upper and the lower limits included. A sample size of 50 households were to be studied, however data from 53 households could be collected out of which 51 observations from 51 households could be used for analysis. Face to face/personal interview was used as the method of data collection with the help of a semi-structured interview schedule. Maximum questions in the schedule were structured with given options. The questions which sought elaborate opinions of the parents were left open ended. It was ensured that the schedule was filled in the presence of the interviewer so as to help the parents clarify doubts regarding the questions if required and avoid any delay in obtaining the responses. Responses were manually filled in the interview schedule by the researcher

As mentioned earlier, random sampling was used to map the units of the sample. Later within the selected strata to make the sample more heterogeneous in terms of school the child attended, and homogenous in terms of the social class under study, snow ball sampling method was used. Filters like married couple with at least one child going to elementary school were added right before a parent was interviewed. This helped to cover more number of areas in the town and also the chance of the neighborhood influence on the decisions and opinions was reduced to minimum. A prior the interview began parents were informed of the purpose and utility of the research as well as promised anonymity of the interviewee to avoid any form of non-conformity or disagreement for or during the course of the interview.

After the data was brought from the field it was cleaned and processed to rule out any cases of discrepancy. The cleaned and processed data which reduced the total number of families from 53 to 51 due to unfilled responses was

thereafter classified on the basis of qualitative and quantitative information. That is those questions which had specific options to mark and information was collected on such basis, simple analysis was done upon them. The open ended questions with narratives were reclassified and regrouped with the help of content analysis. After these responses were tally marked and frequency counts were taken, the most frequently responded opinions to the least were arranged in descending order for the purpose of further analysis. The remaining data was put under simple aggregation and wherever applicable simple regression analysis was employed to establish any kind of emerging influence of one variable over the others.

Statistics used to analyze choice factors

Logistic Regression was done on the factors of choice by using the following:
In the Logit model, G is the logistic function;

$$G(z) = \exp(z)/[1+\exp(z)],$$

which is between zero and one for all real numbers.
Based on this we estimated the following model:

P(choice for private school = 1/X) = G(constant+ β_0 Income (in Rs. Thousand) + β_1 Edu Parents).

Limitations of the Study

No coercive measure was applied to obtain information regarding income, assets and other source of income along with the primary source of livelihood of the family. Thus the information on income was culled out during discussion on school expenditure and life style. It is crucial to mention about the income category as it was one of the chief indicators based on which class status could have been observed. Nevertheless to determine class status of a family in the field of social science research, occupation and level of education together with household assets can be used to ascertain the status situation. Initial discussion on the research design also involved interaction with the school teachers and

principals of the schools which children attended, but due to such a time period of the research when students wrote their board exams, rendered this initiative unattended. Also it was challenging to obtain permissions to meet principals of the schools as they were skeptical to reveal information for the fear of any sort of exposure. To establish rapport with the schools in so short a period of time became constraining. So as to avoid only mothers responding for the purpose, efforts were made to reach the father of the child during the working hours to obtain an equilibrated response from the families. It was a study conducted over a very short period of time without involving any field assistants. Thus only a small sample could be collected. There was lot of apprehension shown by parents and thus could not undertake in-depth interviews as was proposed prior to going to the field. Nevertheless the data obtained is authentic.

Characteristics of Tinsukia Town (by Census 2001): Tinsukia (MB+OG)[134]

Table: 3.3. Population and Sex Ratio of Tinsukia by 2001 Census

Population and Sex Ratio	
Number of HH	20,672
Total Population	1,01,957
% of Male Population	55.19
% of Female Population	44.81
SC Population	5350
% of Scheduled Caste	5.25
ST Population	998
% of Scheduled Tribe	0.98
Sex Ratio	811.83
SC Sex Ratio	831.56
ST Sex ratio	732.6389
Household Size	4.93213

Tinsukia town had about One Lakh population and above twenty thousand households in the area which included the municipal board and outer growth of the town. Male population in the town was about 55 percent of the total population as against the female population which was about 45 percent of the total population. The Scheduled Castes constitute a little above 5 percent of the total population whereas Scheduled Tribes did not add up to 1 percent of the total population according to 2001 census. The present population of the town is

[134] MB+OG= Municipal Board + Outer Growth, Census 2001, GOI

to be read along with the population growth rate that the town had seen over the last one decade. However it is to be noted that the exact per year population growth rate is unavailable. The sex ratio according to 2001 census was 812 female per 1000 male in the town, scheduled caste sex ratio of 831 was little better that the overall sex ratio but the schedule tribe sex ratio was alarmingly low standing at 732 female per thousand male. Household size of the town was large in comparison to it being an urban conglomeration standing at about 5 persons per household. This may be attributed to both large nuclear families as well as joint families which is quite prevalent even till the present time. Ethnically the town is diverse with migrated population from the Marwari business class families from the western part of the country and the Bengali professional class migrated before or during the partition of the country settled for generations together beside the indigenous Assamese population living in the town with its own heritage. Enormous industrial growth of the town and availability of natural oil in the nearby towns like Digboi and Makum had opened up work opportunity for the marginal and casual laborers to come from various other parts of the country[135] in search of livelihood.

Table:3.4. Literacy Levels and Gender gap in Tinsukia by 2001 census

Literacy Levels and Gender gap	
Total Literates	77063
Male Literates	44547
Female Literates	32516
Total Illiterates	24894
Male Literacy Rate	88.49
Female Literacy Rate	80.39
Gender Gap	8.10

Nevertheless the literacy level of (Table) of the population was considerably good as against a population of 1 lakh, 77 thousand were literates who constitute about 75.5 percent of the total population. The male literacy rate of 88.49 percent was higher that the female literacy rate of 80.10 in the town. However the literacy

[135] Source: www.tinsukia.nic.in

rate in comparison to the district literacy rate was higher but lower than the oil town Digboi which is one of the most developed towns under Tinsukia district circle. This was the case with both male and female literacy rate in the town. While the literacy status of the population was remarkable in comparison to the national level, or state level literacy rate, the corresponding gender gap[136]however was as high as 8 percent in the town.

Table: 3.5. Worker and Non Worker Status in Tinsukia by 2001 census

Worker and Non Worker Status	
Total Work Population	35287
Percent of Total Workers	34.61
Percent of Total Male Workers	55.99
Percent of Total Female Workers	8.28
Percent of Non workers	65.39
Percent of Male Non Workers	44.01
Percent of Female Non Workers	91.72
WPR	0.3461

Out of the total population, 34.61 percent constitute total work force. Percentage of male workers in the town was much higher than percentage of female workers with 55.9 percent and 8.2 percent respectively. Although it is an urban town with possibility of maximum job opportunity or informal work in various sectors of the economy in and around the town, there was high rate of non-working force present in the town. Close to 44 percent of the male population were not engaged in any kind of work by estimation of the census for 2001, the non-working women constituted more than 90 percent of the total female population in the town.

Principal Characteristics of the Sample

With the above information and considering decadal growth rate it becomes clear that literacy and educational achievement was not lagging behind

[136] Definition: Gender Gap is any statistical gap between the measured characteristics of men and women in areas such as educational attainment, wage rates or labour force participation
Source: www.dwaf.gov.za/docs/other/RISDP/Glossary.doc

much as was the lack of work opportunity in the town or the district all together. There is a sense of possibility and deeper hope amongst the people to gain better education and migrate out of the area for a stable future which is likely to be reflected through the interaction with the present generation of parents, they are the nouveau parents of the 21st century entrenched in the conspiracy of globalization and anxious/nervous/restless in the presence information revolution. In the present era, knowledge and information is the key to the success of individuals and groups rendering individuals to be further individualistic.

As already mentioned in the above section on methodology, parents from urban conglomeration were interviewed for the research study. The questions in the interview schedule were broadly classified into four basic categories which were; Personal identity information of the parents, their socio economic profile and age, their child related information and their perceptions on various education related matters. This section as titled above seeks to present the profile of the respondents and any other general information. Also all analysis with regard to the data presented below will be done in the following chapter.

Table: 3.6. Gender of the Sample Respondents

Gender of the Respondents		
	Total	%
Male	26	50.98
Female	25	49.02
Grand Total	51	100

Interviewed parents were almost equally represented in terms of gender. Out of the total parents interviewed 51 percent were male and 49 percent were female respondents (Table. 3.6). Out of the total sample of 51 parents, 68 percent of the families reported to be of Bangla origin, spoke Bangla at home and have been living in Assam for generations together post partition of Bengal. Close to 24 percent of the parents belonged to Assamese origin, spoke Assamese at home and are the indigenous inhabitants of the state.

Table: 3.7. Ethnicity of the Sample Respondents

Ethnicity of the Respondents		
	Total	%
Assamese	12	23.53
Bengali	35	68.63
Migrant from other States	4	7.84
Grand Total	51	100.00

The lineage of the families however was not traced in pursuit to establish any connection with the different sub castes they belong to; for example ethnicity of the Assamese are classified in terms of ahoms and non-ahoms and other sub castes within it. Rest of the parents belongs to the migrant business class families from the western part of India. A longer discussion about their place origin led their roots to be discovered in Rajasthan and Gujarat. They however identify themselves as the Agarwals, speak Hindi or Marwari at home and consider themselves very much a part of the Assamese culture. They claim to have moved three generations back and hardly have anybody to visit back to their native place. A visit to the town will clear any doubts in the mind of the reader with regard to how well they have imbibed the culture. This experience also comes from the researchers' upbringing amidst them, and Tinsukia is a representative case of an ethnically diverse and multicultural town considering the area that it occupies.

Table: 3.8 Religion of the sample Respondents

Religion of the Respondents		
	Total	%
Hindu	50	98.04
Jain	1	1.96
Grand Total	51	100.00

Hindu is the dominant religion practiced by the parents, 98 percent of the sample belong to this religious group, whereas only about 2 percent of the total reported to be practicing Jainism. No Assamese or Bengali families follow Jain

religion. This religion has been imported by the migrated families from Rajasthan and adds to the religious diversity of the town along with linguistic diversity.

Table: 3.9. Caste of the Respondents

Caste of the Respondents		
	Total	
SC	1	1.96
ST	2	3.92
OBC	8	15.69
General	40	78.43
Grand Total	51	100.00

About 4 percent of the parents said they belonged to scheduled tribes, about 2 percent reported to be from scheduled caste community, 16 percent out of the total reported to be belong to other backward classes and 78 percent said they were from general category. While whatever caste category the parents have told is considered to be true, there is however an iota of doubt about the nature of the information, because somewhere parents were skeptical about revealing the true caste status for two things, one going by the independent nature of the research and two fear of adverse effect of the information revealed. Any other variation may be considered as the limitation of the study as no family was visited of any prior knowledge except that they have children who go to school.

Table: 3.10 Age of the sample Respondents by Gender

Age of the Respondent by Gender						
	Male	% Male	Female	% Female	Total	%
18-25	2	7.69	0	0	2	3.92
26-35	2	7.69	10	40.00	12	23.53
36-45	15	57.69	14	56.00	29	56.86
46-55	7	26.92	1	4.00	8	15.69
Total	26	100.00	25	100.00	51	100.00

Out of the total male respondents about 57 percent belonged to the age group of 36 to 45 years. The next higher percentage of male sample lied between 45 to 55 year age group, the value standing at 27 percent. Female disaggregation of proportion by age shows that of the total female interviewed, 56 percent belonged

to age group of 36 to 45 years, the next higher percentage of female sample belonged to the 26-35 age groups. The average number of women is definitely younger than their male counterpart in the sample.

Table: 3.11 Relation of the sample respondents to the child

Relation to the child		
	Total	%
Mother	25	49.02
Father	25	49.02
Others	1	1.96
Grand Total	51	100.00

All female reported for the interview and respondent for the schooling of the child were mothers. Similar is the case with male respondents, every one interviewed were father of the child except one. Thus the above discussion on age clearly shows that the average age of the parents whose children got to elementary school is young and primarily belongs to the late thirties and just above forty.

Table: 3.12 Occupation of the sample respondents by Gender

Occupation of the respondents by gender				
	Male	Female	Total	Total %
Shop owner/retailer/businessman	9		9	17.65
Self employed professional	1	1	2	3.92
Clerical	4		4	7.84
Teacher	3	9	12	23.53
Senior level executive	4		4	7.84
Housewife		15	15	29.41
Others (one each) (doctor/employee in pvt firm, shop/pvt service/student)	5		1	1.96
Grand Total	26	25	51	100.00

Most men were engaged in business, owned shops and retailed goods. Almost equal number of male parent was engaged in government service in the post of clerk or held senior executive level post with long years of work experience. One each was doctor, artist, and student and three others worked in private enterprise or small shops. In the case of respondent mothers' occupation more

than 50 percent were housewife, 9 out of 25 were teachers in government and private schools

Table: 3.13 Monthly Household Incomes of the sample respondents (HHI)

Monthly Household Income (HHI)		
In Rs.	Total	%
4,001-6,000	3	5.88
6,001-8,000	2	3.92
8,001-10,000	4	7.84
10,000-20,000	19	37.25
>20,000	23	45.10
Grand Total	51	100

Household income of the sample families was estimated on the basis of the information on occupation of both the set of parents. It was a difficult question to address as no family willing gave the correct figure. The life style, possession of other assets and expenditure on education all corroborated together helped the researcher along with the parents to arrive at the income status of the family. Around 45 percent of the households earned more than Rs20,000 per month. Households with earnings between Rs10, 000 to Rs 20,000 per month comprised of 37 percent of the total working sample. Out of all, 9 families earned less than Rs 10,000 per month. It is to be noted that the per capita income at current prices (2005-06) is Rs 18,598 in Assam[137]. And the income thus estimated does show major variation from the state per capita income.

[137] Manorama Year Book 2010, Kottayam: Malaya Manorama Press

Status of Education of the Respondents

Table: 3.14Education levels of the sample respondents

Education level of the Respondents		
	Total	%
Up to Matric	3	5.88
Matric /HS	17	33.33
Undergraduate	7	13.73
Grad/PG	24	47.06
Grand Total	51	100.00

Disaggregated proportion of the sample exhibit that 47 percent of the respondents either male or female at least completed graduation or above as part of their education. The next representative proportion are those who at least finished high school and went to higher secondary or completed higher secondary and did not pursue education further with 33 percent of the total sample. It is impressive to note that about 61 percent of the sample population irrespective of their gender has managed to reach the graduate level of education and have expressed interest in the perusal of good education for their children. They claimed to have felt the need of it and at the same time value education an asset for their future.

Table: 3.15Type of Education sample respondents received

Type of Education Respondents received		
	Total	%
Government	44	86.27
Private (regular)	5	9.80
Private (professional)	1	1.96
Other (govt+pvt)	1	1.96
Grand Total	51	100.00

As clear from the table, 86 percent of the total male and female respondents received education from government run colleges and institutes. Education for them during their time meant "government education" as told by

the parents. Only 10 percent went to private educational institution which offered regular courses.

Enquiring in to their three generations of tryst with education, respondents were asked about the education status of their parents and their spouses' parents and what followed is presented in the table below.

Table: 3.16 Education status of respondent's parents

Education status of respondent's both set of parents		
All literate parents	41	80.39
Either illiterate parent	10	19.61
Grand Total	51	100

Separate literacy and education status was sought for respondents' mother and father and her/his spouses mother and father. 41 respondents informed that both set of their parents were educated and if not higher education, were at least literate. This group formed 80 percent of the total respondent. Only 20 percent of the families reported that at least one parent was illiterate from either side of the family. Thus the urge, encouragement and level of interest to imbibe education as a means for end had seen the light way back with older generation among the middle class. The middle class attitude begins to show in the form of availing better schools for their children, good education and disciplined life for accomplishment in the future, to be continued in the next chapter.

Chapter Four:

An analysis embedded in Parental Choice and Class practice

The analytical domain of the research findings proposes to deal with the choice and voice of the middle class in the neoliberal inferno where the role of the state and market are being negotiated in the same time and space. At the same time it finds its place in both the issues within the sociology of education pertaining to the concerns raised by the non-homogeneous middle class and the economics of education dealing with implications of schools under different management type. Creation of urban space brings with itself a set of uncertainty and individualism to grapple ahead of the common people.

Depiction of the Research Space

Tinsukia is a major urban town of Assam (referred to as city sometimes) well connected with a National Highway and Assam Trunk Road. Therefore businesses are easily brought to the town because of improved transport connectivity. Private buses ply connecting Tinsukia to other nearby towns but the main mode of public transport within the periphery of the town is 'share tempo' or local rickshaws. The private tempos and busses also act as a source of business and livelihood to many, mostly youths. They are employed by an owner and given the tempo on lease. While visiting the field for the survey frequent conversations with them revealed their socio-economic background and education level. They are considerably educated for a formal job but lack of proper opportunity and adverse circumstances have made them discontinue their studies and take up this particular work. Nevertheless there is lot of hope with the youth and their potential cannot be undermined. Tinsukia is also directly connected through railways and Assam state transport and inter-state transport buses for easy access to far off places in Assam and other north eastern states. The state capital Guwahati is about 460km away from the town and can be reached in an overnight journey from Tinsukia. Railways have helped develop the connectivity of the town with the national capital with two major trains running between the two stations. The

place can also be reached by Air and has an airport 25 kms away. Not forgetting to point out that the purchasing power of the population mentioned in the earlier chapter is good. If not most people (that will be too much of generalization), many private vehicles are seen on the roads of the town. Although availability of public transport has improved, not much expansion of the town has taken place in so many years of witnessing its growth. Private vehicles seem to have multiplied adding to congestion and hustle bustle. Increase in population and growth of tangible goods have added to its urbaneness over a period of time. Thus the residential area in the town spread far and wide is coming up with numerous small localities with every passing year. That however does not dilute the possibility of segregation of the population on the basis of possession of a house in a better off locality. A house in good residential locality not only divides the population physically, there is attitudinal differentiation of class and status which was apparent during the interaction with the parents. The population composition of the town is thus; Assamese and Bengali population are the permanent residents of the town, there are others who have migrated from western part of the country such as from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, etc. for the purpose of various types of business as mentioned in the review, migrants from states of Bihar and Jharkhand are also found to co-habit in the town but their occupation status is that of mostly casual labours.

The schools are not very far from each other, considering the square kilometre area of the town; however since the population has spread far and wide and good popular schools are in the main town area, it is a task to send a child to a particular school if there is no school bus. The weather and commuting both has to be extremely conducive to undertake any kind of fieldwork specially in order to meet those who are bound in a 9-5 job or go out of station to work or those who run business, who are available at home before and after the office and working hours only. The town slithers into silence by 8.30 pm and daily public transport

stops commuting after 7.00 pm. It is tough for the commuters to return to their home from far off places unless they have their personal vehicles.

Some families who live in the outer growth but send their children to schools in Tinsukia were also interviewed for better understanding of certain factors to be explained later. There were very few such families too who lived in the main urban town but preferred to send their children to schools in a place they worked and who either commuted daily for work or stayed for the week and came back to the town during the weekend.

The Family Factor

Table: 4.1 Ownership of house

House Ownership	Total	%
Rented House	12	23.5
Own House	38	74.5
Separated House Hold	1	2.0
Grand Total	51	100

Before proceeding further in the discussion it is important to know the economic profile of the families. On being probed about the ownership of the house the following information was obtained. Around 74 per cent of the total sample families has own house to live which exactly meant they have land of their own. Only one family is a separated household with the mother of the child staying at her maternal home however providing expenses for the child's schooling, and bore other expenses. Thus the average sample population at least have own share of land to live and sustain and that way are settled.

Trying to draw relationship between the type of school the child is sent to with the extent to which the family is affluent, it is found that families of those children who attend Government school are less well-off in terms of possession of durable goods, domestic appliances and vehicles starting with simple things such as refrigerator to high end durables such as a microwave oven or air conditioner.

This has helped calculate the household wealth of each family. For example it is a mark of status to own car in the town and 26 families out of 51 (just above 50 %) own at least a car. Out of which, 88 per cent of the families send their children to either type of private schools. Similar is the case with rest of the durables which are more than obvious. Television and mobile phone are the only two common goods owned by every family interviewed. In this way suggesting that economic prosperity and wealth of the family is related to the type of school the child attends or rather the families choose to send.

Table: 4.2 Family Affluence by School type

	Type of School				
Durable Goods	Govt (%)	Pvt (%)	Pvt Rel (%)	Total (%)	Total N=
Refrigerator	9	40	51	100	43
Computer	14	43	43	100	21
Microwave	9	55	36	100	11
Air Conditioner	11	33	56	100	9
Cycle	15	34	51	100	47
Motor bike	10	40	50	100	30
Car	12	38	50	100	26
Television	14	35	51	100	51
Landline phone	18	32	50	100	22
Mobile phone		35	51	100	51

Further segregation of the families by per month household income level shown in the table below only affirms the point discussed above. As the monthly income level rises from Rs 4,000 to more than Rs 20,000 per month, the order of ownership of domestic appliances, vehicle and overall wealth status of the families also rises from increase in the ownership of everyday utility items to luxury items such as microwaves and air conditioners. Maximum percent of ownership of all the goods are seen among the families whose per month household earning is more than Rs 20,000 emphasising that they are financially well off to afford items of need and luxury to show class status.

Table: 4.3 Family Affluence by Per month Household Income

Affluence by Per Month Household Income (in Rs.) (%)							
Durable Goods	4001 – 6000	6001 – 8000	8001 – 10000	10000- 20,000	>20000	Total (%)	Total N=
Refrigerator	2	2	2	37	56	100	43
Computer	5	5		33	57	100	21
Microwave				18	82	100	11
Air Conditioner				22	78	100	9
Cycle	4	4	6	38	47	100	47
Motor bike		3		47	50	100	30
Car		4		35	62	100	26
Television	4	4	8	37	47	100	51
Landline phone		9	5	32	55	100	22
Mobile phone	4	4	8	37	47	100	51

Both the above data set are corroborated to reveal the real economic status of the family to locate them in the middle class strata for the analyses. While income alone cannot considered to be the correct indicator of the family wealth, as real income is under stated by those whose total earnings exceeds their income and under represented by those who can benefit through some scheme of the government. Thus household assets are used to substantiate any gap in the school choice and family economic condition.

From the above two tables, effort is to delineate the class stature of the families in terms of their income ability and the relational view of the type of schools the children attend. Wealth of a family is a key criterion to enable a child from the family to avail quality education which is available with better off and expensive schools as against the government. Thus it merely situates the position of the family not challenged with monetary constrains in the context without overstating the possession of wealth as the only factor for school choice.

Within a sample size of 51 families, information was gathered for only one child per household attending elementary school. However children of the sample families could be mapped to 19 schools in the survey. Eight schools were cited as secular private English medium schools whereas five schools were cited as private

schools with religious influence such as Christian and Hindu missionary schools. Two other schools were cited as both secular private as well influenced with religious ethos. Segregation of the schools on the basis of religious denomination and its subsequent influence on school choice has been studied by Denessen et al. (2005) and Escardibul and Villarroya (2009) in Netherlands and Spain respectively. The findings of the Netherlands study show, it was mostly Muslim and Protestant parents for whom schools which followed their religion were considered to be of primary reason for choice. However in the present research the parents think that the religious factor does not influence the curriculum or the pedagogy of the classroom or school processes much and thus may not be too much of a reason for choice. Though they believe it is important for the child to imbibe cultural ethos and it is good if they get similar environment in the school as at home. The parents seek continuity of the value system even in the school. The remaining four schools are government schools out of which one is a Kendriya Vidyalaya (Central School) which are considered to be the best state funded and state run schools following Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) curriculum. The table below shows the diversity of the schools which children attend in an urban town as large as Tinsukia.

Table: 4.4. Name of the school by Type of School

			Type of School				
		Name of the School	Govt	Pvt	Pvt (rel)	Total	%
Secular Private schools	1	Babies Nursery Co-ed High School		1		1	1.96
	2	Budding Buds Senior Secondary School		6		6	11.76
	3	Buds Nursery School		1		1	1.96
	4	Holy Brooke School		1		1	1.96
	5	Pinewood Residential School		1		1	1.96
	6	Jatia Vidyalaya		1		1	1.96
	7	Tinsukia English Academy		2		2	3.92
	8	The Gurukul Residential School		1		1	1.96
Religious Private	9	Carmel high School, Digboi			1	1	1.96
	10	Holy Child School,			4	4	7.84
	11	Ramakrishna mission			1	1	1.96
	12	St. Mary's High School, Margherita (facilitated by Coal India)			1	1	1.96
	13	St. Stephen School			5	5	9.80

	14	Guru Teg Bahadur Academy		3	8	11	21.57
	15	Vivekananda Kendriya Vidyalaya		1	6	7	13.73
Govt. School	16	Gangabishan Chowkhani H.S. School	2			2	3.92
	17	Govt. Bengali Girl's High School	1			1	1.96
	18	Kendriya Vidyalaya, Miao, Arunachal Pradesh	1			1	1.96
	19	Tinsukia Railway High School	3			3	5.88
		Grand Total	7	18	26	51	100
		Total Schools	7	44		51	

The Gurukul School, about 15 kms away from the main town of Tinsukia so is Pinewood Residential School and are comparatively very new schools in comparison to many others which are situated in the urban hub. Established not more than 3 years back, the Gurukul has drawn parents who can afford a hefty price for residential education mostly by the Marwari families. The private schools have come up at every possible vacant land in the city. While most schools are situated in the main town area, some of them are really far away and are not easily accessible. Study done by Escardibul and Villarroya (2009) emphasise on geographical factors which consider the plurality and diversity of schools, the extent of public transport networks and greater access to information which work to aid in the selection of private school. In the present work some schools such as Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya, St. Stephens School, Guru Teg Bahadur Academy, The Gurukul Residential School, Carmel High School, Holy Child School and Pinewood Residential School provide bus service for children coming from remote areas of the town as also from other nearby towns. For few among these schools it is an optional and charged to those who avail the service. And also it is easier for working parents to manage with the school timings of the children as it becomes the responsibility of the school to take care of their children. Few parents also think that it is a matter of status to send children to such school as they are big school with more market value as against these whose children either go to neighbourhood school or manage their own share transport (*an additional responsibility*) to send their children. Government schools of all sorts are

considered to be usually neighbourhood school and attended by those who live in the near vicinity. Overall access is not much of an issue with those attending better off private schools as different arrangements are made by the parents for the child to attend it and eventually raise ones social status in the neighbourhood and among the peer. It is primarily a matter of choice and the reasons for choosing a particular school which shall be discussed later.

Table: 4.5 School Status and Percent of children attending

School status	Sex				Total No. of Children	%
	Boy	%	Girl	%		
Co-education	28	96.55	15	68.18	43	84.31
Single Sex	1	3.45	7	31.82	8	15.69
Grand Total	29	100	22	100	51	100

It is found most children attend co-education school where both boys and girls are imparted education together, and there is only 1 case of boy attending a boy's school and 7 cases of girls attending a girl's school. High percentage of girls in girl's school is because of the fact that out of 7 girl's 6 goes to a highly reputed private school called Budding Buds Senior Secondary School and one goes to a very old Government Bengali Girl's High School. Out of a total of 19 schools to which children are mapped, only 3 schools are single sex school including 2 Girls School and 1 Boy's School, rest of them provide combined education. However with middle class families in the town it is not a matter of concern whether the school is only for boys or girls, what matters is primarily the provision of education and other correlated dynamics which impinge on the choice factor.

Age- grade cohort of the children from sample families studying in both type of school shows that there is rarely any representation of underage or overage children. Most children are attending grade 4 followed by grade 8 and grade 6. Majority of the children are aged between 9 years to 12 years. Parents are conscious of the schooling of their children and take care of their performance in school by continuously attending to their educational needs in general as well as maintaining the matriculation age to avoid future discrepancies. In similar context

the Spanish study does not find significance of age of the children as critical for choice making of the parents as most children are of correct age to be in the particular class they study. Gender of the children also does not find any significant importance to draw attention to the findings.

Table: 4.6 Age- Grade Cohorts

Age /Grade	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	Age Total
5	1								1
6	2								2
7		1							1
8		2	3	2					7
9			3	6	2				11
10				4	3	2			9
11						1	1		2
12						5	3	2	10
13							1	5	6
14								1	1
16								1	1
Grade Total	3	3	6	12	5	8	5	9	51

Social Milieu Factors

One of the important criteria to make choice of education for their children is education of the parents themselves. That education of the parents itself influences the desire to educate ones child and show aspiration of kind to be achieved with the help of good education is an inherent assumption may be countered with the fact that even poor educated families seek good education for their child if they are in the right environment.

Table: 4.7 Education level of the Parents

Education of the Spouse of the respondent	Education of the respondent (values in %)			
	Up to matric	Matric /HS	Under Grad	Grad/PG
Unmarried			14	
Up to matric	33			
Matric /HS	67	71	14	13
Under Grad		6	14	4
Grad/PG		24	57	83
Total %	100	100	100	100
Total N=	**3**	**17**	**7**	**24**

The above table provides information on the education status of the both the parents in the household. It is evident that most parents have completed at least one stage of education tier either they have finished school or college. Only

one set of couple are school dropout and have not completed matriculation. Graduate or Post Graduate respondents with spouses educated up to similar level constitute the highest percentage (83%) of the total sample population.

Table: 4.8 Type of Institution attended by respondents by their education level

	Type of Education (%)			
Education Level	Govt	Private (regular)	Private (profess)	Others (govt+pvt)
Up to metric	6.82			
Metric/HS	31.82	40	100	
Undergrad	11.36	40		
Grad /PG	50.00	20		100
Total N=	44	5	1	1

The type of education received by the respondents has been shown in the table above. It is clear that most of the parents are educated in purely government educational institutions. Even for those who were trained in medical or technical education, are products of the state funded education system.

Table: 4.9: Education Level of Parents of children attending Private schools

Children attending Private School: All Type		
Education of the Spouse	Education of the respondent (values in %)	
	Under Grad	Grad/PG
Under Grad	25	5
Grad/PG	75	95
Total %	100	100
Total N=	4	20

The table shows the education status of those parents whose children attend Private (secular + religious) schools. They composed of undergraduates and graduates or above. The incidence of such choice is higher among those who themselves are better educated. According to Bourdieu (1986)[138] and Coleman (1988)[139] such parents can be classified to be middle class privileged/skilled choosers who has the right social and cultural capital to access information on

[138] P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London: Routledge

[139] J S. Coleman, Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital, *American Journal of Sociology*, 94 (supplement), pp-95-120, 1988.

school, evaluate schools, and arrive at a choice customized according to the attributes deemed to be fit for their children.

With changing nature of the market situation and process of knowledge dissemination, parents have managed their best to provide private English medium schooling to the children considering the declining preference for government schools. Parents shared and compared the quality of education they received and the quality of education they want their children to receive. The parents believe during their era government schools were relatively good as not many private institutions were out there to compete with the standard of education provided. Similar to what is stated in the present study, Donner (2005)[140] combined the results of a study done in an Indian metropolis of Calcutta. While language was held up with pride, parents moved out of the notion to school their children in 'Bengali medium state schools' and preferred English medium private schools in order to equip their child with the competence to adjust in a new global workplace.

The status of school education eventually over a period of time has improved and has grown more competitive than their time. There was disappointment among the parents as they had no other choice but to pursue education that was general and omnipresent in the form of government schools and other government institutions. As discussed in the previous chapter, the average age of the parents lie between 36-45 years and are a generation behind when establishments of the private schools was yet to gather momentum. In fact they form the second tier of educational elite in the 1970s educated in the 'middle-grade regional-medium high schools' and colleges according to Kamat (1985)[141]

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[140] H. Donner, 'Children are Capital, Grandchildren are interest': changing educational strategies and parenting in Calcutta's middle-class families, in J. Assayag and C J. Fuller eds. *Globalizing India. Perspectives from Below,* London: Anthem Press, pp 119-139, 2005; Cited in Nambissan, 2010

[141] A R. Kamat, *Education and Social Change in India,* Bombay: Somaiya Publication Private Limited; Cited in Nambissan, 2010

Table: 4.10. Literacy status of the Respondent's parents

Literacy status of respondents parents	Education Level of the respondents					
	Up to matric	Matric /HS	Under grad	Grad /PG	Total %	Total N=
Father	6	33	14	47	100	51
Mother	4	32	13	51	100	47
Father- in- Law	6	33	10	50	100	48
Mother-in- law	5	32	11	52	100	44

In order to capture the tradition of education and learning among the sample families the literacy status of the parents of the respondents was obtained. It is found that those respondents who graduated or post graduated had high percentage of educated or literate parents than those who were lesser educated. Though no distinct difference can be drawn with the level of the education their parents received but surely it has been a motivating factor for the respondents to pursue education beyond school.

Table: 4.11 Household Income by Type of school the child attends (I)

Household income Rs/month	School Type			
	Govt n=	%	Total Pvt n=	%
4001 – 6000	2	28.57	1	2.27
6001 – 8000	1	14.29	1	2.27
8001 – 10000		0.00	4	9.09
10000-20,000	3	42.86	16	36.36
>20000	1	14.29	22	50.00
Total	7	100	44	100.00

Most children who attend private school belong to higher income group. In order to trace back the economic affluence of the children attending different types of school, it was found that families who earned more than Rs 20,000 per month chose to send their children to private school than government ones. On the contrary low cost government schools are a compulsive choice for those who do not earn much. The variation is not very stark however. It is a matter of convenience and location of the school in the neighbourhood.

Table: 4.12 Household Income by Type of school the child attends (II)

Household Income Rs/month	School Type					
	Govt	%	Pvt	%	Pvt (rel)	%
4001 – 6000	2	28.57	1	5.56		0.00
6001 – 8000	1	14.29		0.00	1	3.85
8001 – 10000		0.00	2	11.11	2	7.69
10000-20,000	3	42.86	4	22.22	12	46.15
>20000	1	14.29	11	61.11	11	42.31
Total	7	100	18	100	26	100

Few families who reported to earn a low monthly income did also send their children to private school emphasising the urge to get marginally good quality education even if it may be difficult to manage other expenses of the house. They reported of cutting back on other nature of expenses but not on their children's education, which they felt was indispensable and one least likely to be curtailed. Though not convenient but they went ahead to enrol their child in a private English medium school. Thus families of all income type have at least one child going to private school however more number of them in the upper income slab chose to send their children to education institutions run by private management.

Table: 4.13 Expenditure on Education by Type of school the child attends

Education Expenditure Rs/month	School Type		
	Govt %	Pvt %	Pvt (rel) %
< 500	43	6	-
501 – 1000	43	22	23
1001 – 2000	14	33	46
2001 – 3000	-	28	27
3001 – 4000	-	6	4
4001 – 6000	-	6	-
Total	100	100	100
N=	7	18	26

The expenditure on education incurred by the families is shown in the above table. Most parents spend between Rs 1000 to Rs 3000 per month on education of the child attending private schools. It is a matter of fact that state

school education is almost free of cost. This expenditure includes school fees, spending on extracurricular and project works, books and stationery, cost of different type of uniform, private tuitions fees, expenses on travel to school and other miscellaneous expenditures on schooling of their child. Some parents complained that the education expenditure per month for the child goes up because of the fees paid for the private home tuition for that extra coaching either in all subjects in primary grades or in science or mathematics in upper primary grades. This expenditure inflates the per month expenditure on schooling of the child. And students who go to a good private school also prefer to take tuition because of performance pressure. Thus even if the per month school tuition fees is not very high, the expenditure is engorged because of the extra coaching outside the school. Education from a private English medium school comes with a cost[142] and a major portion of the family earning as parents said is spent in helping their child excel.

School Related Characteristics effecting Choice

Table: 4.14 Decision in enrolment of the child by School type

Admission factors in %			
	Govt	Total Pvt	Total %
Your choice prevailed	71	52	55
School selected	14	14	14
Both	14	34	31
Grand Total	100	100	100
N=	7	44	51

The selection process for the admission of the children is not a part of the decision making process of the parents alone. The school also imposes selection criteria based on which they enrol children in the school. It is indeed a two way process where first it is the parents who decide which school their children should

[142] It occurs through *concerted cultivation* (Lareau, 2003). This involves action aiming to stimulate the cognitive development of their child. For this purpose parents set up a rigorous regime to organize *out-of-school* time, (sports, art class, dance, learning other language, etc.), which becomes an integral part in the logic of child rearing (Nogueira, 2010).

attend at the same time it is the discretion of the schools to select the type of children they want in their school. Thus mere choice of schools creates possibilities for the parents but does not completely empower them to send their children in whichever school they wish to send. The above table shows the proportion of responses in favour three categories based on which selection of the child takes place in the school which they are attending. In maximum cases though the child is prepared beforehand to undergo the selection procedure laid out by the school. The parents are conscious to prepare their children with skills and training required for the level of entry. Mathematics and language skills are a must for the child for any level of entry however same is not the case with the children who seek admission in government school. For admissions to government school is open and require only a birth certificate to complete the formality as told during the interviews. The private schools and central schools conduct tests and interviews for the selection of the child to the school. Parents also shared that admission in schools is also dependent on the availability of seats and it is a matter of chance all dependent on first come first serve basis. Thus there are no clear cut strict rules using which admissions take place. Nevertheless schools at their own end as mentioned above conducts tests for the children and holds interviews of the parents as well as children to ascertain inclusion of those who are meritorious and can sustain the demands of schooling. The table below disaggregates the sample into different admission criteria.

Table: 4.15 Admission Criteria by School type

	School Type			
Admission Criteria	Govt	Pvt	Pvt (rel)	Total
Test/Interview	14	67	73	63
No particular Criteria	71	33	27	35
Others	14	0	0	2
Total	100	100	100	100
N=	7	18	26	51

The other criteria's which were part of the questionnaire were donation and recommendations which work for admission to 'big' schools already discussed

previously. However when probed for information's regarding any special fees that the schools charges, parents comfortably revealed that it is part of the fee structure and one has to pay for the admission of their child. No parent agreed the over-charge as donation or capitation fee. The question of recommendations seemed inapplicable to non-influential parents as admission to schools in the town is not in real sense out of bound of middle class families unlike those in the metropolis.

Table: 4.16 Grade-School Type Distribution

Grade-School Type Distribution (In %)				
	Govt	Pvt	Pvt (rel)	Total %
I		6	8	6
II		17		6
III		22	8	12
IV		17	35	24
V		17	8	10
VI		11	23	16
VII	29	6	8	10
VIII	71	6	12	18
Grand Total	100	100	100	100
N=	**7**	**18**	**26**	**51**

*N=51

The purpose of using the above table on grade and type of school the child attends here is to read the information together with the performance of the school. To highlight all children who attend government school study in upper primary level of education. The attendance for the private schools is dispersed, however higher percentage of children are in attending grade 4, grade 6and grade 8 in this section.

Table: 4.17 Satisfaction with school Performance; Private School: All Type

	Primary Grade %					Upper Primary Grade %			
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	Grand Total
Satisfied	100	67	100	92	80	63	33	75	80
Dissatisfied		33		8	20	38	67	25	20
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N=	3	3	6	12	5	8	3	4	44
Government School: Satisfaction with school Performance									
Satisfied							100	80	85.7
Dissatisfied								20	14.3
Total %							100	100	100
N=							2	5	7

Parents were asked if they were satisfied with the performance of the school towards their child and overall academic activities. While majority of the parents expressed satisfaction with the performance of the school towards their child's educational needs and development at the primary level, with the increase in grade there is decline in the percentage of satisfied parents. Parents said as the child enters higher grade, classroom competition becomes stiffer and the curriculum becomes complex and demanding. The subjects become more specialized and require teachers of higher competence to deal with them. Specialized teachers are not available with every school as was inferred through discussion with parents. Appropriating this it can be said that the agency is continuously creating strategies to meet the demands of the structure by behaving like rational actors in the field of elementary education. This is what van Zanten (2007)[143] meant by the reflexive capacity of parents to analyze their present educational reality and guard the consequences of their acts, particularly in choice of educational institution.

Parents also complained that there is too much money in the market and private schools run like businesses nowadays. Commitment towards education and learning is deteriorating unlike the earlier times. Their view is that with passing of years once the schools have earned its name and reputation they have become

[143] Text in French quoted by Noguiera (2010)

complacent towards education as parents are easily approaching the schools for admission of their children by its mere name.

Network Enabled Choice of School

Table: 4.18 Parent's Source of Information about the school

Information about the school for admission	Total n=	%
From your child	1	1.96
From colleagues	11	21.57
From colony friends	17	33.33
From spouse's friends	6	11.76
Others (as a teacher/community school/ self/spouse/pvt teaching/elder siblings)	10	19.61
From relatives	6	11.76
Total	51	100

Information regarding the schools child attends was mostly gathered from colony friends and then from colleagues in order of decreasing percentage. Then there are others such as, elder sibling attending the same school, or parent working as a teacher or in some other capacity in the same school. Relatives are also highly influential is helping select a particular school for the child as well as friends or colleagues of their spouse. Thus good networking is an important asset for choice of school. Choice of school can be attributed to spread like word of mouth rather than any personal judgement through open advertisement. Schools therefore are likely to bring children from one type of class of people who associate with each other either formally as office colleagues or informally as relatives. In any case homogeneity in schools are sought and too much of class variation is not appreciated by the families. The parents also seek only certain type of peer for their children and dilution of their status and class standards is resented even within the school space. Education space is not thus is restricted to functional role to maintain order and produce social conformists; they embody the cultural expectations of the parents in their own selection and rejection processes.

Table: 4.19 Source of Information about the school by Education Level of Parents values in %)

Source of Information	Up to Matric	Matric /HS	Under Grad	Grad/Post Grad	Total
From your child	33	0	0	0	2
From colleagues	0	12	29	29	22
From colony friends	33	59	0	25	33
From spouse's friends/colleagues	0	6	29	17	14
From relatives	0	18	14	8	12
Others (self)	33	6	29	21	18
Total %	100	100	100	100	100
N=	3	17	7	24	51

Looking at the disaggregated proportion of population with respect to education level of the parents, it is found that those who are well educated seek information about which school their child should attend from colleagues, followed by colony friends and then self. While colleagues are the most relied source of information for higher educated parents, spouse's colleagues/friends and relatives find some place in the decision making of school choice for those who are matriculate or undergraduate. Decision making for good school is a choice making process contingent not only upon ones education and occupation but is also dependent on the company one keeps in the colony or work place, their level of education and interest.

Table: 4.20 Household income by Number of Schools Applied to for admission of the child

Household income Rs/month	No. of Schools	School type			
		Govt	Pvt	Pvt (rel)	Grand Total
4001 – 6000	No other school	1	1		2
6001 – 8000	No other school	1			1
	1 other school			1	1
8001 – 10000	No other school		2	2	4
10000 -20,000	No other school	2	4	10	16
	1 other school	1		2	3
>20000	No other school	1	7	10	18
	1 other school		3		3
	2 other schools	1	1	1	3
Grand Total		7	18	26	51

Expanding the possibilities for the child's academic pursuance, parents try to exhaust all options to get their child enrolled in a good quality school. However this endeavour may vary with the capacity of the families to pay for the application charges as well as the willingness to explore more than one possibility for the admission. With this backdrop the survey revealed that with increase in income level the range of application to number of schools varied. The above table depicts the values for the number of schools the parents applied to for their child's admission besides the one they are already attending. Thus 'no other school' means that the child has got admission in the only school they applied to. And '1 other school' and '2 other school' means schools applied to in addition to the one the child is already attending. For some it was like a fall out option which is in case there is stiff competition and the child is not able to get through the first choice may try for the second best option available in the town. On the contrary there are parents who simultaneously apply for 2 to 3 schools hoping (s)he should get admission in any of them so long as it is private English medium school. Thus choice is not of a particular school but schools with particular characteristics which may satisfy the parent's requirements for a good school.

Table: 4.21. Social membership by Monthly Household Income

Monthly Household Income (values in %)	Social Membership	No Membership	Total %	N=
4001 – 6000	0	100	100	2
6001 – 8000	50	50	100	2
8001 – 10000	25	75	100	4
10000-20,000	42	58	100	19
>20000	38	63	100	24
Total	37	63	100	51

*N=51

Parents were asked to inform about their membership in any voluntary organization or boards the responsibility of which is external to their occupation. The responses are mapped with respect to their income and education level. While high percentage of parents have some form of membership into voluntary groups, committees or associations, lower income households show less

participation in these forms of networking and associations. Some are also engaged with state chapter of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan*, the flagship education programme of Government of India. Profession of the parent is important to determine their engagement with other types of related associations, however even membership in a local club shows the kind of exposure the parents have and think is important for the growth of their child as well. Dissociating from the social processes of interaction is not very healthy for the development of the child as well is what parents believe. At the same time parents think that it keeps them abreast with different realms of interaction and helps develop different faculties and keeps them active in their social life. It is also a matter of social status to acquire prolific membership in different associations.

Table: 4.22. Social Membership by Education Level of the Respondents

Respondent's Education Level	Social Membership	%
Up to metric	1	5
Metric /HS	4	21
Undergrad	4	21
Grad/PG	10	53
Total	19	100

*N=51

The box below shows participation of the parents and membership in different organizations.

community club; eco club in college; lion's club; medical association; temple committee; NGO; community celebration committee; contribution to social welfare; friends club; teachers association; women association; pragjyotish cultural association; cultural association; samata society (ssa); citizen council, SC/ST committee; board member railway school, girls sarva shiksha; ex-AASU member; ISKON; etc

Table: 4.21 Opinion of Parents on role of Social Network

Importance of Social Network	F	%
Assam is not as developed thus contacts for better opportunity is required for higher studies away from home town, for growth	9	13.85
Child develops through cultural contact and , builds confidence, overall development	9	13.85
Helps in School choice, helps in School tasks and choice of extra curricular	9	13.85
Network can cooperate but not much, no particular help, self decision is required	9	13.85
Resourceful relatives and contacts are important for inspiration as well as aspiration to plan for future	7	10.77
For everything, competitive exams, knowledge of admission, procedure, course, estimate cost , finance, loans etc., the future plans	7	10.77
Qualified parents in School, good informed parents are asset, quality discussions on education is mandatory for development of child	5	7.69
Network determines the social character my child will attain, network helps in social acquaintance with most educated, qualified and politically motivated individuals	3	4.62

On being asked about the role of social network and if it holds any importance in their life, parents expressed diverse opinion on its value. Assam as has been discussed is one of the most educationally backward states. Opportunities are not many in terms of higher education as well. Although there are some good institutions for technical education but parents believe not much opportunity is available in terms of others fields of education. To avail of better opportunity contacts are important which is built through maintaining social contacts with the parents of those children who are already studying outside the state engaged in pursuing technical education, business administration or information technology related studies. Parents are willing to send their children away for a better future. Equal percent of parents believe that *'Child develops through cultural contact and builds confidence. It helps in overall development'*. Social networking takes place among the equals as the parents told in the sense that there is exchange of cultural traits and activities which they can relate to. Whereas equal number of parents think that social network is closely related and helpful in the matter of choosing a school, helpful in tasks given by the school and also

extracurricular activities which their child should pursue after school. In this sense many children attend art classes, in fact one of the parents is an art professional and runs classes in schools and outside teaching painting and art, a very popular creative engagement which does not require much investment as well is what parents think. Girls popularly take music classes outside the school. Few other parents think network or social mingling is not much of help beyond school. When it comes to career and decision making parents said they have to take a call on their own. Where on one hand people draw their social contacts through participating and engaging with other associations, office colleague, friends, some parents believe it is most helpful if networking is built through relatives. It is a family matter and well placed siblings or cousins are a source of inspiration for those who are yet to be in school. Parents have thought to the extent that they say social network is important *'for everything like competitive exams, knowledge of admission procedure, course, cost estimate, finance, and loans, etc., the future plans'* which essentially means that they are prepared for whatever it takes to get a good education for their child and wish to explore all viable options by estimating the cost of education to be incurred in future. The foundation of which has to be laid now is what they believe. Influential contacts are like an asset is what some of the parents expressed. Informed parents are themselves like an investment for a future plan and help establish a secure life for their children by ensuring every possible commitment to provide their children with a better direction in life. Similarly parents also said that social network determines the social class of the child in which (s)he is brought up. This demarcation of the class territory is important for the child as *'network determines the social character my child will attain'*. They also spoke about cultural and political socialization through interaction with individuals who are well educated and qualified and are placed as officers in office. They have a different class as one of the parents revealed who himself in administrative officer in government office belonging to scheduled caste section of the society.

Factors for School Choice

To understand in real sense of the term and proposing a perspective, choice cannot be understood as '*choice*' or '*no-choice*'. It is in fact '*positive-choice*' and '*negative-choice*'. However irrespective of the social milieu and occupation level parents have ranked quality of school education as the most desirable choice factor for selecting a particular school for their child. Out of the total sample, 25 percent of the parents think quality of the education disseminated in school is crucial as it is this foundation on which the child will pursue his future. Followed by discipline and access as choice factors which parents think are the most important reasons for which they will select a particular school. School reputation has been ranked the next most important on the priority list by 14 percent of the total sample, followed by language of the school and the education board the school follows. The remaining factors are given in the table below. The factors are mentioned in such a way as had been assigned rank 1 to them.

Table: 4.22. The factors for school choice

Factors for School Choice	Rank 1	%
Quality	13	25
Discipline	8	16
Access	8	16
Reputation	7	14
Language	4	8
Board	4	8
Affordability	3	6
Religion	0	0
Advice	0	0
others	4	8
Total	51	100

Parents were asked to rank the 3 most important factors on the basis of priority for school choice out of the total 8 factors provided. Parents classified them in the following manner.

Table: 4.23. Ranking of Choice factors

The factors for school choice ranked in order of preference (values in %)											
Rank	Affordability	Quality	Access	Advice	Reputation	Language	Religion	Discipline	Board	Others	Total %
1	6	25	16	0	14	8	0	16	8	8	100
2	8	27	12	2	18	8	6	10	6	4	100
3	10	25	20	2	14	20	0	4	2	4	100

*N=51

That quality of school education ranked by most parents as an important factor is evident as it has been awarded rank 1 by 25 percent of the parents. It has also been ranked 2 by 27 percent of parents and has been awarded rank 3 by 25 percent of parents out of the total sample. In a similar manner, access to the school and discipline in school as second and reputation of the school as third most frequently ranked factor to emerge among the first three ranking. The tables mentioned above and below have to be read together to understand the analysis done on them.

Table: 4.24. Standard Deviation of Choice Factors: In terms of overall ranking

	Number	Mean score	ST Dev	Rank
Discipline	15	1.67	0.82	1
Quality	41	2.05	0.86	2
Reputation	25	2.08	0.86	3
Access (distance)	25	2.16	0.94	4
Language	20	2.45	0.89	5
Affordability	14	2.50	1.09	6
Advice	2	2.50	0.71	7
Religion	5	2.60	0.89	8

Discipline is assigned top priority as the major determinant of school choice followed by quality, reputation, access, language, affordability. Religion does not seem to matter in a predominantly Hindu area. Discipline comes first despite only 15 respondents thought it to be a choice factor although it was a part of the 'others'. This implies that those who value discipline, they value it highly. This order of preference among the parents can be attributed to their concern of

an insecure and blurred future ahead. Discipline is one such factor continuously mentioned by the parents during the interviews and school related discussion. For them discipline encompasses every such belief which will make the child learn the ethos of their middle class behaviour. Parents want their child to learn decorum and regularity of life by conforming to the laws of the school. In a strict sense of the term the child has to do well in studies even if (s)he is inclined to perform well in other things such as music, sports, painting or anything else. The encouragement is only additional. While the functional perspective on education ascertains that the role of school is to produce citizen conforming to the social order and participate in the division or labour, parents involuntarily give way to this perception. As Durkheim (1956)[144] writes "society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity: education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands" (p. 70). However he also leaves space for diversity for cohesiveness through diversified and specialized education. Schools also reinforce the family socialization of social-class position, the social class related structure of education and their norms in education which encourages a sense of efficacy among the middle class students is what Paulsen (1991)[145] argues. As discussed earlier the state schools in America aspired to develop citizens with pan American identity through schooling. Expectation from the school milieu are that classes are held regularly, teachers are engaged mostly in academic work and teaching, rare teacher-absenteeism is reported and few holidays make school life disciplined for the child.

Quality of school education what parents meant is the quality of pedagogy and teaching, the syllabus and incorporation of extracurricular activities in the school curriculum. It is also the manner in which teachers take care of the children in the school and ensure good academic performance. Some parents

[144] Emile Durkheim, *Education and Society,* New York: The Free Press, 1956.
[145] Ronnelle Paulsen, Education, Social Class, and Participation in Collective action, *Sociology of Education,* 64(2), pp 96-110, 1991.

believe that education quality is an all encompassing factor without which one cannot think of sending their child to a particular school. However this is not the case with all the parents. Access to a good school is dependent on the availability of transport facility and geographical distance of the school from home. While those schools which provide school buses are considered to be the best in the town as they are the 'big' schools with lot of funds for themselves. Admission to such school is not only dependent on the ability of the child, but also on the affordability of the parents who want their child to be in that particular school.

Schools which are old establishments and have been consistently performing well are considered to be the best reputed schools in the town. Students who finish their matriculation or higher secondary from these schools are considered to have a better future as the seed of ambition and excellence is ingrained in the school ethos and best of the teachers are recruited to maintain the standard of the school. Parents are aware of the competition that their children are going to face if they wish to pursue education away from the town or state and thus seek commitment from schools as well. Reputation in terms of board performance is very important for the parents. Almost every parent wants their child to score more than 90 percent in 10^{th} or 12^{th} standard board exams so that they get more choice to select a good higher education institution out of Assam.

Table:4.25 Monthly Household Income by choice factors

	Rank 1 (values in %)			
Per Month HHI (Rs)	Quality	Access	Discipline	Reputation
4001 – 6000	-	13	13	-
6001 – 8000	-	-	-	-
8001 – 10000	8	25	-	-
10000-20,000	54	0	38	43
>20000	38	63	50	57
Grand Total	100	100	100	100
Total N=	13	8	8	7

Disaggregate proportion of the ranking on the basis of per month household income suggest that quality of education and reputation of the school are not very much a concern with the low income household. It is a characteristic surfacing among those whose earning exceeds more than Rs 10,000 a month more so with those who are concerned with the reputation of the school. For them it also meant if the child attends a reputed well established school their social status is enhanced among their peer and colleagues. However access is not any issue with the high earning group unlike the low earning families.

Table: 4.26. School Type by Choice factors

	Rank 1 (values in %)			
School Type	Quality	Access	Discipline	Reputation
Govt	15	38	0	14
Pvt	38	50	25	29
Pvt (rel)	46	13	75	57
Grand Total	100	100	100	100
N=	13	8	8	7

Similarly parents of those children attending government school have some say in the quality of education and access to school, but does not even closely associate with discipline as the foremost factor for school choice. Reputation of the school is also highly represented by parents of those children attending all type of private schools. Two families out of those who send their children to government school are financially well off but prefer to send their children to the neighbourhood governments school for they believe it is an old school and the children who are in school belong to their own community as the school is under the railway administration called Tinsukia Railway High School.

Table: 4.27. Education of the Parents and Choice Factors

Education of the Spouse	Education of the Respondent															
	Up to Matric (in %) N=3				Matric /HS (in %) N=8				Under grad (in %) N=8				Grad / PG (in %) N=19			
	Quality	Access	Discipline	Reputation	Quality	Access	Discipline	Reputation	Quality	Access	Discipline	Reputation	Quality	Access	Discipline	Reputation
Up to Matric				100												
Matric /HS	100	100			67	67			50				43			
Under Grad								100	50						20	
Grad/PG					33	33	100			100	100		57	100	80	100
Total	100	100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100		100	100	100	100

The table above is trying to see the influence of parents' education in the matter of school choice. While most of the factors are minimally represented with small number of parents, those which are considerably represented needs to be delineated. Four most important factors have been selected to see the influence of parental education in choice, thus reducing the total number to 36. Out of the total of 36 respondents who at least ranked any of the four factors as the top most 'choice' factor, 3 have not finished school, 8 have finished school, 8 are under graduate and 19 have finished graduation or post graduation. In this same order the more educated respondents have spouses who have finished similar level of education. The point to note is that with both parents being graduates or post graduates the factors of school choice moves away from access majorly. The focus of choice is reputation and discipline and quality of education in this order respectively. This can be explained in the sense that with good reputed schools, quality itself is taken care on its own. They prefer to go for best schools such as Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya, Budding Buds School or St. Stephens for example. New schools are also coming up with lot of promises but there is more scepticism as batches are yet to pass out from these schools and fees and charges are higher because of the establishment costs.

Table: 4.28. Ethnicity and Choice Factors

Ethnicity	Factors for School Choice: Rank 1 (in %)			
	Quality	Access	Discipline	Reputation
Indigenous Assamese	31	25	38	14
Bengali	62	75	50	86
Migrant from other states	8	0	13	0
Grand Total	100	100	100	100
N=	13	8	8	7

Among the Assamese middle class, all the factors are almost equi-represented by the parents as the most important factor for choice. It varies from discipline, quality, access and reputation. The Bengali middle class parents have also ranked each factor as the foremost criteria for school selection. Parents whose forefathers have migrated from Rajasthan and Haryana do not think access is a problem nor needs consideration for school choice. They mostly belong to the business class have money to send their children to any of the good school so long as they are aware of its performance. Since the sample is not equally represented by ethnicity of the families, the perceptions of the parents have been used to describe the data and also see the influence of difference in language on school choice.

Table: 4.29. Correlations between the 6 possible Choice factors

Variables	Correlation coefficients	Level of significance
Affordability, quality	(-) 0.539	(0.047)**
Quality, access	(-) 0.477	(0.046)**
Quality, discipline	(-) 0.553	(0.097)*
Access , reputation	(-)0.839	(0.076)*

The correlation coefficients between two of the 8 choice variables have turned out to be negative in the all the cases. This is to be expected as the respondent assigned more importance to one choice variable compared to the other. One can expect a positive variable when two choice variables are given consecutive rankings in the majority of the cases. The statistically significant bi-variate correlation coefficients are reported only. If quality matters, .the

respondent tends to give a low priority to affordability as the parents are willing to spend for quality education. Similarly, if reputation matters, access is low priority as the respondent seems to be willing to bear the cost. Affordability and access reflect the costs side of making the choice whereas, quality is unambiguously desirable. Since discipline ranks first, the respondents think that quality follows if discipline is ensured in the school.

Table: 4.30 Education Level of the Respondent and Choice for Children attending Government School

Choice of parents whose Children go to Government school*				
School Choice	Up to Matric	Matric /HS	Under Grad	Grad/PG
First Choice	67			
Not First Choice	33		100	100
Total %	100		100	100
Total N=	3		3	1

*N=7

For most families private school is a first choice for they believe that private school means at least better than government school in terms of education although school education in state run school is almost free. However this is not an incentive with around 50 percent of the families with at least one parent attaining higher education who think there is not enough of what government school education can give their children. On the contrary those parents who send their children to government school upon asking whether this choice was the first choice, they denied in maximum cases. Only 67 percent of those who have not finished school said they chose the particular school for their child and had not filled forms for any other school. Educated parents do not agree and said it was not their first choice but reasons like low income or lack of permanent job has forced them to put the child in government school. Families who send their children to Kendriya Vidyalaya only do so to cut the cost of schooling and also get good education. This particular data point has also skewed the information and perception of the families who send their children to government school as one Kendriya Vidyalaya (KVs) in the town is not easily accessible and is not good as

compared to other KVs. This particular child stays with her father in Mao and comes back to the town on weekends. Thus parents who work away from the town and think there is better option available pull out the child from the town school and get them enrolled in schools close to places of their job.

Table: 4.31 First Choice by Education of the Male respondent

School Choice	Education level of the Male in the family (%)			
	Up to Matric	Matric /HS	Under Grad	Grad/PG
First Choice	50	50	50	83
Not First Choice	50	50	50	17
Total	100	100	100	100
Total N=	2	8	4	12

*N=26

A graduate male takes charge of the decision making process in the family and selects school with the help of peer advice, suggestion of colleagues or based on their own judgements. The school which their child attends are thus selected as their first choice because they say already a lot of thinking has gone behind selection of the schools and are equipped to choose the best for their child. Only 17 percent out of the total think against this because the school also selects the child and has some specific admission criteria, which if remains unfulfilled the child is denied admission.

Table: 4.32. Logistic regression to assess Influence of Social milieu on Choice

Variables in the Equation	β	S.E.	vald	d.f.	Level of Significance	Exp(β)
Per month HH Income	.095	.055	2.958	1	.085	1.100
Education of Parents	.745	.713	1.091	1	.296	2.107
Constant	-.991	1.034	.917	1	.338	0.371

The choice variable, whether the parents send their children to a government school or a private one is binary in nature. Parents of private school goers are assumed to face unconstrained choice facilitated by levels of income and

education of the parents. Again, income and education may have collinearity as higher level of education leads to higher level of income. The applied logistic regression model with income and education level as the covariates or independent variables show results as mentioned in the table above. Both the expected values of the odd ratios for income and education are greater than indicating a positive relationship. However, only income turns out to be statistically significant at 8.5 % level. The *Exp(B)* of income and education level are 1.1 and 2.1 respectively. A value of 1.1 for income measured in thousand means that if income rises by one thousand, the odds of choosing a private school goes up 1.1 and education being a dummy variable, the odds of choosing a private school goes up by a factor of 2.1 as the education level moves from 0 (till 10+2 level) to 1 (UG and above). The overall success rate in predicting the outcome is 74.5% i.e. choice of a private school which can be considered to be reasonably good.

Dispositions of the Parents on Public and Private Schools and Aspiration

Table: 4.33. Opinion of parents across all socio-economic indicators on Government Schools

Government	F	%
Government Schools do not conduct classes properly, irregular classes, poor education	9	17.65
Do not get child centric attention	5	9.80
However free education in Government School takes of the load off from poor parents who seek education	5	9.80
Government School is good and has improved	4	7.84
Government School lack the basic standard as compared to private	4	7.84
In Government School all children are rural, poor quality of students	3	5.88
Government Schools are mostly vernacular and follows state board	3	5.88
High salary negates the responsibility of the teachers in Government School;	3	5.88
Parents aren't caring enough,	3	5.88

Most frequent responses by parents on government schools are in the form of criticism rather than deification. Most parents who send their children to private school were asked to opine on government schools. The opinions are ranked in order of the most frequent response to least frequent one. Majority of the parents said that Government Schools do not conduct classes properly, have irregular classes with number of holidays and provides poor education to the children. Next point of concern with the parents were, these schools in general do not provide child centric attention, the student-teacher ratio is also alarmingly large in these schools. Government Schools are good for the poor as it provides free elementary education and charges minimal fees in secondary schooling. They think in this way those families who cannot afford private schooling as the fees are high at least can educate their children if willing. Contrary to what most parents believe, few parents said that there is improvement in the performance of the government schools in comparison to the past, more so with the initiative of the government things are improving. Some other criticisms against the Government School are they lack the basic standard of schooling like experimental labs for sciences, computer facility, sports facilities, etc. as compared to private. For some other parents it is the type of children who attend government school such as children attending government schools belong to rural area and from poor family background puts them at a disadvantageous position. The urban middle class families of the town do not want their children in reality to attend government school. This is one of the many reasons to follow. Problem also arises with government Schools as they are mostly vernacular schools such as Assamese medium, Bengali medium and Hindi medium follows state board of education which parents think is a disadvantage in the competitive milieu. The government school teachers are not dedicated enough as they get regular salaries and do not need to put enough effort for the students is what opinions of the parents are. Whereas some parents said it is not the school alone but the family background of the children matters. Parents are not caring enough to take care of their child's education back home such as completing home works and regular learning.

Table: 4.34. Opinion of parents across all socio-economic indicators on Private Schools

Private	F	%
Private School puts effort towards education, learning, regular classes, more teaching time	13	21.67
Better response towards students, personal care and development of the child	9	15.00
English as medium of instruction is important which is not available in govt School, for future	7	11.67
Higher specialization demands more alternatives, demand in the market, too many pvt Schools	4	6.67
Competitive environment	4	6.67
Private Schools has to reap benefit from the parents as expenditure to maintain such Schools is high, profit oriented	3	5.00
Performance, evaluation and tests, result oriented	3	5.00
Discipline is better than govt	3	5.00

Private schools of all types are considered better than government schools nevertheless opinion regarding their schooling varies from one family to other. According to majority of the parents, Private Schools exert effort towards education and learning, conducts regular classes, and devotes more teaching time towards completion of the courses. Another proportion of families expressed that private schools show better responses towards students, provides personal care and development of the child. Children learning English is an important factor for most parents who primarily juxtapose private school along with them being English medium. Although parents have shared that curriculum and pedagogy in English is an advantage available with private schools, they are also a break away from the compulsory vernacular state schools which does not have any future. This is precisely taking stock of the demand generated by the parents to obtain what is offered at the global level in the form of standardized education. The corollary to support the discussion is that there are no vernacular private schools in Tinsukia town. Is it common to hear of vernacular private schools?[146] Among

[146] Private schools are an investment in the business of education. A massive demand to access English education in the country would render the vernacular private schools run the risk of having few

the Assamese families however there is this strong feeling to retain their linguistic dominion and expect their children to learn Assamese early and retain it through school. The private schools in the town offer Assamese language as a subject from grade 4 to grade 8 so that children are abreast with the indigenous culture of the state. However historically there is language a clash between Bengalis and Assamese and the domination of one linguistic group over other varies from area to area in the state[147].

These middle class families understand that higher specialization demands more alternatives in the market and private schools are in demand thus too many private schools have come up and are competing to remain in the business. This may have both positive and negative effect on the standard of education and fee structure of the school. However private schools provide competitive environment which government schools do not. Few parents felt that private schools intend to reap benefit from the parents as expenditure to maintain such schools are high and these are developing as profit oriented institutions deviating from the real context of education dissemination. In reality private schools may turn to be institutions of profit but with a larger goal of educating and propagating the ethos of certain sections of the society. Thus emerges the concept of religious affiliation in schools. Private Schools perform well than their government counter parts, maintain strict evaluation standards and conduct regular tests to ascertain the performance of the students which shows that they are result oriented unlike government school where till elementary level schools follow no retention policy irrespective of the competency of the child for the next grade. Discipline is better in private schools than government schools is what few parents believe

consumers/buyers. Moreover bilingual states have their own internal social and political tussle reflecting in establishment of schools as well.

[147] Earlier discussed in the second chapter.

Table: 4.35 Awareness on Reservation of economically backward children in Private Schools

Education of Parents	Awareness of Reservation in Pvt schools (in %)		
	Aware	Unaware	Grand Total
Shop owner/retailer/businessman	9	20	18
Self employed professional		5	4
Clerical	9	8	8
Teacher	36	20	24
Senior level executive	9	8	8
Housewife	27	30	29
others	9	10	10
Grand Total	100	100	100
N=	11	40	51

On being asked whether parents are aware of the 25 percent reservation for economically weaker section of the society in private schools with the wake of Right to education being a fundamental right, majority of the parents expressed unawareness with regard to this. Among those who showed any hint of awareness majority of them were school teachers teaching in government schools. When enquired if private schools should be given the responsibility. The parents who were interviewed expressed it as a good move but those parents whose children attend the best schools in the town are unwilling to share the space with children from poor and culturally weak social background. Reay et al. (2007)[148] on a study on white middle class families who sent their children to schools with mixed ethnicity revealed the fear among the families of the pernicious influence of classmates from lower social class on their children, and negative impact of peers who do not value academic success. Similar concerns were shown with sample under study as well. There will be certain impact upon the schooling of those who are already attending private schools and change of mind among the middle class parents is likely to be visible.

[148] D. Reay, et al, " 'A darker shade of Pale?' Whiteness, the middle classes and multi-ethnic inner city schooling," *Sociology*, 41 (6): 1041-1060, 2007.

Table: 4.36. Career aspiration for the children

Career aspiration for the children	Total	%
Child 's own choice	26	50.98
Engineer (software/mechanical/genetic etc.)	8	15.69
Depends on academic excellence and competence	4	7.84
Uncertain/Not yet decided	3	5.88
Doctor/Engineer	2	3.92
Others	8	16
Grand Total	51	100

*N=51

Doctor , Graduate , Join Army, IPS, Lawyer, MBA, Support, fathers business, Teacher

Keeping pace with the changing time and multiple career opportunities available post good schooling and high school education parents were unwilling to impose any opinion of what they think was a good career option for their child. Thus majority of the parents believe it is up to the child to decide what (s)he wants to be in life. A clear reflection of the parental aspiration for their child is visible with respect to their own educational attainments. Parents with good higher education have more clear aspirations for their child, such as making them, pursue MBA, genetic engineering, scientific education, become lawyer or IPS (appendix, xix). Whereas with those parents who have either finished high school or below have rhetoric aspirations for their child such as engineering or doctor.

Anxious and ambitious those Middle class parents are their future rests in the achievements of their children. Reflecting in the way they aspire for their child's future, plan for good schooling in the present and provide concerted cultivation so that (s)he has a complete social and psychological development. Their anxious approach towards life is not a feeling in isolation. Three decades ago Bernstein (1975; 126-127)[149] predicted upon the change of the social context, meaning making and knowledge transmission and its effects on new middle class. He believed if this class position has to recur in the class structure, despite ambivalent enthusiasm the middle class quest of appropriate secondary socialization in to privileged education becomes crucial. The economy and

[149] B. Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control*, Vol 3. London: Routledge, 1975.

opportunity in the prestigious occupation became stringent with grim obduracy of the division of labour and of the narrow pathways to power and prestige. The late 1990's and 21st century bore the fruit of this climax.

Chapter Five:

Final remarks-Beyond Emulation and Generalization

The new middle class are the product of the unequal core of the society, of the disorder and change in the social dynamics, of revolutionary changes in the material and non material culture, of industrialization/globalization/liberalization and they are here to stay. Nothing less than this may virtually explain the rise of the new middle class in the contemporary/modernist/democratic culture of the world. Their exigencies have been stimulated by a continuous reflection of the status gains, positions and privileges of those better than theirs; their fear has emerged from experiences and empathies with the adversaries of those hierarchically lower in the social strata. They seek a soul of security and adulation and they are continuously driven by the enthusiasm and hope exhibited by the opportunities thrown open to them through neo-economic reforms, neo-culture and neo-identity of class.

The all pervasive-all encompassing virtue and unproblematic character of the middle class seen hitherto as latent with the society has now been able to draw the scholastic attentions especially in the discipline of economic sociology and sociology of education. This class conscious people, are more than willing to make their presence felt in various socio- economic and cultural institutions of the society. The 'unproblematic', 'individualistic' class culture of the middle class so far as understood by 'others' is gradually getting dismantled. Middle class is not anymore taken for granted, is nowhere vanishing in the thick descriptions of the underprivileged and weak but becoming a shade darker to emphasise its implicit contribution in the decision making powers of the state, its extent of influence and its extent of choice. While Power who has critiqued Ball has pointed out to the analytical inconsistencies created due to absence of sociology of education on middle class and has proposed to examine the intimate relationship between education and the middle class who together with the school processes foster differentiated identities among them. Nouguiera has also added to the anxiety of

the lack of depth of study on them. They are the protagonists of the contemporary family milieu and not passive receivers of the state funded, state run schools or educational system. From general to particularistic Nambissan has appealed to take up similar research in India, it is important and imperative. The new utilitarianism and strategic capacities of middle class parents as decision makers is to be delineated. Blessed with ideologies and aspirations of their families, middle class has inherited part of what they have in the form of cultural capital. Their strength of character and their disposition are reflection of this heritage from the past. Unwilling to part, share or bequeath, they seek to preserve this capital bestowed on them from a rich milieu. Least could be mentioned which helped to develop a critical understanding on this is the scholastics of critical theorists on cultural reproductions. The class consciousness percolates down vehemently in the educational pursuits for their children. They plan and strategise continuously for a better education for their children without any question of compromise. On the other hand middle class is not a homogeneous group in the social strata.

Reproduction of the middle class culture, its transformation into a form of capital begins with early primary socialization within home and secondary socialization beginning with schooling. Education space is one of the sites of this capital accumulation. Instead of divulging in to the act of unravelling the mystery at the base of the precedence of professional educated aspiring middle class parent or the child imbibed with the class character and know what to aspire for to uphold and continue in the class position, let us say there is a non-linear relationship between their means and goals. And education plays a significant role in this reproduction and struggle, but not without demanding their own spaces within the educational space or school. While the classical way to define middle class in the market economy is through the socio economic scale measured in terms of their income and expenditure capacity *(wealth)* or education and occupation *(status)*, other cultural traits such as their religious and language dominance, ethnicity and historicity all have a bearing upon their middle class

status in a multicultural region. Many studies across countries have earlier tried to show the reason of school choice based on their religious and ethnic dispositions, middle class families in the present study too have highlighted the role of their way of life as an important factor for school choice. The differentiated demands could best be understood in a specific context where schooling of their child is not merely a learning exercise in school. Ethnicity and language play an important role reflective in the indicative sample studied. That school have their own ethnic and linguistic composition cannot be ruled out at least in the town under study, but cannot make any generalization for lack of information from the schools about the class and cultural composition. Similar study had been undertaken in Netherlands to ascertain the school denomination affecting choice among middle class parents. Religion in the present study did not play an important reason for selection of school for possibly two reasons. One the sample was purely dominated by Hindu respondents, the varied preferences could not be mapped. Second, the next populous religion in the country is Islam and they have alternative schooling system in the form of *madarssas*. The intersection between formal school and madarrsa is minimal. However, religion in Netherland study came out to be an important factor for school choice among Muslims and Christian who found religious schools more empathetic towards their children than non-religious schools private schools. In the present study language determinant is an important factor governing the choice making strategy of the parents. While Bengalis were more inclined towards maintaining their religious *(Hindu)* ethos by sending them to schools with such denominations, the Assamese families focused on the language aspects of their culture which should engrain in their child during schooling itself. There is apprehension of language loss and loss of lately gained dominance in the state among the Assamese. Their involvement and membership in cultural associations is much more than their Bengali counterparts.

The rationality of choice to fulfil their goals is primordial. It is like evaluating the milieu closely and contrasting their cost and benefits in the

education market that the middle class families choose private schools over government schools for their children. This essentially means choosing good quality English medium school rather than educating their children from poor quality government schools. Income of the family has bearing upon the schooling of the child in a private school to a great extent. Good quality private schools are a definite choice if the parents belong to the upper strata of the income level and have had professional education or completed basic graduation shown through studies done on white middle class in the UK and the US. Occupation of the parents' too has some bearing upon private school choice. However in the study differentiation of choice across occupation level is not very explicit (see Appendix, xx). Access that is geographical distance to school, affordability in terms of fees and other contingencies are chosen by the parents only at the cost of foregoing other quality established by the negative correlation between the choice factors. However if income holds importance in parental choice it is accentuated with higher education among the parents (see appendix, xxi). The chance to choose a private school with this combination of parental attributes is around 74 %, a good score to predict.

Moreover in this particular context more than quality of education which they feel is a natural addition in selecting a private school, what educated parents are unwilling to trade off is the 'discipline' and 'reputation' of the school which eventually they think will matter most in the future for their child. In the study the perceptions of the parents on 'quality of school' however is contingent upon factors related to who attends the school, to what type of family do they belong to, the peer and the socialization and training which the child undergoes in the school. Unlike in metropolis or cities, parents in this town are more dependent on their colleagues and neighbours to know about the schools they wish their child to attend, projecting an inclination to acculturate in similar middle class practices and in-group attitudes. There is cohesion of a fluid group through school

choice making culture. Parents participate and interfere in the school processes; they are fearful, alert and strategic.

The dichotomy between which type of school is better or ought to exist is a never ending debate among the educators, sociologists and policymakers. Because it is not the school by itself but a complex of processes taking place in same time and space which determines its quality. To place them critically in the market economy and neoliberal culture, all strata's within the middle class behave like a monolithic whole for their self interested goal. Juxtaposing their behaviour in the neo-liberal culture which seeks to provide regulated autonomy to the institutions as well as freedom of choice to the individuals, the new middle class is quick to grasp the strategies of competitiveness behaving like a self interested individual driven towards the goal of maximising profit/gains. Most advocates of choice and school autonomy support the claims that competition will enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of schools and thus increase their effectiveness. The different factions of choice proponents among educators, economists, policymakers and government did not majorly differ on the proposal to improve the public school education system even if the chosen means and goal was either equity or privatization, diversification of school or competition based. The middle class parents being the consumers of the new education market and public school system yet struggling to maintain minimum standards of quality and continuing with the vernacular medium, proliferation of private schools is subscribing to the demand generated for by the middle class parents for English medium schools to be in competition with rest of the English educated society. Availing opportunities with the help of English education was emphasised by parents in the qualitative response obtained on their opinions on private schools. From education gradually becoming a positional good from public good needs special attention of the policy makers and social scientists. Whitty has proposed the idea of creating quasi market for education. Critically looking at the market which functions as efficient allocator of resources, in provisioning education the larger purpose of education

itself is feared to be lost. That although the rhetoric of reform often suggests that the hidden hand of the market will produce the best possible outcome, the reality suggests that this is unlikely to be the case.

Thus there are few fears. One that with the unregulated growth of the private schools in big and small cities and remote town of the country like Tinsukia, schools may compromise with the quality of education any way because the aspirations are entangled with the constrained choice the middle class parents have to make. It may merely turn out to be a money making opportunity forgetting the larger agenda of education. By far private schools share the responsibility to impart education voluntarily regulated largely by the choice of the parents than by the state. But with the new educational provision in favour of 25% reservation for the economically backward people in private schools, parents expressed diverse opinion. While some parents said it is good for the poor many disagreed to permeate the school space by 'others'. Second their non-retreat to the government schools is a siphoning phenomenon once they are aware of the availability of private schools which are better than their government counterpart expressed by the parents in the present study as well. The government schools in the region may fall out in the race. Third with good schooling and lack of good higher education institutions and varied job opportunity in the town and the state, every parent believe that their child should learn and earn outside the state after schooling, rendering to regional brain-drain or educated unemployed which is major area of concern in economically backward states.

And there are few hopes in the middle class parental choice practice. One, the importance of their choice making ability, their vantage point cannot remain under the veil of an isolated class culture anymore. Their ability and concern, anxiety and ambition, the way they perceive, conceive or live in absolute, relative and relational sense in the education space cannot be undermined by the policy makers and the state. The externalities of their education strategies and aspirations have to be assessed. Two, their behaviour is suggestive towards their

own growth, but indicative towards the need to improve the school education system of the country or a region if it has to accomplish the goal of education for all. They imply improvement in the standard of education and expect a minimum standard of quality of education prevailing with the schools. Three devolution and choice is suggested to be one of the means to provide education to the masses. In India establishment of high quality model schools as benchmarks of excellence at the block level has already been sponsored by the government in 2008[150]. Provisioning reservation for the economically backward section[151] of the society in all private schools is another step ahead to make education meaningful for all.

The condition of school education in Assam and its dependent economy are challenges to the people of the state. The immediate opportunities are few and constrains are many facing preferential policies of the centre. The internal contradictions of the state reflect in the constrained aspirations of the people of Assam. In such eventualities an interventionist role to the central government may be extended. The resolution of conflicting claims of respective cultures and political attitudes has to be meted out, education of the masses and encouragement of the socialization process are few projections made by the proponents on Assam. The language issue irrespective of preference of English education may be seen as a reason for educating children in vernacular government schools in the state. This research was an indicative attempt to draw the regional variation of parental choice in school education with factors specific to the state.

Withstanding this fact, the old contradictions need to be resolved if a society such as us seeks development with dignity for their own people. Towards the envisaged goals of the state, empowering parents with regulated choice with overall improvement in the quality of school education may resolve few

[150] MoF, GoI, Economic Survey 2009-10, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010
[151] Right to Education Act, 2002

contradictions in an education space, may as well resolve the dichotomies of positive-choice and negative-choice made by parents in school education.

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PARENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of Respondent:					
Area:	Urban	1	Rural	2	
Town/Village:					
District:					
Date :					
1. Gender	Male	1	Female	2	
2.Ethnicity	Indigenous Assamese Migrant Bengali Migrant from other states	1 2 3			

A. Household information

3. Religion		4. Caste		5. Education		6. Relation to the child	
Hindu	1	SC	1	Illiterate	1	Mother	1
Muslim	2	ST	2	Upto Primary	2	Father	2
Sikh	3	OBC	3	Upto Matric	3	Uncle	3
Christian	4	General	4	Matric/ Hr.Sec.	4	Aunt	4
Buddhists	5			Undergraduate	5	Grandparents	5
Jains	6			Grad/ Post Grad.	6	Others	6
Others	7						

B. Child related information 7. Name of the school

8	Age		9	Sex	Boy...1 Girl...2	10	Class child attends	
11	Type of school your child attends						Govt. Govt. aided Private Private (religious)	1 2 3 4
12	Status of the school your child attends						Co-education Single sex school	1 2

C. Information on Parent's and their Perception

13. Age		14. Monthly Household Income (Rs.)				15. Overall Monthly expenditure on education			
18-25	1	501 - 1000	1	4001 - 6000	5	Less than 500	1	4001 - 6000	6
26-35	2	1001 - 2000	2	6001 - 8000	6	501 - 1000	2	6001 - 8000	7
36-45	3	2001 - 3000	3	8001 - 10000	7	1001 - 2000	3	8001 - 10000	8
46-55	4	3001 - 4000	4	10000+	8	2001 - 3000	4	10000+	9
55+	5					3001 - 4000	5		

16. Occupation					
Industrialist /	1	Clerical	4	Senior level executive (8 yrs and above)	7
Shop owner/Retailer/ Businessmen	2	Teacher	5	Housewife	8
Self employed professional	3	Mid level executive (5-8yrs)	6	Not working/Unemp	9
Any other.....	10				

17.	Occupation (your spouse)	
18.	Education (your spouse)	

19.	Have your parents been to school?			Literate=1 Illiterate=0
			Respondents father	
			Respondents mother	
			Spouse's father	
			Spouse's mother	
20.	Type of education you received	Govt.(regular) Private (regular) Private (Professional) Other	1 2 3 4	
21	Your Membership in other social groups			
22	Other economic engagements besides profession/occupation			
23	Your opinion of on government run schools or privately run schools (whichever applicable)			
24	How did you come to know about the school your child attends	From your child From colleagues From colony friends From spouse's friends From advertisement Others.....	1 2 3 4 5	
25	How many schools did you apply to, for your child's admission? (number of schools)			
26	What do you think are the factors for school choice? Use the options given *(rank them in order of preference)*		Rank	
		Affordability Quality Access (distance) Advice Reputation Language Religion Others	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	
27	The school your child goes to, was it your first choice?	Yes No	1 2	
28	What are the factors which led to admission of your child?	Your choice prevailed School selected Both	1 2 3	
29	What were the admission criteria?	Donation Recommendation Test/interview No particular criteria Others.....	1 2 3 4 5	
30	Did you change the school of your child in any of the transition stages (class 5, 8), why?	Yes No	1 2	
31	Did you discuss school choice with your child?	Yes No	1 2	
32	To what extent have your social network helped in your child's education and other activities?			
33	What have you aspired for your child in terms of career achievement?			
34	Are you satisfied with the performance of the school your child attends?	Yes No	1 2	

35	Household assets *(observation)*	Yes.....1 No.....2	Do you live in a Rented House?					
		Refrigerator		AC		TV		
		Computer		Bicycle		Telephone		
		Microwave		Motor bike		Mobile		
				Car				
36	Are you aware of 25% reservation of economically backward students in pvt schools? (if applicable)	Yes.....1 No.....2	If 'yes' give your opinion.....					

Opinion of Parents on role of Social Network

Importance of Social Network	F	%
Assam is not as developed thus contacts for better opportunity is required for higher studies away from home town, growth	9	13.85
Child develops through cultural contact and , builds confidence, overall development	9	13.85
Helps in School choice, helps in School tasks and choice of extra curricular	9	13.85
Network can cooperate but not much, no particular help, self decision is required	9	13.85
Resourceful relatives and contacts are important for inspiration as well as aspiration to plan for future	7	10.77
For everything, competitive exams, knowledge of admission, procedure, course, estimate cost , finance, loans etc., the future plans	7	10.77
Qualified parents in School, good informed parents are asset, quality discussions on education is mandatory for development of child	5	7.69
Network determines the social character my child will attain, network helps in social acquaintance with most educated, qualified and politically motivated individuals	3	4.62
Monetary help	2	3.08
Relatives are more helpful and are supportive in development	2	3.08
Discussions with teachers is also important	1	1.54
Put one on track, certain aim n ambition, help child to choose appropriate career	1	1.54
Being in profession helps build worthwhile contact	1	1.54

Opinion of parents across all socio-economic indicators on Government Schools

Government	F	%
Govt Schools do not conduct classes properly, irregular classes, poor education	9	17.65
Do not get child centric attention	5	9.80
However free education in govt School takes of the load off from poor parents who seek education	5	9.80
Govt School is good and has improved	4	7.84
Govt School lack the basic standard as compared to pvt	4	7.84
In govt School all children are rural, poor quality of students	3	5.88
Govt Schools are mostly vernacular and follows state board;	3	5.88
High salary negates the responsibility of the teachers in govt School;	3	5.88
Parents aren't caring enough,	3	5.88

Govt needs to provide education to achieve MLL for poor, teachers are dedicated,	2	3.92
Govt teachers do not labour hard to educate, not interested in academic work; involved in non academic work	2	3.92
Rote learning, blackboard teaching;	1	1.96
It depends on the quality of students be it govt or pvt	1	1.96
KV's are sensitive Schools, with child centric focus	1	1.96
None	1	1.96
Not competitive	1	1.96
Govt Schools are not systematic in terms of discipline etc.	1	1.96
It's a mad rush parents want to send their children to pvt School	1	1.96
SSA is doing good for the govt School	1	1.96

Opinion of parents across all socio-economic indicators on Private Schools

Private	F	%
Pvt School puts effort towards education, learning, regular classes, more teaching time	13	21.67
Better response towards students, personal care and development of the child	9	15.00
English as medium of instruction is important which is not available in govt School, for future	7	11.67
Higher specialization demands more alternatives, demand in the market, too many pvt Schools	4	6.67
Competitive environment	4	6.67
Pvt Schools has to reap benefit from the parents as expenditure to maintain such Schools is high, profit oriented	3	5.00
Performance, evaluation and tests, result oriented	3	5.00
Discipline is better than govt	3	5.00
Quality of students are good in pvt Schools,	2	3.33
Both type of Schools are dependent on demand for School in the market,	2	3.33
It is the mentality of the parents that pvt Schools are good	2	3.33
Pvt teachers work hard, have performance pressure, sincere, better trained, salary deprnds on performance	2	3.33
Parents of pvt School children are alert and conscious towards education	2	3.33
Access ,	1	1.67
Follows mostly CBSE	1	1.67
Students background must be considered as well be it any type of School	1	1.67
Financially better of families send children in pvt School	1	1.67

Pursuing graduation, Graduate or Post Graduate Parents

Career Aspiration by Parents	Undergraduate and Above
Child's own choice	14
Depends on academic excellence and competence	3
Doctor /Engineer	2
Engineer	2
Genetic engineering	1
Graduate	1
Join Army	1
IPS	1
Lawyer	1
MBA	1
Scientific education	1
Support fathers business	1
Technical education	1
Uncertain about future, depends on the environment	1
Grand Total	31

Parents Completed Higher secondary or below

Career Aspiration by Parents	Higher Secondary or below
child's own choice	10
depends on academic excellence and competence	1
doctor	1
engineer	2
mechanical engineer	1
not yet decided	1
nothing	1
scientist, but depends on child	1
software engineer	1
teacher	1
Grand Total	20

Occupation	Govt	All Private	Grand Total
Shop owner/retailer/businessman		9	9
Self employed professional		2	2
Clerical	1	3	4
Teacher	1	11	12
Senior level executive	1	3	4
Housewife	2	13	15
Doctor		1	1
Employee in pvt firm	1	0	1
Employee in wine shop		1	1
Private Service		1	1
Unemployed	1	0	1
Grand Total	7	44	51

SPSS Output on effect of Socio EconomicChoice

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a]	HHIRsth	.095	.055	2.958	1	.085	1.100
	EduParnts	.745	.713	1.091	1	.296	2.107
	Constant	-.991	1.034	.917	1	.338	.371

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: HHIRsth, EduParnts.

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	50.268[a]	.100	.151

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 4 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Classification Table[a]

			Predicted		
			SchChoice		Percentage
	Observed		0	1	Correct
Step 1	SchChoice	0	2	10	16.7
		1	3	36	92.3
	Overall Percentage				74.5

a. The cut value is .500