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Craig Jeffrey, Patricia Jeffrey and Roger Jeffrey, *Degrees Without Freedom?: Education, Masculinities, and Unemployment in North India*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2008, pp. 240, \$21.95 (Paperback).

Many works on education have found Amartya Sen's emphasis on education and its links to a more just and equitable society compelling. Taking the freedom of individuals as the foundation of his argument, Sen has elaborated on how the capabilities of persons should be the focus of development. Sen's argument views freedom as both a means and an end of development; that is, both substantive basic freedoms like health and literacy and other instrumental freedoms that contribute directly and indirectly to the quality of life led need to be developed for their intrinsic value. Sen's thesis serves as both the foundation of the argument of this book as well as its point of departure. The book under review is based on fieldwork in rural Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India, and also one of the most complex in terms of the socio-economic diversities it encompasses, and difficult to fathom with respect to the political transitions it has undergone, especially in recent years.

The ethnography not only keeps as its focus what the authors term the 'educated un/under-employed', but also engages with the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Paul Willis. The trajectory of the argument emerges from Sen's 'education as freedom' to one which has an eye on both how agentic action deals with the conditions that the rural youth find themselves in, and on how distinctive cultural identities are shaped in these contexts. After presenting an outline of the political economy of their fieldwork site, which also notes how the liberalization programme of the 1990s reinforced the already existing social inequalities, the authors move on to the weakest link in the book. The reading of symbolic dichotomies of the modern-traditional through narratives about educated/uneducated behaviour appears to be rather simplistic and convenient, both in terms of the ethnography offered, which reads 'thin', and in terms of the theorizing, which appears imposed and not adequately explicated.

A discussion of the narratives, perceptions, and experiences of four more or less distinct categories of the educated unemployed or under-employed, and how they construct their cultural identities based on these experiences, form the bulk of the book's content and also lay the foundations for the author's main arguments. While probing the strategies adopted by these four different social groups to cope with their respective situations, the authors simultaneously try to contextualize each within the broader academic debates surrounding these groups. Members of the first group, comprising the Jats (a dominant landowning caste) are able to create a distinct identity as an 'educated' class and also access employment opportunities that reinforce their distance from the uneducated, due to their greater access to social, economic and cultural capital. The academic debates surrounding social transitions among the rich peasantry in northern India underlines the strategies of the Jat youth, which are woven into the narrative through an ethnographic case study. This pattern is repeated for the next category, comprising the educated and relatively affluent Dalits. In contradistinction to recent published academic work on Dalit mobilization, which

privileges a vocabulary of resistance, the authors posit that the Dalits' strategies hinge on forging a new cultural identity based on education. The actions of this group, which occupies intermediate political spaces resulting from unemployment even after the acquisition of education, lead them to become 'social animators' rather than political agents of social change.

The strategies of the third group, comprising members of the Muslim community, are seen to parallel the routes taken by the Jat youth group; drawing upon social, economic, and religious networks, this group, in response to its lack of success and continued marginalization, tends to withdraw from the path of education and formal employment towards working as artisans or religious teachers instead. The authors counter-poise the narrative of the educated Muslims and their assertion of a value that can be ascribed to their educated status with that of the unemployed Muslims, who weave a very different narrative of physical endurance and being worldly-wise. The issue of the manner in which the overt portrayal of Muslim identities has been compromised in the aftermath of 9/11 and its implications for broader opportunities of work and political participation for this group, is also explored by the authors. The poor among the Dalits, Jats, and Muslims of the region make up the fourth category. Despondent narratives of wasted time not only bear testimony to their sense of uselessness but also feed into diametrically distinct perceptions of these groups by the elders: as either being a threat to the local women, or as being dominated by their spouses.

The effort of the authors to contextualize higher education and un-/under-employment among the rural youth within a broader ambit of access to social, economic, and cultural resources, and the diverse consequences for different social groups, is indeed worthwhile. However, the main argument seems to have given way to a number of secondary issues and academic debates that the authors have introduced in the key chapters. While the authors do acknowledge, at the outset, that they have found it difficult to elicit experiences of schooling from their respondents, this fact itself seems worth problematizing though it seems to have been evaded. Finally, it is not as if Sen's work is blind to what the authors ultimately appear to discover through Bourdieu and Willis: is not education a 'contradictory resource', that can be sometimes enabling and sometimes a reinforcing of structural inequalities, mediated on a terrain of instrumental freedoms such as political freedom, economic freedom, or social opportunities, which Sen also emphasizes?

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