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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Changing trend in choice of schooling in selected areas of rural Almora, Uttarakhand: Some case studies.

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Abstract

In recent times the number of public and private schools has flourished in all the states of the country, including Uttarakhand and thus the idea of school choice between government schools vis-a-vis public/private schooling has received considerable attention in the minds of the parents. Consequently the trend to send children- son and daughter towards English speaking private schools has grown significantly amongst middle and lower-middle income group families. This has mainly arisen due to the growing awareness on the quality aspect of education. Since private schools are expensive, therefore, cost of schooling does influence girl's schooling in India. The gendered nature of parental choice in the context of schooling is known to play some role; this aspect has not been considered in any of the studies undertaken in this region of the country. Hence a field study/survey has been undertaken in rural areas of Almora district in Uttarakhand comprising, four selected blocks, focusing on some case studies, with a view to understand the attitudinal change of parents on the choice of schooling for their daughters irrespective of their family status like identity and financial conditions, parental education, caste and gendered nature particularly in reference to their daughters.

This study reports a current growing concern not only among urban parents but also amongst parents in rural areas who realise the importance of quality education for their children. Appropriately, a growing trend has emerged to send their children, including daughters to private schools. A close analysis of interviews with students, parents and teachers reveals that educational choice exercised in these middle or lower middle income group are connected with issues of marriage, self dependent (job), or gendered norm of conduct (like discipline, honesty). Apart from considerations of costs, gendered ideas of school proximity, quality education, security and disciplines are of prime significance in their choice of high school for children and particularly for daughters.

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Introduction:-

'Choice' is a relative term and at times be deceptive. Choice is generally exercised keeping in mind several thoughts and/or constraints in actual situations. Hence it is used as a tool to examine the complex dynamics of social life (Goswami, 2015). The idea of school choice between government schools vis-a-vis public/private schooling is changing in the minds of the parents. The conception of the social space in which parental choice of school is generally exercised has been questioned. At the same time framing of issues in individualistic terms of consumptions at the expense of social process of choice can be debated. On the other hand some scholars have pointed out how the capacity of, and the inclination towards, making choice vary with class based and gendered practices of parenting (Bowe et al. 1994; Reay, 1996, 1998; Ball and Vincent, 1998; Sarangapani and Winch, 2010).

It must be mentioned that relatively few studies have been conducted in India on the class and gendered nature of parental choice in the context of school market expansion (Goswami, 2015). It has been reported that a larger proportion of boys as compared to girls attend private schools, since private schooling involves higher investment (De et al., 2011). Although the cost of schooling do influence girl's schooling in India, nevertheless, it does not give a full account of the multifarious ways in which class, gender and community identity is reflected in specific situations (Goswami, 2015). Some studies have, however, examined family strategies of schooling across class and presented situations where girls, instead of boys, are sent to high cost private schools (Chopra, 2005; Nambissan, 2010).

The concept of choice needs to be examined in a social context which necessarily is interaction of class, caste and gender (Goswami, 2015). Debates on school choice have gained attention in the South Asian context in recent years, especially in reference to the category of the urban poor (Alderman et al., 2001; Tooley, 2009). Expansion of private school in urban India has occurred in recent times and some scholars have presented evidences that indicate acts of resistance by the poor against the state controlled bureaucratic education system that generally fails to deliver quality education (Tooley et al., 2007; Tooley, 2009). In this context, some studies have highlighted the need to understand the social context of schooling in South Asia and have found flaws with the quality of low-cost private schools (Saragapani, 2009; Sarangapani and Winch, 2010). Further, some scholars have also focused on the class strategies made by relatively well off group of people to convert their economic capital into cultural capital. Although Nambissan (2010) has reviewed the reproduction of educational advantages produced by middle classes in India, however, while highlighting the class aspect of family strategies, many of these have tended to over look the fact that the schooling process itself is shaped by and is constitutive of gender relations in a family setting (Goswami, 2015).

Low-cost private schools appear to provide the necessary numbers, quality and security to parents concerned about girls' education (Tooley, 2009). While providing an account of private schools for the poor in Kenya, China and India (Hyderabad), he documents narratives of parents concerned about quality education and safety of their daughters, and mentioned that parents relied more on low-cost private school for these reasons. These narratives of *parental* choice for girls' education show them simply as urban poor devoid of any history and social identity (Tooley, 2009). Another aspect which requires attention when analysing the parental preference is to examine the dynamic of class, caste ethnicity and gender in a particular social setting. While examining the girls' education in a village in Rajasthan (Hill et al., 2011) the issue of parental choice beyond that of an expanded school market was envisaged through a study of class and caste relations in a village. However, in this study by Hill et al. (2011) the gender issue was examined based on only cost of school and attempt to address the variation in gender norms by class and caste groups was not made. Further, only limited studies have attempted to examine the schooling patterns in light of the advances made in feminist scholarship in family and kinship studies (Chanana, 1993). Gender concerns regarding schooling in India are often expressed through macro indicators of gender gaps in dropouts and enrolments of students from various categories (Govinda and Bandopadhyay, 2012). However, as mentioned by Goswami (2015), nuanced investigation of gendered process implicated in the schooling process and situated in family context is rare.

Family aspects also play an important role in schooling. Thus at the family level, decisions regarding the future roles of children are deeply influenced by hierarchies of sex and age, and ideologies of conduct which shape gendered identities of young men and women. These identities are reflected differently in a plural society where different communities have their own ways of preparing young generation for adult roles (Goswami, 2015). In South Asian societies, the upbringing of children is marked by gender ideologies of seclusion and segregation (Dube, 1997). In the Indian context, Chopra (2005) provided the linkage of educational choices with particular acts of feminine

identity constructions to gain access to globalised marriage market among land owning caste families in agrarian Punjab. Further, linkage between family structures, gendered norms of marriage and girls' schooling have been reported by several workers (Chanana, 1993; Seymour, 1999; Manjarekar, 2003; Hasan and Menon, 2005). However, the implications of linkages between ideologies of sexual segregation and educational choice have not been examined in the context of the expansion of school market in recent years (Goswami, 2015).

In this article a survey has been undertaken to understand the attitudinal change of parents for the choice of schooling for their daughters irrespective of their family status like income, parental education, caste and gendered nature. The first part of the article reviews/discusses on preference of schools, i.e. school choice; the second part describes the study/field site and the methodological approach adopted for the empirical study involving a set of students and their parents located in the rural area in Almora. The third part dwells with the various cases studies, focusing on the gendered nature of choices and constraints, regarding schooling options negotiated by parents and children at different stages during schooling.

Methodology and Field area:-

Over the past few decades the number of low cost private schools in the country has markedly increased. Studies have indicated that even lower income group families are moving away from government schools to private schools in rural areas (Hill et al., 2011). But one must acknowledge the fact that there is a wide category of private schools which widely vary in their human and physical resources and in their degree of independence from the state (Goswami, 2015). In the hilly areas of this country the number of private schools could be noticeable right from the time of post-independent days but these were for mostly upper class families. But in recent times large number of low costs private schools have flourished. In rural areas of Uttarakhand too, many private schools both at the primary and secondary levels, are growing very quickly in number. Consequently the trend to send children- son and daughter towards English speaking private schools has grown significantly amongst middle and lower-middle income group families.

The study was conducted in the state of Uttarakhand where the literacy rate increased from 71.62% in 2001 to 78.82% in 2011, with 87.40% for male and 70.00% for female. The overall literacy rate of 78.82% is higher than the national rate of 74.04% (in 2011). The field survey was conducted during September 2013 to May 2014 in Almora district, Uttarakhand which comprises of 11 blocks (Bhasyia-chhana, Bhikyasen, Chaukhutiya, Dhaula Devi, Dwarahat, Hawalbagh, Lamgarah, Saalt, Syalde, Takula and Tarikhet) and the corresponding forest area. Based on the female literacy rate, the blocks were arranged into two categories, i.e. high and low (source: Vikas Bhawan, Almora, Govt. of Uttarakhand; based on Census of India, 2011). Since the female literacy rate in rural areas of Almora district is 67.88%, blocks with literacy rate up to 67.88% were categorized under 'low level' while the blocks with literacy rate of above 67.88% were placed under 'high level' of literacy. Thus from each of these categories, two blocks each, i.e. with lowest and highest literacy rates, comprising a total four blocks, namely, Dhaula Devi (60.67% literacy rate; 35 km from Almora), Lamgarah (64.09%; 33 km from Almora), Hawalbagh (73.69%; 14 km from Almora), and Tarikhet (74.04%; 56 km from Almora) were chosen. The location of these sites (in map) and their geographical position, area, population, literacy rate, etc. in these four different blocks selected for the study have been detailed earlier (see Nandi and Joshi, 2015).

The principal occupation in the rural areas of Almora district is cultivation, cattle rearing, poultry farming, small scale business, and wage labour. More recently there has been an expansion of economic opportunity in the informal service sector like semi-skilled labour or driving. Most of the families are nuclear but vary in size according to number of children. In some of the families, the mother also worked to supplement the family income. Most families relied on wage work combined with seasonal cultivation and cattle farming to supplement their income. Majority of the parents had basic literacy education through primary or secondary schooling. In a few cases (particularly fathers) were found to possess higher secondary and above, while in some mothers never attended any school.

Information relating to geographical position, area, population, literacy rate and number of school/college of under different blocks/sites in Almora district selected for the study has been provided earlier (Nandi and Joshi, 2015). A brief description of the four blocks is given below:

Lamgarah Block:-

Lamgarah block head quarter is located about 33 km from Almora town. Most of the area is situated in a hilly mountainous area (Figure 1) and the overall economic condition of the people residing is quite poor with a number

of people living below poverty line. Majority of the people living in this block, work as daily wage labourers. Lamgarah block is an under developed area; when the male and female literacy rate is compared, female literacy rate is much low (64.09%).

Hawalbagh Block:-

Hawalbagh, the block headquarters, nearest to the Almora town among all of the selected blocks, situated about 14 km from Almora town, is a relatively developed block with a population of 67,447. River Kosi, the main source of water for Almora town runs just below the area; the forest area is relatively less and with small scattered habitation. The people are mainly engaged as daily wage labour or carry out small business. It is well connected and walking distance from the Almora-Kausani and Almora-Ranikhet highway. The overall literacy rate of this block is good and the female literacy rate (73.69%) is well above the district's female literacy rate (69.93%).

Dhuala Devi Block:-

Dhuala Devi block is situated about 35 km from Almora town on way towards Jageshwar temple, historically an ancient temple of Lord Shiva; also called one of the twelve Jyotirlinga temples. The block has a population of 60,620 with a total literacy rate of 73.01%, and a female literacy rate of 60.67% which is lowest in rural Almora. Thick forest with small habitation is scattered in the block (Figure 2). The block has the largest area of 324 sq km among the four selected blocks but is most back ward as far as the female literacy rate is concerned.

Tarikhet Block:-

Tarikhet, a well developed block as far as literacy rate is concerned, is situated about 56 km away from Almora town. It is well connected to most of the important places of the state but is far away from Almora town (Figure 3). It has highest female literacy rate of 74.03% among the selected four blocks in rural areas. The well known Dwarahat Engineering College (now Bipin Tripathi Kumaun Institute of Technology) is located about 43 km away. The Army Cantonment area, based in Ranikhet town, is only 14 km away. The remarkable literacy rate of 88.75% can be attributed to the presence of the institution (Army base) and several schools in the area.

The criteria for selection of respondents was only the girl children aged between 6 to 18 years (excluding married, widow and divorce) with their parents (without any caste, race or creed) in order to get a complete range of information. The sample is representative of various variables like age, standard or class, family, financial condition, parental education, and parental attitude of the respondents. The sample consisted of only school going students of various types of school (Government, Private and Under schemes).

Information was gathered through in-depth interview and conversation with students, some parents and teachers. It comprised of questions on socio-educational and demographic characteristics as well as on various aspects related to educational choices in these families. For parents, apart from expenditure, considerations of proximity, security, discipline and quality education (mostly English medium) are of prime significance while discussing their choice of school for children.

All the interviews were basically conversation of educational patterns and their future plans of their children. In order to gain rapport with the respondents I gave a brief introduction of myself and explained the actual purpose of the study. I also assured them about the importance of their contribution and promised them to maintain confidentially. In order to make the interviews more efficient they were conducted in a lonely place where no other person was present. Initially interviews started with common general talk and when the respondents were comfortable then proceeded to the actual questioning. Despite the initial inhibition, the girls gradually adjusted to the interview situation and appeared to enjoy talking and sharing their experiences.

The interviews were conducted in Hindi depending on understanding of the respondents (all dwellers of the block) and on weekdays in the afternoon, except interview with the male teacher and office staff of G.I.C in Tarikhet blocks. Later I translated the interviews in English. This study draws primarily on data collected from a set of students and their parents; it also relies on the secondary data from state government office and case studies undertaken in four blocks.

Field experience and case studies

In order to understand the reasons why the parents exercise a choice of schooling in different blocks undertaken in the study, several criteria emerged from the discussion. Three themes, as observed by Goswami (2015) in a recent

study in Assam, also emerged from the interviews of this investigation; these are costs, security and discipline. Therefore the case studies are broadly grouped under these 3 groups.

1. Cost of schooling:-

In the given familial context, strategy about school may be conceived of as consisting of a range of actions regarding beginning continuing switching and discontinuing school attendance. Some of these identified limited resources in terms of net income and provision of low-cost schooling. It is important to note that in many families, expansion of educational provision through the government seems to have made the choice of schooling much easier for the present generation of children as compared to their parents. The majority of the parents said they themselves did not have as many facilities such as free meals, uniform, and books; moreover even the school infrastructure was reported to have been very poor, and they had to sit on a mat and the roof was not 'pucca'. The costs of the schooling of children continued to be a common concern within family. The costs included not only school fees, but many other expenses like transportation, stationery requirements, uniform other items (Goswami, 2015). However, the time and situation has gradually changed in the last two decades. The parents are quite concerned about not only education, but also the quality of education for their children, equally for both sons and daughters. When it comes to schooling decisions within a family, costs are not merely calculated in monetary terms, and even when they are, the calculations are not same for every child in the family. The small family with stable income are more interested about quality higher education for their children. Besides the formal school education they want their children be smart, disciplined, honest, and able to speak English. Therefore, they are extremely selective about the choice of schooling for their children, not only for boys but equally for their daughters. They have felt that they would not be able to fulfill their desire through government schools. These experiences made them attracted towards private or public schools. The following cases from the different categories of family with contrasting experiences somewhat reveal these complexities.

Case 1 (Lamgarah block):-

I interviewed Sri Madan Singh Bisht, a resident of Lamgarah. A home maker wife with two sons and three daughters, Sri Bisht is an owner of small grocery and stationery shop cum tea stall. With a monthly income ranging between Rs. 5000-7500 (Lower middle income group) he takes sufficient care of his children in education. Due to lack of degree colleges in the area both the first and second daughter are enrolled as private students studying Bachelor of Arts (1st year and 3rd year, respectively). Although a new degree college has started recently but due to insufficient number of teachers, the student enrolment is quite less. The third daughter (a student of class 10) attends a nearby Government Inter college. In contrast, his two sons have been admitted in a nearby private school (Upper primary). During survey it was noted that there are a few other private schools in Lamgarah block. He said that due to financial constraint he cannot afford to support the third daughter to private school due to higher school fees, nevertheless, he has arranged private tuition for her. He highlighted that his wife completes domestic work on her own and occasionally, if required absolutely, calls her daughters in helping her. Sri Bisht and her wife want that all their daughters continue studies up to graduate level and above, and dreams that after completion of daughter's education they will take up jobs and enjoy their independence.

While discussing about the quality of education, he indicated that although there are a number of Government Junior schools in the block but student enrolment is very less compared to private schools. The number of student is around 50 in a government school while it is 300-400 in private schools. He also mentioned that presently there has been a growing trend among parents to send their children to private schools where children are taken care and given more attention. In general, it was understood that parents do send their children (of both government & private schools) weak in studies, for private tuition to local teachers who charges fees between Rs 200-250 per month.

Thus it is clear that there has been a gradual change in the attitude of parents who pay sincere effort to educate their children thus fostering educational development.

Case 2 (Hawalbagh Block):-

The survey revealed that people of this block are quite serious about education and ensure that every child goes to school. During interview in one of the villages of the block, i.e. in village Mahetgaon I met Mrs Seema Negi (B.A.), a primary school teacher of a private school located in Gwalakot village (Figure 4). The school, run by an NGO, is Upper Primary (up to 8th standard) and 10 km away. Mrs Negi is mother of two children- a son (3 years old) and a daughter (6 years old) who are students of LKG and class 1, respectively in the same school. She and her children have to put in some effort since they live at the top of the hill, about 2 km from the main road. Both the children

accompany her in a school bus owned by the same NGO. She appreciated the bus facility and said that without transport it would have been very difficult for her going to school with two little kids. The bus service provided by the school makes easy for her and many students of that area. She is a caring mother with no mental bias between her son and daughter, and therefore has admitted both of them to the same private school. Education, according to her is the right of a child and duty of parents is to provide good education to their children; whatever demands the children put forth, efforts must be made to fulfill it. Mrs Negi lives in a nuclear family and is of the opinion that one can take care of the family in better manner than a large family. She said that as proper upbringing of children is extremely important, therefore, the number of children should be restricted. Another girl student (of class 2) of the same village is being escorted by Mrs Negi in the same school bus (Figure 4).

Case 3 (Hawalbagh Block):-

While discussing with Mrs Negi it was noticed that a person was listening to our conversation very carefully. On interacting with him, Sri Surinder Singh Mehta, owner of small road side tea shop has a different story to tell. He informed that with a monthly income of little more than Rs 5000 (Lower middle income group) he is making sincere efforts to make a decent living. His two children, a son (15 years old & student of class 9) and one daughter (17 years old & student of class 11), attends Government Inter College located in Chaura, about 3 km walking distance from his home. He said that his daughter wants to join Polytechnic after completion of her intermediate studies.

According to him expenditure in a private school is much higher than in government school. In general most villagers want to send their children to Private school since personal attention to students is lot better and facility like school bus is also available. He mentioned that student enrolment in private schools has increased considerably. However, he admitted that with little income he can't afford to send his children to a private school. Since the government school has no bus facility, his children has to walk a distance of 3 km which results in daily loss of 2-3 hours, without proper reason, and he felt sorry for this wastage of time.

Education, according to him, is very crucial in this modern age and education of woman is even more important because it can be used as a tool at the time of crisis in terms of widowhood, desertion and also for economic upliftment. Sri Mehta also said that he cannot afford to give any dowry for his daughter's marriage but is of the opinion that if he educates his daughter who then gets a job, it will be a gift more than a dowry. Besides he said that only educated woman can bring up a generation of enlightened citizens. On the number of children in a family, he mentioned that "Poor people like us cannot afford to have too many children in today's expensive era". According to him, more teachers need to be appointed for improving the quality of education in government schools. He categorically mentioned that Government should pay more attention and the various educational schemes that are launched must be monitored and assessed for their success/failures. Moreover, more High schools and Degree colleges need be established in nearby areas so that poor students can study and fulfill their dreams.

2. Quality and strict schools around:-

In recent times preference for a good quality education and strict school selected by parents for their children, not just for son but also for their daughters, is a rising demand and plays an important role in working middle class family's decisions about school choice. Studies by Reay and Ball (1998) on parents from varying class position suggested that 'for many working class families, locality and community represent security belonging and connection; places and spaces to feel (relatively) safe and comfortable in' (Gewirtz et al., 1995 as cited by Reay and Ball, 1998). Thus in ethnically diverse setting the conception of safe and comfortable spaces for working class parents will actually vary. Moreover, the sense of varied types of threat may arise quite often during conversation with mothers mainly with reference to their daughter's safety. However, such consciousness does not surface in the case of each and every school, and parents generally negotiate their community identity in their concerns about school quality (Goswami, 2015).

In this study, experiences and views of parents and children of desirable schools from a given range of options available to them were obtained. The choice expressed was mainly based on quality of education and discipline in the schools compared to other government schools on various attributes. Many parents ignored the distance of school and admitted their daughters in private schools only on the basis of quality education. Such parents also dropped their children (son and daughter) to school bearing own responsibility, ensuring maximum security for their children, particularly daughters. It emerges on various occasions that the proximity of school location is expressed not simply in terms of physical but also in terms of status. Further, a striking pattern among the majority dwellers in the rural area has been in their preference for the English medium private schools for their children, both son and

daughter. In families with more than one child, the parents were inclined to send the younger sibling to same school as the older child.

During discussion with Principal of a popular English medium private school in Hawalbagh block several facts emerged as to why parents send their children (son and daughter) to private school even if nearby government school are available. The Principal indicated that currently there is a growing trend amongst parents to send their children (both son and daughter) to private school, even if the school is situated far away from their locality as the parents can be assured of their children's safety in this school compound. The children cannot bunk school and roam in school uniform; if someone is identified outside the school campus, the matter is reported to the Principal and the students is likely to be thrown out of school. But in government school the situation is different. The first and foremost point the parents prefer is safety of their daughters and thus choice of a private school over a government school can be seen. Moreover, quality of education, discipline and attention to every individual student is given; Parent-Teacher meetings are regularly conducted, and the performance of the students are reflected in the Report card handed over to students in the presence of parents. Thus such methods not only help in maintaining discipline but also improve the performance and quality of students. Moreover, parents can be made aware of the performance (good or bad) of their wards. In this way the parents, teacher and Principal are fully engaged in maintaining the well being of the students. The Principal also mentioned that at times parents complain about the excessive home work and indicate that their daughters would fall sick completing the burden of assignments. The Principal made it clear that all students compulsorily need to complete their home work and there is no excuse; however, in case due to some reason a student cannot complete, she/he may be allowed to complete it in school, prior to the morning assembly/prayer time, with the permission of class teacher. The Principal stressed that only through hard work and dedication can students achieve the target result. Thus the resultant effort of hard work of teachers and students this school is well known for good performance in High school results.

It is important to indicate that the above said school was founded in 2006 with an aim to start an English medium school in rural area of Hawalbagh block. The number of students getting admitted has grown rapidly each year, particularly in Nursery and K.G. classes. Currently student enrolment is more than 350, indicating a growing demand of this Private school by parents of younger generation. The school, situated near Kosi market and on the Kosi-Almora main road has about 16 teachers along with 10 support staff. While the school is well known for maintaining a strict discipline citing a particular case (below) is worth mentioning.

On a Monday morning when I started the field activity at 9.00 O'clock, I observed that a group of four students (in school uniform) of the above mentioned private school are standing in front of a 'Barber shop'. This group included three boys and one girl. Quite surprised, I enquired the reason for their waiting near the shop? One of them replied that every Monday is a 'checking day' by the class teacher; short hair for boys, white hair ribbon for girls, nails be cut, clean uniform, shoes polished, etc must be maintained by all students, otherwise they will be punished. So the boys were having a haircut in the shop. The girl replied that she has forgotten to bring her class test copy and hence requires purchasing a new one. They also added that for every subject class tests are held weekly and the class test copy should be brought; the marks of these class tests are important as they are included in the 'Annual Report card'. The combination of careful attentive teachers and disciplined environment is what convinces the parents to send their children to a quality Private school with confidence.

Case 4 (Hawalbagh Block):-

Amrita Pathak and Deepika Mehta, two students of class 10 attending the above said school in Hawalbagh block were also interviewed. Both of students are very intelligent compared to other students of the class and compete with each other during exams to attain position in the class. They indicated that they loved their school extremely and attend classes every day without being absent. Both the girl's parents belong to Upper income group (above Rs 10000).

Amrita's father is a rich business man, educated up to 12th standard, while her mother, class 10 pass, is a homemaker. She has a brother who studies in 9th standard in the same school. They live in Shitlakheth and travel to school every day by their own car covering a distance of 22 km (one way) spending about 2-3 hours every day. After reaching home after school every day she feels very tired but when she thinks about fulfilling her dreams then she recharges herself. She is quite good in English and has a passion for the subject, thus aims to be a journalist cum English writer. She not only wants to be independent but also wishes to make an identity of herself. According to her, a girl should acquire as much education as she can. The main objective of education according to her is to gain

knowledge but she also mentioned about the other benefits of education as well. Besides gaining knowledge, her formal education can contribute in various ways in her future life, i.e. to fetch a job, a good match, keeps her tuned to the new developments that are unfolding virtually every day, she can enjoy high status, economic independence and respect in society. She said that in order to fulfill her dreams she gets every possible support from her parents who are more serious about her future than her. Since she belongs to a joint family she noticed that it was very difficult for her mother to take care of her every essential need, but she (her mother) always tried to solve her problems related to studies or personal matters. In order to assist her in studies, her parents also appointed a private lady teacher. When asked about the age of marriage, she mentioned that between 25 to 30 years is perfect age. Since a person needs time to settle them, Amrita was of the view that now a day not only men but also women should first take time to settle down and then marry. Whenever she gets spare time she loves to watch TV programmes because she thinks that through TV she can obtain quick information on what's happening in the modern world.

Like Amrita, Deepika Mehta is also a student of class 10 of the same school. Her father is a government employee while mother (educated up to class 8) a homemaker. She has a younger brother who is also a student of class 5 in the same school. They live in Mahetgaon which is about 3 km (one way); they travel to school using public transport. She is a very intelligent girl and her dream is to become an Environmentalist. According to Deepika education is a basic necessity of life in today's modern era and without education it's not possible to keep pace with the fast moving world. She lives in a joint family and she always noticed that her mother has no role in decision making; on the other hand seniors in the family, particularly her grandparents take all the decisions. There is no gender biasness in her house. Her family give equal facilities both to her and her brother. Deepika rarely enjoyed any leisure time because of burden of school home work, and likes to help her mother whenever she finds time, particularly in light domestic work like chopping vegetables, washing lentil, etc.

Both the students agreed that the atmosphere of the school is extremely suitable and strict discipline maintained helps to generate quality students. The attitude of most of the teachers towards students are very caring, friendly and helpful, nevertheless, are very strict. If any student is not able to complete home work the teacher ensures to get it completed within the school working hour. All class work is finished otherwise teachers help to complete their work after the school hour. They had a high praise for their school.

Case 5 (Hawalbagh Block):-

One fine sunny day I reached Katarmal village, close to the famous Sun temple. I met the Gram-Pradhan of this village. She has been living in this village since the 8-10 years along with her husband, who works in a nearby government office. She holds a Post Graduate degree and a mother of two kids, a son (8 years) and a daughter (2 years). The son is a student of class 3 in a nearby private school. When asked why they did not admit their son in a nearby Government Primary School (Junior Basic; up to class 5) situated close to home, she mentioned that she was not very satisfied with the quality of education in this school, and because this school has around 25-30 students of varying classes with only one teacher. It is difficult for the teacher to teach properly and at the same time take care of the students alone; in addition she has to perform other school duties including assigned Government work. The Gram-Pradhan also added that after lots of effort, another teacher was appointed. In addition, there is a Government Senior Basic School (up to class 8) where the quality of education is relatively better than in the Government Primary school, and sufficient number of teachers is present. When enquired about the quality of education, she wasn't satisfied with the standard and quality in the Government Primary School in the village; improvement is needed. She mentioned that at present there is a trend amongst all parents (belongings to all categories) to send their children to private school where teachers pay more attention and quality of teaching is also better. Being not fully satisfied with the educational standard of girls in her own village she narrated that they have to put in lot of hard work to compete with their counter parts of Almora town. She also added that extra educational schemes are necessary for promoting girls' education in this village.

I had an opportunity to conduct a *Group discussion* with villagers and parents of village Katarmal, to learn about the educational situation of their daughters. There are two Government schools (one up to class 5 and other up to 8) in the village where free education, mid-day meal and dress are provided. This has been very encouraging and excellent facility, particularly for the poor villagers, who mainly work as daily wage labourers. It was found out that presently there are no drop-out girls in their village; all girls are enrolled. Some parents expressed the desire to send their children to English medium private school but due to financial constraint unable to do so. They certainly felt that some expenditure has to be incurred to get quality education that can be obtained in Private school. Nevertheless, some parents of the village do send their children to a nearby low-cost Private school located 2 km

away in GBPIHED Campus (up to class 5) where the quality is better. In general, all the villagers expressed that the quality and standard of the teaching in government primary school is comparatively poor than in the private school.

Case 6 (Dhaura Devi Block):-

A survey and interaction with several girl students and their senior English teacher of a co-educational Intermediate College (semi-Govt) in Panuanaula was of the opinion that due to limited interest and financial problems literacy rate in that area is low but currently parents, students and also teachers are trying to overcome this situation. The student enrolment in this school is nearly seven hundred with about 70% girl students. He indicated that in the year 2015, there was no drop out case in the school. In general, after completing intermediate studies the students take admission in Kumaun University situated in Almora town. The attendance of girl students is better than other schools and they are relatively serious in studies; moreover the performance of girls is better than boys. Most students walk to school daily covering about 4-5 km (one way); while some live on top of the hill others stay down the road side. On the quality of education, he responded that in general it is good but some important aspects were missing out, i.e. out-knowledge, communication with modern world and exposure; these need to be improved for their betterment. He said that the people of the area, particularly the teen agers are very simple, unlike city dwellers they do not know what is happening around them. So he mentioned the urgent requirement of counseling and guiding the students of his school by some educated personalities (professors, scientists, doctors, and others). Various extracurricular activities (games, dance, drama, arts & NCC) are also taken up by the students; it was observed during the interview that both boys and girls were undertaking NCC training. He also said that NCC camps are being organized every year where both girls and boys participate. At present most parents are serious and particular about their children's education, providing equal treatment to their sons and as well as daughters.

During conversation we met three girl students of the above said Intermediate College. They live in a nearby village called Gunja. They narrated a similar tale, living a distance of about 4 km away (one way) which takes more than 2-3 hours every day. Daily they attend school, and try not to be absent. One student, named Kiran Negi (a student of class 12) said that "My father does nothing, every day he drinks and beat my mother, brother and me; it's a daily drama". Her mother works as domestic help in a nearby house, earning some money to support family, including their education. Thus despite many obstacles at home Kiran attends school daily with lot of hope that those good days will arrive one day when she and her brother will obtain a job after completing education. Her brother is also a student of class 9 in this same school. Kiran wants to study up to Bachelor's level and then would try getting a job as she desires to help her mother in sharing house hold expenses. She also added that since her father has no job and daily drinks alcohol, hence once she begins to earn she will take up the responsibility and then his father's mental situation will change. When asked about the age of her marriage, she quickly replied that for her it is a sort of problem, and has no time to think of marriage at present. Hence, she would complete her study first and then she would try to solve family's financial problem. She said at the end "my first duty is my home".

Case 7 (Tariket Block):-

Tarikhhet block has several schools within close proximity to the block headquarters. The Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (Boys only) an important government school, and a girls' college, i.e. G.G.I.C. are located within 100 metres of the block headquarters. Two students of class 8 studying in G.G.I.C. were asked about their opinion for improvement in their life, they expressed that they would first like to complete schooling and subsequently higher studies (Graduate, PG, etc). They attended school daily and were not absent; but the most serious problem they faced every day was shortage of public transport (bus, small van, jeep, etc). The government schools have no facility of transport and some of them stayed in remote rural area about 5-6 km (one way) from their school. Moreover, according to the students after reaching home nearly most of them performed some domestic work. Following that they have to also complete school assignments. Thus they argued that it was difficult for them to perform well and attain good result like the students of English medium private schools as they reach home quickly because of school bus service and after schooling they can also take tuition. These students of private schools also take part in extracurricular activities. On the other hand the girl students of G.G.I.C. waste their precious time waiting for public transport. At times due to shortage of public transport they do not find seat in public transport (bus, small van, jeep, etc.) and have to travel in a pick-up van. During survey such a situation was observed and was disappointing for me to watch. Thus they strongly suggested that all government schools should try to provide vehicle facilities for children who live in distant locations like them.

Further, during this survey exercise I visited G.G.I.C. and discussed with two school officials about their school. Currently the total student enrolment is 315 (from class 1 to 12). It can be appreciated that 75 students (from class 1

to 8 class) are being provided with nutritious free lunch daily under the 'Mid-day meal' scheme. On enquiring about the performance of the students, they mentioned that they did extremely well. However, there is a gradual decrease in the number of girl students in their school and other government schools due to increasing trend among most parents to admit their children (son or daughter) in English medium private schools. It was observed that there are several private schools (mostly English medium) in that area.

3. Disciplining daughters through school:-

Parental perceptions of discipline and strictness of a school emerges as an overarching theme cutting across community affiliations, especially in reference to the daughters' education. A common yardstick of discipline in schools is to keep daughter safely in check within the school premises. A lack of supervision of students and/or lack of exposure, however, may be enough to earn the school a poor reputation, as observed in case of students of a semi-Government schools, that during interview they were not confident, initially getting quite nervous and were hesitating to give answer.

The parents wanted their daughters must go to school but should also be safe throughout the total travelling period for school. Thus it can be observed that in Case no. 4, the parents drop their daughter with their own responsibility. The anxieties and tensions about women's sexuality are ever strongly expressed with a consciousness of changing times, when the material cultural symbols are rapidly changing across class. Therefore, in an age when the daughters may have access to mobile phones, which not only opens up channels of communications but may also raise awareness about ones sexuality, the selection of a strict school is particularly significant (Goswami, 2015).

These anecdotal references to the disciplinarian measures of the school, gathered from girls and their family, added to the schools reliability in taking custody of girls in their growing age. The concern for safety and security of their girls cut across community line led to the selection of either a private school in the neighbourhood or a strict school at a distant location

Case 8 (Hawalbagh block):-

I met Meena Bisht, a 17 year-old class 11 student of a English medium private school; she has a younger brother Vijay of 13 years, a student of class 8 studying in the same school. The school is situated around 3 km away and so her father drops and brings both of them in his motor bike. Her father is a rich business man (studied up to 10th standard) and owner of famous sweet shop. Her mother is a homemaker who studied up to 8th class. While talking it was mentioned that she is an adopted daughter, they are not biological parents; she was only three years when they adopted her and brother Vijay was born the following year. Her parents are extremely nice and not biased at all; they love her more than Vijay and always fulfill her necessary desires as per her demands. They want that Meena must study up to the level she wishes. After finishing her studies in school, Meena wants to join Hotel Management course in Almora town. Her main intention is to enlarge her father's business and open a modern hotel. According to her these days tourism sector is much popular in the Hills; however, number of hotels with modern facilities is few, particularly in rural areas.

Case 9 (Tarikhet block):-

Ananya Negi, a student of class 6 (12 years old) and her 7 year-old younger brother (reads in class 2) are students of a local Government High School. On enquiring about her family, it was found that her father is an employee in a Government office and is in a transferable job. Earlier they lived in Rudrapur but recently (six months ago) have come here. In Rudrapur she studied in an English medium school but in her village there is no such good English medium school, thus they were forced to take admission in this school. Since the school is close to their house her mother drops them to school regularly. Ananya said swinging her head and turning her eyes that "We are very small, so our mother comes with us". She also said that her father promised them that in the following year they will be surely admitted to a good English medium school which is a bit far from their village. Ananya is pretty and sincere girl; she added that she loves to study and at the same time much fond of dancing. Dance is her passion. In her previous school in Rudrapur, she performed a dance programme in the Annual Day when all teachers, parents and students appreciated. She said that on completion of her intermediate study she would take a course in Dance and like to become a traditional dancer. Her mother said that she will give support in her capacity.

Case 10 (Tarikhet block):-

After completing the day's interviewing schedule while standing near a bus stop, I observed a Maruti van stop and a 16 years old girl student, wearing a clean school uniform and proper school shoes come out. She then went straight

in to a stationery/book shop and purchased two note books and a bundle of large white glazed paper. I introduced myself and wanted to know about her. She also gave her introduction; her name is Sunita Salal (studies in class 10). She is the only daughter with two brothers; one is elder, a student of class 12 and the younger, a student of class 6. They all study in the same English medium private school (co-educational) which is situated around 12 km from their home. Since her father is a retired army personnel, he drops them daily in their own vehicle. Some children of same school and of their own village, also join them in their vehicle. She said her father is very serious about her study and gives all support whatsoever she demands. She showed me that she purchased the glazed sheets for preparing a Science Project which needs to be submitted within two days.

She admired her father and told me that her father stopped the van to purchase stationery items although they have been quite late and have to travel another 10 km from here; they will reach home late when the sun has set. When asked why they did not take admission in a nearby school then she replied “My father will never compromise with quality of studies and discipline in school; it is his children’s future and hence admitted us in a good school. My father is so concerned about my studies that he participates regularly in Parent-Teacher meetings. He discusses regularly with our Principal on minor issues related to my study”.

She also indicated that after completing her intermediate she will write the entrance test for joining an Engineering College; she is interested to join the Engineering College in Dwarahat and become a Civil Engineer. According to her these days there is frequent occurrence of disasters and extreme events, like earthquakes, flash floods, cloud bursts, heavy rainfall, hailstorms, etc. She is of the opinion that by obtaining a degree in Civil Engineering she would be able to assist in solving these problem with her department. She would also help in construction of earthquake proof buildings and dams, good roads and bridges. This would help in reducing disaster and improving safety, and consequently better the living conditions of the hill people of Uttarakhand.



Figure 1: A panoramic view of a village and hilly terrain in Lamgarah block.



Figure 2: A panoramic view of some villages close to village Panuanaula, Dhaula Devi block; nicely terraced land for cultivation is seen in the foreground.



Figure 3: A panoramic view of some villages in Tarikhet block.



Figure 4: Students and a mother (teacher) returning home after attending a private school located in Gwalakot village, Hawalbagh block.

Conclusions:-

This study mainly focused on the objective of school choice among a set of different income-group families from four development blocks in rural areas of Almora district; while discussing the process of school choice one must take into account social and economical aspect and cultural discourses which in all manner of ways structures experiences of people located in a particular setting. In all these accounts it is the overarching concerns of costs, discipline and quality through which a deeply gendered choice is exercised by these parents. In this study, costs of schooling did differentiate on the decisions but it varied within a family and between son and daughters (Lamgarah block). Moreover, in some case there was no difference made between son and daughter (Hawalbagh block).

During interviews a significant and quick change in the people's attitude (including parents, girls, villagers, teachers etc.) was observed in the rural area in Almora, and this could be noticeable throughout the whole interviewed sequence. The socio-educational profile of school going girl children indicates that a remarkable changing scenario is going through education and now the confident girl children in different age groups with different economical category are the product of different educational effort.

The present study also attempts to profile the educational and sociological status of the girls in rural Almora District. Relevant information has been gathered from the respondents, particularly on their educational condition, choice of schooling, cause of choice schooling, and from other stakeholders like parents, Gram-Pradhans, teachers and school officials. The data for the study was collected through in-depth interview schedule. It was collection of questions on socio-educational and demographic issues. The empirical data gathered demonstrates that education has contributed significantly in raising the status of girl children in rural Almora. All the girls aged between 6 to 18 years were found to be enrolled in schools. The number of drop out students is negligible, indicating that at present the parents are aware about the importance of education. It can be also noted from the educational status of the parents that new generation of parents had greater levels of education than the older ones and was found to influence respondents' education, i.e., higher the education of the parents, higher was the educational level of the girl children. The parents formed the source of encouragement for higher education of their daughters. The nature of encouragement from parents is indicative of the high practical value they had for higher education which contrast with a number of stereo-typed notions about girls' education in rural areas. Although girl students studying in higher classes (10 and 12) have moderate percentage of illiterate parents, nevertheless, due to changing trend and importance of education such parents do encourage their daughters to get educated. Better income of parents was likely to place the children in a better educational position. Parents whose children were sent to a private school for acquiring quality education believed that their children would obtain quality education and give good performance, did not really consider the

school fees or the distance of the school (Hawalbagh & Tarikhet block). It must be mentioned that the parents with poor financial background were also found to influence the daughter's accessibility to education.

The present study also suggests that now a day there has been a trend among parents to send their children to private school. It also reveals that, according to parents, the quality of education and caring for students in private school are better than in government schools. Moreover, vehicle facilities are available in most private schools (in Hawalbagh and Tarikhet block). The expansive growth of private schools in the country due to fact that government schooling has not been able to provide quality education has also been reported in earlier studies (Nambissan, 2003; Balasundran, 2005). It was observed that majority of the girl children goes to school with neat and clean uniform, proper school bag, and maximum students carried drinking water. In addition, a number of the parents themselves escorted their children to school and brought them back to home (Figure 4).

In general, the parents were of the opinion that the quality of education in government schools is just satisfactory, and not comparable with the private schools, and this is reflected in unsatisfactory level of education standard of girls. The girl students in rural areas are quite simple, and unlike their city counterparts, some important facets were missing in them, particularly out-knowledge, exposure and communication with the modern world (in Dhaula Devi block). Further, more attention in studies need to be given by the girl children at home.

India has the second largest education system (World Bank, 2003) and largest number of children out of school in the age group 6-10 years (Huebler, 2007). But over the last few decades there has been considerable change in status of girl's education in hilly areas of Uttarakhand. The situation has improved considerably following the formation of Uttarakhand state since currently the drop out girl students of 6-17 years age form only a very small proportion, i.e. 2.9% in rural Almora and 0.5% in urban Almora (Annual Health Survey 2011-12. Fact sheet- Uttarakhand. <http://www.censusindia.gov.in>. Retrieved on 10th May, 2014). Hence, it can be concluded that a gradual change is occurring in rural areas and going to change further; the rural parents now want to give an opportunity to their daughters to live a hazard-free, open and enjoyable life.

The present study has depicted the 'role of education for all' changing the status of girl children in rural Almora. The status of girl children in rural areas needs to be examined further. Moreover, several challenges would come their way but the girls have to overcome them. They need to study seriously, improve their skills, and establish themselves in the competitive world. They need to first love, care and value themselves, increase their self esteem, then only can they understand the value of others; they should become good citizens and good human beings. Their aim must be not only to become a working and independent woman but also a caring and loving mother in their future.

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