Reforming Education and Challenging Inequalities in Southern Contexts

Research and policy in international development

Edited by
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First published 2021

ISBN: 978-0-367-26489-5 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-29346-7 (ebk)

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Educational aspirations versus the material realities of rural families in Pakistan

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This OA chapter is funded by the Bill and Melissa Gates Foundation

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

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Arif Naveed

This chapter illustrates how the rise of basic schooling in contexts like rural Punjab in Pakistan is experienced and mediated within already stratified social and cultural spaces. It argues that poverty and social inequality generate a range of differentiated values, meanings, aspirations and schooling decisions amongst families with complex, and often compounding, effects on their strategies to use schooling to improve their living conditions. For the efforts to universalise educational access to be effective, it is therefore necessary to take account of such cultural complexities by addressing the forms of social stratification that can be found both *in* and *through* schooling. This is particularly important since some 22.84 million school-going-age children in Pakistan were reported to be out of school (GOP 2018), with poverty often cited as the main reason for this pattern, despite the unprecedented expansion of the education system since the new millennium.

Given persistent under-funding of education in Pakistan (Malik & Rose 2015), national reforms continue to grapple with the issue of improving access of the traditionally excluded in 'supply-driven' ways that often undermine the apparently agentic yet socially structured decision-making of the poor. I argue in this chapter that it is in the process of decision-making that social inequality is revealed and often reproduced through educational choices. The multifaceted social hierarchy in Pakistan embedded within the education system and the labour market is associated with differentiated private returns to schooling with potentially lower (expected and actual) returns to, and higher costs of, schooling for the socially disadvantaged, especially compared with those favourably positioned in the social order. Improving access to education under such conditions could reduce the private cost of schooling for the poor but cannot, on its own, increase the private economic returns of schooling in a socially shaped labour market. Neither does it necessarily address everyday subjugation often experienced by the poor. In the absence of wider social and economic reforms aimed at equalising economic opportunities, socially disadvantaged groups have little to gain from investing in schooling as the levels and quality realistically achievable for them do not necessarily offset their prior disadvantage.

It is crucial to recognise that the educational strategies of the poor, like others, are guided by societal norms and wider ideas associated with progressing towards

DOI: 10.4324/9780429293467-7

a better life (Appadurai 2004) which are formed in a complex web of social relations. Educational goals, thus formed, are revised in light of experiences within and outside the education system. Schooling is situated in families' long-term intergenerational quest to achieve a life that offers their members opportunities to progress, collectively and individually. When the promised route out of poverty and towards dignified living through schooling is seen to break down, little is left for the disadvantaged to use to meet the targets of the global development agendas. At this point, no amount of supply-driven educational reform or even legislation for compulsory schooling can help universalise access to schooling; rather, advancing the interests of those already privileged is more likely.

This chapter has five sections. The first provides a brief description of the theoretical framework that I use to conceptualise the relationship between social inequality and schooling. I follow with a description of the longitudinal research I conducted in a village in Punjab where I attempted to tap the aspirations for, and the reality of, social mobility amongst rural families. My analysis of the second-round interview data I collected in 2016 asks what values and meanings are attached to the role of schooling in families' pursuit of social mobility and to what extent these are differentiated by the different positioning of the families within rural social order. I then explore how such socially structured meanings and values shape differentiated aspirations for achieving social mobility through schooling and different family trajectories. The final section concludes with a discussion on the need for socio-economic reform as a condition, rather than an outcome, of educational expansion in the Global South.

Conceptualising the rural social structure

Many factors restrict the uptake of schooling and mediate its impact on poverty. The day-to-day politics of schooling and the labour market shape the objective possibilities of the poor through their subjective realisations. Arjun Appadurai's (2004) concept of the *capacity to aspire* encourages us to appreciate the engagement of the poor with the cultural regimes that govern their lives and thus to uncover this micro-level, cultural politics of schooling. Situating schooling within aspirational worlds reveals its relationship with beliefs about material conditions, social relations and general norms about what constitutes a 'good life', to which the 'choices made' and the 'choices voiced' by the poor are attached (ibid., p. 68). For Appadurai, those with greater resources, status and power have richer experiences that help them 'in navigating the complex steps between "norms and specific wants and wishes"' (ibid., p. 68). The poor, in contrast, have 'less easy archiving of alternative futures' and a 'weaker sense of the pathways from concrete wants to intermediate contexts to general norms and back again' (ibid., p. 69). With 'practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture, and refutation' necessary for their capacity to aspire (ibid., p. 68), poor families are inherently disadvantaged as they tend to have too much at stake to make risky decisions (Wood 2003) for the sake of gaining experience.

Appadurai's insights have been extended and complemented by many, including Debraj Ray (2003) whose notion of an *aspiration window* (formed from individuals' cognitive worlds) enables us to see individuals drawing information by comparing themselves with others. Contexts that are characterised by higher perceived social mobility and less polarisation provide a broader *aspiration window* that can, in turn, inspire higher levels of aspirations. Here, the cultural analysis and the framing of *capacity to aspire* of both Appadurai and Ray points to the significance of relationality. After all, it is in the 'thick of social life' that individuals' meanings, values, preferences, aspirations and strategies for a good life are shaped, and a consensus is formed (Appadurai 2004, p. 67).

White's (2017, p. 133) conception of well-being makes a case for adopting an ontological position that sees 'relationality as logically prior to individuals'. This avoids the risk of placing greater responsibility on individuals of what is an outcome of the collective – the social structure (Sointu 2005; Ahmed 2004). A relational ontology addresses an important omission in educational research by recognising the role of families (and by focusing on their stratified positioning in their communities) in educational processes, thus generating deeper insights into the cultural complexity of schooling. Such a focus broadens our understanding of the role of schooling in the lives of the rural poor by revealing the power relations that shape their subjectivities and aspirations and contribute towards the reproduction of inequality (Hart 2012). In this context, Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus* is appealing given its remarkable complementarity with Appadurai's notion of *capacity to aspire*. Both concepts bring together the objective and subjective, structure and agency, helping us understand how a person's position in the social order shapes their schemes of thought, perceptions and tendencies – the day-to-day practices in determining their life chances *in* and *through* schooling. Habitus, as a set of durable and transposable dispositions, refers to the embodied form of objective structures, internalised through socialisation (Bourdieu 1977, p. 87). It represents the 'mental and cognitive structure through which individuals perceive, understand, appreciate and deal with the social world' (p. 76), thus recognising the mechanisms through which their aspirations are formed and adjusted to their experiences of material reality. It acknowledges that the 'practical knowledge' of social actors is constitutive of the reality of the social world (p. 142). Using this argument, Madeleine Arnot and I developed a 'Habitus Listening Guide'[1] with which to explore how young people negotiate the relational dispositions, ambitions and values within their families and the implications for their consequent educational choices and work experiences (Naveed & Arnot 2019; Naveed 2019a). Collecting and hearing deeper, dynamic, family narratives are crucial in understanding the relationship between schooling, poverty and social inequality.

For Bourdieu, the social structure is highly significant because of individuals' *sense of limits* or *sense of reality*. His so-called *theory of practice* suggests that individuals think and take positions based on their relative place in social structure, the *field*, depending upon the quantity of their economic, social and cultural

capitals (see Hilgers & Mangez 2015). Examining the relationship between schooling and rural social inequality through this framework therefore requires an understanding of the social structure and hence of some of the key (in)formal institutions. It is to these I now briefly turn.

A pentagonal rural social structure

By engaging with literature on the patterns of social inequality in rural Pakistan (specifically rural central Punjab), I identified what I call a *pentagonal social structure* consisting of five sets of power relations: (1) landownership; (2) kinship and caste; (3) religion; (4) patriarchy; and (5) the politics of patronage (Naveed 2019b). Whilst Pakistan is highly diverse with rich cultural traditions varying across its geography (Mohmand & Gazdar 2007), my brief overview of these five elements helps us recognise the cultural complexity that were likely to have shaped the engagements with schooling of the rural families I met.

(1) *Landownership*: The profound impact of landownership on educational outcomes is demonstrated in the highest upward educational mobility found amongst the landowners and lowest amongst the landless (cf. Cheema & Naseer 2013). Such patterns reflect the fact that landownership, as a primary factor of production and social differentiation in the rural economy, has historically been the most prominent aspect of the social structure in rural Pakistan (Elgar 1960; Akhtar 2008). Landlords have historically positioned themselves as 'middlemen' between the villagers and the state, avoided successive political/land reforms and maintained their dominance of rural social life, despite the emergence of a range of intermediary occupational classes (Alavi 1974; Akhtar 2008; Javid 2012).
(2) *Kinship and caste structures*: Early theorising of kinship in rural Pakistan (e.g. Alavi 1972 p. 25), suggested that kinship 'embodies the primordial loyalties, structuring its social organisation' and presents itself as 'the key . . . dimension of economic, social and political interaction' (Gazdar 2007, p. 87), affecting educational experiences and economic outcomes. In rural Punjab, structural inequalities of social status and power are associated with the ranking of one's caste in the village (ibid.). Caste hierarchies permeate schools; teachers may discourage students from low-caste backgrounds with parents having little voice in teachers' accountability (Tamim & Tariq 2015). Where schools are in a community dominated by high-caste groups, low-caste parents are less likely to school their daughters (Jacoby & Mansuri 2011). Overall caste identities strongly differentiate the increasing educational mobility over three generations of men in rural Punjab (Cheema & Naseer 2013).
(3) *Religion:* Religion is central to the social organisation and hierarchy in Pakistan. Religious elites have a long history of dominating social, cultural and political life particularly in rural Pakistan, maintaining social order and resisting attempts to uplift the poor, socio-economically and educationally (Darling 1928; Malik & Mirza 2015).[2] The communal division of colonial

Punjab in 1947, the resulting riots and the representation of religio-nationalism in educational discourses encouraged pejorative attitudes towards 'religious others'. Not only can the history and image of religious minorities be distorted in educational content, but children from minority backgrounds can also face a hostile schooling environment (Hussain et al. 2011), limiting their prospects for social mobility.

(4) *Patriarchy*: The patriarchal nature of the Pakistani society is manifested in all dimensions of the social structure, as power is greatly concentrated amongst men. Women benefit from their families' advantaged position in the social hierarchy but also suffer disproportionally if their family is disadvantaged. Hence Pakistan is ranked at the bottom of various global indices of gender equality including education.[3] While gender relations are likely to change over time, the traditional three-generational patrilocal households common across rural Pakistan are known to be sites which reproduce gender inequality (Kandiyoti 1988), mediating female life chances in and through education.

(5) *Relationships of patronage*: In contexts where governments often fail to ensure the basic rights and the welfare of the poor, and markets fail to ensure equal competition for everyone, the poor rely on their personal relationships and community networks to ensure security in their lives and livelihoods (Wood 2003; Shami 2010). Such dependencies affect access to basic services since those who are less able to reciprocate favours are excluded (Chaudhry & Vyborny 2013). Such relationships have had a detrimental effect on the education system; for example, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, officials have adapted the 'unofficial' way of doing official business by exchanging favours with political elites (Khan 2012). These relationships are likely to embed labour markets, thus mediating the use of education for economic gain.

This complex constellation of mutually reinforcing social hierarchies grant different resources and opportunities to different families and their members. It determines how far those in disadvantaged positions can aspire to a change in their circumstances through schooling. Families and their members with differentiated positionings in this rural social structure experience different processes of socialisation, shaping their habitus (Bourdieu 1977, p. 87). Consequently, deep-seated differences resulting from such power relations affect how individuals perceive, understand, aspire, strategise and act (McNay 1999; Arnot & Naveed 2014) when using schooling to improve their lives. We can see here how far the reality of social inequality confronts the potentiality of education to reduce its effects.

Researching generational and gender worlds

Given this theoretical framework, my empirical work focused on the relationships *within* (across gender and generations) and *between* families (differently located in village social hierarchies). In August–September 2016, I revisited the village,

Chak Nagri (a pseudonym) in Central Punjab where I conducted fieldwork in 2009–10 for the Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty (RECOUP).[4] The village consisted of landowners, farmers, landless tenants and agricultural/non-agricultural labourers, some government employees and the owners of small businesses within and outside the village.[5] In 2016, I re-interviewed the members (a father, mother, son and daughter aged 15–25 in 2010) of 10 families previously interviewed in 2010 (see Naveed & Arnot 2019). By 2016, most sons and daughters were married, and most daughters lived in other villages with their in-laws. Several sons were also away, living in various cities for work and returning home only periodically. However, I was able to re-interview the available members of seven of the families still living in the village or nearby (see Table 7.1).[6]

In 2016, I designed a new semi-structured interview schedule to explore the aspirations for, and experiences of, social mobility and how these were mediated by the rural social structure.[8] Since *social mobility* is a social-scientific, Western-inspired concept largely based on urban social structures, I used the more familiar concept of *taraqqi*, an Urdu word of Arabic origin, commonly understood in nearly all local languages in Pakistan to uncover participants' own core expressions and subjectivities and the cultural discourses underlying their interpretations of social mobility. *Taraqqi* captures several implied meanings of social mobility and can be translated literally as 'progress' or 'improved social and economic status over time'. The conversations about *taraqqi* revealed the subtle dynamic underlying processes associated with social inequality that constrain social mobility and what contributions schooling could make to reduce inequality in families' experiences.

All interviews were audio-recorded in Urdu and transcribed. I coded the data in NVivo using a thematic frame. The selected quotes were then translated into English. All names were anonymised. Interviewees have been given a pseudonym, followed by the acronym indicating their status (M = mother, F = father, D = daughter and S = son) and by their years of schooling. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the pattern of responses and profiles of three of these families, first on their meanings, norms and values and then outlining how these shaped their aspirations through schooling.

Table 7.1 The 2016 interview sample by the highest educational level achieved[7]

Category	*Total interviewed*	*No/low schooling 0–2 years*	*Primary completed 5 years*	*Secondary and above 10+ years*
Father	7	1	4	2
Mother	7	4	2	1
Sons	5	1	2	2
Daughters	6	0	4	2

Socially structured meanings, norms and values

An important insight offered by all the family members I interviewed was that schooling was seen as part of their long-term struggle to attain *taraqqi*. Whatever their circumstances, these families had a clear understanding of what they wanted to gain collectively and for their members by investing in schooling. In the wake of economic precarity, attaining secure and sustainable livelihoods and decent jobs was a crucial expected gain from schooling. For mothers like Nazima, Kiran and Irfana who had not been schooled, 'when children get education and government gives them jobs, their *taraqqi* happens then'. Alternatively, for those unable to secure salaried employment, schooling was considered to help them run a *karobar* (i.e. all forms of economic activity with growth potential) as it gave them the required awareness and attitude: 'one should be educated, have a functioning mind, have money, can buy things, this is what is *taraqqi*, that comes with hard work' (Farheen, M, 5). Schooling was expected to provide employable skills, attitudes, values and knowledge that would be rewarded in labour market.

A closer listening to participants' voices revealed that the meanings given to *taraqqi* were structured along the lines of social status, economic position and gender. At one end of the spectrum were those who engaged in hard labour and considered having any stable source of income as an indication of *taraqqi*.[9] Instability caused by consumption shocks, for example, resulting from illness or wedding expenses, often pushed the poor into indebtedness, or even bonded labour, thus postponing their *taraqqi*: 'The lenders don't let you eat away their loans. They ask to pay back first and then give wages' (Irfana, M, 0). For such families, starting any *karobar* was a sign of economic independence thus an indication of upward social mobility as fathers Bakht and Khadim argued: 'if one has a *karobar* then *taraqqi* happens'. No matter how small, independent *karobar* liberated unskilled workers from exploitative, seasonally fluctuating and uncertain casual work which often came with social control by employers and did not necessarily lead to socio-economic uplift. At the other end of the spectrum were those who had better schooling, and *taraqqi* for them meant an improvement in their social status and prestige along with economic progress. For those with relatively greater economic capital coming from landowning, privileged caste families, *taraqqi* did not mean merely securing livelihoods. It also meant 'having power and authority' to influence others preferably through high-status public sector jobs (Rahim, S, 12) which also granted them access to state authority. These different values and norms, and their meaning and understanding of a good life, had far-reaching implications for the educational possibilities for their young family members.

Beyond occupational gains, the ability to read and write in certain ways was considered relevant to *taraqqi*. Schooling was seen to create a sharp distinction between the *parrha-likha* (schooled) and the *unparrh* (without schooling), with different habitus and trajectories for *taraqqi*. Schooling could thus potentially restratify the very social order depending on who could access it. Those who were better schooled could draw upon the embodied forms of cultural capital – thus

distinguishing them from those with no schooling and positioning themselves as on a *taraqqi* track:

> The more there is education, the more a person would be refined from the inside; the more education you have in your society or at home, the more you will head towards *taraqqi*.
>
> (Shuja, S, 16)

Those with religious dispositions had other commitments that they wanted to fulfil through schooling. Shuja, for example, described how schooling improved the 'morals' of society alongside peoples' 'ways to communicate'; it improved their *saqafat* (culture) and *tehzeeb* (civilization) and their *maeeshat* (economy), thus contributing to success in the broadest sense. Schooling was thus seen as both *intrinsic to* and *instrumental in* the process of *taraqqi* – both a *means* and an *end* in the pursuit of a better life. The centrality of family in defining each individual's goals and values is seen in parents such as Akhtar for whom *taraqqi* was manifested in domestic life, such as in the quality of familial relationships, parenting and the household environment.

Another crucial dimension of the socially structured meaning of *taraqqi* related to the gendered expectations placed on the schooling of sons and daughters in ways that reproduced the sexual division of labour. Investments in sons' schooling were seen as an integral part of the *intergenerational bargain* (McGregor et al. 2000) as they were meant to ensure the welfare of their parents in their old age in addition to improving their own economic and social status. Under such norms, schooling was meant to prepare boys and girls separately for their respective roles in the family, community and economy.

The utmost necessity for sons was viewed as their being able to keep the 'household system well-functioning' (Akhtar, F, 5). A good job would add to a family's standing in the community and increase its 'goodwill' as people came to 'greet them', thus adding to their prestige. A son's education was thus crucial for the whole family's *taraqqi*. Amongst the sons with more years of schooling, those with higher and professional education were considered better placed to secure high-status jobs: 'If a guy is becoming a doctor . . . [or] if someone is becoming an engineer, one knows he is doing *taraqqi*' (Akhtar, F., 5). *Taraqqi* was associated, therefore, with urban professional work, salaried employment and skilled labour. Schooling was the best strategy for sons to fulfil these expectations: '*Taraqqi* for a young man is the completion of his education, getting a job, a permanent job and parents are also at peace that their son has [a] job' (Rahila, M, 5). Those sons who failed to secure sustainable livelihoods were subject to temporary, hazardous work and a disappointment to ageing parents by failing to take up the provider's role.

Daughters, in contrast, had far fewer (in)formal paid employment opportunities in the rural economy; their schooling was essentially linked to unpaid work of providing care, raising children and contributing to the economic success of

their menfolk and children, whilst also adding to family honour by adhering to the accepted gender norms (see Arnot & Naveed 2014). Some parents wanted their daughters to get a 'good education' so as to get 'good jobs' – for example, to 'become a teacher' at a public school that offered good pay and job security or even at a low-paying private school. For economically aspiring families, women's earnings – whether from a job or a *karobar* like 'stitching clothes' or 'some kind of work at their homes like making dresses or tutoring children' – were an important, often welcome contribution to the household economy. At the same time, the social and gender order embedded in the labour market severely limited such thoughts. By and large, the family and the social structure placed a woman's *taraqqi* largely within gendered norms of domesticity, expecting them to be the primary provider of care to their current and future family members. Their schooling was meant to prepare them for such a role, which would create a 'good household environment' and demonstrate their family's *taraqqi*: 'One such educated woman in a family changes the entire environment of the family' (Akhtar, F, 5).

The normative situating of women within domesticity inevitably invoked the value of the reproductive and maternal roles that their schooling was expected to prepare them for. Like Akhtar, most parents believed that by schooling their daughters 'their future generation will do *taraqqi*'. Marriage therefore offered a daughter a chance to move up socially while also setting the parents free from having to support her. A 'good marriage' could bring a young woman high social status, economic uplift and personal stability for the rest of her life and prestige and peace of mind for her parents, while also providing families with new social networks or strengthening existing ones. In contrast, a 'wrong marriage' could lower a daughter's social and economic status and lead to her continued economic dependence on her parents. Families had to avoid such a fate for their daughters and their strategies usually protected the boundaries of caste, kinship and socio-economic status. On occasion, potential matches could come from the outside of these close-knit social sphere, opening up the possibility for change in social relations.

An educated young woman would have better life chances by marrying into a well-off family, as she could offer a rich home environment, take good care of her husband's family, raise the children intelligently and educating them better. The chances of upward mobility would also increase dramatically if an educated woman was lucky enough to find culturally appropriate employment, such as becoming a schoolteacher or a doctor. The proud declaration of father Khadim (a brick-kiln worker with no schooling) reflected this: 'All my daughters are educated and now married . . . one still at home has BA; if she had found a job, she would have done *taraqqi*'.

Such social structuring of values, meanings and norms, differentiated as they are for sons and daughters, underlie the aspirations and strategies for schooling. How, and if so whether, such meanings and values help perpetuate inequalities *in* and *through* schooling is addressed in the next section.

A sense of limits and realities

Families that are hierarchically positioned in the pentagonal rural social structure have different educational and economic goals to aspire to. Their varied *sense of limits* and *reality* (Bourdieu 1977, p. 36), of feasibility, risks and opportunity costs are inscribed in the habitus of their members. Even the most marginalised families started with high desires for *taraqqi* through schooling – after all, the rise of mass schooling in rural communities hinges on the promise of an escape out of poverty and an improvement of life chances (Jeffery et al. 2008).

The education system in such a context, however, may not be prepared to equalise and capitalise on such increased aspirations for *taraqqi* through schooling by offering equitable learning experiences to students from unequal social backgrounds. Any failure of schools attended by the poor in providing economically valuable skills and credentials (perpetuated by the increasing privatisation of schooling) and any discrimination in the labour market even when poor young people acquire these skills can result in narrowing of the aspirational window. Inequality in schooling and work transitions displays the material realities that familial aspirations may not easily escape. Through these dynamic processes, one can see limits to the potential of schooling in improving the life chances of all.

Using a relational ontology and the *Habitus Listening* Guide for the analysis of my family interviews (Naveed & Arnot 2019), I was able to compare three Punjab families,[10] revealing the dynamic processes in which their aspirations were shaped by their positioning in the pentagonal rural social structure and their intra-family cross-gender and generation perspectives which collided and reshaped the possibilities they saw of social change.

Rehmat's family's limited expectations and low educational outcomes

My first example of this complex cultural tension between the *capacity to aspire* and the reality of social inequality is the family of Rehmat who was 47 at the time of my second interview. Rehmat came from a kinship group that had a low status in the caste hierarchy of the village. He was a landless village butcher who traded livestock on the side, an activity which was prone to seasonal fluctuations and losses.

Owing to a childhood living in poverty, Rehmat had not attended school nor had his wife Latifan. They had three sons and two daughters, but none had reached secondary school. Rehmat, Latifan and their daughter Itrat (who lived with her in-laws in a neighbouring village) revealed their relatively modest but also frustrated familial aspirations and the low outcomes of the schooling they had received.

Father Rehmat

I tried hard to educate my children. The oldest son left school from 7th Grade. He was not going to school and started working with me. The one younger than him studied till 8th, then he also left studies and is also working with me now. The youngest one is studying in 6th Grade; we are trying that he continues his studies. . . . I wanted my sons to get education so that they understand themselves, understand worldly matters, [and] do their own good *karobar*. That's what all parents desire for their children. . . . Our poverty stopped us from fulfilling my dreams. When there are not enough resources, one can't spend on education and then just quietly pulls [children] out of school. If I were educated, would have known what education is. My children would also have got education. When I myself am not educated, what could I tell them about education?

Mother Latifan

We didn't have education, what dreams could I have had then? I did think of a good home, a good *karobar* so as to have a few days of comfort but nothing happened. . . . Not a single desire has been fulfilled. . . . If children came home and told me that they have completed their lessons, how could I know whether or not they did? Many times, I have thrown out their important papers by mistake. One is blind from the eyes if one is not schooled . . . I have spent [my] own time, it is gone now. . . . My dreams about the daughters were that they should get married into beautiful homes, well-to-do families. . . . For sons, I want them to have good *karobar*, a nice home, that's all I desire. I can only pray to Allah. What else can I do? I pray 5 times and ask Allah that only He can help me now, none else can do anything.

Ah, what to feel about it all now? . . . I want that Allah may help in my sons' *karobar* so that they buy some land for their house and I find some peace in my heart. I don't have big dreams. I just want my children to have their own space, their own home in my lifetime.

Daughter Itrat (5 years of schooling)

I wanted to become a teacher after my studies but . . . there was no system at home, how could they have educated me? There was a lack of money and the business was not good either. Whatever my father earned, we would spend on food by the end of the day. How could they have educated us then? . . . I don't think much about the dreams that remained unfulfilled, I don't feel good about those. . . . When I go [to village] and meet my friends and they tell me that they completed their education, I feel angry

> about myself. . . . I had thought of better than how my family is now. Their circumstances may change as you never know when something good happens. If anyone at home gets a job, my parents' circumstances will improve. . . . Who were I to think about my in-laws [and marriage]? My family decided that it was good. My husband is son of my maternal aunt . . . one has many desires but whatever one gets is alright.

Rehmat's case illustrates that even poor, landless parents who had never been to school start with hopes of schooling their children so as to achieve *taraqqi*. At the same time, these aspirations are limited to achieving *karobar* for sons and decent marriages for daughters offering a narrow aspirational window to parents as well as a 'less easy archiving of the alternative futures' (Appadurai 2004, p. 69). Given the fragile economy of Rehmat's family, educational aspirations had to dovetail with the need to draw sons frequently into the family's economic activity at a young age. It is in the material realities as well as social relations of the family that the struggle between short-term economic survival and the long-term possibilities through a better education occurs, taking sons out of school 'against their parental will' – a habitus involving a voluntarily rushing towards the inevitable future, as Bourdieu tells us. The intersection of family's disadvantaged position in the social structure and its gendered meaning of *taraqqi* and values also implies the disruption of daughters' schooling as soon as a *reasonable* marriage proposal arrives for them. They had to give up their high educational and occupational ambitions for marital arrangements in ways that offered them little or no agency in making crucial decisions about their lives.

Another aspect of educational expansion in a context of major social inequality is the deepening of disadvantage through the internalisation of failure amongst the poor. This is evident in Itrat's self-directed anger over her lack of educational success in comparison to her peers. An outcome of structural inequality is portrayed as disadvantage resulting from their personal incapacity. The discursive framing of schooling also caused symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977, p. 237) on this family where those with low/no schooling believed their subjugation to be legitimate – as mother Latifan believed about herself 'One is blind from the eyes if one is not schooled'. Such views misplace the responsibility of failure on the disadvantage rather than the social structure.

Bakht's family's high aspirations and poor outcomes

Bakht was a brick-kiln worker. His family belonged to a religious minority; with a caste identity associated with refuse work, the lowest in the kinship hierarchy of the village (although the family had not engaged in this work for at least three generations). In the following, we see a marked gap between the family's high aspirations for social mobility and their poor outcomes of schooling.

Bakht was schooled to primary level whilst his wife Irfana had not. They had five sons and three daughters. Their oldest son had not been to school and the second one had 10 years of schooling, a requirement for many low-level public sector jobs at that time. However, he could not find a job. The third son did not go to school and the fourth one only attended school for two years. Both started working with Bakht at the brick-kiln at an early age. Their youngest son was intelligent but dropped out of school from 7th grade. None of their daughters received any schooling; all were married at the time of the second interview. The educational aspirations of family members and their experiences are poignantly described in their own words.

Father Bakht

My own father took care of my [second] son. He would take him to school and bring him back and would keep in contact with his teachers. That is why he could study. . . . He went to the city some 15 or 20 years ago [with] 10 years of schooling, and at that time, 10 years was a lot.

I got tired of running around for his job but couldn't find any. They were asking for Rs. 100,000 to 150,000 for a job.[11] We are unable to earn our meals, where could we bring a lakh from? . . . *Kamzor admi ko rishwat ke beghair job nahe miltee* (a powerless man does not get a job without bribes). He is now running a donkey cart in the city like his oldest brother. The other [son] got 7 years of schooling. . . . He was sharp minded, always stood first in his class, scored better than sons of the rich people . . . looking at his older brother unable to get job, he left school . . . he learnt repairing cars, he could also work on tractors and motorcycles, whatever you name, . . . He went abroad, and has helped us a lot in constructing our house, but went out of contact for the last 3 years.

Now I have asked my sons to start their own *karobar*. If that happens then some *taraqqi* is possible. This labour work doesn't feed us properly, what kind of *taraqqi* is possible with it? But setting up [*karobar*] of our own would cost at least one or two lakh, we shall arrange this by working hard.

Mother Irfana

When I was young, I had many dreams. I wished to marry into a prosperous family so that I could also have some comfort and do *taraqqi* . . . Had thought that there would be enough money, children should be educated and we should feel freed and experience *taraqqi* . . . nothing happened. My children are also like this, going in circles, doing daily labour, what *taraqqi* can they do? The plan was that sons would have education and

have their own *karobar*. Had thought that we should work hard and save some money, to improve the lives of children . . . When my children were young and my husband was working hard at brick kiln . . . I used to work at people's homes, and children started going with their father to the brick kiln. Their father could not educate them. He could not get them out of brick kiln, and *taraqqi* could not happen. What *taraqqi* can they do now? None of my dreams are fulfilled. Sons could not find better paying work so no dream was fulfilled . . . when dreams are not fulfilled, children could not do *taraqqi*, what can we do?

Son Imran (2 years of schooling, brick-kiln worker)

I had many dreams when I was young. I thought of doing a lot of *taraqqi*, wanted to earn and feed parents. It could not happen due to poverty. I just kept going to work with my father. Doing one's own *karobar* requires money, so it cannot be done because of poverty. We could only fulfil our dreams if we had any money, could buy cattle raise and sell them and earn some money. When we don't have money, we cannot do that . . . our poverty is increasing over time.

The relational dynamics of schooling are most evident in Bakht's case as two generations took it as their responsibility to school the third generation – a desperate strategy to break out of exclusion from the web of oppressive social relations in the village. The consequences of these dynamics became all the more evident as the family began to navigate the working of the labour market when even the secondary schooling of their son could not offset the family's overlapping disadvantage of poverty, landlessness and low-caste status. The personal archiving of the experienced inability of schooling in helping the poor achieve *taraqqi* could be seen playing a crucial role in narrowing the educational aspirations for younger family members. When a secondary schooled older sibling ended up running a donkey cart like his eldest brother who had not been to school, it is not surprising that the younger, high-achieving brother chose to drop out of school opting for an alternative track to achieve *taraqqi*. It was not the lack of aspirations for *taraqqi* or schooling per say, it was the oppressive social relations governing educational outcomes that limited the ability of the poor to make schooling work for them. There are limits to what the expansion of mass schooling can contribute to the lives of socially disadvantaged like Bakht's family apart from deepening the sense of betrayal, social exclusion and a widening of the gap from those favourably positioned in the local social order.

Aslam's family's high aspirations and high educational outcomes

Aslam, 61, and his wife Kinza were both secondary schooled, retired primary school teachers. Kinza was one of the few women in the village who had had

formal employment. Both belonged to the privileged caste in the village. Kinza's family owned more land than her husband. After retirement, the parents set up a successful fertiliser business.

Aslam and Kinza had two sons and two daughters, all of whom had completed secondary schooling and progressed to tertiary education. One daughter had earned a master's degree. The aspirations of mother, son and daughter about education and *taraqqi* were relatively high, allowing them to reflect on a frustrating range of educational outcomes in the family (Aslam was not available for a second interview).

Kinza, Mother

When I was young, I thought of doing the teacher training course after 10th grade and this dream was fulfilled. Then I became a teacher. . . . My parents helped me a lot. I went to [a city name] for the teachers' training and they used to visit me there. It was 1972, and very few people had education at that time . . . I take pride in all that I could achieve . . . I had wished my children could get a good education. I got the youngest daughter admission at the Degree College and then at the University, and fulfilled her desire to do a Master's degree. One son did BA and the other did higher secondary only. . . . They themselves did not study further, there was no other hurdle. The oldest son went abroad and the younger also followed him. I had a lot more aspirations for *taraqqi* than what my family has achieved so far. I wanted my children to get higher education and do jobs. . . . They couldn't get a public-sector job, but otherwise, Allah has his blessings on us.

Rahim, Son (13 years of schooling)

My dream was to join the police. Like one becomes SHO (head of the police station) after completing an education and the whole area knows that there is an SHO, who works carefully, and does not take bribes. There is a fear about him in the area and everyone thinks he is an honest person, doesn't misuse his office, and also provides security to everyone. That was my dream for a while. Then I started thinking about going abroad. I went abroad and spent some 3–4 years working there. Then it came to my mind that whatever hard work I am doing there, I could do the same efforts back home and do my own *karobar* and that would be much better, so why facing the worries of being out of home and the country.

I just could not pay sufficient attention to my education as I was more involved in the family business. When one has to work on the business, then studies become only a formality. The age of 20 or 22 is not for running

business, it is for studies. If one starts doing other work, it is not good for the studies. One should have a strong [social] background for having high ambitions and for pursuing them . . . I did not have any problems.

My brother had gone abroad, and I had to take care of many things so could not focus on my studies. I could not go to university, and attended the college in the neighbouring village that did not have good educational standards. If I were in the city, in addition to attending university, I could also have joined some academy for private coaching and done better at my studies. If I had a slightly better education, I could have thought of looking for a job.

There is nothing particular that I wished and did not achieve. I have worked very hard. My education is a bit low, but I have paid full attention to my *karobar* Masha Allah. . . . We have done good *taraqqi* from the previous generation. Will take better care of our children so that they do further *taraqqi*.

Samina, Daughter, (12 years schooled)

Some of my dreams are fulfilled and some remain unfulfilled. I think about those dreams and say thanks to Allah for whatever He has given me. Sometimes I feel I should have studied more. In my BA, I failed in English and I feel sad about it. I had desired for more and more *taraqqi*. I wished all our family needs were fulfilled by my husband. But that did not happen. The main reason is that my husband has only 10 years of schooling and these days, this much schooling has no value. If he had better education, he could have applied for some other job.

I think about my children and wish they study well. I have said to their father that for the next 5 years, we should put them in good schools so that they have good educational foundation. Afterwards, whatever school he likes, he can send them to.

The striking feature here is the relative ease with which Kinza's dream of becoming a schoolteacher, at a time when fewer women attended school was fulfilled. The privileged economic and social status resulting from landownership and higher caste identity of her parents meant that Kinza's family could provide for the resources required for her teacher training in a different city and the foundations not only for a successful career as a schoolteacher but also widening the aspirational window for her family's *taraqqi*. The relative shift in gender norms in Kinza's own experience was evidently transmitted to the next generation. A sense of experimentation was reflected in her son Rahim's ability to choose between options. The educational success of the older siblings, as Ray (2003) noted, provided compelling information for his own educational and economic aspirations.

Clearly, social change also raises aspirations. Whilst all children had achieved more than secondary school, their mother's desire for their education was even higher and remained unfulfilled. A wide range of experiences, whether personal or those of other family members, helped Rahim to navigate 'the complex steps between . . . norms and specific wants and wishes' (Appadurai 2004, p. 69). The social structure which had worked against Bakht and Rehmat's families instead offered resources to Aslam's children in pursuit of their ambitions. Their failure to meet the educational aspirations of Kinza did not limit their aspirations for cultural and material resources to achieve *taraqqi*. Rahim's complex experience of exploring a wide range of possibilities – education, employment opportunities in Pakistan, overseas and setting up a business in Pakistan and his disposition to aim for power, prestige, authority and economic success appear to have been driven by the privileged family position offering economic, social and cultural resources.

At the same time, significant gender differences existed within Aslam's relatively successful family. While sons went on to pursue economic opportunities overseas and set up successful businesses in Pakistan, his daughters lived as housewives after their marriages, unlike their mother who was a working woman. The marriage of the youngest university educated daughter into a major city-based well-off family was presented by the family as a marker of her *taraqqi*. The life chances of the other daughter were tied to the status of her husband who had less schooling than her. Marriage was crucial for daughters to realise their aspirations for *taraqqi*. Samina felt she had attained less *taraqqi* than she or her family wished for.

Discussion

Common across all these case studies is that rural families, no matter how poor, start off with high aspirations for achieving a good life, collectively and for their individual members, and schooling is seen as integral to achieving this life goal. Those who are relatively privileged, however, have a better *navigational capacity* and better understanding of the social norms that they use 'to explore the future more frequently and more realistically'(Appadurai 2004, p. 68) in achieving *taraqqi* in and through schooling that help them realise and improvise these aspirations. The desires and wants of those disadvantaged by the rural social structure, however, frequently confronted unfavourable material realities. Their experiences can force them to lower their aspirations down to the levels suitable for people like them.

The insights in these data question Dreze and Sen's (1995) rather optimistic view of schooling improving *substantive freedoms* suggesting that, in highly economically, socially and politically unequal contexts, schooling may instead perpetuate prevalent social hierarchies of caste, religion, class and gender and widen economic inequalities (see also Jeffrey et al. (2008) in the case of northern India). The expansion of basic schooling in the Global South as a gendered, classed project may well groom rural girls for a better version of docile domesticity, instead of empowering them economically (Jeffery et al. 2005).

My aim here was to offer a new way of looking at and into the relationship between schooling and social inequality. By analysing the educational experiences of these families through the lens offered by Appadurai and Bourdieu, I have illustrated the ways in which the cultural *capacity to aspire* is entangled with one's material realities and place in social structure. After identifying the shape of what I call a *pentagonal rural social structure*, I have shown some of its inner working and dominance in the subjectivities of three rural families' values, meanings, aspirations and their economic outcomes. I highlighted how the ideas of progress and *a good life* that provide the moral basis for individual and familial educational aspirations, strategies and practices are culturally constructed and reflect (although often not explicitly or intentionally) the power relations of the local social order. The complex interplay between structure and agency, and between cultural, economic and social resources can leave schooling as a mechanism for social reproduction, capable of perpetuating existing inequalities rather than encouraging social opening and mobility. The expansion of schooling is not therefore unproblematic in an unchanged social structure. It raises expectations with its promise of a better life. At the same time, in the absence of cultural and economic resources to realise these aspirations, it leads to considerable disappointment, low outcomes and frustrations and potentially greater social distance between not just those variably positioned in social structure but also between the schooled and those who had not been schooled (Arnot & Naveed 2014).

For schooling to be a viable investment strategy, it must offer these poor, landless, socially excluded families a credible route towards improvement in their economic conditions and a dignified social status. The case of Bakht's family makes clear that, even if very poor, some families are willing to take a leap into investing in education in the wake of economic hardships, even if the economic returns to the level and the quality of schooling they could access are uncertain. Quantitative analyses of chronic poverty across South Asian contexts indicate that, although schooling was important in preventing families from falling into poverty, once poor, it was either ineffective or higher levels of education were required in order to break out of poverty (see Naveed & Sutoris 2020 for details). This chapter has shed some light on what constrains the role of schooling in reducing social inequality. Social mobility for the poor appears to depend on processes that build on prior unequal access to opportunities and resources, with the chances of success strikingly limited.

In estimating the average returns to each additional year of schooling for the entire population, the standard models of economic returns to schooling fail to take these inner workings of the social structure on mediating these returns. As Ray (2003, p. 8) notes: 'there is no experience quite as compelling as the experience of your immediate family, and more broadly, those in your socio-economic and spatial neighbourhood'. By relying upon their own experiences and observations, they perform their cost–benefit analysis on a daily basis for educational decision-making, often recognising the risky nature of their educational investments compared with the low, but guaranteed, returns to engaging children in income-generating activities early on. The micro-level assessments of the value

of schooling for economic prosperity, social progress, equality and an overall better life suggest that the aspirations, which are shaped and restricted by the material realities of rural social life, need to be taken into account in educational policy debates. The family case studies discussed in this chapter demonstrate that the wider social, cultural and economic context, if not transformed, have the capacity to overpower the opportunity that schooling might have offered to the poor. Without creating a level-playing field, as a precondition, there is a little that schooling alone can achieve in reducing inequality and eradicating poverty in contexts such as rural Punjab.

Notes

1 The Habitus Listening Guide described four readings of interviews with father, mother, son and daughter (social structural; horizontal intergenerational; vertical gender and, mythic-ritual listenings).
2 One needs to recognise that religious schools also provide free Islamic education (including boarding and lodging) to the extreme poor children, across the country.
3 For example, Global Gender Gap Index produced by the World Economic Forum (2014) which is a composite measure of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment.
4 RECOUP investigated the social/economic outcomes of education for the poor in Pakistan, (see Colclough 2012). The first round of data was collected for the sub-project, 'Youth, Gender and Citizenship', (directed internationally by Madeleine Arnot) by a field research team based at the Mahbub-ul-Haq Human Development Centre, Islamabad which I headed.
5 Educational facilities in the village in 2010 included: two government primary schools for girls and a higher secondary school (teaching up to grade 12), a primary school for boys and a high school that taught only boys up to grade 10. Two private schools offered co-education. A few small Madrasahs (seminaries) also offered religious education, which was common, particularly for girls (Naveed 2019b).
6 Given cultural norms, interviews with female members of the households were conducted by two female Research Assistants, Sidrah Saleem and Iqra Saleem.
7 The original purposive stratified sample recruited youth in these three categories of educational attainment. The three sets of parents in this second study also fitted these categories.
8 The interview covered various aspects of family history, educational aspirations, experiences and biographies.
9 Such as primary schooled son Nisar and son Imran who had two years of schooling.
10 The interviews were conducted and analysed in Punjabi. I translated selected quotes from Punjabi to English.
11 In 1995, this would be approximately three to five times Bakht's annual wage.

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