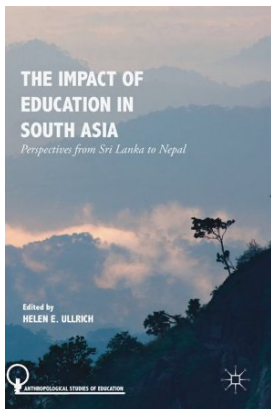


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The Impact of Education in South Asia: Perspectives From Sri Lanka to Nepal

Edited by H. E. Ullrich, 2019. Palgrave Macmillan: ISBN 9783319966076

Reviewed by Susan Allen Namalefe, *Texas Department of Criminal Justice, USA*



Education is produced within power relationships; therefore, power and social dynamics are central to any analysis of the impact of education. The acquisition and benefits of education are similarly intertwined by class, family, gender and social tensions, relentlessly mutating into different varieties, environments and appearances, and endlessly involving control. This is the essence of *The Impact of Education in South Asia*. Drawing from case studies, ethnographic research, and interviews from different parts of India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, the authors attempt to provide perspective to the relationship between education and society. Formal education challenges society by changing gender roles, household organization, family, and the caste system. Individuals

negotiate and transform culture and the educational system. Moreover, social institutions challenge education systems—for instance, tensions result as education is thought to endanger family honor, and to perpetuate societal divisions, humiliation, and discrimination. Nevertheless, the book also discusses the positive aspects and increased value of education, especially for women. Education impacts social structure by raising marriage age and improving health and nutrition. The literacy skills of mothers contribute to their children's survival, health, and mastery of fundamental literacy. Education also increases family income, self-confidence, societal acceptance, self-image, and cooperation. Generally, increased access to education impacts social life through the improvement of individuals, families, and society.

The Impact of Education in South Asia is therefore about relationships between education and society. It is an assembly of narratives about access to education organized around an interplay between problems, periods, and a chronology. It delineates the history and development of education in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The authors do not simply point out what might be wrong; they identify the assumptions and the unconsidered and unchallenged philosophies underlying access to education. For instance, education is viewed as an investment for the future, albeit with fears of its impact on girls' behavior and marriage prospects. One of the study participants narrates that education "made the repetitiveness of her daily life tedious and her mother in law's demands hard to bear" (Ullrich, 2019, p. 27). By considering the significance of the family in decisions about a girl's future, including family support or lack thereof, this work avails instruments for intervening within the gender differential, which seems to be prevalent in South Asia. It objectively offers another lens through which education in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka can be viewed—for instance, while patrifocality can limit girls' educational opportunities, it can also enable educational prospects and accomplishments before and after marriage. As arguments for girls' education increase, including educational endogamy, earning ability, and potential to help with the education of children, patrifocal families are convinced to educate girls.

The authors' backgrounds as educators and scholars is evident as they promulgate a cogent systematic approach. They are part of the history they are reworking and in so doing they rethink the essence of the value of education and challenge the reader to reimagine its value. They write empirically and experientially, drawing from personal narratives, observations, cracks, silent shocks, failings, etc., gathered from years of interacting and working with different individuals in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. They discuss factors that both enable and hinder students—especially girls—from attaining education in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. They present education in South Asia as a series of historical procedures, facts, themes, and of relationships of prejudices and of control.

The text follows an arrangement based on problematizations ranging from determinants of girls' school attendance, family matters, refashioning futures, life options through education, the curriculum, and the hidden curriculum, etc. The opening sections highlight the benefits of education. The middle sections discuss how the educational system preserves the traditional hierarchy with Christianity, while the final sections analyze the value and the deficits of the educational system, such as the limitations of formal and institutionalized structures of educational opportunity for disadvantaged groups. The strength of this structural design is its ability to demonstrate the merits of practical education and Western education. It serves readers not very conversant with education or South Asia but also provides substance for more familiar readers. Furthermore, the book contains pictures and quotes from real life experiences. These experiential firsthand accounts provide deeper insight into what, in some books, is just a catalogue of facts. While this book is not a complete resource on the impact of education in South Asia, it provides a starting point, new ways of thinking about education, and an array of perspectives for others to adopt and develop. All the examples in the book are from India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, but the

authors manage to establish universal educational perspectives that can be applied to other contexts worldwide.

All 13 sections of the book explore a space offering academics possibility for new modes of thought and operation regarding education. Educators and policymakers who read and understand this book will be moved to think about persistent education questions including:

What actually is “education” in South Asia? Does the concept extend far beyond minimal literacy and numeracy? Is the “curriculum” presented in meaningful ways? Does the educational experience work equally well for students from all walks of life? If not, why not? What could be done to improve the quality of teaching and the management of government schools and others serving children of low status families? (Ullrich, 2019, p. ix)

Drawing from these studies, educators could identify a sphere in which they can practice differently, applying their skills to provide an ideal learning situation rather than preserve the wide gaps in education for men and women, the poor and the wealthy. Furthermore, a decent government school system might attract students from all backgrounds. This could truly be disconcerting because educators would be compelled to query deep-rooted patrifocal social order, relinquish firmly established truths, and hold on to the delicate promise of change. They may further have to disturb the status quo where caste, poverty, patriarchy, and gender roles have been considered normal and acceptable. By writing this book the authors challenge educators and policymakers to think creatively about education, practically address problems, and explore possibilities.

Apart from making sense of the past in the present, olden times can also be made unacceptable through questioning the history that envelops us and aggressively thrusts the truth upon us. Besides, small scale studies can help us to understand large scale trends. This book discusses educational and marital choice, changing gender roles, the effect of education on patrilocality, the challenges of limited school availability, the negative aspects of government-run educational systems, caste and religious discrimination, and Western versus traditional education. It serves as a vital starting point in reconsidering and rewriting educational acquisition and practice.

SUSAN ALLEN NAMALEFE holds a PhD in higher education from the University of North Texas and has worked as an educator in different capacities for over 25 years. She is currently a research specialist with TDCJ-Criminal Justice Assistance Division. Email: allensusan@my.unt.edu
