Chapter 14
Capabilities of Students

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Introduction

…Maharaja, have you seen the bird?' 'Indeed, I have not!' exclaimed the Raja. 'I completely forgot about the bird.' Turning back, he asked the pundits about the method they followed in instructing the bird. It was shown to him. He was immensely impressed. The method was so stupendous that the bird looked ridiculously unimportant in comparison. The Raja was satisfied that there was no flaw in the arrangements. As for any complaint from the bird itself, that simply could not be expected. Its throat was so completely choked with the leaves from the books that it could neither whistle nor whisper. It sent a thrill through one's body to watch the process…

…The bird died. Nobody had the least notion how long ago this had happened. The fault-finder was the first man to spread the rumour. The Raja called his nephews and asked them, 'My dear nephews, what is this that we hear?' The nephews said: 'Sire, the bird's education has been completed.' 'Does it hop?' the Raja enquired. 'Never!' said the nephews. 'Does it fly?' 'No.' 'Bring me the bird,' said the Raja. The bird was brought to him, guarded by the kotwal and the sepoys and the sowars. The Raja poked its body with his finger. Only its inner stuffing of book-leaves rustled.

- Rabindranath Tagore (The Parrot's Training (1918))

The Parrot's Training by Rabindranath Tagore, even though written almost a century ago, may still easily find relevance in the current educational context. It captures the compulsiveness and superficiality of the constructed aims of formal education which our society tends to obsessively associate with the 'output' or the end result that is primarily limited to employability and economic prosperity. But one may need to critically analyse the nature of this prosperity. What kind of prosperity are we focusing on? Are the meanings that we hold about the idea of prosperity inherently narrow in nature? Does prosperity only equate to one's purchasing power in the market? Should quality formal education be only treated as a means to another end? Shouldn't the process of education in its truest sense be also considered as an end in itself?

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The current structures of higher education in the Indian context seem to be visibly anchored towards the end result of time and resources 'invested' in a formal educational programme. The murmurs around introducing learning-based outcomes in the Indian higher education system have been doing the rounds for a while. Even though the outcome-based approach to higher education may be of great utility, if formulated and implemented well, the focus still comes down to the fact that the formal education is mostly treated as a means to a particular end (which may either be to get educated, or to get employed, or simply to meet the learning outcomes). Amartya Sen's Capability Approach pulls this argument to the point that education in its very self should be treated as an end. This is not to diminish or underestimate the importance of treating education as a means to a particular end that will help ensure the material or maybe social sustainability of an individual; but the argument is made against reducing education to just only that. Then the question that arises is, 'How could we look at education as an end in itself?'

It may be considered as a relatively well-established insight, that entry and existence into a formal educational setting provide an individual with a new sphere for socialization. This implies that an individual's exposure to such a dynamic environment provides new scope for building, changing, disputing or reinforcing one's attitudes, belief systems, preferences, etc. It creates a new platform to facilitate the process of building one's self-concept, one's identity. This makes it imperative for us to understand the elements or factors during one's educational experience that can either enhance or diminish the freedom and efforts towards holistic well-being.

The ability to critically analyse and question the relevance of existing educational practices is stimulated and developed through a critical and democratic educational pedagogy. The prevalence of rigid structures and norms pertaining to our educational settings restrict the stakeholders to an extent, to do just that. The notions of studying in an institute and education are instinctively understood as identical in nature; being elusive to the idea that entry to a formal educational setting may not directly imply the holistic growth and development of an individual. Our focus is usually on what the parrot is being able to reproduce on paper, rather than how he or she is making sense of the intellectual stimulants around and how he or she can inculcate the wisdom from these resources to lead a well-balanced life.

So, to envisage an optimistic future of Indian higher education system, the process of quality education needs to be perceived as an end in itself. The focus needs to steer sharp at the micro level, towards the main stakeholders in higher education – the students. Policies need to be futuristic as well as retrospective. It is useful to explicitly define the goals and desired outcome of schemes and provisions, it is useful to decipher the past trends and make projections for the future, but besides all the objective parameters, the systems are still lacking in terms of shadowing the humanistic aspect of it, which lies within the experiences of the students.

Out of the many identities that an individual comes in association with, an important one is of being a student. Learning, as we understand, is lifelong, but the interaction of an individual with and within a formalized institution, with peers and contemporaries, with teaching and guiding agents, with institutional administration, can play a major role in either breaking or making one's social being. It holds the

capacity to determine one's future relationships, ideologies, value systems, interactions, participation in the civil activities, and of course, employability. Therefore, it seems essential to understand the factors that influence this process of an individual existing and growing as a student so as to realize and fiercely protect his or her capabilities.

The present chapter does not aim to critically look at the inadequacy of our formal educational systems, for now; rather it wishes to *first* attempt to understand what are the factors that may influence or hinder the capacity of a student's being, throughout his or her educational journey, starting from schooling to postgraduation. The chapter does not restrict to factors that only pertain to an institution – whether school or university – but also delve into personal and interpersonal factors that may play a role in moulding the existence of an individual as a student. For this purpose, narratives from two students, who have completed their postgraduation from different institutions and carry exceptionally varied personal, social, geographical and cultural backgrounds, were taken using a structured interview schedule, which was then followed by its thematic analysis. The factors analysed and derived from the interview were then substantiated by existing literature. The *second* aim is to envisage a very tentative idea of certain capabilities of a student, on the basis of the thematic analysis, that may be considered as fundamental prerequisites for one's optimal functioning in a formal educational environment.

The theoretical approach which will be the guiding and supporting backbone of the present chapter is Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Martha Nussbaum's expansion of it. The conceptual makeup is influenced by Amartya Sen's idea of Capability Approach, whereas the operationalization of the concept is influenced by both Sen and Nussbaum (which is reflected in the treatment of the analysis).

The notions of agency, freedom, human development and well-being that the Capability Approach puts emphasis on lay the floor for us to ask different kinds of questions about education (Walker, 2006). It attempts to compensate for the limitations of the dominant neoliberal human capital approaches to education, which equate it only to employment and economic productivity, instead of also focusing on the role that education can play in enabling an individual to be and to do; and places human capabilities in the forefront for evaluation of holistic well-being (Walker, 2006). The chapter will first focus on the notion of capability with respect to the Capability Approach and attempt to understand what it means when we talk about the capabilities of a student. Then it will move on to understanding the factors that may enhance or hinder the experience and the very being of an individual as a student. The overarching categorization is influenced by the Ecological Model of Human Development and are broadly divided into personal, familial, interpersonal and institutional categories. The next section will include the methodology of the study undertaken, and its limitations and future scope. Following which, the focus will then be on the thematic interpretations and analysis of the narratives. The findings will also be substantiated by the existing literature. The next section will attempt to derive and conceptualize the capabilities pertaining to a student based on the analysis. The final sections will include the scope of the overall study, its implications and conclusion.

'Capability' in Capability Approach

Capability Approach can be understood as a way of evaluating an individual's well-being and prosperity, not just in terms of their employability value in the market but more so in terms of their freedom to be and to do. Amartya Sen (1992) states, 'in the capability-based assessment of justice, individual claims are not to be assessed in terms of the resources or primary goods the persons respectively hold, but by the freedoms they actually enjoy to choose the lives that they have reason to value'. Therefore, 'equality of what?' is responded with 'equality of capabilities', rather than equality of economic resources (Walker 2006).

A capability can simply be understood as a potential functioning. A complementary concept in Sen's Capability Approach is of functioning. The thin line between capability and functioning can be understood as the difference between opportunity to achieve something and the actual achievement. For example, the difference between capability to be well-educated and actually being well-educated. Amartya Sen laid relatively more emphasis on the notion of capabilities rather than the functionings. He believed that more than the outcome or the actual achievements, the very opportunity to achieve so is of more importance. Therefore, 'capability represents an individual's freedom to achieve well-being' so that 'acting freely and being able to choose are directly conducive to well-being' (Sen 1992).

For instance, this value system responds to the long-drawn arguments by a section of our society that question the provision of reservations in educational institutions and public employment arenas. One side of debaters argue over the fact that, for example, 'why do students belonging to the SC category are given relaxation and reservations in higher educational institutes when their financial standing is at par with the students of unreserved category?' This is where the problem lies; equating one's standing and well-being on the basis of an individual's economic status. The most fundamental fact that escapes the notice of this section of debaters is that an individual belonging to a scheduled caste has been, and still is, discriminated on the basis of his or her 'social' standing on an imaginary but fully realized hierarchical ladder; then why should reservations, that serve the purpose of reparation and rehabiliation of this disadvantaged group, be based on their economic standing. Few extended arguments also propagate that providing extended constitutional and expending welfare resources on the education of such individuals will not yield equal or substantial returns. This is where the Capability Approach presents the counter-argument: that it does not concern itself with what kind of an outcome the individual in question yields, but just the mere fact that provisions were put in place to bring the individual at an equal position where he had the capacity or capability to attain education – that in itself enhances the well-being of an individual and on a larger context, of the state and society.

Having said that, the concept of functioning does attract equal emphasis when the practice comes down to issues pertaining to, for example, health, education, etc. Here, the freedom to 'be healthy' or 'be educated' becomes problematic and disputable. These are the kinds of capabilities of humans that must be treated and protected as functionings otherwise the subsequent or future capabilities of the individuals might become compromised.

The Ecological Model of Human Development

The Ecological approach to understanding human development was introduced by Urie Bronfenbrenner in late 1970s. The approach primarily was to understand the role of various environmental factors that influence the growth of a child, but as the model's understanding grew extensively, its implications could be applied throughout life span development.

Bronfenbrenner realized the importance and influence of the interaction that takes place between an individual and his or her environment. He believed that this interaction shapes the process of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). He translated these ideas into his theory of Ecological systems, wherein he conceptualized that an individual's environment can be divided into four different levels or systems – Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem and Macrosystem. He later added another influential element – Time – as the Chronosystem level. The notion of 'Time' in this theory implied the occurrence of specific events, changes and transformations in the individual's culture over a period of time. Bronfenbrenner, also later recognized 'Biology' as creating an individual's potential – whether being realized or not through social and environmental factors. He added it under Microsystem. Therefore, now the model is also sometimes known as the Bioecological model (Ceci 2006).

The different levels of this model can be understood as follows:

Microsystem: It is the closest layer to an individual that includes the structural elements which are in direct contact with him or her. Simply put, it is the immediate environment of an individual and the close interaction with the elements constituted in it. These structures or elements can be understood as family, school, peers, religion, etc. (Berk 2002). As this is the most intimate environment of an individual, the interactions that take place here provides him or her with a reference point for the rest of the interactions with the world.

Mesosystem: It involves the interaction or relationship between two different elements of microsystem. For example, the interaction or involvement between an individual's parents and his or her school teachers about the academic performance. This relationship can be bi-directional.

Exosystem: This level involves the larger social system in which an individual does not have a direct involvement or functioning. The elements in this level interact with the ones in an individual's microsystem/immediate context and exert its influence on him or her. This influence may either be positive or negative. For example, a parent's work place timings or nature of the work might have a dissatisfactory effect on the time spent on his or her child and the activities related. The main elements in an individual's Exosystem that may have an influence can be understood as one's family social networks, parents' workplace, neighbourhood community, mass media, local politics, etc. (Bronfenbrenner 1994).

Macrosystem: This level constitutes the cultural and social values, customs and laws surrounding an individual (Berk 2002). This may also be understood as one's socio-economic status, ethnicity, poverty, etc. Besides that, it also pertains to the

ideology or value system that a given societal context characterizes itself with. Simply put, the macrosystems can be understood as a way to understand the social and cultural contexts of a particular society, such as ethnic groups, social classes, religious inclinations, etc. (McLaren and Hawe 2005) and how that context influences the functioning and relationships of the individual on the other levels and dimensions. The macrosystem naturally has an influence on all the previous three layers of the individual. It plays a significant role in how, when and where we carry out our interactions. For example, an individual who belongs to the disadvantaged caste and a poor socio-economic background and who exists in a societal context that strictly functions on caste-based hierarchies might have lesser opportunities and more difficulties for enrolling in a school.

Chronosystem: This level involves the dimension of time with respect to an individual's environment. It pertains to the significant events and transitions that take place throughout an individual's life (for example, parent's divorce, death of a close one, disability due to an illness, etc.) as well as the sociohistorical circumstances (for example, legal acknowledgement of transgender as the third gender, increase in career opportunities for women, etc.)

On the basis of the Ecological Model of Human Development, four broad factors were determined for the purpose of the present chapter: *personal, familial, interpersonal* and *institutional.* To determine the capabilities that pertain to the identity and being of a student, it becomes important to analyse the factors that help or hinder in the transformation of one's aspirations into capability. As per the Capability Approach, these factors may also be known as *conversion factors.* Usually, conversion factors under Capability Approach concern themselves with the process of turning capabilities into functioning. But in the present chapter, the focus will be on the transformation of aspirations into capabilities. The rationale behind this diversion is because an individual existing as a student under a formal educational institution is considered as an end in itself here, therefore, the factors that play a role in converting the aspiration of being a student in a formal educational setting into actually coming in contact with an institution and becoming a student are paid primary attention in this chapter.

The categorization of four broad factors – personal, familial, interpersonal and institutional – is an attempt at encompassing the major factors that may influence the very being of a student. The personal factors include one's own dispositions, for example, one's traits, characteristics, motivation, interest. The personal factors may also pertain to the presence of a physical or psychological condition. The familial factors involve elements or dimensions that pertain to one's family. These can include the family structure, economic status, social status, family's attitude and perceptions about education, etc. The interpersonal factors involve one's interaction with his or her peers; how the group dynamics were – whether the individual as a student felt included or excluded by his or her peers at any level of educational engagement in an institution, etc. The institutional factors relate to (i) the teaching faculty – their engagement and behaviour towards the student, whether their pedagogy was inclusive or not, whether the teachers were approachable or not;

and (ii) the institution in itself – the facilities and provisions that were provided; the rules and regulations; whether the institution was open to students' viewpoints, criticisms, etc.

The present chapter approaches the topic of 'Capabilities of Student' by first analysing the aforementioned factors and then attempting to derive an idea of capabilities that pertain to the very being of a student, because of the assumption that it could have been a mere superficial task to just ask an individual to directly list out the capabilities that he or she thinks are essential to his or her optimal functioning as a student. An individual's capabilities might not always be something which can be extracted in a concrete form from one's conscious awareness. This does not imply that individuals are not consciously aware of their fundamental needs and capacities and choices, but many a times the idea of our basic capabilities might not be in a clear-cut understanding in our conscious thought process. Therefore, the current chapter makes an attempt at trying to understand the idea of capabilities of a student by first asking the individual what and how certain factors influence their capacity to thrive throughout their educational journey in a formal setting. Through the process of attempting to understand the positive or negative role that these factors play, the chapter gains some insight into *what* exactly these factors are hindering or enhancing. This 'what' factor might be able to give a tentative idea of the capabilities of that individual existing as a student.

Methodology

To understand the factors that influence an individual's educational journey and experience, and derive relevant meanings out of the findings that pertain to the aims of the present paper, the method of narrative inquiry was employed. Since, the present paper is just a personal stepping stone in the overall process of understanding and deriving capabilities of a student, as a means of 'testing the waters', the present study took detailed oral narratives of two participants using a structured interview schedule.

The two participants, both female and of the same age, belonging to exceptionally different terrains of the country – one from Jammu and Kashmir and the other from Maharashtra – pursued their Masters degree from the same college, but different courses. The participants were selected through purposive sampling and it was ensured that both had completed at least their postgraduation.

> Participant A is a 24-year-old female who was born and brought up in Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir. She is Buddhist by religion and belongs to the Schedule Tribe (ST) category and comes from a middle-class family background. She did her schooling from LKG (Lower Kindergarten) to 10th at a private school in her village in Ladakh. For her 11th and 12th education, she came to Delhi and studied in a private Christian school. She took up the Non-Medical stream (PCM) during her higher secondary schooling but changed her stream to Social Sciences while applying for Undergraduate studies. She then did her Bachelors in Sociology from a college in Delhi University (DU). Following which, she then pursued her Masters in Social Work from a reputed institute in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Participant B is a 24-year-old female who was born and brought up in Nasik, Maharashtra. She is Hindu by religion and belongs to the Other Backward Class (OBC) category and comes from an upper middle-class family background. She did her schooling from LKG (Lower Kindergarten) to 10th grade at a private convent school in Nasik. For her 11th and 12th education (Junior College), she came to Mumbai and studied Humanities in an autonomous institution. From the same institution, she pursued her BA Pass in Economics and Sociology. She then did her Masters in Development Studies from a reputed institute in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Analysis

For the purpose of analysing the narratives of the participants, a thematic approach was attempted. Isolated but relevant as well as recurrent themes were identified. The overall analysis of the narratives has been divided under five sections: personal, familial, societal, interpersonal and institutional. The personal section includes one's own dispositions, traits, conditions, motivation, interest, etc. The familial section includes family support, family's financial condition, family's involvement, etc. The societal section includes one's domicile background, social perceptions, etc. The interpersonal section involves the peer relations and engagement in formal and informal class activities. The institutional section includes the rules, regulations, teaching pedagogy, teacher–student relations, space for discussions, etc.

Personal	Introversion, but still adaptable
	Not much interest in participating in class even if you know the answers
	Reluctance to participate because of personality and classroom structure
	Resilience; personal motivation and willingness to overcome complexes
Familial	Educational background of the parents influenced the motivation and awareness of opportunities in the participants
	Guidance but still provided freedom to choose the course of action
	Stable source of family income led to explore new career and good college options
Societal	Educational Migration because of lack of good educational opportunities in rural or non-metropolitan cities
	Perception of Engineering and Medical studies over Social Sciences, shaped the career choices, Stigma
Interpersonal	Strong network system of friends and teachers helped in coping with stress of work
	Similar cultures lead to more collectivism in classroom
	Rat race, competition in urban school. Lack of cooperation, and more of competition
	Diversity in urban schools helped in feeling confident about oneself and interacting
	'Group culture' in schools, people restrict to their friend circle
	Seeing other students taking extra tuition created a sense of exclusion since the participant herself was not taking tuitions

		Peer encouragement helped in putting oneself out there more
		Diversity of people helps you to understand different perspectives and conditions
		Peer support usually would solve academic problems rather than teacher involvement
	Institutional	Exposure, in terms of diversity and space for exploration and practical field work experiences helped in realizing in true interests
		Lack of guidance in schools
		Career counselling from external avenues; since not provided in school
		Opportunities to try new things, like theatre
		Accommodation helped in easing financial strain on family
		Teachers' sincerity is more important than their qualifications
		Pace of the teacher and student should match
		Teachers didn't teach properly in school because they thought that Engineering and Science students would anyway be taking tuitions
		Classroom structure demotivates to participate in class
		Preference of only one way of participating in class – acknowledgement of only English language – other ways of performing or participating are disregarded
		Personal perceptions that teachers cannot be approached outside of class – approachability issue on part of the teachers as well
		Teachers just come and deliver the lecture; good teaching helps sustaining interest in the subject
		Hasty and unprepared implementation of new evaluation system can be very difficult for the students
		Strict language and dress codes, that sometimes even teachers would not follow in classroom
		Strict punishment, fines, for violating dress codes
		Co-curricular groups and societies in college were very exclusive. Information as to how exactly one can get in is also not properly provided
		Sometimes, there are facilities but students are not allowed to use them so as to maintain their condition – library, gym
		Lack of agency in school to address issues
		Extreme religious inclination of school – forced religious practices otherwise breakfast and dinner would not be given in hostel
		Lack of teacher encouragement in formative school years make you less adept and confident to new systems at later stages
		Inclination of the institution to certain ideology can be overwhelming

Capabilities of a Student and Its Implications

Through the narratives of the two participants, the attempt at thematic analysis and literature review – a tentative idea of the capabilities that pertain to a student's being in a formal institutional setting could be derived. The following set of capabilities are very broad at this stage and requires further substantiation, validation and academic expertise to narrow it down and become more conceptually comprehensive and effective in terms of its application. The capabilities of students are as follows:

1. **Individuality and Personal Agency** – Every individual comes with his or her own set of personality traits, domicile background, physical conditions, interests and preferences; the educational environment should be such that respects and accommodates such individuality. For example, a person who is introvert by nature and does not thrive or gets stimulated by constant classroom participation, should not be perceived or evaluated negatively. Everyone has his/her own way of absorbing the classroom transactions. This does not imply that encouragement and involvement from the teachers and peers towards such students should stop – but a process should be facilitated where in such students can engage at their optimal level without being undermined or judged negatively.
   As Participant B stated,

   > Personally, I don't think I was excluded actively by my peers. I think it was more to do with my reluctance to participate due to personality. Also, I think once I got the encouragement from the people in college, I just started putting myself out there by participating and interacting with classmates and in activities.

   Walker (2006) points out that 'education in any context should promote agency, and as a key element of this agency that education should facilitate the development of autonomy and empowerment'. Students should be provided with the freedom to undertake the decision-making process themselves, whether it is in terms of choosing a topic, or as simple as what one chooses to wear; students should be provided with the autonomy of directing the course of their own lives. This does not imply that students need to be left unguided. The guidance should ideally only pertain to awareness of different avenues and choices that one can choose from. Agency also is a central concept of the Capability Approach that promotes the freedom to make one's own choices. It states that an individual with lack of agency or a constrained agency can be equated to disadvantage; if the individual comes across obstacles to genuine choices and a life of reflective choices (Robeyns 2003).
   Therefore, the institutional structures as well as the primary guardians may create an environment where the student's capability of preserving one's identity and personal agency is safeguarded and enhanced.

2. **Guidance and True Aspirations** – The life of a student involves a lot of decision-making with respect to courses, academic streams, schools, colleges, etc. The educational background of students' family also plays a very important role when it comes to informed decisions about one's education, and unfortunately in many cases not all students are privileged enough to get that kind of informed knowledge about various avenues and prospects. And even when students from disadvantaged backgrounds manage to enter the mainstream educational settings, it plays out to be a struggle for them to catch up to the pace of the educational and institutional transactions and the culture. Thus, the academic institutions and its facilitators can play a very major role here, in terms of educational and career guidance as well as aiding those who need it more, so as to set their feet at par with the others.

Participant B stated,

Coming from relatively small schools to one of the renowned colleges, I had to undergo reorientation in terms of adjusting to diverse teaching methods, a slight advanced course-work and a demanding syllabus. Until junior college, the focus was on rote learning without much scope for classroom discussions. In undergraduate and post-graduation course, class-room discussions were the norm and the courses were demanding of your analysis and opinions which could only be formed after extensive reading and interaction with peers. That itself was a massive change from how I had experienced learning in school.

Sen talks about the issue of 'adaptive preferences' where in an individual might internalize his disadvantaged personal, social, or economic condition and has aspirations that are limited to his prevailing situation. The educational environment then therefore should be functional in such a way that the students are encouraged to reflect and identify their true aspirations that are devoid of stereotypical preconceived notions formed by the society and internalised by themselves. Appadurai (2004) asserts the strong need to strengthen the capability to aspire, especially among the poor. He suggests that this capacity involves a resource for people who come from poor economic backgrounds to contest and transform the conditions of their own welfare.

As Participant A stated,

Till my schooling, there wasn't much motivation as such. Even my parents for that matter, I do not come from a highly qualified educational background. So, as the trend is like in our society, if you get good marks you do Science or Engineering, so after my Boards I opted for Non-Medical Science since I had got good marks in my Boards exams. But after that I realised, when you move out from you know, protective parent shell, from your cocoon, you kind of explore and realise things about yourself and where exactly your interest lie. After my 12th I was very confused about what to do, I just wanted to do something Humanitarian, for society; so, I took career counselling and then there I got to know about Sociology so I took it up later.

Therefore, the institutional structures may engage their efforts in safeguarding and enhancing a student's capability of realizing one's true aspirations and academic footing under necessary guidance or mentorship.

3. **Social Relations –** Healthy interpersonal relations with peers as well as the teaching faculty is essential as it helps in creating a conducive social environment that promotes individual growth and development. An individualistic educational environment mainly promotes unhealthy competitions and lack of cooperation and collectivism that is fundamental to the very being of human beings, the social animals.

As Participant B stated,

I do think that my background as a student from a small college and as one who studied in a state board put me at a disadvantage as compared to the rest of my peers. They were just more adept at processing the information thrown at them really well. This I assume was because of better schools and training they may have received due to better resources and better teachers. This I completely acknowledge as a complex that I managed to overcome by the end of my educational journey because of the support of an incredibly diverse range of classmates that I studied with. Everyone had some disadvantage but it was possible to

overcome it if you had the right support from peers, teachers and institution. This acknowledgement just made me more inclusive of the people I studied with.

Therefore, to sustain and prosper in a social-educational environment, a student's capability of forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships plays an equally important role in enhancing the educational experience and the holistic growth and development of the individual.

4. **Inclusion –** Further extending the point on individual differences, it is imperative that the educational environment should not only preserve the identities of the students but also help them develop it. The different lived experiences of students and the diverse socio-economic, personal, religious backgrounds that individuals come from should not only be acknowledged but also accommodated. Sen (1992) argues that 'human diversity is no secondary complication to be ignored, or to be introduced later on; it is a fundamental aspect of our interest in equality'. Therefore, the incorporation of the concept of basic heterogeneity of human beings, human diversity, is central and explicit in Amartya Sen's approach to equality; it is not just an add on factor (Walker 2006).

   As discussed earlier, students come from different background and have different way of behaving and understanding in a setting. Especially, those students who migrate from rural to urban areas in search of better educational opportunities, might find themselves in a pool of complexes that emerges by not feeling included in the educational environment. A very evident issue is of language – the orientation of our present educational system is so inclined towards the English language, that many students who might not be familiar and comfortable with it, find themselves behind their contemporaries. The class room structures should be perceptive of this gap. The pace of the teacher and students should be such that these students who come with the 'disadvantage' of not being comfortable with English language, should be given the space and pace to overcome their difficulties while not having to compromise with their equal positioning in a class. In a study conducted by Gallacher et al. (2002) on mature learners in Scotland, it was found out that there is a positive relationship and impact of earlier schooling experiences on the people's perception of themselves as successful learners in the later years.

   Therefore, the academic structures should be accommodating as well as respectful of the diversity that emerges in a classroom setting. The curriculum should be inclusive of this diversity and the different lived experiences of the individuals. Education should not just limit itself to the factual dimension, but it should also be looked as a process that validates the student's diverse representation. Therefore, our educational structures should acknowledge, enhance and safeguard the student's capability of being included in the mainstream educational narratives and transactions.

5. **Exposure and Opportunities for Exploration –** Essential to the intellectual growth of a student is not only theoretical knowledge that one receives through classroom transactions – but also practical experiences. It is important that the curriculum should have ample space for field work in the real ground level, field

settings. This not only enriches the academic experience of the students but also helps them in translating their knowledge into real settings.

As Participant A stated,

> In Masters college, the lectures used to be given and it used to go for hours and on the other hand we used to have field work which used to be twice a week. We had other exposure also, there were diverse things included. So that's why I think Master's college experience enriched me a lot because it wasn't just that a teacher was sitting there and delivering lectures and you are writing down notes and then you just read through it. There are projects for which we go to ground. We also had a paper called rural practicum where we are given activities for which you are divided into groups and there you work together on various tasks and then are taken to villages to work in groups. We get the ground reality. And I think that since everyone is engaged in it, this also has a positive impact on the class as a whole. It's not just the students who enjoy it, it's also the teachers who enjoy it because the teacher is also himself doing something different other than just sitting in a corner and delivering lectures because I don't think the attention span of a person can be more than 40 minutes or so. Because of all these methods you know, making charts, going on the field, and then writing reports and your reflections and timely submission… all this could be a headache sometimes but when you look back, you realise that you learn a lot.

Besides formal classroom curriculum transactions, it is also important that a student is provided with opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities that helps in the overall growth of the individual. The educational space and curriculum should be created to cater the student's capability of exploration and exposure to varied and real-setting avenues that helps them to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

6. **Presence and Access to Facilitative Institutional Infrastructure –** For many students, better educational opportunities mean migrating from their present place to another, bigger cities. This might not only bring in cultural shock and other set of differences but an added economic strain, especially since the cost of living in such cities are high. Therefore, the educational institutions should either have provisions of hostel or have other networks of accommodation nearby the campus so that students with economic baggage don't have to make compromises with their choice of educational options. Proper infrastructure should also be in place for those students who have any kind of disability, so that their capacity to access the institution is facilitated and enhanced. Besides the provision of having infrastructure and other institutional facilities, equitable access to such provisions should also be ensured and safeguarded. The gap between the functioning of having facilities and the capability of being able to use these facilities need to be realized and diminished.

   As Participant B stated,

   > We had minimum facilities in school and junior college that I wasn't exactly encouraged to utilize. Not that the facilities were bad, but things like libraries, gyms etc. were off limits most of the time. Compared to that in undergraduate and postgraduate, the facilities were beyond my expectations and I was actively encouraged to use them.

7. **Holistic Evaluation –** In majority of the educational institutions, the form of evaluation is very unidimensional that usually pertains to only the kind of marks that a student is getting. Now, different students have different capabilities and

different ways of thriving in a classroom environment. Some might be very good orators and can articulate their points very well in front of an audience, while others may find it easier to put their thoughts on paper. Some might have it more advantageous to assimilate their learning as a term paper, while others might find a classroom discussion a better platform. At the end of the day, it is understandable that the systems remain common for all, and all these methods can be looked as skills that one might have or not have, but which can be developed through proper guidance, personal interest and practical engagement. But the evaluation system should be holistic in such a way that it acknowledges the varied skill set and different abilities and plus points of different students. The evaluation system should be receptive of these differences and be comprehensive in such a way wherein it allows every student's abilities to be assimilated in their evaluations instead of getting written off on the basis of standard parameters of performances. Therefore, the students should be able to perform their optimal best on the assessments without having to be concerned about a reductionist and standard evaluation norms. Their capability of being holistically evaluated should be practiced.

8. **Facilitative Teaching Engagement –** The pedagogy of the teacher is not the only factor that comes to play when we talk about student engagement. Besides the teaching method, another factor that becomes essential is the interest and involvement of the teacher himself/herself. No matter how qualified the teacher may be, if he or she conducts the class with no sincerity, then the classroom transaction will yield no significant results. To sustain the interest and motivation of the students in a subject; besides the content and the matter, the teacher's real interest and willingness to disseminate the knowledge influences the attention of the students in it. The teachers should also be aware of the power equation that he or she has/built with the students in the class. The teacher should be approachable in her interactions so that the students don't hesitate in voicing their concerns and issues with them or about the nature and content of classroom transactions.
As Participant A stated,

…and even in the teachers, I didn't find that sincerity because since I was in engineering, I mean PCM, it was expected that students should be going for IIT or cracking AIEEE. So, they know that students take coaching and tuitions. So, they think about what to teach because students already know everything as they cover most of the content in tuitions, so then the teachers also have that kind of an uncommitted mentality.

Participant B stated,

Because I came from a very small college where professors were mostly for namesake and I didn't have proper grounding in how to go about studying proper coursework, I found the Mumbai college's coursework to be more demanding and challenging. I just couldn't approach the professors because I had no clue about anything. I didn't know professors can be approached outside classroom and you can just ask for help. Moreover, I felt like if I didn't have any knowledge about it or how things work in college, I couldn't ask questions about it either.

Therefore, a student's capability of having engaging teaching agents and the capability to approach one's teaching agents may be considered as a primary stepping stone towards a critical as well as a facilitative educational experience.

9. **Secular, Democratic and Transparent Institutional Culture –** An educational structure is such, that not only plays the role of a medium where students acquire knowledge and skills for life, but also develop their sense of citizenry. This sense of citizenship should be devoid of over imposed religious and other agendas. At the end of the day, the students are being helped to develop into fully functioning citizens of the democracy; therefore, the culture of the educational institute in itself should be democratic in nature and devoid of any personal and hidden agendas of the institution. This can be done if the institute in itself practices the ideals of secularism and democracy. For example, a student body could and should be formed through a democratic process – through student voting, and which also gets to actually get involved with the authorities in the decision-making process that pertains to issues concerning themselves, the students. Appadurai (2004) states that 'we need to provide opportunities to practise these capabilities, that is opportunities to function. By contrast, pedagogies of silencing and passive learning do not contribute to voice, aspiration, or autonomy'. As Participant A stated,

...And the environment too was like that because it was a protestant school and at times I realised that more than teaching they were more into getting you converted. They would make you sing gospel songs in the morning for like 30 minutes and would always talk about the Lord, and then for hostelers, before you go to attend school, for twenty minutes you first had to do this devotion which was compulsory otherwise you wouldn't get breakfast. And in the evening before dinner, for 45 minutes you have that devotion period again, so there were these rules and you had to abide by them. And I found these rules very senseless that's why I never liked those two years in school.

Every institution has their own set of rules, regulations and certain ideologies and principals that it identifies with. These ideologies should not be imposed on the students to the point that they feel an identity and ideological crisis. An institution should be free of such ideological weight and should rather be structured in such a way which allows growth and development of an individual's own value and belief systems that are healthy and productive in nature. The educational institutions should also not impose strict and principally irrelevant rules that might threaten the decency of a student. And the rules that are in place should be common for all; otherwise, it projects a sense of mismatch and creates the ill feeling of hypocrisy of the institution that naturally hinders the student's experience and outlook towards the relevance and utility of formal structures. As Participant A stated,

...the rules and regulations were very weird. We used to have language and dress code. Language code was that you have to speak only in English and if you speak in Hindi and someone catches you then you would get punished. That was the rule which was imposed by the principal although the teachers themselves used to teach in Hindi sometimes, but that was against the norm actually.

…So, there was an incident when I was told that your dress is not starting from the naval. It wasn't low but it was not above the naval. My class teacher was then called and the Principal told her that this was the issue and then I was asked to pay a fine of Rupees 1000. My class teacher told me not to do it because she didn't see anything wrong with my skirt. Even I

didn't see anything wrong with it but then they were asking to pay it. So, I thought that I was going through my studies and I had come from so far so I didn't want such issues to revolve around me. But the teacher refused to agree with it and then she was asked to leave the school, which she did.

The area in which the regulations should actually be more prevalent is in terms of various activities that are undertaken in an institute. Student bodies and co-curricular groups, fees and other finances, etc. their mechanisms should be common for all and the information about them should be disseminated throughout the institutions. The feeling of exclusivity pertaining to groups and co-curricular societies formed under an institution, the opportunity and the process should be open and available for each and every student to avail.
Participant A stated,

> In DU, you have these theatre societies and other groups, you could be in drama, writing and all but there is no inclusiveness as such. There are some people who are already in the group and you know how they got in. Facilities were there but you didn't know how to be a part of them. I got to know about an extra-curricular society that I wanted to be a part of in my 2nd year but then I didn't come to know how to get in. They were not very inclusive you know, like open for all. It doesn't seem like an open space for all. They also say that they have to maintain this exclusivity so not everyone could get in like that.

Every institute has its own culture, and that culture has a deep influence on the students. Many a times, during one's educational journey, various beliefs or attitudes get adopted, some get rejected; our point of view about the world around us changes, our decision-making and problem-solving skills either get sharpened or rough around the edges. A lot of our growth and development reflect our educational institutional culture. Therefore, these structures should be set up in such a way that it does not forcefully impose its belief systems onto the students but instead creates a facilitative ground that lets the students explore and choose what they wish to believe in and how they wish to colour their perceiving lens. It is necessary that the rules and regulations in an institutional structure are serving the purpose of maintaining decorum rather than acting as shackles which deprive the agency of its students. It is also imperative that the structures of the institutions are transparent for everyone, debarring any sense of exclusivity. These are prerequisites for the student's capability of being in a secular, democratic and transparent institutional environment.

Limitations and Scope of the Study

The present chapter was conceptualized and designed keeping in mind that its treatment should be done as that of a pilot study. The purpose of the study was to assess the logistics, hindrances and the gaps that could emerge in the future when this study could be undertaken on a larger scale. The formulation as well as the conduction of the study threw light on the various limitations that would need to be looked at and dealt with for future works. The narratives were found to be in-depth and rich, although, if the understanding of the topic needs to be extended further, the sample

would inevitably need to be more in number and diverse in terms of age, gender, socio-economic status, physical abilities, etc.

Another limitation of the study was that even after persistent efforts, the task of minimizing the length of the interview schedule could not be successful. This has an impact on the respondent's attention and interest in the interview. It was quite evident that after a point into the interview one of the respondent's pattern of answering started becoming relatively less elaborate as compared to the previous answers. This necessarily does not imply that this transition had direct relationship with the length of the interview, but this fact cannot and should not be ignored for future endeavours. At the same time, the feedback provided by the participants shed light on to the gaps in the interview schedule and what more questions or aspects could be added.

This study was conceptualized as exploratory in nature as there was paucity of similar researches done in the Indian context. Therefore, the idea and concept behind the study needs more scrutiny and critical assessment by peers and experts who have been working in this area.

Working in the future on filling the aforementioned gaps does not imply that the final form of the design of the study and the questionnaire will be in a perfect state – the presence of errors or limitations will always be a reality, but efforts should nonetheless still be made to build the concept and structure of the study to its best possible level.

Conclusion

The idea and the relevance attached to education require us to perceive it in a more holistic way. Its significance should not only be looked at as a means to a specific end, for example, attaining a degree or employment. This is not to imply that aligning education with visible outcomes such as the aforementioned, are not valuable. But limiting our anchor regarding education to only tangible and measurable goals, shifts our attention from less visible but equally important, if not more, influence that education can play in an individual's life. An individual's experience in an educational setting can make or break his or her being. It has the power to shape one's values, attitudes and concepts about the world around, but even more so, about himself or herself. It helps an individual in situating oneself in the larger context – the society. Therefore, it becomes important to study the various factors that can influence one's educational experience.

This chapter, as a preliminary step, attempted to understand few factors that were categorized as personal, familial, societal, interpersonal and institutional and what kind of influence they had on the educational journey of the students. Based on that, a tentative set of capabilities pertaining to a student in the context of the Indian education system were derived, which are as follows: individuality and personal agency; guidance and true aspirations; social relations; inclusion; exposure and opportunities for exploration; presence and access to facilitative institutional infrastructure; holistic evaluation; facilitative teaching engagement; and secular, democratic and transparent institutional culture.

The aim of the chapter was not to conclusively derive the set of capabilities that pertain to the identity and being of a student. That requires a more rigorous and elaborate work. But the present chapter may be looked as just a mere starting point of personally understanding the factors that play a major role in the educational journey of a student. At this stage, the study may not have very concrete implications for educational policies or educational institutional practices, but it may be considered as a preliminary step into attaining an understanding of the relevant and prevalent conditions that may or may not be conducive for a student's optimal functioning in the present Indian educational scenario.

Needless to say, there is an inclination to build on the conceptual understanding and practicality of the present chapter that may be possible through more literature review, continuous guidance and extensive and more rigorous research methodology; for which, future engagements and the bent towards the Capability Approach of a Student, in a more comprehensive and thorough sense, can be undertaken.

The implications of this chapter, even though existing as a very nascent phase, may primarily be for the educational institutional structures and culture, as well as the pedagogy. This can be justified through the lens of capability approach, which stands right in the face of commodity, utility and outcome-based approaches that assess the quality of life and experiences from the perspective of tangible outcomes, commodity possessions and approximations based on economic and visible capacities. It pushes us to ask more questions and bring in an even deeper argument on the idea of well-being by aligning it with an individual's capabilities, freedoms, functionings and agency; an important notion that should be treated as an imperative point, if not the starting one, when we deliberate on the importance of education and the quantitative as well as qualitative value that it can bring to the life and well-being of an individual.

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