Between Aspiration & Despair

Government Jobs & The Predicament of The Educated Unemployed

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(A Study by the Centre for Equity Studies)

Executive Summary

As researchers in the Centre for Equity Studies, we have been grappling with the question of joblessness in India over the last few years. While the crisis in the job market is no secret anymore, the present government has tried its best to withhold or distort data. Nonetheless, a recent 'leaked' report from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) claimed that the unemployment rate in India has touched a 45-year high of 6.1 per cent in 2017-18. And the rate among educated unemployed is nearly double of that. It is to understand the particular vulnerabilities and specificities of the educated unemployed that we chose the “competitors” as our subjects in this study.

Who are the competitors?

A very large number of educated youngsters apply each year for a shrinking pool of highly coveted government jobs. While information on job vacancies is somehow made available through media reportage and research publications, we know almost nothing about the experiences and concerns of those who spend years in pursuit of these jobs. Anecdotally we know that large areas in major cities like Delhi are populated by people preparing for competitive job exams and the coaching industry has visibly grown in our cities. Yet, we hardly have any empirical data on this group of people. They occupy a particularly tense, and from an academic point of view, interesting, place today. In the context of an intensifying jobs crisis, this group of educated youth willingly keeps itself out of the workforce for a number of years in the hope of gaining a secure government job at the end. The study aims to document the perspective of this group on the state of employment in India today.

The unemployment industry

Entire colonies and thriving eco-systems have developed selling this dream so as to train, house, and feed them even as opportunities have shrunk in recent years and irregularities have plagued the system adding to the woes of aspirants. Some call this the “unemployment industry”. From coaching centres to PGs, from reading rooms to book shops, from tea stalls to photocopiers, from online form fillers to typing classes – an entire economy runs on the aspirations and desperations of the competitors.

Methodology, scope & purpose of study

In this study we have collected 515 survey responses (based on a questionnaire) from such coaching hubs in Delhi (350), Jaipur (160) and Allahabad (60) along with qualitative (unstructured) interviews & FGDs with the aim to understand the social profile, expenses, and perceptions and concerns of these competitors and thereby to get a sense of the precarity in the job market. The attempt has been to arrive at some general findings as also some of the crucial differences between a metropolitan and provincial centres. While the whole report is available in all its details in our website for your reference, we provide here just some of the key findings.
Key Findings:

- Overall, our respondents are 72% Graduates & 19% Post Graduates
- 93% of our survey respondents were unemployed at the time of preparation. And almost all of them have to depend fully on their families for financial support.
- Overall, 71% of our respondents were of the opinion that adequate number of jobs were not created under the present government. (18% believed to the contrary, whereas 11% were unsure)
- The urgency to get a job trumps which job one gets. A 19 year old applicant learning computer efficiency in a coaching institute in Jaipur told us that these days it doesn’t matter which job or what grade. What matters is how fast.
- The rate of success (clearing exams and securing a job) is reported to have fallen in recent years.
- The perception of jobs in the private sector is dominantly negative. Many respondents who previously worked in the private sector reported their working conditions to be undesirably exploitative and wages below par. “After a Diploma in Polytechnic, I went off to Chennai to work in a plant. There were 20-25 of us who went together”, said Kishore in Allahabad. “But having reached we found the conditions no similar to what we were told. It required us to do 12 hour shifts for too less a salary.” All but the most hard pressed (majboor) ones left in a week. Now Kishore feels his three years of Diploma was in fact a “waste”. It was only good enough to fetch sub-human jobs. And hence he started taiyyari for sarkari naukri.
- Across the cites we find a largely negative perception of our respondents vis-à-vis privatization as a “solution” to the prevailing job crisis. Instead, a fairly large share of them consider the filling up of vacancies and further expansion of state jobs as the way forward and a higher number indicated a preference for legal guarantees for work as in an Urban job guarantee or an employment guarantee for graduates. (Fig 1).

![Figure 1: How can unemployment be effectively tackled? (High Red and Blue towers indicate respondents’ preference for a solution. High Yellow and Grey Towers indicate the opposite)](image1)

![Family Income Profile (%)](image2)
In the overall sample, as high as 65% of our respondents were from rural background. An opinion that cuts across the cities of our study is that competitors from rural areas face a relative disadvantage in course of their preparations.

Only the better off can make it to bigger cities to prepare for exams. There is a wide variation in the class composition of competitors in Delhi, Jaipur and Allahabad. The proportion of competitors belonging to the upper income group is highest in Delhi and falls as we move to Jaipur and then to Allahabad. The converse is true if we look at competitors from lower income groups. They form the highest proportion of respondents in Allahabad, their proportion reduces in Jaipur and then reduces further as we come to Delhi. (Fig 2)

- There is an unsurprising overlap of class with rural background. Our survey shows that the Delhi sees the lowest proportion of competitors from rural background (50%) while the proportion is 87% in Jaipur and 92% in Allahabad.
- While coaching costs an average of 11,449 rupees and 21,040 rupees annually in Allahabad and Jaipur respectively, the same costs 65,351 rupees in Delhi. (See Table 1)
- While room rent amounts to an average of 3,737 rupees and 4,677 rupees per month in Allahabad and Jaipur respectively, the same amounts to 6,638 rupees in Delhi (See Table 1).
- Annual expenditure per competitor on average, as per our survey is 1,52,303 rupees and 1,95,130 rupees in Allahabad and Jaipur respectively. The same amounts to 2,97,168 rupees in Delhi; approximately double of that in Allahabad.
- Men out number women 3:1 in our overall sample. In Delhi the ratio is 1:1 with women forming 50% of the sample in the city. 30% of our sample in Jaipur consisted of women, while in Allahabad women accounted for only 14% of our sample.
- Upper castes and OBCs dominate the ranks of the competitors forming 40% each of our entire sample. The proportion of upper castes is highest in Delhi at 52%, it reduces to 24% in Jaipur and falls further to 15% in Allahabad. The proportion of OBCs increases from 33% in Delhi to 47% in Jaipur and 58% in Allahabad. SCs constitute only 9.5% of the sample whereas STs form a mere 8%.
- Muslims constitute a mere 4.66% of our sample indicating a large under representation.
Table 1

37% of our respondents reported agriculture as their primary means of family income. In Delhi it is 22% while in Jaipur and Allahabad it is 55% and 71% respectively.

From our qualitative data we find that competitors in smaller cities such as Allahabad have an active connection with the farm economy. Not only are farm incomes the largest source of sustenance for competitors in small towns, they also travel to their villages to work on farms during peak seasons.

38% of our respondents **said that their educational training was not helpful** in their preparations.

Faith in the selection and recruitment is low. This is owed, in good measure, to the lack of transparency in the aftermath of major scams and regular leaks, etc.

- In our survey **39%** of the respondents claimed that the selection process was not fair (21% said Not fair at all + 18% said Not fair). The figure goes as high as **64%** in Jaipur.
- In the words of a Coaching instructor, “The confidence in fair evaluation has deteriorated since 2014 and have further taken a dent since 2016”.

### Expenditure Summary - Delhi

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<th>Expenditure Category</th>
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<th>Food</th>
<th>Library</th>
<th>City Travel</th>
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