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Uncomfortable encounters between elite and “shadow education” in India—Indian Institutes of Technology and the Joint Entrance Examination coaching industry / Jakob Williams Orberg

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Abstract

India’s elite sector of engineering universities, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), are seen as safe gateways to a life in the politically hyped “new India” of the global knowledge economy. The Indian entrance exam coaching industry each year enrolls hundreds of thousands of students in classes strictly directed at “cracking” the institutes’ famous Joint Entrance Examination (JEE). Vast majorities of students at IITs are by now former coaching students, and coaching is increasingly supplanting performance in secondary education as the perceived prerequisite for IIT admission. This poses serious questions about the ability of the institutions to autonomously steer student selection and recruit the select exceptional students whom until now have kept “IITians” in the center of imaginaries of India’s future. This article explores the case of residential pre-entrance exam coaching to assess the coaching sector’s role in shaping India’s future technological leaders. It assesses the educational structure of the sector, its effect on student lives, the life aspirations it relies on, and how it is shaping IIT education itself. The case of entrance exam coaching in India, it is argued, prompt a

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reassessment of the concept of “shadow education” in order to begin a more thorough research agenda focused on the educational production and policy consequences of this “shadow” industry as an integrated (even if unwanted) and co-constitutive part of the higher education sector. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Orberg, Jakob Williams, E-Mail: jwo@edu.au.dk