Educational Experiences and Aspirations among the Balmikis in Delhi:

An exploratory study

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DECLARATION

I, Anshika Srivastava, declare that the dissertation entitled **'Educational Experiences and Aspirations among the Balmikis in Delhi: An exploratory study'** is my bonafide work. The dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **'Educational Experiences and Aspirations among the Balmikis in Delhi: An exploratory study'** submitted by **Anshika Srivastava**, Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067, India, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is her original work and has not been previously submitted for any other Degree of this or any other University.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

While Dalits[1] constitute a significant proportion of the Indian population (16.2 %, Census, 2011) they remain the most socially discriminated group in India that is also politically marginalized and economically vulnerable. As it has been observed 'the group continues to be categorized amongst the poorest and most subordinated in the Indian society by any measure of human development' (Thorat, 2009: 1). One of these measures on which their deprivation and disadvantage is clearly visible is that of education. As the existing educational statistics reveal, Dalits are the educationally most disadvantaged groups in India. As compared to the non-Dalit population, Dalits show low rates of literacy, relatively poor school enrolment rates, high school drop-out rates and lower representation in higher and technical education (Wankhede, 2002; Ram, 2008; Thorat, 2009).

The education of Dalit children (in its different dimensions) has been a subject that has drawn considerable scholarly attention. While researchers have not only highlighted their poor educational status by the means of the available educational statistics, recently some attention has also been paid to the nature and quality of their schooling experiences with a view to uncover the spheres of exclusion and discrimination of these children in schools. The latter studies, though few, reveal how the stigma of being an '(ex)-untouchable' mediates the relationships and learning experiences of the Dalit children within the institutional settings to the detriment of their educational performance and retention at school. Such studies stress that 'education may further entrench social exclusion by exposing Dalits to discriminatory attitudes or processes within the formal, informal or hidden curricula' (Jeffery et.al, 2005: 258).

Thus, the research on the subject clearly reiterates that the progress of the Dalit children in education remains poor not only in terms of their presence in schools, but also the quality of learning experience for those who enter these institutions.

[1] Here the term Dalit is used to refer to the Scheduled Caste communities in particular, though the term is used today to include other oppressed groups as well.

Most of the work on the education of Dalits (Dalit children) focuses upon unravelling the disparities in education for the group vis-à-vis the non-Dalit groups. There has been a tendency among the scholars to view 'Dalits' as a homogeneous group (Nambissan, 2010). As a result research in the field tends to be focused more on the aspects and issues concerning the education of the group as a whole.

However it is important to note that rather than being a homogeneous group, the category of Dalits constitutes an aggregate of different castes with differences among them in terms of socio- economic and educational status. Further as the available research suggests, there is even a well defined hierarchy among the different Dalit castes in several regions of the country in terms of the degrees of defilement and pollution that is considered to accrue from the occupations traditionally associated with and engaged in by each caste group across regions (Randeria, 1997 cited in Macwan and Ramnathan, 2007; Judge, 2003; Ramiahiah, 2007). Moreover, there is also a presence of an 'untouchable' Dalit caste within the Dalits (Shah, 2002; Macwan and Ramanathan, 2007). These are the castes collectively referred to as the 'Valmiki community'(Valmiki, 2008) that have traditionally been assigned the work of scavenging and sweeping- a work that is considered to be the most polluted of all the other occupations assigned to the Dalits. It is for this caste group, as it will be discussed later that the low ritual status, defined in terms of the relative impurity of the occupation pursued by it strongly corresponds to its low socio-economic and educational status.

Given this context, it becomes crucial that research on the subject takes into account the heterogeneous composition of 'Dalits' and adequate attention is paid towards exploring not only the educational disparities between different Dalit castes, but the educational levels, patterns, aspirations and experiences of the respective sub- castes as well. It is with this contention that the present study explores and understands some aspects pertaining to the education of one of the castes constituting the Valmiki community in Delhi –the 'Balmikis'. It traces the patterns of school participation of the Balmiki children in a settlement in Delhi. It also explores the views of a sample of these children on the value of education, their educational and occupational aspirations and the quality of their schooling experiences to see whether and how their caste identity mediates the interaction with the teachers and relations with peers.

The study also captures the views of the parents of these children on the purpose of schooling for their child. Also their educational and occupational aspirations with respect to the child are looked at.

1.1 Theoretical Perspectives:

The impact of education on reducing the disadvantages of marginalized groups has been a critical issue that has engaged sociologists for long. With the expansion of schooling across countries, critical questions as to whether (and in what ways) education has accentuated the existing inequalities or whether it has provided channels of mobility for the disadvantaged groups have been significantly deliberated upon. There have been various ways in which the significance and impact of formal education on the disadvantaged groups is understood and explained.

One of the ways in which the impact of education on the disadvantaged groups has been explained involves highlighting it as a means of individual development and social and economic mobility. Such a view was most strongly put forth by the proponents of the functionalist paradigm on schooling. Educational institutions according to this view are hailed as meritocratic in nature that sort and select people on the basis of their talent and ability than the background and parental status (Hurn, 1993). It is this sorting and selecting of talented people that is further seen to ensure that only the most able (irrespective of the backgrounds) attain the highest status position in the society (with the occupational status tied up with educational attainment). So, as it suggests, the meritocratic nature of the education system ensures that the students from the disadvantaged backgrounds and those from the privileged come to have identical opportunities in schooling which opens to both, chances of seeking high status jobs thereby leading them to acquire a high status - position in the society. Along with this, extensive schooling is also seen as equipping the individual with specific skills, knowledge as well as intellectual sophistication (Hurn, 1993).

Further, there was also a conviction that an expansion of education will have the effect of increasing the chances of an increasing number of individuals from the lower-class or minority groups to gain access to high status occupations. Thus, education was seen as functional to the mobility of all the individuals in particular the disadvantaged groups.

While the role of education in creating possibilities for social and economic mobility of individuals and groups cannot be fully denied, at the same time taking such an extremely optimistic view remains problematic. The shortcomings of such an analysis have very well been put forth by another set of explanations that critically evaluate the role of education in the society and its implications for the status of the marginalized. Referred to as 'Reproduction theories', these explanations highlight that rather than being a great equalizer as asserted by the proponents of the previous view, education functions to reproduce the dominant ideology, its forms of knowledge and the distribution of skills required to reproduce the social division of labour in the society (Arnowitz and Giroux, 1986). As against the view that education offers possibilities for individual development, social mobility and political and economic power to the disadvantaged, these suggest that it operates to serve the interest of the dominant and the privileged groups and works towards the maintenance of the status-quo. Three variations of this theory exist also referred to as the three models of reproduction with each explaining the reproductive role of schools in a different way and with a different emphasis.

Firstly there exists the 'Economic -Reproductive Model' that stresses on how the school by providing different skills and knowledge to students of different social classes and groups ensures the reproduction of labour power and the relations of production. Thus education in this way successfully reproduces the (economically) dominant and the subordinate classes in the society. The 'Hegemonic – State reproductive model' sees schools as a part of state apparatus that legitimate the 'economic and ideological imperatives of the state' (Arnowitz and Giroux, 1986).

Third is the 'Cultural – Reproductive model', most elaborately put forth in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who maintained that the main function of the educational system is the reproduction of the existing power relations through the production and the distribution of the culture or the cultural capital of the dominant classes in the guise of its claim of being neutral, meritocratic and impartial in nature. As he viewed it, schools value the linguistic and cultural competencies of the dominant group and legitimate their knowledge through the 'hegemonic curriculum' (Giroux and Arnowitz, 1986) which marginalizes the knowledge and competencies pertaining to other groups. It is thus the inherited cultural capital of the dominant classes that becomes a precondition for academic success in schools. So, children whose cultural

capital is valued remain at an advantage in terms of coping with the system and perform well while the others face failure which in turn prevents them from moving further in the education system, thereby resulting in their elimination from it. Another way in which those lacking the dominant cultural capital are eliminated from the system is what he referred to as the 'process of self – elimination'. This as he argued results from the anticipation of their failure which in turn results from 'their direct or indirect intuitive grasp of the statistics of the failures or the partial successes of children of the same kind' (Bourdieu, 1966: 33). Thus it is by looking at the objective conditions of their social group as a whole that the students anticipate their chances of failure and thus withdraw from education on their own volition. This also implies how the education system also impacts the educational aspirations of the groups wherein this failure or anticipated failure restricts the subordinate classes' expectations and aspirations for further education.

So education as is argued becomes a means to reinforce the culture of the dominant classes and thus their privilege and power in the society. But a very crucial aspect that he notes is that the subordinate classes rather than recognizing this reproductive function of education actually 'misrecognise' (Bourdieu and Passerson, 1997) the realities of class domination and view it as legitimate, which obscures the power relation that lies at the root of the education system. Thus failure to succeed through the education system is seen by the members of the subordinate groups as a personal failure (individual and that of the group as a whole), rather than looking at it as a result of the school's differential valuation and transmission of the cultural capital of the dominant group than that of their own.

The Reproduction theory – in all its three forms- thus suggests, education rather than being a source of mobility and status enhancement as claimed by the functionalist explanation, actually reinforces the disadvantaged status of the subordinate classes/ group. Thus in this way it looks at the relation between education and mobility of the disadvantaged more or less pessimistically.

Though this view provides significant insights about the way in which education functions to maintain the power relations and position of the dominant groups in the society, somewhere as the critics suggest there is an overemphasis on the idea of

domination and a claim that the dominant culture ensures the consent and defeat of the subordinate classes and groups (Arnowitz and Giroux, 1986). As a result it undermines the aspect of human agency and thus the possibility of mediation and resistance by the marginalized groups. Education is thereby considered as smoothly reproducing the subordinate status of these groups wherein they are seen as passive to the process without making any attempts to challenge such a reproduction function of education or strategizing to improve their status by negotiating and working their way out through it to effect such an improvement. Thus education as mentioned, is seen as largely reproducing the disadvantage of the marginalized. Such a view on education (and its impact on the disadvantaged) has over the years faced immense criticism by scholars and has begun to lose its influence.

More recently there has emerged another view that sees education as not simply leading to a complete reproduction of the dominant culture, but it is also seen to hold a transformative potential (Rao, 2010). In this sense education is more or less seen as 'a contradictory resource opening up some opportunities but also drawing the disadvantaged groups more tightly in the systems of social inequality' (Levinson and Holland, 1996 cited in Jeffery et.al, 2005: 257). The disadvantaged in this view, are seen as constantly strategizing to not only challenge the dominant culture reproduced through education, but also as using this resource to seek an improvement in their position. Emphasizing the agency of the former this view as against the previous view highlights that while the structures of caste, class, gender and others may constrain or restrict chances of mobility and success for them, at the same time they also develop strategies to realize these goals. Moreover these strategies and the decisions pertaining to schooling and education are ascertained with respect to the meanings and the values attached by the group to education.

These strategies may take two forms – that of resistance and conformity. The former may be adopted by individuals and groups when education is seen to be oppressive and discriminatory towards one's culture and meanings and when there is a little hope for mobility (Balgopalan, 2005). It may take the form of an explicit rebellion in the form of dropout or self exclusion or the rise of counter-culture to the school culture (Willis, 1983). While such an act may result in the reproduction of the dominant culture itself, but at the same time it also holds some potential to shift the existing

norms and practices not just in the school but in a wider context of lived experience thereby creating possibilities to bring about a transformation in the social hierarchy (Rao, 2010).

Further the disadvantaged rather than resisting may also adapt and conform to the school cultures. Such a response is again nurtured by the meanings and value that the group and individuals attach to education. A number of different cases may be seen. Firstly despite being rooted in the cultural capital of the dominant groups, education may be valued for the skills and credentials associated with it which are in turn linked to the economic returns from the same. Thus the disadvantaged may simply confirm to the system to just move through it successfully, in lieu of these returns which in turn are expected to or in actual may facilitate social and economic mobility for the group. Conformity may be a result of one's view of education as a means that helps to cultivate particular lifestyles, tastes and dispositions that mark the upper-class/caste or middle class cultures. It is this cultural capital (along with skills and values) that is considered crucial for realizing the possibility of social and economic mobility for the group. Conformity to the dominant culture of the school may be shown especially by lower class children 'in order to transcend the family's limitation and acquire the speech, manners values and tastes of the superior groups' (Drury, 1993: 121) and thereby facilitate an improvement in their social and economic status. Further education may also come to be seen as a source of cultural distinction (Boudieu,1984), a sign of modern status and as a means of challenging caste (Jeffery et.al, 2005) as a result of which the disadvantaged may show a conformity to the system. While such conformity to the education system may on the one hand lead to the reproduction of the dominant culture, but as discussed it also holds the potential to open up channels of mobility for the disadvantaged as well as increase a sense of confidence and dignity in the individual in the face of oppression (Jeffery et.al, 2005). This may further enable the group to challenge their existing structural location in terms of caste, class, gender and others. So as mentioned, education emerges as a contradictory resource - leading to both a reproduction and a transformation in the status of the concerned groups.

As against the other two views discussed previously this explanation takes neither of the extreme views in explaining the impact of education on reducing the disadvantage

of the marginalized groups. Most importantly it allows us to see how the disadvantaged and subordinate groups have their own understandings and meanings of education and its implications for their lives which are defined within the larger structural constraints of class, gender, caste etc. and at the same time these meanings also define the strategies adopted to realize an improvement in their disadvantaged status. Further the groups are well aware of the limitations and disadvantages imposed by their structural location in terms of caste/class/gender etc - as the case may be, in particular the relative lack of the cultural and social capital which the education system values and rewards. But at the same time rather than withdrawing from the system, they negotiate and strategize to maximize chances of success within the context of the given structural constraints.

The present study seeks to explore the views of the Balmiki parents and children on the purpose of education, their aspirations and children's experiences of education. This involves understanding the meanings they construct about education, its importance as well as its expected impact on them. Thus drawing from the third perspective, it views education as a 'contradictory resource' and attempts to understand the different meanings that disadvantaged groups give to education, and the ways in which they strategize accordingly to secure an improvement in their status.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The existing data suggests that many of the scavenging castes including the Balmiki caste in different regions of the country lag behind other Dalit castes in education. For instance Census (2001) reveals that while the scavenging castes like Bhangi, Balmiki etc. are among the most populous Dalit castes in states like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and even Delhi, they show the lowest/low levels of education - in particular the schooling of children in the age group 5-14 years vis-à-vis other more populous Dalit castes. However, very few studies have paid attention to such disparity among the Dalit castes. This is what guides the selection of this caste group for study.

Further studies, again a few, also report experience of severe discrimination by children of this group in schools not only as Dalits, but 'Dalit among Dalits' (Shah, 2002). However their experiences are yet to be systematically and extensively studied. The urban context is of particular interest in this respect as it is a site for change, given the possible weakening of the traditional caste-occupation link and the expansion of the existing educational opportunities for Dalits. Given this context an inquiry into the schooling of the Balmiki children in Delhi is made through the present study to look at the opportunities available for their schooling and their schooling experiences in the mega city.

Thus by focusing on the perceptions of the Balmiki parents and their aspirations with regard to schooling and future occupational choices of their children as well as by capturing the educational and occupational aspirations and the schooling experiences of the children themselves, the study is an attempt towards closing the gap in the available research.

1.3 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What are the patterns of schooling of children in the chosen Balmiki settlement? Do these patterns of schooling vary for boys and girls?

2. What are the perceptions of the selected parents in the Balmiki settlement about the purpose of schooling and their aspirations concerning the education and future occupational choices of their children?

3. How does gender mediate parental aspirations pertaining to the education and occupational choices of their children?

4. What are the perceptions of children in the Balmiki settlement about the purpose of schooling and their educational and occupational aspirations?

5. What is the nature of pedagogy and teacher and peer relations that these children experience in school? Does their caste identity influence their school experiences within this specific sphere?

1.4 Objectives

1. To study the patterns of school participation of children in the chosen Balmiki settlement.

2. To explore the perceptions of parents in the Balmiki settlement about the purpose of schooling and their aspirations concerning the education and the future occupational choices of children.

3. To understand how gender mediate parental aspirations concerning the education and future occupational choices of their children.

4. To explore the perceptions of children in the Balmiki settlement about the purpose of schooling and their educational and occupational aspirations.

5. To explore the schooling experiences of these children and see whether and how their caste identity mediates their relations and interactions with peers and teacher(s).

1.5 Methodology for the exploratory study

The study was conducted in one of the resettlement blocks in Trilokpuri area situated in East Delhi. Data collection was conducted in two stages. Firstly 50 households located in 2 lanes (*galis*) were surveyed in one sub-block in order to obtain information on the educational levels and occupations of the adult members (18 years and above). Details pertaining to the schooling of children in the school going age group (5-17 years) were also obtained.

In the second stage, of the presently enrolled children, a selected few who had completed the primary level of schooling and were now studying in class VI-XII were chosen for in-depth interviews. While 22 girls and 14 boys were presently attending

these classes, many of these were siblings and belonged to the same household. In such a situation, one child was chosen from each household. As a result 18 children (10 girls and 8 boys) belonging to 18 households became available for the study. In-depth interviews were then conducted with these children and their parents (9 fathers and 9 mothers).

Also 4 teachers from government schools attended by 4 selected children (2 boys and 2 girls) were interviewed.

1.6 Overview of Chapters

The second chapter discusses the caste system which forms the larger context in which the discussion on the low ritual and social and economic status of the Dalits is located. The chapter also discusses the intra – Dalit hierarchy and it is through this discussion that the life of the Valmiki community and its low position in the Dalit hierarchy is reflected upon. Chapter 3 provides a picture of the education of Dalits in India and that of the Valmikis in particular- reflecting both on the educational levels as well as the schooling experiences of the Valmiki children from a review of research. Field data is presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. The last chapter presents the conclusion and the larger issues that emerge from the study.

Chapter 2: The Caste System: Situating the Valmikis

The caste system is viewed as one of the oldest forms of stratification that has thrived in the Indian society for centuries. This system of stratification divides the society (Hindu) into a series of local, hereditary and endogamous units or 'jatis', arranged in a hierarchy according to the ritual status. Each jati has also traditionally been assigned a hereditary occupation. This ritual hierarchy among the castes, as the scriptures suggest is based on the notions of 'purity and pollution', with castes opposed as 'high' or 'low', in terms of being ritually pure and impure on the basis of their association with the 'purity of blood' and 'the nature of work' assigned to them (Chakravarti, 2006). It is this opposition between the 'high' and 'low' that in turn accounts for the respective prescriptions and proscriptions pertaining to the social intercourse between castes. Thus in ritual terms, the status and the nature of social intercourse of castes in the traditional caste system come to be derived and defined by the relative purity of the castes.

While the hierarchy between the castes has been a marked feature of the caste system (Srinivas, 1987 cited in Guha, 2009), the position of each caste is not always clear and fixed. As field studies in the area suggest, there is a considerable ambiguity around the ranking of castes, especially in the middle ranges across regions and that there is a great deal of disagreement about the mutual rank between the jatis (Srinivas, 1962; Ghurye, 1969). But at the same time as noted, despite this ambiguity surrounding the ranking of the castes in the middle levels, the top and the bottom positions of the caste hierarchy continue to be occupied by specific castes throughout the regions (Srinivas, 1962). While the 'Brahmins' have more or less occupied the highest position in the caste hierarchy, the bottom has been occupied by the Dalits – the '(ex) untouchables' who have been considered to be the most impure by birth and are traditionally assigned occupations like skinning of animal carcasses, tanning leather, removal of human waste; attendance at cremation grounds to name a few, considered to be the most polluting of all the occupations. They still hold the lowest ritual status among all the castes and have been regarded as so polluted that even their touch has been considered as a cause of impurity and pollution to other castes.

But having recognized that it is the supposed purity and impurity of the castes that has defined their ritual status in the traditional caste system, it is critical to realize that

'caste is not merely the opposition between the pure and the impure, but at a more fundamental level it incorporates other kinds of oppositions such as domination and subordination, exploitation and oppression, based on unequal access to material resources' (Chakravarti, 2006: 21). In this sense caste system is a system of material inequality and entails an unequal and hierarchical entitlement of economic and social rights as well as privileges that are predetermined and ascribed by birth for each caste (Thorat and Newman, 2010). So, castes not merely hold a differential ritual status but most importantly a differential social and economic status that provides unequal economic and social rights and privileges to them. Thus disparities are observed between castes in the social and economic life. Moreover as 'the economic and social rights are unequally assigned, therefore the entitlement to rights are diminished as one moves down the caste ladder' (Thorat and Newman, 2010: 7). This therefore implies that privileges are concentrated at the top thereby leaving the castes at the bottom – the Dalits in particular, socially and economically deprived.

Though with urbanization and introduction of education, the contemporary times have witnessed changes in the caste system especially in terms of the weakening of the caste-occupation link as well as the purity-pollution considerations (Srinivas, 2003; Beteille, 2002; Shah, 2007, 2010). However the impact of such changes for Dalits has not been uniform. The educational disparities by the caste are persistent and Dalits still lag behind the non-Dalits both in terms of literacy and educational attainment (Deshpande, 2011). Uneven spread of education to some extent explain the fact that despite a weakening of the caste –occupation link for them, many Dalits 'remain disproportionately clustered in the lowest rungs: casual labour, agricultural labour and unemployed while the others dominate the more prestigious occupations' (ibid: 74). Being poorly paid, such employment further adds to their economic deprivation.

However while such a state of affairs mark the larger reality of the lives of many Dalits, it is also important to note that there have also been those (located in urban areas) who have benefitted from the schemes and incentives introduced by the government (Ram, 2008) and secured an improvement in their socio-economic status. Though with the introduction of such measures, it was expected that all the Dalits would avail themselves of benefits arising from education, government employment and political representation, but the spread of these benefits has not been uniform among them. Two trends are noticeable in this regard. First, only some caste groups

like Chamars, Jatavs, Mahars and few others have cornered most benefits accruing from such provisions (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002). Second even among these castes (and others who have largely lagged behind in this regard), only a small proportion of the Dalits have been able to secure mobility by availing these benefits. Thus the changes effected through urbanization, introduction of education, special government measures etc. have largely remained limited to the lives of a few Dalits only.

Further along with the poor economic status of a large number of Dalits, the practice of untouchability against the Dalits remains a strong indicator as to how the purity-pollution considerations still remain strong for them. While such a practice may be regarded as limited to the rural context, 'what is astonishing is the extent of untouchability that continues to be practiced in the country, even in urban settings, despite its abolition after independence, the bulk of which is unreported and goes unpublished' (Deshpande, 2011: 8). Rather as Shah (2010) observes, the most visible expression of untouchability in the urban areas continues to be the job of cleaning streets and collecting garbage exclusively by the members of the scavenging caste and who are usually segregated in their own streets' (Shah, 2010: 9).

So as it is clear, it is not only that ritually Dalits have occupied a subordinate status, but rather this 'lowly' status of theirs has also come to be translated into extreme social and economic disadvantages and deprivations for the group.

The institution of caste and the aspect of untouchability has been a subject of considerable scholarly engagement. Many scholars have attempted to explain the origins of untouchability and thus the Dalits . There exist different theories/ explanations around its origins. These can broadly be identified as the racial theories, the religious theories and economic theories (Shah et.al, 2006). However there has been an absence of consensus around the issue.

According to the racial theories the untouchables and the 'touchables' i.e. the caste Hindus are considered to belong to two races differentiated by colour (Shah et.al, 2006). Explanations are offered in terms of the Aryan invasion in India and their hostility towards the native population who were declared as untouchables by the former. For instance Risley (1908) and Dutt (1931) (cited in Shah, 2006) argued that

the ‘touchables’ were white Aryans who enslaved the black race native to the subcontinent and categorized them as untouchables. Then there are also scholars like Mukherjee (1988) (cited in ibid, 2006) who argue that it is was only those indigenous groups who could not be brought under control that had to face segregation and cultural and religious prejudice that then turned into untouchability. The untouchables were considered by these scholars as altogether a different race than the others.

Scholars have also provided a religious theory of caste and untouchability. Drawing upon the scriptures, they stress on the principle of purity and pollution as the basis of caste hierarchy. As these scholars argue, it is the notions of purity and pollution that govern the interpersonal and intergroup relations in the Hindu society and most critically all the members of the community including those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy share this value system. Prominent among such scholars was Louis Dumont (1970). He argued that the hierarchical caste system is founded on the ideological principle of the opposition between ritual purity and pollution, which as he maintained, defines the hierarchical relationship between the pure Brahmins and the polluted untouchables. So caste hierarchy for him was a true religious hierarchy defined in terms of the superiority of the pure over the impure (Madan, 1971 in Gupta, 2008). Emphasising on the ideological principle of purity and pollution, Dumont in turn argued that this hierarchy is accepted by all the members of the society (Hindu) including those at the bottom- the ex-untouchables. In a way ‘he represents Hinduism as a moral hierarchy that is deeply accepted even by the most subordinated elements’ (Mendelsohn and Vicziany, 1998: 15). Similar views have been put forth by Moffat through his study of the untouchable community in South India. Through this he argued that the ex-untouchables belong to a single Hindu community and that there exists a cultural consensus around the norms and principles of the caste hierarchy (ibid, 1998).

But such a view has been largely criticized by other scholars and the most prominent of them was Berreman (1979). Drawing upon his empirical work, Berreman argued that people do not confirm to the caste system unquestioningly and that they are ‘willful, factionalized and individually variable’ (Berreman, 1979: 81 cited in Gupta, 2008). He criticized Dumont for having failed to see caste system as a system of inequality and the experiences of this inequality by different castes. Rather he labeled Dumont’s view as the ‘Brahminical view of caste’ for it propagated the Brahmanical

ideal of caste system drawn from the religious texts which as Berreman asserted bears little relation to the experiences of castes especially the untouchables (Berreman, 1979).

Along with Berreman, scholars like Kathleen Gough (1956), Joan Mencher (1974), Robert Miller (1966) (cited in Michael, 2007) and others have also highlighted how the understandings of Hinduism and its caste hierarchy differ among the caste groups. Through their field studies, they suggest how rather than accepting their degraded status which Hindiuism assigns them, the (ex)-untouchables possess a distinct culture. For instance Gough in her study of the (ex)-untouchable Pallans in South India, argued that they have a distinctive social and cultural subsystem vis-a vis the Brahmins. She describes them 'to be most free of the restraints of the Sanskritic culture' (Michael, 2007:27), thus seeing them as different and non-confirming to the life conditions assigned to them by the Brahmanic culture. Similarly others like Mencher and Miller also see the untouchables as having a relatively distinct culture of their own.

Thus (ex)-untouchables are seen by these scholars 'to have demystified caste and its accompanying ideology' and see it 'as a system of oppression' (Michael, 2007: 27). So as these writings suggest the untouchables are not seen as simply accepting the caste system as given. Rather as these studies show, there exist divergent and conflicting understandings of Hinduism and the caste hierarchy. Also the evidence of the existence of Dalit struggles against the dominant castes right from the early Vedic period also suggests that caste has been a locus of critique and challenge by the oppressed groups (Shah et.al, 2006).

B.R. Ambedkar (Rodrigues, 2002) also critiqued the religious explanation of the caste system and asserted how caste was legitimised and given a religious justification through the Shastras. Challenging the authority of these scriptures, he rather called for the 'cleansing of the minds of men and women, of the pernicious notions of the Shastras' (ibid: 290). For him the caste system was a system of 'graded inequality' which comprises groups that are not only different but unequal in status; a graded system that regulates all the spheres of an individual's life.

Then there have also existed economic theories that explain the origins of untouchability. In this view the Varna society (the division of society into four social

orders with each engaged in a fixed occupation and untouchables being outside it), is seen as a class society which over the time developed features of the caste society (Shah et.al, 2006). Some scholars like Sardesai(1986) suggest that varnas became hereditary in the course of time which distorted the class relations, while others like Klass (1980) argue that the previously egalitarian social groups developed a stratification due to an increase in population and generation of surplus (Shah et.al,2006). Another view that exists suggests that agricultural production in ancient India necessitated a need for mass labour which could exist only in the form of socially oppressed strata of the society and it were these oppressed classes that were treated as untouchables (Yurlova, 1989 cited in Shah et.al, 2006).

So as evident, there exists not one, but different explanations of the origin of untouchability and thus the group of (ex) untouchables. But what is clearly reflected is that despite an absence of consensus around the subject, most scholars recognize (leaving Dumont and those who subscribe to the Dumontian explanation of caste system) that caste system is inherently a system of inequality which as discussed is clearly visible on the ground as well. Thus as it can be rightly said 'as a form of social and economic organization based on principles of hierarchy/graded inequality and exclusion it has historically served to deny lower and especially Dalit castes, access to economic and cultural resources and social respect' (Nambissan, 2010).

The foregoing discussion provides a clear picture of the persistent inequalities between the Dalits and the non-Dalits in different aspects pertaining to their social and economic well being. The roots of such inequalities as reflected, lies in their lowest position in the hierarchically graded caste system- both in its ritual as well as material dimensions. But having recognized the presence of such inter-caste hierarchy, scholars have also highlighted the presence of an intra-dalit caste hierarchy and further even the presence of the 'Dalits among the Dalits' (Shah, 2002) who have even been reported to be suffering discrimination in the hands of other Dalit castes (ibid,2002). It is this discussion of the intra-Dalit hierarchy that forms the larger context of the present study.

2.1 Intra-Dalit hierarchy

As mentioned, having documented the oppression and discrimination which the Dalits have traditionally faced as '(ex)-untouchables', scholars over the years have

highlighted the need to look at 'Dalit' not as a homogeneous category, but as an aggregate of many caste groups that are hierarchically differentiated (Shah,2002; Judge,2003). Studies in the area have revealed that there exists a hierarchy among different Dalit castes, based on degrees of defilement and pollution. Thus, the position of various Dalit castes in this regard comes to be decided on the basis of their engagement in the lesser polluting, more polluting and the most polluting occupations and the notions of relative impurity of the groups. Hence those engaged in the most polluting occupations are treated as the most impure of all Dalit caste groups and thus as 'untouchables'. Moreover practice of discrimination among the Dalit groups has also been well documented in some regions (Shah, 2002; Ramaiah, 2007)

Apart from the nature of work, there may be other factors that enable one Dalit caste to situate itself above the others. As research suggests, one of these could be following of specific traditions that makes one Dalit caste superior to the others – in particular vegetarianism which is considered to be one of the most important markers of 'pure' high Hindu castes and a claim of Brahmin ancestry (Ramiahiah, 2007). Also castes may come to successfully claim a higher place for themselves in the caste hierarchy on the basis of their economic and political status vis-à-vis other caste groups than the degree of impurity per se. Lastly, the hierarchy may result from an intersection of these factors.

These factors have very well been brought forth through different studies. Shalini Randeria's research among the Sabarkantha Dalits in Gujarat demonstrates how ' the Dalit social world replicates the internal system of caste hierarchy of the savarna model' (Randeria, 1997 cited in Ramanathan and Macwan, 2007: 27). The Dalit caste group, in this community called Garodas perform the role of priests and others called the Vankars and Rohits together play the role of Kshatriyas (protecting the service caste dependent on them), and also of Vaishyas (with the Vankars engaged in trade of woven cloth and Rohits engaged in the trade of hides). Further another caste group that is the Senvas performs menial tasks like the Shudras, from whom the Vankars and Rohits do not accept food and drink. There are also other caste groups like the Turis, Tigdars who contest with Senvas for superiority and lastly there are the Bhangis (or the scavengers) who are excluded from the services of the others and are considered as 'untouchables' and marginal in their sub-system. Thus, it is the kind of occupation engaged into by the caste group and thus the purity-pollution association

with them- as in the case of the caste hierarchy in general - that appears to inform the intra-group hierarchy in this case. Also as it is evident, there is a marginalization of the caste that engages in the occupation of scavenging by the other sub-castes.

Similar observations have been put forth by Shah (2002) who again describes the hierarchy within the Dalits in Gujarat. As he states, 'There is at top a small caste of Garodas, who are the priest for other Dalit castes. They have been claiming for quite some time to be Gaud Brahmins and have adopted Brahmanical surnames such as Vyas, Joshi, Pandyas and Shukla……The Bhangis (scavengers) are at the bottom of the hierarchy and most underprivileged. Between the Garodas and Bhangis there is a large caste, the higher stratum of which is traditionally Vankar (weaver) and the lower stratum (menial servant)…….the Chamars (leather workers) and Senwas (rope makers) occupy positions intermediately between the Vankar-cum-Dheds and Bhangis' (Shah, 2002: 1318). Thus, again it is the occupation pursued by the Dalit castes that comes to form the basis of the intra-caste hierarchy. It clearly reveals the lowest status attached to a particular caste (occupation) and it's oppression by the other.

Macwan and Ramanathan (2007), through their research in Gujarat also point to a similar hierarchy. The Bhangis also known as the Valmikis in the state are still engaged in the disposal of dirt and refuse, including dead animals and human excreta and are not only untouchables to caste Hindus, but to other Dalit castes as well. Interestingly, as they reveal 'the Vankars in Gujarat refer to the Valmikis as Harijans denoting thereby that Gandhiji's term is applicable to the former Bhangi caste alone' (Macwan and Ramanathan, 2007: 25).

The existence of an intra-Dalit hierarchy and the presence of the castes considered as untouchables within the Dalits have also been found true for other areas. Judge (2003) highlights the presence of such a hierarchy in Punjab with the ad-dharmis occupying a high caste position among the Dalits, while the balmikis or the mazbis – the traditional scavenging caste- having the lowest position and placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. But in this case apart from the occupation as a basis of placement of a Dalit caste as high or low, there have also been other reasons, as Judge observes, that have led to a high position of ad-dharmis in the intra-Dalit caste hierarchy. These include economic benefits to the group with an increase in the demand for leather and

prospering of leather trade under the British rule, access to other avenues by the richer members of the caste to improve their condition and the success of the ad-dharm movement in the pre-independence period. Post independence, factors like the access to education, utilization of the reservation policy, participation and success in the electoral politics helped them to acquire a dominant position (Judge, 2003). Thus it was an improvement in economic status and political success that also acted as prominent factors that led the group to achieve a higher status than the other Dalits.

Ramiaiah (2007) through his study of two villages in Ramanathapuram district of Southern Tamilnadu also points to the presence of a caste hierarchy among the 'more visible castes among the Scheduled Castes' (Ramiaiah, 2007: 64). These include the Pallars, Parayars and the Chakkiliyars. Of these, the Parayars are considered to be below the Pallars in the caste hierarchy and that the Pallars in most of the villages in the Ramanathapuram district consider themselves to be superior to the Parayars in social status and treat them as untouchables. The Parayars are not only few in number in the district, but are also associated with leather works and drum beating, and practice beef eating. It is these aspects that make the Pallars consider Parayars as inferior in status. Further even below the Parayars are placed the Chakkiliyars. The traditional occupations of the group include sweeping, scavenging and removing the dead animals, tanning and making footwear. Along with this they also play instruments. But all these activities, as Ramiaiah informs, are considered by upper castes and the Pallars to be dirty, defiling and polluting. Hence the Chakkiliyars are looked down upon and restrictions are placed on inter-dining and inter-marriage between them - though it varies from place to place. Another caste, the Kuravar is found to be at par or slightly above the Chakkiliyars in the caste hierarchy. The Kuravars earn their living by making house - hold items out of Bamboo and palm leaves, hunt birds and rear pigs both for consumption and sale , but are not required to perform any inauspicious tasks and rituals for the other Dalits (Ramiaiah, 2007)

Thus, it is the Pallars who occupy a superior position in the intra-Dalit hierarchy. Apart from the fact that they are not associated with the occupations considered to be degrading and defiling, the Pallars have a few traditions that make them different and superior to other Scheduled castes most important of which is not eating beef – often considered a marker of caste superiority - which the other Scheduled Castes in the district do (Ramaiah, 2007). Also the Pallars are not dependent for their living on

the caste Hindus or the other Scheduled Castes and are economically more stable, placing them higher in the hierarchy. Thus apart from the aspect of occupational impurity, there may be other factors that lead to the intra - Dalit hierarchy.

While the above studies have mostly been conducted in the rural context, a few studies also show the presence of some level of stratification in urban areas (Ram, 1986). Through his study in Kanpur city, Ram (1986) reveals how even though the different Scheduled castes interact more with each other especially in terms of inter-dining, marriage is restricted to one's own group. Thus it is with respect to marriage that the intra-Dalit hierarchy and the status of each Dalit sub-caste gains prominence. Further even in the city as well, those engaged in the tasks of sweeping and scavenging are regarded as lowest among all the Scheduled Castes and are downgraded by both Hindus and the latter.

Similar have been the observations of Chandrasekhran (1992) in her study on the social mobility among the Madigas in a city in Karnataka. Focusing on the immigrant sweepers, she informs, how they were socially ostracized by the Madigas (Scheduled Caste) who were giving up this polluting occupation in a bid for their social mobility and were even prevented from joining the local associations in the area. Here the occupational shift by the Madigas and the continuance of the immigrants in sweeping that came to mediate the relations between the sweeping caste itself. Such studies, though conducted more than two decades ago, seem to suggest how in cities also considerations of the difference in the status of the sub-castes, impacts their relations, even if not as sharply as the formerly discussed cases. However it is important to explore this aspect in the context of contemporary times that calls forth fresh research on the subject.

The studies discussed above give us an idea about the presence of a hierarchy among various Dalit castes in different regions of the country- wherein one of the prominent basis of hierarchy is the degree of defilement and impurity that accrues from one's occupation. The bottom of hierarchy in all the cases, as we observe, is more or less occupied by those Dalit castes that are traditionally associated with the occupations of scavenging and sweeping that are considered to be the most defiling and polluting of all the occupations associated with and engaged into by the Dalits . This remains true

for these castes even where along with occupation other factors are at work – like education, economic stability, political strength etc.

One assumption that can be made here is that given that the scavenging castes are doubly marginalized both within the caste hierarchy and within the intra – Dalit caste hierarchy, they are less likely to attain mobility through these means. But, it is important to note that the chances for such mobility may be also be contingent on their location in the rural-urban context, wherein it is in the latter where the possibility for mobility may be brighter. The life of these castes is reflected upon in the following section.

2.2 The Valmiki Community

The castes that have traditionally been associated with the occupation of scavenging and sweeping are known by different names in India like Bhangi, Balmiki, Chuhra, Mehtar, Mazhabi, Halalkhor etc in Northern India; Hari, Hela, Dom, Senei etc in Eastern India; Mukhiyar, Thoti, Chachati, Pakay, Relli etc. in Southern India and Mehtar, Bhangi, Halalkhor, Gahsi, Olangna, Zadmalli, Barvashia, Metariya, Jamphoda, Mela etc. in Western and Central India (Sachchidananda, 2001). But, while different terms of reference exist, some of these groups over the time have started referring to themselves not by these existing names, but as Valmikis/Balmikis (Kutty,2006) originating from their claims of links with Rishi Balmik/Valmiki who wrote Ramayana. Many believe themselves to be his descendents. Hence, collectively they are now commonly referred to as the Valmiki community (Valmiki Samaaj) (Valmiki, 2008).

Irrespective of the terms of reference, what is common to them is their traditional association and engagement in the work of ‘scavenging and sweeping’. In addition to this work, the scavenging castes have also been assigned in the past other tasks like removing dead animals, skinning and tanning (Valmiki, 2003), beating drums, carrying death messages and making brooms (Gayathridevi, 2011) which have been considered as ritually polluting. Though urbanization and industrialization have provided them an opportunity to enter other work, but as noted only a few have been able to move to different occupations. But their low levels of education have largely restricted them to wage employment and manual work (Gayathridevi, 2011). Only some, with higher levels of education have managed to enter professions like that of

clerks, doctors and engineers (Valmiki, 2009). An important aspect to be noted is that while the latter kind of change surely represents an upward mobility for these Valmikis, at the same time given the stigma and the 'lowest status' attached to scavenging/sweeping even a shift into other manual occupations has been regarded by researchers as upward occupational mobility for them (Sharma, 1995).

However such mobility as mentioned has been low for the group at large. The occupational engagement of most Valmikis, at present largely entails performance of manual scavenging and sweeping.

Manual scavenging mainly involves manual handling of human excreta – that is removal of the night soil which has been considered the most impure and lowest of all the hereditary caste based occupations. The manual scavengers were in the past and even at present employed either to clean the night soil privately at homes with dry toilets, wherein human excreta is left on a stone, mud, or in a bucket which is taken by them to a place of disposal or they are engaged in cleaning of sewage pits, both in private homes and in municipalities (Ramaswamy, 2008). The modalities of the task clearly suggest the dehumanizing and degrading nature of the work. Further what makes it all the more demeaning is that it is done with the most primitive and crudest of tools- mostly a broom and a tin plate used to pick up the excrement and put in a basket which is then carried to the dumping ground (Thekaekara, 2005; Ramaswamy, 2008). While such a practice of scavenging may sound primitive and be unbelievable especially for the urban elite (Thekaekara, 2005), but '……there still exist one million such manual scavengers in the country (and majority among them are women) involved in removing human faeces manually, using bare hands from both private and public latrines and carrying it on their heads to a place for disposal often in a far off place' (Gayathridevi, 2011: 2). This work is not only performed by them in the rural areas for the upper-caste families with dry privies arising out of the traditional jajmani relations (Karlekar, 1982; Gayathridevi, 2011), but even in the urban and semi urban areas where dry toilets are still present. However the incidence of manual scavenging is reported to be higher in the rural areas.

As the recent census 2011 data also reveals , human excreta is still manually cleaned in at least 7,94,390 dry toilets in the country and in at least 7.4 lakh households manual scavengers are still engaged (Hindustan Times, April, 2012). Of these, 2 lakh

are located in the urban areas and the remaining in the rural. A state wise glance suggests the presence of such latrines in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Assam and Rajasthan, Karnataka, Bihar, Odisha, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat (India Sanitation Portal, June, 2012). Thus performance of manual scavenging still marks the lives of many Valmikis and so does the stigma associated with the work. These figures are not only suggestive of the continuance of the traditional occupation for the community across the country, but also the poor state of sanitation facilities even in a megacity like Delhi which constitutes one of the largest urban centres in the country.

What makes the issue all the more reprehensible is, that manual scavenging exists despite the legal prohibition of the system of dry latrines and manual scavenging through the promulgation of 'The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993'. Despite such law, the use of such latrines as well as the continuing employment of manual scavengers by various departments of the Government of India, particularly in the departments like the railways, defence and Ministry of Industry, let alone their employment in homes privately is well documented (findings of the report of the National Commission for Safai Karmcharis stated in Singh and Ziyauddin, 2009). Thus, even though the scavenging work is legally abolished, it remains widespread. But again as evident from the recent census data the practice of scavenging is much widespread in the rural than the urban areas due to the introduction of sanitary flush system in the latter. It is this, which has helped to replace dry toilets with those with water flush, thereby reducing the incidence of the employment of Valmikis for manual scavenging as compared to the rural areas and those urban areas where the condition of sanitation facilities remains poor.

Further the introduction of the sanitary flush system, along with improved equipments like long-handle brooms and protective clothing which tend to diminish direct contact of the workers with the waste matter has also made the work of sweepers less degrading (Karlekar, 1982; Vivek, 2000). Thus in this regard the extent of contact with direct bodily waste has reduced. This has been true for those Valmikis working as sweepers often referred to as 'Safai karamcharies', attached with the Municipal Corporation (Sharma, 1991; Sachchidananda, 2001; Narayanaswamy and Sachithanandam, 2010; Gayathridevi, 2011) , engaged in sweeping of streets, roads,

collection and disposal of garbage, cleaning of sewer and public urinals in the urban areas. They also work as sweepers and cleaners in Government and private offices, hospitals and nursing homes. As mentioned in comparison to those engaged in scavenging, for these sweepers including those engaged in cleaning of toilets; the work is relatively lesser defiling (Karlekar, 1982; Gayathridevi, 2011). What is important to note is that this difference in the degree of defilement especially pertaining to work involving only sweeping, has led to the rise of feelings of inferiority/superiority among the Valmikis themselves (Sharma 1991). The work of sweeping is considered to be superior to the scavenging work even though both the sweeper and the scavenger belong to the same caste background. However whether and how such feelings impact the social relations between them forms a separate subject that needs to be researched upon.

It is important to recognize that whatever be the nature of the cleaning tasks engaged into by the Valmikis and the extent of contact with the waste matter, the stigma attached to the work and the low status conferred to the caste does not wane away. It still falls in the realm of 'sweeping and scavenging' and the stigma of pollution due to handling of waste matter remains attached to this work till date. They not only suffer from the stigma of engaging in a 'dirty work', but are even themselves regarded to be 'unclean' (Vivek, 2000). As a result of their engagement in this 'dirty work', there are also notions about them being 'unhygienic'. The low status of the work has been one of the central reasons for the performance of this work by and large by those from the Valmiki community since generations.

Research in the area very well reveals how the occupation of the scavenging castes has largely remained hereditary and that still a majority of them are involved in the traditional occupations of sweeping and scavenging and other related pursuits like the previous generation(s) (Shyamlal, 1984; Sharma, 1995; Sachchidananda, 2005). As scholars like Thekaekara (2005) comment 'For centuries now they (the scavengers) have held strict monopoly of cleaning latrines and toilets, handling human excreta. This is one area where progress has not intruded' (Thekaekara, 2005: 3). This has also been true for those working as sweepers in the municipality and other government and private units/offices. Many of the Valmikis who migrate from the villages to the cities, leaving behind the work of scavenging, also end up engaging in this work in either of the avenues (Sharma, 1991; Macwan and Ramanathan, 2007; Gayathridevi,

2011). Further as the work is by and large engaged into by the Valmikis, often kin-connections and other acquaintances play an important role in accessing these jobs (Sharma, 1991). Interestingly though lately, many a 'non- ex-untouchable' community members have began to undertake jobs of sweeping in Municipalities in megacities, 'drawn by the secular nature of the employer (the city corporation or municipality) and the cash income that one is entitled to, besides other perks' (Gayathridevi, 2011: 5). But again as most studies reveal, there is still reluctance in most of these castes to enter this occupation and as they suggest the caste-occupation link remains strong for such jobs. Rather because of the shunning of these jobs by the other castes, sweeping work in the Municipality and other government and private sector units appear to be more or less 'reserved for them' (Macwan and Ramanathan, 2007). Moreover as it has been highlighted through a research study in Gujarat, that even if a non-Valmiki gets a job in the Municipality, 'he pays someone else to enter the manholes through bribes or threats……..they thus have other means to further their careers' (ibid: 27). So despite the entry of a few non-Valmikis, there has not been much of a change in the traditional occupation of the Valmikis.

Such reluctance has also been observed on the part of the other Dalit castes as well, especially in some rural areas where the dictates of the caste system remain strong. As reported in one of the leading dailies (Hindustan Times, June, 2012), in a village near Raipur, a woman belonging to the 'dhobi caste' (washermen community) and her family was threatened to be ostracised for the next 60 years for accepting a sweeper's job in a school. While the woman and her family were resentful of such a response from the 'Dhobi samaaj', the latter was insistent on her quitting of this 'menial job'. Such an instance confirms how the work of 'sweeping and cleaning' continues to be placed at the lowest position in the occupational hierarchy that exists within the Dalit community and thus the stigma attached to the work and the Valmikis, which makes the other Dalits reluctant from pursuing it and even those who wish to, are prevented from doing so by the prescriptions and proscriptions regulating the intra-Dalit hierarchy.

The low status and the stigma attached to the traditional work, has subjected them to discrimination, wherein the Valmikis have been kept at a social distance by the rest of the society. One of the sites through which this can be observed is their residential settlements. Most scavengers and sweepers live in physically segregated settlements.

This has not only been true for the villages, but the cities as well. In villages, while they are found generally living on the outskirts, in urban areas they live in segregated 'bastis' in the most crowded parts of cities and towns (Sharma,1995; Sachchidananda, 2001). What becomes all the more critical is that in many cases, the separate residential colonies are sponsored by the government under various schemes (Gayatridevi, 2011).

Moreover the living conditions and sanitation in these bastis are poor. This is well documented in different studies. For instance Shyamlal (1984), in his study of the 'Bhangis' in Jodhpur, Rajasthan describes a 'Bhangio-ki-bustee' and states ' Their mohallas or bustees are located on the outskirts of the cities. Often an open drain runs through these bustees. It is also found that there are public latrines, night soil cart stands everywhere and a dumping ground can also be seen near these bustees' (Shyamlal, 1984: 6) . Similar observations regarding the existence of segregated residential areas have been put forth in studies in regions of Delhi (Karlekar, 1982; Sharma,1995), Bihar (Sachchidananda,2001), Tamilnadu (Narayanaswamy and Sachithanandam, 2010) and other states, where the basic amenities like housing, drinking water, sanitation, electricity and medical facilities have been found to be in a poor state.

Apart from a segregated living, researches in the field also highlight the discrimination meted out to the group not only by the non- Dalit caste groups but as discussed in the preceding section, also by other Dalit castes. The kind of treatment that has been given to the scavenging castes since the past and the humiliation experienced by Valmikis is very well reflected through the following lines from the autobiography of Omprakash Valmiki (2003).

'Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes, if one [a higher-caste person] happened to touch a Chuhra , one got contaminated or polluted. The Chuhras were not seen as human. They were simply things for use. Their utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and then throw them away' (Valmiki, 2003: 2).

The practice of untouchability against the Valmikis has not only been a matter of past. Rather even the recent studies also reveal the ways in which untouchability is practiced against these groups. However what is to be noted is that such a treatment

has been reported mostly for the rural areas. A study by Action Aid (2002) (cited in Gayathridevi ,2011) in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa highlights how there were more than 30,000 dry latrines in these states and that the manual scavengers (mostly women/girls) were not treated at par with others in public places like tea-shops,grocery shops,buses and so on. As observed separate cups were kept for their use in hotels and tea shops and also barbers and other professionals denied services to them. Another study by Thekaekara (2005) of the manual scavengers in the villages of Gujarat reveal how the Bhangis (as they are called there) 'were not allowed access to water from the well that was meant for the Dalits and as reported they have to wait for any person to pour water to them and in doing so they had to maintain a 'non-polluting distance' from the latter' (Thekaekara,2005: 66). Practice of untouchability has also been reported for other areas as well. As Thekaekara (2005) cites 'shopkeepers in HazariBagh , Bihar would not except notes from Bhangis. They had to pay coins and the shopkeepers would pour water over the coins before touching them . If they bought something it was placed on the ground, never on the table. Things havent changed there even now' (ibid: 31). Such incidents very well reveal how even in the contemporary times, scavengers and sweepers are still subjected to discrimination in different ways.

As mentioned such instances have been more prominent in the rural context. The urban areas however present a different case. As the available studies suggest, as compared to the counterparts in the rural areas, the urban sweepers do not face such forms of discrimination. Rather as observers note the anonymity of the urban mileu not only allow them (and other Dalits) to enter other occupations, but also move closely along with the other people as the caste taboos are less a matter of concern here which however has not been the case for many in the rural context (Karlekar, 1982; Sharma, 1995). Rather as Karlekar notes 'in the anynonymity of the urban mileu, they shop unnoticed and visit cinemas and places of worship without the fear of being apprehended' (Karlekar ,1982:31). But this is not to suggest that given such changes, the stigma associated with their work ceases to exist. Even for those who may not engage in scavenging or cleaning of the bodily waste through toilet cleaning, the stigma of pollution due to the handling of waste matter remains. It is this that may impact their social relations with members of other castes who may come to know of the occupation and thus the caste of the sweeper. But, as mentioned, the intra-Dalit

hierarchy and relations between the Dalit castes remains under researched. It is in this regard that the present study also explored the life experiences of living in the city of the chosen Balmiki parents. An attempt was made to look at whether and how their caste identity mediates their social relations with others from different caste background both at the place of work or otherwise.

In addition to the stigma and discrimination faced, it is also crucial to note that these castes remain poorly paid especially in cases where they engage in manual scavenging and sweeping privately. This very well becomes evident by the fact that scavengers and sweepers in certain villages and small towns in states like Madhya Pradesh, UP, Gujarat are either paid in kind- grains or wheat bread (Thekaekara, 2005) and/or paid a meagre sum of Rs. 50 and even lesser monthly for the performance of such demeaning work (NDTV, 2012). Given this context, the work particularly in Municipal Corporations (and other Government and private avenues) still ensures relatively a steady cash income for them (Balagopalan and Subrahmanian, 2003; Gayathridevi, 2010). Thus, as it emerges, Valmikis have not only suffered from different forms of social discrimination, but also economic exploitation which reminds us of the caste system as not only a system of ritual inequality, but also social and economic inequality (Valmiki, 2008).

The foregoing discussion clearly suggests how the caste system has placed the Valmikis at a disadvantage not only as 'Dalits', but the observation of a similar caste hierarchy among Dalits has also marginalized them as untouchables within the Dalit community. Thus, it would not be wrong to suggest that the group has for long lived a life of economic and social degradation, both within and outside the Dalit community. At the same time some change especially with respect to a shift from the traditional occupation has also been noted for a few of them especially in the urban context. However what becomes most noticeable is the role which education has played in facilitating such a change, even though this occupational shift has been limited to a few Valmikis located largely in the urban context. Such a shift seems to reiterate how urbanization and introduction of education to some extent has brought a weakening in the caste – occupation link for the Dalits, and only for some of the Valmikis who could avail of education to enter the white-collar work. However as studies report, it is a change through education which is aspired for by many Valmiki parents. This is

discussed in detail in the following chapter that also looks at the overall picture pertaining to the education of Dalit children in India.

Chapter 3: Education of Dalit and the Valmiki children

Dalits today constitute one of the most educationally deprived and disadvantaged groups in India. Their position as 'untouchables' in the caste system not only led to their historical exclusion from access to knowledge (Chakravarti, 2006) but the stigma of being an 'untouchable' critically impacts their educational access and experiences in contemporary times as well. Though, there have undoubtedly been improvements in their educational levels post independence, the Dalit/Scheduled Caste (SC) students still lag behind those from the non-Dalit/non-Scheduled Caste backgrounds.

As far as the schooling of Dalit children is concerned, then the situation regarding their retention and completion of school education vis-à-vis the other non-Dalit groups remains un-satisfactory. Despite an increase in the enrolment of Dalit children over the past six decades, they still remain among the educationally disadvantaged groups as reflected through their high school drop-out and low school completion rates (Nambissan, 2010). This is evident from the fact that while the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) with respect to Scheduled Castes at the elementary level has gone up from 85.6% in 2001-2002, to 106.9% in 2007-2008, the social gaps in drop-out rates appear to be widening, with nearly 52.62% of SC children dropping out at elementary level (GOI, 2011). Further the drop-out rates for these children also vary across states. In states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan over 50% of SC children do not go beyond the primary level of education (ibid). Such facts and figures reflect clearly that the progress of the education of these children has been un-satisfactory.

Different family and school related factors leading to the relatively poor spread of schooling have been identified through the research on the subject. The poor economic condition of the family and the economic value of child's labour have been identified as important factors hindering the successful completion of the schooling for the Dalit children. As it is recognized, poor socio - economic status of the Dalit family has a role in aggravating educational deprivation among Dalits (Jha and Jhingran, 2002; Kumar,2006). While high levels of poverty, may keep the child away from school owing to the economic value of the child's labour, his/her contribution in the household work may also do so or hinder regular attendance in school. This may be most true for girls, given the gendered division of household work (Karlekar, 2000). Further high costs of schooling may also intervene in the child's retention in

school. Despite that elementary education is supposedly free in India; there are still indirect costs to it even in the government sector. Rather children, both in rural and urban areas, have been reported to be paying tuition fees as well as other charges in local government schools and even municipal schools as well (Tilak, 1996). Moreover expenditure is also incurred on the stationary and other items like books, notebooks etc. Such costs may further constrain their schooling. Thus 'poverty and its bearing on costs incurred in schooling as well as children's work are likely to be serious constraints in the education of poor Dalit children'(Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002: 80)

In addition to these, even apathetic attitudes of the Dalit parents and their lack of interest in child's education are also stated as other reasons for poor schooling levels of the Dalit children. However such findings fall flat in the face of improving enrolment rates of these children, which seems to be suggestive of the growing demand for education in the Dalit families. Moreover recent field studies have also shown how even non-literate parents are well aware of the advantages of education and send their children to school. Studies on the subject reflect Dalit parents' desire to educate their child and their willingness to make the necessary sacrifices to attain their goal (Muralidharan, 1997). Contrary to the view held by some researchers about the lack of parental interest, Dalits rather aspire for education of good quality for their children (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002).

Dalits value education for a number of reasons. Education as research reveals is considered as a means of escaping the traditional caste occupations and for seeking upward occupational and social mobility. They value education for its 'potential to open up new employment opportunities' (Kumar, 2006; Rao, 2010) and thereby for creating possibilities for mobility for them.

Kumar's study among the Musahar community – one of the educationally deprived (ex)-untouchable caste in Bihar- highlights how contrary to the popular notions in the local society about the non-interest of the Musahar parents in education and in their upward mobility, interactions with parents revealed that 'they saw it as a means of better employment opportunities and believed it to be important to learn new things that would equip the child better to live in this world and also for employment' (Kumar, 2006: 329). They thus valued education for these reasons. Given these views, it is not the lack of interest in parents, as commonly believed, that can be held as a

primary reason for the groups' poor educational status. This somewhere also points to the need to look into other reasons for this (Kumar, 2006).

Value of education for mobility is also highlighted through other studies as well. Research in Uttar Pradesh (UP) reveal how many Dalits (Chamars) in the rural UP have followed a dual strategy of investing in formal education and seeking salaried employment in government, in an attempt to seek social mobility (Ciotti, 2002; Pai, 2000; Pai and Singh, 1997 cited in Jeffery et.al, 2005). Thus education for them becomes an important means for entry into the higher status work than the 'polluting' traditional occupation of leather work, which assigned to them a low status and marginalization in the hands of the other castes in the villages. It is out of such perceptions that parents come to recognize the importance of education for their children.

Along with this, education has also been found to be valued for enabling access to elite tastes and style that serve as markers of elite distinction (Jeffery et.al,2005; Rao,2010) and a means to develop 'cultivated selves' (Ciotti,2006). Thus in a way education is valued for obtaining cultural capital; range of goods (material possessions), titles (academic qualifications) and forms of behavior (a person's demeanor, speech and manners), that tend to confer distinction in social situations which the Dalits and other disadvantaged communities otherwise lack (Jeferry et.al, 2005). It is thus through education that the Dalit parents may attempt to improve the family's otherwise poor cultural capital along with improving its economic condition. A very interesting observation has been put forth in this regard by Jeffery et.al, (2005) through their work on the Chamars in the UP. As they suggest, it is in terms of obtaining the 'cultural capital', the 'distinction' that education may continued to be valued by some even if it does not open up the expected employment opportunities (Jeffery et.al, 2005). Thus education becomes a significant source of evolving, a 'cultivated self' and possessing the respective cultural capital in contrast to the uneducated.

While education may come to be valued by the Dalits in this regard, at the same time research also highlights how in the face of scarce employment opportunities not all parents may simply over-value education. Parental expectations around the futures of their schooled children are mediated by the realistic assessments of the available

opportunities (Balagopalan and Subrahmanian, 2003). Rather than blindly over valuing education for its potential to open up channels for mobility, parents often reassess the decisions of further investment in education and strategize differently to ensure employment for the child. This may involve either a withdrawal of the child after a particular level of schooling and looking for vocational training (Jeffery et.al, 2005) or seeing the traditional occupation as the fallback secure options (Balagopalan and Subrahmanian,2003). Thus, while for some parents even if education fails to provide the desired employment it may be still valued highly for conferring of distinction, for others it may mean a move away from schooling.

Along with the family related factors, researchers have also identified certain school related factors to have led to poor schooling levels of the Dalit children. A very crucial aspect to be noted here is that it is these factors that may come to constrain parental decisions about their child's education even when the familial factors may not act to their full force. These relate to different aspects pertaining to schooling. One of these pertains to the aspect of provisioning and quality of schooling facilities for the Dalit children. Scholars like Velaskar (2006) identify the school system to be marked by a hierarchy, with the elitist schools at the top and the impoverished schools run by the local bodies catering to 'the overwhelmingly poor SC/ST sections' (Velaskar, 2006: 202). This remains true for not only the rural areas but urban as well.

Provision of schools within easy access has been relatively poor for the SC children as compared to the general population (National Focus Group, 2006). However the problem of access becomes most serious with respect to the Dalit habitations in rural areas that are lesser attended to in terms of the provisioning of schooling facilities than the higher caste habitations (ibid). Thus in these areas the absence of schools becomes the most obvious factors hampering the enrolment rates of these children.

Further schools, even when present in the higher caste habitations may become physically as well as socially inaccessible for the Dalit child. The caste status of the Dalit child may come to intervene and rather restrict his/her entry into the higher caste habitation. As Nambissan and Sedwal (2002) observe, 'Navigating their way into upper caste habitations may prove daunting for Dalit children and instances have been reported of their encountering hostility and even being barred from entering these areas' (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002 cited in Nambissan, 2006: 234). Thus the

educational access of these children becomes heavily constrained by poor availability as well as the politics of the location of schooling facilities (ibid) which has its roots in the hierarchical norms of the caste system.

Further schools that become accessible to the Dalit children in the rural areas are found to be generally lagging behind in the basic infrastructural facilities. As research in the area reveals there is high incidence of poorly and irregularly functioning schools in the SC (and ST) dominated areas in several states (National Focus Group, 2007). Many of these schools lack the basic facilities like a well maintained building, furniture, water and toilet facilities, adequate teaching-learning materials etc (Jha and Jhingran, 2002; Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002). Along with this, the presence of inadequate number of teachers as well as high teacher absenteeism in these schools also further compounds the problem.

Thus schools for the Dalit children especially in the rural context largely remain poorly endowed as far as the basic infrastructural facilities are concerned. But having said this, what is crucial to note is that such descriptions pertaining to the state of the rural schools does not imply that these are necessarily worse than the urban ones attended by the urban Dalit children (National Focus Group, 2007). As studies have highlighted even in the urban context these children largely attend schools located in the slums and impoverished areas, run by the state and the local bodies. The inferior quality of schooling available to the Dalit and other poor children is put forth through research. For instance Banerji (2000) through her study on the children of the urban poor in the cities of Delhi and Mumbai shows how the state schools attended by these children are often overcrowded, with poorly equipped teachers who find it difficult to cope with children who are first generation school goers in their families or the children of families which are first generation urban residents.

Similarly Jha and Jhingran (2002), through their work in the urban areas highlight that the schools in urban areas attended by the children of the poor and the deprived groups are similar to schools in rural areas in two aspects – poor infrastructure and more importantly ‘insensitive’ and indifferent teachers, lacking the competence and the willingness to deal with children coming from poor and deprived situations. Ramachandaran (2006) also observes that the vast numbers of the poor in rural and urban India have to rely on government schools of different types, but the quality of

these may vary (Ramachandaran, 2004 cited in Juneja). Further as she highlights, schools in the resettlement colonies in the urban areas, from where the Dalit children may largely come, are often under-resourced, with poor infrastructure (ibid). Thus as it emerges through these and other such research work, schooling available to the Dalit children largely remains to be poor. Such quality of schooling may become one of the major impediments in the continuance and successful completion of schooling of the Dalit children.

Though over the years an increasing number of SC children from better-off economic backgrounds are accessing private school education (Jeffery et.al, 2005), but it is important to note that private education they access is not necessary of a higher quality than the government schools. Rather the kind of private schools (usually the 'low-cost' unrecognized private schools) attended by these children provide low quality schooling. However in the face of the poor infrastructure available in most of the government schools and regional medium of these schools than English, the demand for private schooling – even if it is of poorer quality than that of the government schools has increased (Sedwal and Kamat, 2008)

The nature of school curriculum has been identified as another factor impacting the Dalit child's interest in schooling. 'School curricula has been seen to be heavily biased in the favour of middle class professional households…….with the absence of any positive representation of the labour of the working poor, and especially of 'untouchable' Scheduled Castes communities, alienates SC children from their own communities and families and negatively affects their self-esteem' (Sedwal and Kamat, 2008: 36). The absence of an immediate relevance of the curriculum and its negative impact on the self esteem of children may become major deterrents to their interest and rigour for pursuing schooling further.

Along with these factors, researchers have also highlighted how the school, entrench social exclusion by exposing Dalits to discriminatory attitudes or processes within the informal or hidden curriculum (Jeffery et.al, 2005). Studies reveal how the stigma of being an (ex) -untouchable mediates their social relations with teachers and peers which impacts their learning and performance at school in a significant way. Dalit children as studies have shown are subjected to discriminatory practices like inadequate attention, segregated seating, abuse etc. by teachers and harassment and

exclusion by peers. Most importantly while recent research suggests that Dalit children may not face overt forms of untouchability in schools, discrimination against them takes a direct and subtle form (National Focus Group, 2007). It is also important to note that while most of these studies have been conducted in the rural areas, at the same time some research in the urban context also reflects the presence of some of these practices, though in a subtle form against the children from the deprived groups attending state schools- a large number of which is constituted by the Dalit children.
For instance, Jha and Jhingran (2001), through their in depth fieldwork in rural (and urban areas) in different states reported negative attitudes and discriminatory practices of the upper – caste teachers towards the Dalit children. Discrimination by teachers, as they revealed, took the form of unnecessary beating, abuse and harassment. Further such discrimination also manifested in the practices like that of 'making the Dalit children sit in the last row' by the teachers and their 'low expectations and attention towards them' (Jha and Jhingran, 2001: 95). Along with this, they also reported how Dalit children faced hostile peer behavior in schools. The upper caste children, as they state 'used to bully them and also did not allow them to mix as equals' (ibid). Thus we see how the caste identity of these children intervened in their relations with the teachers and peers.

Similar observations have been put forth by Nambissan (2010) through an exploratory study of the experiences of the Dalit children in schools in Jaipur, Rajasthan. This study reveals a number of exclusionary practices followed in schools in different spheres both by the teachers and the peers. As she reported, the teachers themselves engaged in caste-based discrimination which manifested most strikingly in the 'division of responsibilities within schools, with the menial tasks assigned to the Dalit children than general caste children', 'denial of equal participation in the classroom', 'inadequate pedagogic attention towards them' and 'exclusion from co-curricular activities' (Nambissan, 2010). It is in these and other ways that the caste identity of the Dalit children acted to the detriment to their full participation in school.

Their identity as 'Dalits' also came to constrain the peer interaction and friendships which as Nambissan stresses 'is deleterious for them, as it circumscribes not only inter-personal relations but also the possibilities for them to seek resources and support both for curricular and co-curricular activities' (ibid: 280). Thus schooling of these children was marred by different forms of exclusion and discrimination.

Muralidharan (1997) in his study of 300 Dalit parents also revealed how the Dalit children were ill-treated, harassed and discriminated against by teachers. The teachers were found to be using indecent language and engage in excessive beating of these children. Moreover not only in many classrooms were the Dalit children asked to sit separate, but also in a few cases 'they were not allowed to touch blackboard, chalk and book used by the teacher' (Muralidharan, 1997: 168). Even the high-caste classmates were reported to be 'harassing the Dalit child, particularly if he was a new entrant, by pinching, hitting or pulling his hair…….in a few cases they used to form a group and beat the Harijan child , bruise his arm or leg' (ibid: 169).

Thus as reflected through these studies, the Dalit child not only becomes a victim to debasing treatment by the teachers but also by peers.

Teacher's perceptions about the low caste children's low cognitive capacities, is also clearly revealed through Kumar's (2004) study of the Musahar children in Bihar. Their discriminatory attitudes towards the Musahars became visible by the articulation of their belief that the 'Musahars would never come to school as they do not have any tensions about life…….they don't think about studying…not interested in studying' (Kumar, 2004: 337). Similar perceptions of the teachers towards the Dalit (and adivasi) children's inability to learn and their 'ineducability' are also put forth by Subrahmanian (2005) in her research in 12 Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

As these studies suggest teachers' and peers' bias, preconceptions and behavior operate to discriminate against the children from the Dalit groups.

In the urban context, most of the Dalit children and those from other deprived groups are found in impoverished schools (government and even private) located in slums and resettlement colonies. Research reveals the prevalence of caste prejudices in cities as well. The PROBE report (1999) highlighted the continuing caste discrimination by teachers in the mega city like Delhi, where the 'teachers go as far as to criticize the accessibility of government schools to Dalit children and question the use of teaching them' (ibid: 51). Similarly Jha and Jhingran (2001) also reported assumptions of teachers about the ability and intelligence of the children attending such schools in urban areas they studied. As they report they are seen as 'not being intelligent enough to learn and that it is useless to spend time in educating them' (Jha and Jhingran,

2002: 211). While this aspect of how caste mediates the relations of the Dalit child with teachers and peers in the urban setting remains under-researched, observations like these clearly suggest the possibility of such mediation though subtly.

So the foregoing discussion clearly shows how the stigmatized identity of the Dalit children intervenes to determine the quality of their educational experiences in a detrimental way. There are factors that operate both outside and within the educational institutions that determine the educational levels and impact the educational experiences of Dalit vis-à-vis the non-Dalit groups.

Along with the inter-caste disparities (Dalit vis-à-vis non-Dalit) in education, there also exist educational disparities between Dalit boys and girls, wherein it is the latter who face a greater educational disadvantage. Apart from the factors that otherwise hinder the access, retention and completion of the schooling (and further education) of the Dalit children discussed above like poor supply of educational facilities by the State, poor quality infrastructure and instruction in schools, poor socio-economic status of the family etc., it is their gender (and the intersection of caste and gender) that makes them doubly disadvantaged. The patriarchal ideology that prioritizes marriage and domesticity for women over education still remains a significant hindrance in the education of girls (Karlekar, 2000) and may come to influence the parental decision to educate them in a detrimental way. Further labour requirements of domestic and public economies also come to shape their educational aspirations and careers (National Focus Group, 2006). Dalit women, as studies highlight are concentrated in the traditional, domestic, informal, low skilled, low status or caste related services in the economy. Such structure of employment opportunities may have a determining influence on the educational levels of the Dalit girls.

Further the educational experiences of the Dalit girls may not only be marred by caste - based discrimination and exclusion, but gender- based discrimination as well, thereby exposing them to a double discrimination. So it is both an interaction of caste and gender that determines the levels and experiences of education for the Dalit girls (Paik, 2009). So, on the whole, ‘multiple macro and micro factors viz. the dominant realities of material poverty, familial ideologies, cultures of femininity and female behaviour and the caste - gendered nature of labour market continue to set limits on Dalit girls’ education levels (Velaskar, 2005 cited in National Focus Group, 2006: 6).

Intra-Dalit disparities in education also need attention. Not only the Dalits differ in social and economic status but there also exist disparities within the Dalits as far as their access to and utilization of educational opportunities is concerned. And it is in this context that the discussion of the education of children of 'the Dalits within the Dalits' (Shah, 2002) that is the Valmikis, needs to be situated.

As it is observed, 'castes such as the Chamars/Jatavs (in Uttar Pradesh), Mahars (in Maharashtra), and Malas (in Andhra Pradesh) are among those Dalits that have been able to improve their educational status and economic situations to a far greater extent than the Balmikis/Bhangis, Mangs or Madigas in these states' (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002: 83). Some scholars are of the view that disparities among the Scheduled Castes in literacy, educational development , economic and social position existed before they were grouped together to form Scheduled Castes in 1935 and that these disparities prevail in the same form with the only difference that they have widened today (Chatterjee, 2000). This is to suggest that castes that held a higher socio-economic status due to their 'relatively favourable structural location'(Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002) were able to avail of the educational opportunities opened to them at that time as compared to others and further registered a better progress over time (Chatterjee, 2000). Today there are sharp intra- caste disparities among the Dalits, with some castes like Balmikis/Bhangis, Mangs or Madigas remaining educationally more deprived than the others in the regions where they reside. Further studies on the different scavenging castes in different regions also reveal low literacy rates among them. For instance Sachidananda (2001) in his study of 2500 households of the traditional scavenging castes in Bihar reveals how most of the scavengers studied were non-literate and were largely educationally backward. Sharma (1995) and Karlekar (1982) in their study of Bhangis and Balmikis in Delhi also bring out a similar finding.This educational disadvantage seems to have passed from generations to the children in the school going age at present, resulting in poor schooling levels among the latter.

Also studies reveal gender disparity in education, where the literacy levels and educational levels of the girls and women are found to be lower than that of boys and men and that school education for girls has been reported only as a recent phenomenon (Lal, 1984 ; Sharma, 1995). But the issue has not been pursued in detail.

Further, the intra-Dalit hierarchy and the status of the scavenging castes as untouchables has been found to be a significant factor that shapes the educational experiences of children from this community. Studies in the area reveal how these children often face severe discrimination by teachers and that their caste identity as 'untouchable Dalits' and the associated stigma impact their relations not only with children from non – Dalit groups but even those from the Dalit groups. For instance Nambissan (2010) in her study of the schooling experiences of Dalit children in Rajasthan, highlights how the Balmiki children have to bear the heavy burden of caste identity and brunt of discriminatory practices. They not only faced discrimination from the higher caste teachers but they were also tended to be excluded by other Dalit children as well. Thus the intra-Dalit caste hierarchy constrained relations of friendships and interaction with the other non-Dalit and Dalit children more strongly for the Balmikis. So as this study reveals, the intra Dalit hierarchy and the intra-Dalit relations mediated as well as defined the schooling experiences of the Balmiki children.

A study by the Navsarjan Trust (2010) in 11 districts in Gujarat , based on interviews with 1,048 children between the ages of 6 and 17 further unravels how the children of manual scavengers are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in their schools. These children as the study suggests, are forced to perform cleaning and scavenging work, and that it is this discrimination and humiliation that often causes them to drop out of the school altogether. As one narrative goes:

"I collect the excrement lying near the school. The excrement of dogs and cats are collected by Valmiki children and thrown away. There is no toilet in the school so the human excrement lying outside the school compound is cleaned by Valmiki children. Women sit out side the school for defecation in the evening which the teachers of the school ask the Valmiki children to clean." - Amrut Ishwarbhai Patadiya, age 7, Surendranagar District" (Navsarjan,2010: 3).

"In school girls from other caste never touch us. They never use the glass which is used by us. Even they do not sit beside us." - Poojaben Ajitbhai Vaghela, age 10, Bhavnagar District (Navsarjan,2010: 3).

Thus narratives like these and others reflect how the caste and occupational stigma affects the daily experiences and interaction with teachers and other students of the

Valmiki caste students in school. Needless to say such an experience in the school has a detrimental impact on children's completion of education.

Such observations have also been cited in other studies and literature on the subject. Valmiki (2003) in his autobiography 'Jhoothan', cites incidents of exclusion and discrimination within the school space in the hands of teachers and other high caste students. As he recalls 'Although the doors of the government schools had begun to open for untouchables, the mentality of the ordinary people had not changed much. I had to sit away from the others in the class, and even that wasn't enough. I was not allowed to sit on a chair or a bench. I had to sit on the bare floor; I was not allowed even to sit on the mat. Sometimes I would have to sit way behind everybody, right near the door. From there, the letters on the board seemed faded……..The children of the Tyagis would tease me by calling me 'Chuhre ka'. Sometimes they would beat me for no reason……. The boys would beat me in any case, but the teachers also punished me. They tried all sorts of strategies so that I would run away from the school and take up the kind of work for which I was born' (Valmiki, 2003: 3).

Also he cites the incident where he was asked to sweep the floor by the principal, who justified the act by suggesting that it was his caste occupation and hence be done by him (ibid). This again indicates how the schools act as sites of reinforcement of the stigma attached to the group and thus the humiliation.

Another study (Narayanaswamy and Sachithanandam, 2009-2010) on the children of the Arunthathiyar community in Tamilnadu that has traditionally engaged in the tasks like manual scavenging, death messages for upper caste community, dead body burials and the like and is considered to be the lowest in the Dalit hierarchy. As the study reveals, most of these children never go to school or drop out due to caste based discrimination and humiliation they face on a daily basis in the school. These children, as the researchers report 'face rampant discrimination and social exclusionary practices like the two tumbler system, forced to clean toilets in schools, calling them by derogatory names and treating them as untouchables….'(Narayanaswamy and Sachithanandam, 2009-2010: 8). These practices in turn have a constraining impact on the relations with the other students from different caste backgrounds. Further as it is stated, many children who drop out join their parents in cleaning toilets and removing garbage. Thus the study again

reiterates how their caste identity shaped their educational experiences in a detrimental way.

Along with discrimination in schools, other factors like poor availability and quality of schooling, irrelevant curriculum, and poor economic condition of the parents etc discussed above also hinder the successful completion of education for the Valmiki children.

But it is important to note that though the educational levels of the Valmiki children remain poor studies reveal that like many other Dalit parents, the Valmiki parents also value education for its potential to open up possibility for occupational mobility. For instance Sharma in her study on the Bhangi caste in Delhi reveals how the respondents in the young generation in the sample of her study wanted to educate their children in order to facilitate an occupational change for them. Similarly a study by Gayathridevi (2011) among the Safai Karamcharies in Karnataka also suggests that most parents wanted to educate their children and prevent the child from taking up or continuing the caste-based occupation (Gayathridevi, 2011). At the same time parents and children also reported experiences of discrimination in schools and outside by teachers and upper caste children. Yet there was still a desire in the parents to educate their children to secure occupational mobility. Other studies (Sachidananda, 2001; Thekaekara, 2005) on the manual scavengers also make a mention of the parental interest in their children's education with a stress on the significance of education for occupational mobility.

Education as such studies reflect is positively valued for its potential to break the caste -occupation link and the stigma attached to it. Thus contrary to the assumption that the Dalits are disinterested in seeking education, such research underscores the fact that there is a considerable desire among most Dalit and Valmiki parents to secure education for their children. However it is only a few studies like those discussed that focus on the education of the Dalit sub-castes like the one under discussion. But even these studies remain limited in their focus with most of them conducted in the rural context. It is also important to look at the extent to which the urban context provides opportunities for education, the access to these facilities and children's experiences within them. How caste mediates the school experiences of Balmiki children in the urban context is yet to be seen. Recognizing the need for such

research, the present study explores some of these dimensions in the mega city of Delhi.

3.1 The Valmiki community and the Balmiki caste in Delhi

The Valmiki community in Delhi comprises the sub-castes of Bhangi and the Balmiki (Census, 2001) and is mostly concentrated in the Valmiki/Balmiki basti/colonies in different locations in the city. The Valmikis engage in two kinds of sweeping work - Private and Public (Sharma, 1995: 62). Private sweeping pertains to private dwellings while public sweeping entails sweeping and cleaning of streets, roads, public latrines, garbage depots and dumping grounds. The latter mainly comes under the auspices of the Municipal Corporation and New Delhi Municipal Corporation. They work under different categories such as Road sweepers, Latrine sweepers, Drain Sweepers, Lorry Sweepers and sweepers of the Sewer gang- which is under the administration of Water Supply and Sewage Disposal undertaking (Sharma, 1995). Further there are also those who work as sweepers in various government departments, for instance the Indian railways, the nationalized banks and large private industrial enterprise (ibid).

Many Valmikis also engage in manual scavenging. There are still dry latrines in Delhi and it is estimated there are around 17420 manual scavengers in Delhi (Singh and Ziyauddin, 2009). Most of the manual scavengers are women. Though, the government denies the existence of dry latrines and thus manual scavenging in Delhi (India sanitation Portal, 2012) statistics reveal a different picture.

While most of the Valmikis have since generations engaged in sweeping and scavenging it has been reported that there is resentment by the younger generation against their engagement in this work. Sharma (1995) in her study of the 'Bhangi community'(as she calls it) in Delhi observes that , while a majority of the sample studied (300 families) were still in the caste based occupation, many in the younger generation were resentful of the association of their caste with the occupation of sweeping and scavenging. A few took up other occupations and worked as manual labourers, shopkeepers, bhistis, skilled manual workers and musician (Sharma, 1995). Moreover they were 'determined that their children will be educated and shall not be sweepers and scavengers' (Sharma, 1995: 104). Thus there was faith in education as a means of economic and social mobility. While such a faith in the potential of

education to transform their lives may be expected, the extent to which it has been possible needs to be probed.

Of the total 36 castes that comprise the Scheduled Castes in Delhi , the Balmiki caste is the second largest with a population of 500,221 persons. Most of the Balmiki caste members are found in North-West district of the National Capital Territory (NCT) (Census, 2001). The Census (2001) data also shows that of the numerically largest Scheduled castes in the city, the Balmiki caste has the lowest percentage of school going children in the age group 5-14 years (73.0%) as compared to the other major Scheduled Caste groups like the Balai (80.1%), Khatik (78%), Chamar (77.3%) and Dhobi (76.1%). At the same time it also has the lowest proportion of matriculates (15.1%).

The chapters that follow present the study and discuss its findings.

Chapter 4: THE BALMIKIS: MAPPING THE CONTEXT

The present study was conducted in one of the blocks in the Trilokpuri area located in East Delhi where there is a concentration of the Balmiki families. This block came into existence in the year 1996, when the Balmiki families residing in the 'Balmiki basti' (jhuggis) once located on Mandir Marg and Panchkuiyan Road, New Delhi were relocated in the areas of Pappankala and Trilokpuri. The families were allotted residential plots of sizes 22 and 12 yards (approx.) in these areas respectively.

The block is further divided into two blocks 'A and B' with 124 and 103 households in each respectively[2]. It was the latter in which 50 households were surveyed and then 18 children in class VI-XII and their parents were interviewed. Similar to the observations made in studies of different Valmiki settlements, sanitation in the sub-block was in a poor state. Open and unkempt drains run across the '*galis*' constituting the block, making the living conditions unhygienic. The poor drainage system was a source of concern and discomfort for the residents. The situation worsened all the more during rains, when the drains overflowed. Even though the maintenance of the drains was a responsibility of the Municipal Corporation, these were cleaned irregularly. As a result not only did the lanes stink, but the filthy drains became the breeding ground for mosquitoes and flies, posing a threat of diseases to the residents. Other basic amenities were also poor. The residents stated that while the supply of electricity was regular during winters, long power cuts marked the summers. The water supply was also irregular and limited to a few hours in a day.

The households comprised of 251 members in all, with 135 males and 123 females. The overall literacy rate (5+) was 77.9%. The literacy among males was considerably higher (85%) than the females (71%). These rates, though higher than the overall literacy rates for Dalit males (82.14%) and females (65.46%) in India, are relatively below the overall literacy rates for males (91.03%) and females (80.93%) in Delhi (Census, 2011).

The educational attainment for the adults (18 years and above) is given in Table 4.1. As evident the educational levels were poor for most of them. Of all the literates, only a miniscule could complete schooling (8) and a majority of those with some schooling

[2] **See site map in Annexure A**

dropped out at varying levels from the primary grades onwards. Further gender disparity was also observable at each level of completed (highest) education. Though, the number of males and females who could study up till the secondary grade (IX) did not vary largely, gender disparity post this level became sharper.

Table 4.1: Highest level of education attained by adult members (18+) across the surveyed households

Education (Completed)	Males	Females	Total
Primary	8	4	12
Completed Primary	10	9	19
Middle	10	6	16
Completed Middle	11	9	20
Secondary	5	3	8
Completed Secondary	12	3	15
Senior Secondary	2	0	2
Completed Senior Secondary	4	2	6
Graduation and above	2	0	2
Non-literate	18	34	52
Total	82	70	152

Source: Household Survey, 2011-12

What reasons explain the poor educational levels for these adults? In depth interactions with the 18 parents provided some idea about some of these reasons.

Of the selected 18 parents (Table 4.2), while 1 mother had completed schooling, 7 (3 fathers and 4 mothers) were non-literates and the remaining 10 (6 fathers and 4 mothers) were drop-outs. Most of the latter were educated up till the middle level of schooling, though 2 fathers were also able to move beyond this level. Similar was the case with the non-selected parents, with all except for one father (with a diploma) being drop-outs and non-literate.

Table 4.2: Highest level of completed education attained by the selected parents

Schooling levels	Fathers	Mothers	Total
Primary	1	-	1
Completed Primary	1	2	3
Below Middle	1	2	3
Completed Middle	1	-	1
Below Secondary	1	-	1
Completed Secondary	1	-	1
Senior Secondary			
Completed Senior Secondary	-	1	1
Graduation and above	-	-	-
Non-Literate	3	4	7
Total	9	9	18

One of the reasons, stated by many parents (15/18) for their present education was the poor economic condition of the family. Such a financial condition led some to work from an early age and not attend school and others to leave studies in the search of work. Their education thus came to be compromised due to the need for additional income through their employment.

Poor academic support at home was another factor that was stated by 7/18 drop-out parents in explaining their educational status. As their parents were poorly educated, they did not receive adequate academic support from them. This was stated to have lead to their disinterest in studies and repeated failure, which ultimately led them to leave school. Thus educational deprivation of their parents became detrimental for their further movement in the educational ladder.

Another reason given by a few (7) mothers was 'their need at home to look after the siblings due to the working status of their parents' and 'the absence of any alternative child care facilities'. These cases reflect how gender may come to mediate the schooling of the girl child. As it is evident, the gendered division of labour at home

that largely assigns tasks like childcare and other chores to girls than boys may act to the detriment of girls' schooling. Another way in which gender norms, particularly patriarchy may come to define a girl's/woman's educational career is through marriage. This was highlighted through the case of the mother who completed schooling. Despite the fact that she wanted to study ahead and aspired to become a teacher, marriage restricted her education. Further even after marriage her husband did not support her education and she had to compromise with the situation.

What emerges clearly from the above discussion is that for these parents and possibly for other Balmikis as well, the poor educational history of the preceding generation(s), lack of adequate socio-economic resources and gender norms (in case of women) became the major factors that constrained their educational mobility.

The present occupations of males and females (18 years and above) are given in Table 4.3. As observable, while a majority of the males were working (96.3%), more than half of the females (62.8%) were not working outside homes. Further, of those working, most of the males (67%) and females (88.4%) were engaged in unskilled manual work, with a large percentage of them employed as sweepers in the Municipality, other Government/Private offices, housing societies and as domestic workers engaged in sweeping and cleaning of toilets (90% males and 86% females). Of the remaining males and females, while 3 females worked as domestic workers, with their work also entailing washing of utensils and clothes, 3 males worked as labourers and the other 2 as guards.

19% of the males and 13% of females engaged in skilled manual work. The remaining males engaged in other works like the lower technical, office and white collar work.

Table 4.3: Present occupations of the adult members (18 +) across the surveyed

Occupation	Males	Females	Total
A.Non-Working	**3**	**44**	**47**
B. Working	**79**	**26**	**105**
B.1 Unskilled manual work	**53**	**23**	**76**
• Sweeper(Municipality/Government offices/Private)	48	16	
• Domestic Worker	-	-	
Only sweeping	-	4	
Sweeping and washing utensils	-	3	
• Labourer	3	-	
• Guard	2	-	
B.2 Skilled manual work	**15**	**3**	**18**
• Cook	2	3	
• Driver	3	-	
• Electrician	1	-	
• Plumber	4	-	
• Mechanic	2	-	
• Factory Worker	3	-	
B.3 Lower technical work	**2**	**-**	**2**
• Fitness Trainer	2	-	
B.4 Lower office staff	**7**	**-**	**7**
• Peon	6	-	
• Conductor	1	-	
B.4 Lower white collar	**1**	**-**	**1**
• Clerk	1	-	
B.5 Upper white collar	**1**	**-**	**1**
• Manager	1	-	
Total	**82**	**70**	**152**

Source: Household Survey, 2011-12

The present occupations of the selected parents are provided in Table 4.4. Sweeping/ Cleaning was the work that more than half (12) of the selected working parents engaged into. Of these 5 (4 fathers and 1 mother) were employed as Safai Karamcharis in the Municipality and 3 (2 fathers and 1 mother) were in other government units, with the fathers working in hospitals and the mother in a government office. The remaining 2 parents (mothers) engaged in this work in private avenues, with one working as a sweeper in a private office and the other in housing society. Two mothers worked as domestic workers and performed the work of sweeping and cleaning of toilets in homes.

Of the remaining parents, 3 mothers did not work outside home, 1 father worked as a guard and the remaining 2 were in skilled manual work. Of these 1 was a plumber and the other mechanic.

Table 4.4: Present Occupations of the selected parents

Occupation	Males	Females	Total
A. Non-Working	-	**3**	**3**
B. Working	**9**	**6**	**15**
B.1 Unskilled manual work	**7**	**6**	**13**
• Sweeper (Municipality/ Private Government offices/)	6	4	
• Domestic Worker (Sweeping and Cleaning of toilets)	-	-	
	-	2	
	-	-	
• Guard	1	-	
B.2 Skilled manual work	**2**	-	**2**
• Plumber	1	-	
• Mechanic	1	-	
Total	**9**	**9**	**18**

Source: Household Survey, 2011-12

The prevailing patterns of work (with respect to all the households and the sample parents) reflect the larger patterns of continuity and change in the occupational life of the Valmiki community in the urban context. Such continuity and change as the review of research suggests, is represented by two trends. First is the performance of the sweeping work by the Valmikis even now in different government/private avenues in the city. The second pertains to an occupational shift for some given the availability of diverse work opportunities in the city which has lead to some weakening of caste-occupation link for them. Both these trends are visible among the families surveyed, however the latter remains weaker for most households.

The continued engagement of a majority of working males and females in sweeping work makes explicit the aspect of continuity in their traditional work and the reinforcement of the caste-occupation link for these Balmikis in Delhi. At the same

time, their taking up of non-traditional jobs also represents a rupture of this link and continuity for some. Though, most of them performed other manual work like that of labourers, guards, cooks etc and only a few engaged in non-manual work, with only a miniscule in white collar occupations, such an occupational shift away from the low status sweeping work indicates some upward mobility for them (Karlekar, 1982; Sharma, 1995). Further as evident, such mobility is lower for Valmiki women in the surveyed households. Continuity in caste-occupation link is hence far stronger for them. This has been observed in the existing studies as well (Karlekar, 1982; Sharma, 1995; Mishra, 2000; Ramaswamy, 2008). Thus the present patterns of work across the households seem to confirm that while on the one hand occupational engagement of the community in the urban context is undergoing change to some extent, their association with the traditional work continues to be strong on the other.

This dimension of continuity and change in the work of the Valmikis and its implications for their social life and inter-personal relations with other castes in the urban context was dwelt upon in detail during the interactions with the selected parents. Given that a majority of them were formerly migrants and only first/second generation residents in Delhi, their narratives provided some insights about the life of the Valmikis in villages and cities at present and the changes across time and the rural-urban context. The aspect of occupational continuity across generations for Balmiki families in the traditional work and the rupture in this continuity was well highlighted by most parents. Tracing the occupational patterns for the earlier generations to the present times, they stated that while still many Balmikis perform scavenging and sweeping, over the past generation they have not only entered other manual work, but those with relatively higher levels of education have also taken up white collar employment. This in their view was the most crucial outcome of education.

They highlighted that Balmikis in their grandparents' and many in the parental generation were engaged largely in the task of scavenging and sweeping in villages. But as the time passed by, many Balmikis and members of other scavenging castes migrated from villages and took up the work of 'Safai Karamcharis' in the Municipal Corporation. This was followed by the next generation(s) as well. Further with the expansion of cities, Balmikis also entered sweeping work in other government units, departments, private offices, hospitals etc. Thus migration from the rural to urban

setting brought for these Balmikis an opportunity to shift away from the highly demeaning work of scavenging to sweeping, which was still lesser degrading than the former (Karlekar, 1982; Gayathridevi, 2011). However what remained unchanged was the caste-occupation link for the community. The most crucial reason for this, identified by the parents was that both in past and even at present, other castes were (and are still) reluctant in performing this work. As a result these jobs became 'readily available' to the Balmikis and other scavenging castes and still continue to be so to a large extent. Parents said that their poor educational levels, the easier availability of this work coupled with the financial crises at home led them to take up sweeping jobs and continue in it. For those engaged in the government sector, it was also the security and benefits of the job that was another reason for their continuity in the work. Rather this was also highlighted to have been one of the major factors for the entry of the non-Balmikis in this work, but again it was 'only very few of the other castes who were doing so' as all parents informed.

The reluctance in other castes to take up this work emerged out of the stigma associated with sweeping work, which was seen as the major reason for the low and disrespectful status of the Valmiki community by the parents. This low status of work led those engaged in sweeping to confess their discontentment with it and stressed that they pursued it out of the force of the circumstances (*majboori),* despite being dissatisfied with it.

The main reason why the other Balmiki parents (3) did not enter sweeping jobs was again the stigma and the low status attached to this work. All the parents, irrespective of their occupational engagement underscored that because sweeping entails dealing with that which is 'dirty' (*ganda/gandh*), not only the work but even the one who does it, is considered as 'dirty and polluting' by others, which leads to developing a strong dislike (*ghinn*) in them against the Valmikis engaged in it. This 'low status of the work' and 'the dislike by the others' was highlighted as the most obvious reasons for the discriminatory treatment they received by others. However at the same time parents also recognised that the intensity and the severity of the discriminatory treatment experienced by the Valmikis differed in rural and urban contexts both in the past and the present times.

Almost all the parents were of the view that in their grandparents' generation that lived in villages, the work of scavenging was more or less forced on them under the strict requirements of the caste system and untouchability was rampant against the Balmikis and other scavenging castes. This was even stated to be the case by some for their parents' generation. Many informed that sweepers and scavengers at that time were not paid in cash but in kind for their work, which mainly entailed stale chapattis and churned milk (lassi/maththa) and that too which was 'thrown in their utensils from a distance by the other castes' which according to them 'symbolizes their disrespectful and low and polluted status'. The nature of work and such mode of compensation were stated by many parents to have laid the basis of the poor economic and social status of the community. As one mother stated:

'*In villages we were employed to clean the latrines, clear the garbage etc. We were not paid but were given maththa and stale bread. We were not respected there at all. Roti was thrown in the plates……..As we got no money in return, we had to live under extreme poverty'* (Mother, V, Non-working)

Pointing to the prevalence of such practice even today in some villages another informed:

'*In villages of Aligarh, Balmikis are not respected at all. I have myself experienced it Balmikis there are mainly sweepers. Till date they don't give money for our work but they give food especially rotis to us. Rotis are thrown in our utensils. They do not allow us to enter their house let alone making us sit with them'* (*Mother*, VII, Sweeper, Private office)

Some parents also shared specific instances where discriminatory treatment was meted out to their parents. While many of them recollected what they heard from their parents, some spoke on the basis of their own experiences. Some of these memoirs are provided below:

'In villages my parents and other Balmikis were in jobs of sweeping (Mohalla Uthana). They also used to clean cowsheds, pick cattle dung etc. The upper caste maintained a distance from us. They even took care that our washed sun-dried clothes hanging on the wires don't touch them. The Banias & Brahmans maintained distance the most' (Mother, VI, Domestic Servant)

'In our parents and grandfather's time the Balmikis in our villages, largely did sweeping and cleaning tasks- cleaning of maila (night soil), cleaning of cattle dung from sheds, throwing away of ash dust (obtained in the chuhlah)and cleaning of garbage from roads, grounds etc. I heard from my parents that we had segregated houses in the village and separate source of water. The other caste hated us so much that it would be a sin if we walked across them' (Father, Non-Literate, Sweeper, Government Hospital)

'We could not even sit in front of the upper castes and were called as chuda- whose meaning is derogatory. We could not even appear in front if the Brahmin was there. Such has been the life in villages……..' (Father, Non-Literate, Sweeper, MCD)

So as it emerges caste discrimination and untouchability was rampant in a generation or two earlier when the parents and grandparents largely worked as scavengers and sweepers in their villages. As far as the present life of the scavenging castes in villages is concerned, parents expressed mixed views pertaining to the nature of treatment meted out to them. They were of the view that while in some areas the work of sweeping and scavenging is still forced on these castes and they experience discriminatory treatment, in many other areas the improvement in the sanitation facilities like the availability of flush toilets (private/community) has made the cleaning work less filthy. They also shared that in many villages there are opportunities for the present generation of the Balmikis and other scavenging castes to engage into other non-sweeping work like labouring and farming and felt that it was due to this movement away from their caste based occupation that there has been some improvement in the inter-caste relations. The most significant of these improvements was a reduction in the incidence of the practice of untouchability as stressed by these parents. However none of them said that there has been a complete change in the attitudes of the other castes towards them. This was reflected through the personal experience shared by six parents. Some of the narratives are given below:

'*In my in-laws village in a district in UP we are not respected at all. I go there atleast 4 times a month. The upper castes do not allow us to even come near themselves. They do not take our names and refer to us as 'Aeri, Aeri' ('Hey you' disrespectfully). They call us saying 'Hey you come here, take this food' (Arri idhar aa ye khanale ja) to give us stale food or used food which is of no use to them. They*

ask us to stand at, a distance from them and say ' Hey you stand there' (Aeri vahin khadi rahiyo)' (Mother, VII, Sweeper, Private office)

'*In the year 2000, I went to a village in Mathura to attend some marriage. I went to a local tea shop. First he gave me tea in a glass. When I was paying him money, he asked my caste. When he heard that I am a Balmiki he took the glass and poured tea in a 'kulladh' (cup made of clay). I got so angry that I broke the kulladh in front of him. This is the kind of treatment that happened at that time……..After that I never went to that place'* (Father,Non-Literate, Sweeper, MCD)

These instances very well reveal how caste still continues to pervade the social life in many rural areas where it is the caste status of the Balmikis (and the other scavenging castes) that informs the attitude and treatment of the other castes towards them. At the same time the resentment in the former against any such discrimination is also noticeable. However, all the parents shared the view that in comparison to the villages there has been a greater weakening of the caste occupation link in the cities, with relatively more number of Valmikis engaged in occupations other than sweeping. They believed that unlike in many rural areas, in urban areas especially in mega-cities like Delhi no caste is any longer forced to perform the traditionally associated work and this has been true for the Balmiki caste as well. Balmikis who have moved away from sweeping in cities, as they informed, are largely engaged in different manual occupations like that of plumbers, electricians, labourers, lower office staff work like that of peons and attendants, technical work etc[3]. But at the same time, as mentioned earlier they also highlighted the presence of those Balmikis who have entered white collar work by seeking formal education (schooling and above). Such a movement away from sweeping was perceived by them as representing a shift away from the work 'least respected' in the society to that which is 'respectable' and marking occupational and social mobility for them. However in suggesting this, parents differentiated between the 'degrees of respect' attached to white collar employment and other employment engaged into by those poorly educated (non-literate and drop-outs). They were of the view that the former was 'most respected' in the society, the others, though lesser respected than it, were more respectable than the sweeping work.

[2] These occupational categories correspond to those used for categorizing the occupations for the members of the surveyed households.

It was the enhancement in 'respect', which formed the larger discourse in which parental discussions of occupational mobility and education came to be situated. Such a reference to the dimension of respect can be traced to the social history of the caste group. Given the fact that the long term engagement of the Balmikis in sweeping has kept them deprived of a respectable status, any change in work was seen as enhancing the same. It is in this regard that the parents recognised the significance of education as a potential pathway for the Balmikis to enter the most 'respectable occupations'.

Such a change in work for the Balmikis both in terms of their entry into other manual occupations and the white collar employment was seen as one of the central factors determining the nature of their inter-personal relations with those from the other castes in cities.

Parents who pursued sweeping stated that while they did not face blatant discrimination at work or otherwise, other castes still have a 'dislike for them in their hearts' (*mann mein ghinn karna/mann mein vichaar karna*) due to the low status of their work which was expressed in rather subtle ways. As the respondents stated:

'……..Here there are many people who may not be bad to you on the face or behave with you badly as it happens in the village but the dislike for those of us in sweeping is still in their hearts that prevents them from intermingling with us ' (Father, V, Safai Karamchari, NDMC)

'……Though discrimination has reduced these days, but people still have the considerations of high and low caste in their minds and they behave accordingly. Because we do this (low) work we are treated accordingly' (Mother, Non-Literate, Sweeper, Housing Society)

Thus it was the nature of the work that was seen as a crucial mediating factor in the inter-caste relationships for Balmikis like them engaged in sweeping work in the city. Some parents also cited specific instances where consideration of their low caste status (work status) constrained their social intercourse with other castes and make them maintain a distance from them (selves). The following testimonies require some consideration here:

'*I have been collecting garbage from the housing society for the past 10 years or so. But till now I have never been called in any house even once or have been asked for*

water and tea. I am asked to wait outside for the dustbin to be brought or the dustbins are already kept at the doors……..If there was nothing in their hearts they would have at least offered me some tea or even water from their side. You see these people dislike us and do not want us to enter their homes. Even though they never have said anything wrong to me and also give me food and money on festivals, but they still have reservations about my entry in their homes as I am dirty!!' (Mother, Non-Literate, Sweeper, Housing societies)

'*Though I sweep in on the road, but I have to report my attendance to the office. I go there daily and greet the senior officers and others who are in the same class jobs. But it has never happened that I had tea with them or have eaten something with them. Though they are nice to me and greet me, but how will they eat or drink with a sweeper*!' (Father, Non-Literate Sweeper, NDMC)

The above responses reflect how the employers in these cases implicitly maintained distance- both physical and social from these parents even though none were reported to have made unfavourable comments or discriminated against them in any explicit ways. But it is crucial to note that such a distancing was seen to be resulting from 'not their being Balmikis by caste', but the 'work they engaged into'.

Two parents (mothers) who worked as domestic servants reported that when their employer came to know about their caste background they were employed for work that was limited to that of sweeping the floors and cleaning of toilets. They were not involved in other chores pertaining to the kitchen or other spheres. Considerations of caste background thus gained significance for them. As reflected, the caste-occupation link was reinforced for these Balmikis where their work was restricted to what the caste has traditionally been associated with. Thus it was the caste identity of these women that came to define the work they were engaged into. Both also reported that there were separate utensils for them in which they were served tea and food. They stressed on how there were reservations about eating with the Balmikis like them who engaged in the sweeping work within the privacy of homes as well.

Those in the non-sweeping work clearly stressed how it was a shift away from the traditional work that has so far prevented them from experiencing any caste based exclusion and any form of discrimination. Interestingly all the respondents stated to have revealed their caste at the place of work and as they informed, their caste

background so far had never intervened in their relations and inter-personal interaction with the colleagues. They remarked that they shared each other's food at work and paid visits to each other's homes. Such intermingling of those from different castes with the Balmikis appears as a contrast to the experience of other parents .It was thus mainly their non-engagement in sweeping that was stated to be the main reason for such patterns of interaction between the Balmiki and the non-Balmiki castes. As one father stated:

'*There are guards from all castes at our workplace and they know that I am a Balmiki. But they meet with me and eat with me. Even the Yadavs eat with us……..If I would have been in sweeping work this would not have been possible. It is because I am not in that dirty job, that my colleagues want to mingle with me as well'* (Father, X, Security Guard)

So as it emerges, while many parents recognised the aspect of change in the relations between the Balmikis and other castes in the cities, it was largely perceived to be limited to the lives of those engaged in the non-sweeping work.

The discussion so far reflects the patterns of continuity and change in the occupational and social life of the Balmiki community as identified by parents. While the engagement of the community into sweeping work reminds us how the caste-occupation link still marks the lives of many Valmikis in the rural and urban context, at the same time the narratives of the parents also reveal the blurring of the same for some especially in the urban context. Of the stated reasons marking the beginning of such a change, what becomes important for the subject of the study is the parental recognition of the role of education in this process. Given their belief that the caste-occupation link is no longer forced in cities, they recognised the potential of education in enabling the much desired mobility of their children and the community in the most respected work. It is in this context that the importance of education was further reflected upon by them.

4.1 Importance of Education: Parental Perspectives

Interactions with parents revealed different reasons along with its perceived role in facilitating occupational mobility (Table 4.5), due to which they considered education to be important for their children.

Table 4.5: Importance of education in Parents' view

Reasons stated	Number of parents n=18
Potential to open up opportunities for 'respectable' salaried employment	15
Making the child knowledgeable	9
Making the child learn to talk politely and develop a mannered conduct	4
Developing proficiency in English language	9
Brings respect to the family in the 'Balmiki samaaj'	11
Creates possibility of seeking good match	10

Source: Parents' interview, 2011-2012

A majority of parents (15/18) underscored the value of education for their children in terms of its potential to open up opportunities for salaried employment (naukari). Formal education (schooling and higher levels) was seen by parents as *creating possibilities for* entering not *just any* salaried job, but 'white collar (non-manual)' salaried employment. This employment was seen to have two attributes- 'being respectable in the society *(izzatdar naukari)'* as well as 'being well paid *(achcha paisa dene waali naukari, zyaada kamai vaali naukari)'*. Many parents referred to it as a 'good job' *(achchee naukari).* As some parents stated:

'*Education helps you do a 'good job'. You sit and work and paid well. It is also respected in the society……...This is what the poorly educated don't get'* (Mother, V, Sweeper, MCD)

'*If a person is educated he will work in an office at a good position, he will be respected and be called sir (sahab) and people will give regard to them…….…… Also he will be paid much more'* (Father, VIII, Plumber)

Education was thereby seen to be leading to jobs requiring one to 'sit and work', endowing him/her with 'respect and regard' and also being well paid. These attributes were perceived by parents to be lacking in particular in the case of sweeping and

present to a lesser extent in other occupations pursued by the poorly educated (non-literate and drop-outs).

In order to convince the child of this merit of education, many parents reported often reiterating to them the importance of education and 'salaried employment' in terms of gaining respect and money. At the same time they also reported denigrating their own occupations in front of the child as typical examples of the occupations pursued by the poorly educated. The views of the parents are reflected in the following responses.

'*I tell her that if you study you will make your life…….. You will have a life of luxury, money and respect which you will get through good job unlike us ……..……..I also tell her that if we were educated enough to do a good job we would have been able to give them (all children) a good life. I keep motivating her this way'* (Mother, V, Non-Working)

'I often remind him that *without education he will stand nowhere and ultimately he will have to enter jobs (low paying and least respected) like us'* (Father, Non-Literate, Sweeper, NDMC)

'If she studies she will also get a good job……At least she will not go into work like ours and work on the order of others.' (Father, VIII, Plumber)

'*I tell him that he should study well. If he does so he will be found working in an office on a table, earn well and people will respect him for his job else, he may be found on the road like us'* (Mother,V, Sweeper, MCD)

Parents thus made all possible efforts to communicate the value of education to their children. As we see this was done by parents of all the boys and most girls. Thus employment was seen as important for not only boys, but girls as well. Though marriage, as it will be discussed, became another consideration for which education was seen as important for girls, but employment was spoken about for girls as well. So gender was not mediating the views of many parents about the importance of education for girls as strongly.

The significance of education was also stated by some parents (9), in terms of making their child **'**knowledgeable'. Education, as it emerged, was seen to be making an individual aware about different aspects of the world and as a tool that introduces him/her to 'new things' (Kumar, 2006). As one parent states:

'*Education helps you to know so many things about this world (duniya)…….. Teachers teach different subjects at school and so the child comes to know about so many things. My child knows much more than us '* (Mother, V, MCD)

Parents saw themselves as being less knowledgeable. Rather the child who was in the school was seen more knowledgeable. By drawing such comparisons parents highlighted how education makes the child 'better' than them in this respect. One father even conveyed this by stating how his daughter (studying in class VII in a private school) 'enriches' his repertoire of knowledge by often sharing with him what she studies at school. As he states:

'*If the child goes to school he will learn a number of things and gain knowledge about the world. This also enhances our knowledge of the parents when the child comes and shares with us. You know I have gained knowledge about different things through her sharing of what she learns in different subjects like science, geography, political science etc. I have learnt many new things from her…'* (Father, IX, Sweeper, NDMC)

A majority of parents (7/9) stated the usefulness of this knowledge in terms of making their children 'capable of providing academic assistance to their own children in future'. All the parents made a reference to their own situation and even expressed their guilt for not having been educated enough to provide satisfactory support to their children in studies. Many parents reported to have never assisted their child because of being non-literate. There was widespread dissatisfaction with the nature and the extent of the academic assistance they provided to their children. As they stated:

'*If she is educated she will also be able to help her children in studies. At she won't be like me* (Mother, Non-literate, Sweeper, Government Office)

If he is educated then he will also be able to teach his children in future……. So if we our future generation has to be well educated it is important that he studies well. (Father, Non-literate, Sweeper, Government Hospital)

'*Also if she is educated then she will be able to teach her children as it is important for parents to be educated and knowledgeable if they want their children to be good at studies. It was also because of lack of my guidance and help in studies that my children have not been able to do that well in studies.'* (Father, IV, Sweeper, Government Hospital)

Some parents (5/9) valued this knowledge for its intrinsic worth. For these parents the study of different subjects enriched the child's repertoire of knowledge which was important in itself.

Education was also seen as significant by some (4) parents as a means to develop 'socially appropriate' patterns of speech and behaviour in an individual (child). As it emerged, education was considered to be 'instilling good manners' as well as a 'polite' and 'respectful conduct' in a person. Rather such a demeanour was considered to be one of the most important markers of an 'educated' individual, which was in turn seen to be missing in poorly educated. The following responses very clearly reflect this.

'…….There's a lot of difference between an educated and a poorly educated. The former will have a good job, good salary and will have a lot of respect in the society. He will also speak politely and behave respectfully with others' (Mother, XII, Non-Working)

'……Unlike the lesser educated, one learns to speak politely with others than using abuses. He will also be well behaved' (Father, X, Guard)

'……..…..An educated person will do a good job, will not speak disrespectfully and will know how to talk nicely (padha likha insaan tu-tu karke baat nahin karega aur bolne ka saleeka hoga)' (Father, VI, Sweeper, NDMC)

As evident, parents perceived education as a means to develop polite and respectful behaviour in an individual which was seen to be lacking or present to a lesser extent in the poorly educated.

The foregoing discussion raises two critical questions. Firstly what minimum level of education was expected to bring about such a demeanour in the educated individual in the view of the parents? Secondly given the poor levels of education of the parents themselves, in presenting a contrast between the educated and the poorly educated in terms of these 'markers' did they not risk denigrating themselves? What could be gauged from the interactions was that it was largely the elementary level of schooling that was expected to bring about such development in the educated. It was these years that were seen as 'crucial and foundational' for the personality development of the child. Hence, it was till this (elementary) level, that schooling was seen to hold critical implications for the cultivation of the 'appropriate demeanour' in him/her. The institution of school was seen as the major agency 'disciplining' the child thereby instilling manners and teaching him/her a respectable code of conduct.

Further in reflecting on the role of the school in this regard, these parents also pointed out the ways through which schooling brought about such a change. To them, it was the schools' 'punishments against the use of abusive language and misconduct' (2/4), 'the moral teachings of the teachers about the importance of respectful conduct' (3/4) and even the 'moral education classes' (2/4 parents of girls studying in private schools) that became the means of developing such socially appropriate conduct in children. Thus elementary schooling was seen to be critical in this regard. What is important to note is that as it was this level of schooling that was regarded as foundational for the development of 'cultivated selves' (Ciotti, 2006) and as these 4 parents were educated beyond this level, they closed any possibility for denigrating the selves.

Many parents (9) specifically pointed to the role of education in the development of competence in English. Such competence/proficiency in the language was regarded as one of the most important requirements to seek salaried employment opened up by education. As the parents believed, along with the educational credentials and the requisite 'subject knowledge', it was the ability to speak, read and write in the language efficiently that was a crucial demand of the present day job market. Formal education was thus seen as a means of introducing the child to the language and making him/her proficient in it. As parents stated:

'*By studying, the child will have knowledge of English which is so important in today's time. Only an educated can have this knowledge and speak it, we can't'* (Mother, V, Non-Working)

*'……..Also through education the child learns to speak with respect, understand English and speak it as well. Otherwise how can he get knowledge about it (language)' (*Father, Non-literate, Mechanic)

So it was through the means of developing such competence in English that formal education was seen as preparing one to enter salaried employment.

Along with valuing education for its potential to facilitate occupational mobility and status enhancement for their children in the society at large, some parents (11) also highlighted its importance for gaining prestige within the Balmiki community (*Balmiki samaaj*) itself. The following responses very well reflect these views:

'*If she studies she will bring respect to the family in our Samaaj. Other Balmiki will say that see what level their child has reached despite such difficult circumstances'* (Mother, Non-literate, Sweeper)

'*He will bring name to us. People will say that despite that he is a Balmiki he has touched the sky. You see Balmikis are not that well educated and are still mostly in sweeping. So if he studies and enters a good job then he will obviously bring us name and fame within the community'* (Father, X, Guard)

'*If he gets well educated he will bring name to his family (agar yeh padh leta hai toh iske peeche jag naam hoga). Other Balmiki families will cite our family and our child's case as example to their children. (baaki Balmiki parivaar hamari aur hamare ladke ki misaal denge)'* (Mother, Non-Literate, Sweeper, Housing Society)

'……..If she does well then she will also get a lot of name to the family in the samaaj. All will say that she is the daughter of so and so and see how well educated she is' (Mother, V, Non-Working)

'*If she becomes an officer (afsar), she will bring name to us. Others will know me as her father. Also in our community children do not study much and if she becomes something it will be all the more a matter of pride and fame for us. People will respect us and see us as their role model* (Father, VI, Sweeper, NDMC)

Such accomplishment on the part of the child was thus expected to bring to the family 'respect in the eyes of the other Balmikis' and 'enhance its social prestige'. Parents here see education as a source of status enhancement for not only the child but the family itself. An important aspect to be noted here is that the enhancement of prestige and status in the Samaaj, was not only spoken about by the parents with respect to the education of their sons but also their daughters. Parents (4) of daughters expressed taking a pride in the fact that their daughters will study and bring names to them. Given that the educational rates of girls have remained poor for the community at large; having a successfully educated and/or employed daughter became all the more a matter of pride for these parents.

Lastly education was also seen as important by parents (10) in terms of its potential to secure an 'educated match' for marriage. This group of respondents comprised of parents of all the girls (10). Such a case clearly reflects as to how marriage of a girl becomes an important reference as far as parental decisions pertaining to their education is concerned. None of these parents desired a groom engaged in the work of sweeping and other manual work for their daughter. Such preference emerge from their dislike for the sweeping work and due to their view about the 'respectful status of the employment opened up by education' than the former. Thus education of daughter was seen as the most important means of securing such a match for her. As some of the parents stated:

'……..…..…..If my daughter is educated, she will get a good job (educated employment) and also a professionally well settled groom' (Father, VIII, Plumber)

'*……..…..…..She will be knowledgeable; in a good (educated employment) employment and will be financially independent. I am hopeful that she will get an educated boy' (*Mother, VI, Domestic Servant)

'*I feel if she studies that much to get even a clerical job we will get good proposals for her. Also if she earns, she will be self dependent and also support her family'* (Father, VI, Sweeper, NDMC)

Given the low levels of education in the community, what makes the parents so optimistic about securing educated grooms for their daughters? Discussions with the parents revealed that they expected that despite the overall educational rates being

low, there were still those who recognised the importance of education and were also educating their children like them. Thus, there was an expectation that the boys will also be educated such that they do not enter their traditional and/or parental occupations. That is, they expected the boys to complete schooling in the years to come and enter non-sweeping jobs. This was anticipated to impact the boy's and the family's expectation as far as the prospective bride's education is concerned, which according to them meant a rise in the demand of educated girls in the marriage market. Thus it was actually their assessment of the prevailing educational and occupational trends among the Balmikis and their anticipation of the future trends and its impact on the marriage market that the optimism about getting an educated match for their daughters developed in parents.

The foregoing discussion highlights the varied reasons for which education came to be valued by parents. As it appears, education was perceived by them to be conferring certain advantages on the 'educated individual (here the child)' making him/her as 'distinct' from the poorly educated. This became clearly evident by the constant comparisons drawn by the parents between the 'educated' and the 'poorly educated', at times including themselves in the latter. It was in the hope of securing these 'advantages', most important of which pertained to entry into 'respectable occupations' that parents were educating their children. Most significantly such hopes with education were fore grounded in their assessment of the possibilities that the urban context provided for occupational mobility through the weakening of the caste-occupation link for the Balmikis and the spread of opportunities for education.

Chapter 5: The Experience of Schooling

The preceding chapter has highlighted the value attached to education by parents. The present chapter focuses on the education of the Balmiki children, maps their participation in schooling and then explores their experiences in school in relation to curriculum transaction. Equally important, it explores whether the child's identity as 'Balmiki' influences their relations with the teachers and with the peers. It draws on the survey conducted in the chosen block as well as in-depth interviews with the sample of children in class VI-XII. It also builds on the discussions made with the teachers (4) pertaining specifically to the aspect of peer relations in the respondents' classrooms.

The surveyed households were comprised of 84 children (46 girls and 38 boys) in the school going age group (5-17 years). As table 5.1 shows, of the 84 children, 72 were presently enrolled in schools and 12 were drop-outs. Their high enrolment rates (85.7%) and low drop-out rate (14.2%) reveal a promising picture pertaining to their education. Though as the Census (2001) suggests school participation of Balmiki children in Delhi is not satisfactory; such enrolment rate for the sample children however suggests a better educational status of these few.

Table 5.1: Last schooling level completed by children (5-17 years)

Education(Completed)	Enrolled, n=72		Drop – out, n=12	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Pre-Primary	5	2	-	-
Primary	14	15	1	2
Completed Primary	7	2	3	2
Middle	7	4	-	2
Completed Middle	4	3	1	1
Secondary	2	4	-	-
Completed Secondary	2	1	-	-
Total	41	31	5	7

Source: Household Survey, 2011-12

Though the number of girls (46) constituting the sample was larger than the boys (38), it is crucial to note that a majority of them were attending schools. What makes the case of these girls impressive is their high school participation rates, given that the gender disparity in schooling for the caste group (and the Dalits in general) has been observed to be high.

The drop-out children comprised more or less equal number of girls and boys, with most children having left school at middle level. One of the reasons for the drop-out was the poor economic condition of the family which led to the withdrawal of 3/7 children from school by parents. However, none of the children were reported to be working anywhere at present. Father's death was another reason stated by 3 children for leaving school. Such unfortunate family circumstances led these children to drop-out and either stay at home or work, as was the case with boys. Repeated educational failure was stated as another reason by 3 children for their drop-out.

The present educational levels of the selected 18 children (10 girls and 8 boys) are given in Table 5.2. Of the 18, 6 children (4 girls and 2 boys) were at the middle level of schooling, 10 (5 girls and 5 boys) were attending the secondary grades and the remaining 2 (1 girl and 1 boy) were at the senior secondary level of schooling. There were a total 11 schools that the respondents attended with 16 (8 boys and 8 girls) studying in 9 government schools and the remaining 2 girls attended private schools. All the government schools were located in Trilokpuri and surrounding areas of Mayur Vihar and Kalyanvaas. While girls attended the schools in the morning shift, boys attended all boys' school in the afternoon shift. The private schools attended by girls were registered and were located in Mayur Vihar.

Table 5.2- Present schooling level of the respondents

Schooling levels	No of students		Total
	Girls	Boys	-
MIDDLE(VI-VIII)	4	2	6
SECONDARY (IX-X)	5	5	10
SENIOR SEC (XI-XII)	1	1	2
TOTAL	10	8	18

Source: Household Survey, 2011-2012

Further each respondent reported the presence of Dalit (Scheduled Caste), other caste, ST (Scheduled Tribes) and OBC (Other Backward Classes) children in their classes. Many of them resided in other blocks of Trilokpuri and the surrounding areas. The number of SC classmates in case of children attending government schools ranged from 10-30 with the number of Balmiki children varying from 4 to 20. The presence of Muslim children was also reported. In case of those attending private schools, the number of the SC children in one class was 8, with 3 of them being Balmikis, in the second, presence of 15 SC classmates was reported, which included 9 Balmiki children. Muslim children were also present in the latter case.

Since the respondents reported on their experiences in their classrooms, their responses help to map the larger picture of these classrooms and to some extent of the schools.

5.1 Teaching and Learning in schools

Respondents were asked about the pedagogy adopted by the teacher and the participation of the Balmiki children (vis-à-vis other children) in the teaching-learning process as well as teacher's response to the academic performance of the students.

5.1.1 Pedagogy and participation

The teaching method that was largely adopted by the subject teachers entailed three stages that were - making any one student or a number of students (one by one) 'read the chapter' (except for Mathematics in all the classrooms and English in some government schools), explaining it (the concepts and the content) and then 'covering' the textbook questions. Respondents reported that none of the teacher used any other teaching-learning aid than the text-book or engaged the students in any activity during the transaction of the content. So teaching in all the classrooms was more or less textbook centric.

While the first stage of making the students 'read the chapter aloud' was common across subjects other than Mathematics, there were some variations in the way subject teachers explained the content. A few teachers provided explanations without involving the students through discussions or questioning, other teachers were reported to ask questions from them. All the respondents reported the presence of both the kind of subject teachers.

Similarly there were variations in the third stage i.e. covering of the exercise questions given in the textbook. Some teachers did not ask for answers from the students but directly wrote them on the board, which then had to be copied by them. But at the same time there were also those who were reported to ask for answers from the students. Again all the respondents stated the presence of both the practices in their classrooms.

The participation of students as mentioned in most subjects was limited and mainly revolved around answering of questions. But what is most significant for the present study is the pattern of students' participation in the classroom. Given the findings of the existing studies about unequal class participation of the Dalit children in classrooms (Nambissan, 2010; Jha and Jhingran, 2002) it is essential to reflect on whether there were any caste specific patterns in the involvement of students by the teacher in the teaching-learning process. Was it the case that any child or group of children (with particular reference to those from Dalit and Balmiki caste background) was involved more by the teacher(s) than the others or was excluded from class participation?

All the respondents reported that teachers asked questions from 'any' student. No caste-based patterns could be gleaned as far as their involvement by teachers is concerned. However in 3 classrooms teachers mostly questioned the 'intelligent' (those who scored high marks). The 'learner categories' will be looked at in detail in the following section on teachers' response to the students' academic performance.

Children also stated that they were free to ask questions from their teachers. These questions mainly took the form of clarification of doubts. Further almost all the children reported that whenever teachers were approached for clarifications, none refused to help or made any unfavorable comments pertaining to their intellectual abilities. This was so for Balmiki children as well. However, not all the respondents asked for clarifications from their teachers. A majority mentioned seeking clarifications from some subject teachers, while the remaining did not ask questions at all. Other classmates and/or their best friends were approached for clarifications when the teacher was not consulted. The reasons for this included their 'shyness and hesitance in asking the teacher', 'the lack of confidence to question them' and even 'taking tuitions', which became one of the major means of clarification of doubts

which in turn made them not to ask anything from the teacher(s)'. But at the same time respondents did mention their other classmates including other Balmiki children as approaching teachers for doubts.

As the foregoing discussion suggests, what was predominant in the classroom was a teacher-textbook centric pedagogy with the teaching-learning being participatory to a limited extent of answering teachers' questions. Further even where opportunities to ask questions were available, the Balmiki respondents did not engage themselves in the classroom through this way. Thus the teaching-learning remained less interactive and more didactic in many cases.

5.1.2 Teachers' response to academic performance

Academic performance was spoken about by the respondents in terms of both percentage/marks secured in tests and exams as well as certain 'learner categories' (Nambissan, 2010) defined with reference to the relative scores of the students. These were the categories of 'intelligent' (hoshiyaar), the high scorers, 'weak' (kamzor), the low/lowest scorers and another 'intermediate category between both' expressed through phrases like 'being okay/average in studies', 'neither good nor bad in studies' etc.

A majority of the respondents (15/18) placed themselves in the intermediate category stating that they were 'neither weak nor intelligent'. Only 3 children (2 boys and 1 girl) categorized themselves as 'intelligent'. None of them placed themselves in the category of 'weak'. Even a majority of the other Dalit children were stated to be 'average', only a few as intelligent and few as weak. Such a distribution of Dalit children in these performance categories is partly linked to the poor educational levels of their parents and the lack of adequate academic support at home which often becomes one of the major barriers in their performing well. Further even the textbook centric and the didactic teaching-learning process and the limited involvement of the Balmiki children also seems to be adding to their poor/average academic performance.

Moreover inadequate academic attention could be another factor explaining the poor academic performance of these children. As one respondent studying in class VII in a government school informed, unequal pedagogic attention to a few Balmiki girls

(including herself) in the class by the English teacher led to their poor performance in the subject. The reason for this inadequate attention was rooted in their refusal to the teacher for the performance of the task of washing teacher's used tea-cups. This according to her made the teacher angry and led her to make adverse comments and ignore them. As she said:

'All our teachers except our English teacher behave with us nicely. They talk to us nicely. It is only our English teacher who behaves with us badly. But she is not this bad with all the Balmiki girls. Those who do all her work like getting her tea, getting and taking & giving papers/books to other teachers etc and listen to her are not said anything bad..'

The reason behind the girl's refusal to perform this task was her belief that doing such work especially washing other's used utensils (here the cup) and touching someone else's *'jhootan'* is against one's self respect. The same belief was also stated to have been shared by her few other Balmiki friends. What is important to note is that while the performance of personal tasks like serving of tea and water for the teacher may be much sought after by the Dalit children and may be seen as enhancing status among the peers (Nambissan, 2010) from which they may be otherwise excluded, here the Balmiki girls disliked doing it. This was because of the respondent's consciousness and strong belief about such work 'being a disrespect' to the self'. As she stated:

'……..…..We actually refused doing her work initially when the classes began and it is since then that she does not like us.……Why should we do such tasks for anyone? We are not her servants. Why should we touch anyone's 'jhootan'. We respect ourselves and so we at least will not so this. Let the others do it'.

In her response to the refusal by girls, the teacher made unpleasant comments to them and ignored their doubts pertaining to the subject. The respondent rather saw teacher's unequal pedagogic attention towards them as the major factor for her and other girls' poor performance in the subject. Rather the inadequate attention paid by the teacher made them stop seeking any clarification from her.

As she remarked:

'She does not pay attention to us. Other teachers have told us that if you do not understand anything ask us. Do not feel shy. But it is only this teacher who does not

ask us anything in the class or clear our doubts.…….… She does not attend to us in class and this is why we perform so properly in her subject. What can we do? It's not our fault. When we do not understand we start talking in the class, on which she scolds us again us and often says 'These girls should be thrown out of the school and that their names should be cut'.

Thus the teacher excluded these girls from participating as equally as others in the class which had a detrimental impact on the performance of these girls in the subject as stated by the respondent herself.

Learner categories mediated teacher's attitudes towards children. Intelligent children were not only questioned more frequently by many teachers, but they were also provided 'special recognition' by them. Children shared instances when the intelligent students 'were praised for their performance in the class', were 'cited as examples to other students' and 'being given the opportunity to become class monitor'. Given the lesser number of Dalit children in the category of intelligent, a majority of them were excluded from special recognition which the other non-Dalit and a few Dalit children received.

Learner categories also somewhere determined seating patterns in most classrooms. All the respondents except one stated that they sat on benches/desks in a 'row-column' seating arrangement in the classroom. Teacher-intervention in seating was minimal in the classrooms of the respondents attending government schools. All the children reported that they were free to sit anywhere and with any student. It was only during examinations that they were made to sit according to their roll numbers. Some of them (5) also stated that occasionally, in case of fights between students, seating was altered with the teacher separating the involved parties where they sat together. However as it emerged, in a majority of classrooms it was largely the 'intelligent students' who 'performed well in class' and 'concentrated more on studies', who sat in front and it was mainly the 'weak' (kamzor) students especially those who did not concentrate much in the class' who sat at the back. As it is reflected here, even though there was no teacher intervention in the seating, it was the friendship relations and the 'learner categories' that determined seating patterns in the most of these classrooms. The 3 respondents who categorized themselves as 'intelligent' also said that they sat in front with their best friends.

Those studying in private school reported teacher's intervention in seating. While in one class, students were made to sit according to their roll numbers, in the other boys and girls were made to sit separately. Further the system of seat rotation was prevalent in both the classes. Thus seating in these cases did not come to be influenced by the learner categories.

While the 'intelligent' were praised by the teachers openly, the 'weak' were subjected to sarcastic comments. As many as 12 respondents informed that when students performed poorly they were scolded by the teachers who made comments about their 'lack of interest in studies' and reminded them of the 'need to work hard'. However in 6 other classrooms teachers made unpleasant comments pertaining to the occupation of sweeping and cleaning which was the respondents' and many of their Balmiki classmates' parental occupation. While in 3 classrooms these were made only to the Balmiki children, in the remaining these were made to any child who performed poorly irrespective of the caste background. What was most critical was that no comments pertaining to parental occupations were made to the non-Balmiki children in these classrooms. Such remarks led to a feeling of distress among the respondents and the other Balmiki classmates. But no instance where the Balmiki children resisted the teacher was reported. This, as they maintained was done out of the 'fear' of the teacher.

As they stated:

'Our class teacher scolds those who score very less in exams. Among these 5 are Balmikis. So when the result is out, then he says to them (Balmiki boys) what you people will do by studying. Any ways your parents will leave their jobs for you and you will also go into it like them. The others are not said anything about their parents work, but they are told that you do not study, I will call your parents etc. We feel bad, but what can we do (Boy, IX, Government School)'

'When the Balmiki girls do not do the work or get low marks , one teacher of ours says ' whatever your father and mother do, you also do that rather than coming to school. You also sweep like them' (school aane ke bajaye vahi kam kar lo jo tumhaare maa-baap karte hain. Jaake unki tarah hi jhadoo lagao). Parents of most Balmiki girls are sweepers and domestic cleaners. But when other girls do badly then she

usually says ' do not come to school and stay at home'(school mat aao aur ghar par hi raho).' (Girl, IX, Government School)

If we score low then few teachers tell children that if you will not perform well then you will have nothing to do except sweep and work as domestic servants in homes. This is told to all the girls who do not perform well. (Girl, X, Government School)

When the girls perform badly teachers say that what will you do by studying it is better if you enter a sweeping job.(jab ladkiyon ke kharaab number aate hain , tab kuch madam kehti hai ki tum padhkar kya karogi, isse achcha jhadoo par lag jaao). But this is said to any girl who gets low marks.…… (Girl, X, Government School)

Irrespective of whether these comments were made to the Balmiki or non-Balmiki children we see how the teachers link failure to perform well in school to future occupational outcomes like that of sweeping. In doing so, teachers here appear to be conveying some critical messages to other children in the class.

Firstly, by projecting this occupation as a result of one's failure to perform well academically, teachers indirectly label the Balmiki children's parents and other Balmikis engaged in the work as 'educational failures'. In this process, they also come to highlight the poor educational history/background of these children and the Balmiki community in general. This indeed could be embarrassing for the concerned students and also lead to the development of prejudices and stereotypes in other non-Balmiki children towards them, which may critically impact their inter-personal relations.

Secondly by referring to their (Balmiki children's) joining of the parental occupation through statements like '……..*You do not have to sit on the chair and check files' and '……Any ways your parents will leave their jobs for you and you will also go into it like them'. You will do this work only so it's okay if you don't study',* teachers communicate their low expectations of educational success and the low status and stigmatised future occupational choices of the Balmiki children. By stating that these children will enter their parental occupation only and no other unskilled occupation, teachers reiterate and essentialise the caste's link with this occupation for these children.

Thirdly and most importantly the category of weak students was comprised of other Dalit caste and other caste children as well. But such sarcastic comments pertaining to their parental occupation and the caste's traditional occupation are made only for the Balmiki and no other children. By commenting on the occupation of sweeping and cleaning and essentialising the link between the Balmiki caste and the occupation, teachers reiterate the stigma already attached with the occupation in classroom discourse as will be shown shortly. This as stated led to a feeling of distress and embarrassment among these and other Balmiki children. No reference to any other Dalit child's parental and/or their caste's traditional occupation is made. Teachers are here clearly discriminating against the Balmiki children, by making a selective mention of their parental/community's occupation and further demeaning them in front of other children. Thus as it emerges, a Balmiki child's educational experiences may come to be different in the sense of being more difficult and humiliating than that of other Dalit children.

So in both the kinds of referencing, there was a degradation of the status of the occupation of sweeping and cleaning.

Thus as it emerges, academic performance of the child became an important context in which caste based comments were made by the teachers and their prejudices and stereotypes against the Balmiki children became explicit. This also became evident through the previously discussed case of the girl (VII, Government School) and her Balmiki friends who were paid unequal pedagogic attention by the English teacher. The teacher along with this also made unpleasant comments to the girls. As she states:

She is so bad to us that when we used to go to her with doubts, she said things like stand away from me otherwise I'll get lice from your hair. You girls remain so dirty and untidy. You smell a lot. But you know all of us come neat and clean to school. We bathe every day.'

As it emerges here, the kind of comments made by the teacher especially the reference to the personal hygiene of these girls, somewhere links to her assumptions and biases about the Balmikis as being 'dirty' and 'unhygienic', often commonly held by other members of the society as well. Such a notion emerges from the caste's association with the work of cleaning and scavenging which is seen as ritually polluting, and even makes those performing it to be regarded as 'unclean' (Vivek,

2000). As the case suggests it may be in these subtle ways that such caste-based assumptions and biases of teachers may become explicit in the classroom with reference to matters pertaining to the academic performance of children.

Along with looking at the teaching-learning process, other spheres of classroom/school life like assignment of tasks and selection in co-curricular activities of the students by the teachers were also looked at in order to explore the relations and interactions between them outside the pedagogic context. As studies suggest these spheres are often marked by exclusionary and discriminatory practices by the teachers towards the Dalit children (Nambissan, 2010).

5.2 Assignment of tasks and responsibilities

Teachers often entrust children with tasks and responsibilities like classroom management through the selection of class monitors, other logistical tasks like collection of notebooks, helping teachers complete pending office work and even some personal tasks. However studies have pointed out that they may discriminate against Dalit students and engage in a differential allotment of the concerned tasks. Instances of more non-Dalit than Dalit students being made monitors (Nambissan, 2010), exclusion of the Dalit - in particular Valmiki children from the performance of tasks like serving of food and water (Nambissan, 2010), assignment of menial tasks like sweeping (Narayanaswamy and Sachithanandam, 2009; Navsarjan Trust, 2010; Nambissan, 2010) etc. have been cited by the researchers.

As far as the present sample is concerned all children reported the presence of monitors in their schools. While those studying in studying in government schools reported the presence of class monitors, the girls in the private said to have ‘row monitors’. Selection of class monitors was made by teachers in a majority of the government schools (11/16). Children reported that it was mainly ‘the intelligent students’ who were appointed as monitors. Such an opportunity became a privilege for these intelligent children to the exclusion of others who performed average or poorly. The use of this criterion for appointment of monitors made the respondents perceive the teacher to be unbiased in their selection. None felt that caste status mattered in such a selection process. Many classrooms presently had Dalit children as class monitors. These included 2 respondents as well. As mentioned, no child felt that any favoritism or bias was demonstrated by the teacher in the selection process. All

believed that the teachers were 'fair' in their decision and it was intelligence which was the sole criterion for selection.

In 5 classes, monitors were selected through the nomination of their names and voting by the other classmates. The basis of selection in these cases included 'intelligence' (2/5), physical attributes like the 'height and good health of the classmate' (3/5), which was regarded as essential to sort out physical fights and 'him/her being well natured (2/5).

Monitors were mainly entrusted with the task of managing the class in teacher's absence as well as other tasks like collection of notebooks, helping the teacher in some office work etc. However the latter tasks were also assigned to other children as well, including the respondents in many cases. Along with these tasks in school, respondents (1 boy and 2 girls) studying in government schools also reported some of their teachers making students – both Dalits and non-Dalits perform personal tasks for them. These included making of tea and washing of tea cups. While in two schools, children performed these tasks for the teachers, in the remaining the respondent and some other Balmiki girls refused her as discussed earlier.

5.3 Co-Curricular activities in school: Participation and Selection

All the respondents stated that their school conducted co-curricular activities for students. The most stated ones were games, dance and music. While all of them informed that they had games /physical education class at least once a week, many respondents studying in government schools (especially those studying in class X and above) reported the absence of music and dance classes. However music and dance performances were held during school functions like the Annual day as well as Republic and Independence Day celebrations in which children participated. Sports competitions were also conducted in 3 government and 2 private schools.

All children participated in games during the physical education class. The physical education teacher engaged them in games requiring all the students to play together as well as the games that they could play with anyone as per their choice (which mostly were the best friends). But only 8 children reported to be participating in the performances for school functions and in sports competitions. The remaining stated that they have never participated in any event so far. The reasons for their non-

participation mainly included 'lacking knowledge of these arts', and also the 'lack of confidence to perform publically'. However the participation of other Balmiki and Dalit classmates was reported.

As the respondents informed, selection in these activities was made through 'auditions taken by the teacher where children were tested for their talent (hunar) and art (kala)'. When asked as to whether the teachers while selecting students showed a preference towards some children, all stated that it was only the child's interest and the talent which was the sole criterion for selection. According to them opportunity to participate in different co-curricular activities was provided to all children irrespective of their background. The teachers were seen as unbiased and fair as far as the selection of the students for school events is concerned. This is reflected in the following responses:

'*Our teachers ask the students if they are interested in performing at the functions. She takes down their names and then takes a test. Whoever does well is selected and then prepared for the performance……..all children get equal chance to participate but they have to pass a test'* (Girl, VI, Private School)

'*Teachers do not favour anyone. Whenever the function dates are announced we go to the teachers and give our names in whatever we are interested in. Then the teachers audition us and we get selected'* (Boy, X, Government School)

Thus from the perspective of the Balmiki children, it appears that students did not face deliberate exclusion from participating in the co–curricular activities. All felt that it was their interest and talents that guided teachers in the decision about their participation in co-curricular activities and that they did not any face deliberate exclusion. Lack of participation was seen as resulting from the factors that lay within themselves. What becomes evident through these cases is the difference in the cultural resources that students receive from their families (middle class) in the form of training in these arts. It is such resources that may come to determine their selection in the related co-curricular activities in school.

5.4 Peer relations:

Students across the 18 classrooms belonged to different socio-economic and religious backgrounds. This was evident through the presence of other Dalit, non-Dalit and

Muslim children. Most importantly all the children were aware of each other's caste background. Information about the caste backgrounds was largely obtained through their interactions with each other. All the respondents reported that most students in their classroom inquired about each other's caste at some point of time or the other in their schooling career. But where this was not done, such information became available through the classroom grapevine that is through classmates. Given the subject of the study, an attempt was made to understand whether the caste identity of the Balmiki children mediated forging of friendship ties with the other classmates as well as the prevailing inter-personal relations between them. This was done by looking into the aspects like their relations of friendships, interpersonal interaction with peers with specific focus on patterns of seating and eating together, nature and extent of academic support by peers and peer-conflicts.

5.4.1 Friendships and the interpersonal interaction:

Respondents revealed the presence of the category of 'best friends' (*pakke dost/ pakki saheliyan*) in the classrooms. All respondents said that they and their classmates have best friends with their number ranging from one to seven. What marked their relationship with the best friends was the 'emotional proximity' between both. Children mentioned that they were close (emotionally) to these friends expressed commonly through phrases like '*voh mere dil ke kareeb hai'* (close to heart), '*mann ke paas hai'* (close to heart) etc. It is this proximity that led best friends to interact more with each other than the other classmates. Their greater involvement with each other became explicit in different spheres of their interaction especially that of seating, eating together as well provisioning of academic support to each other.

A reflection on the backgrounds of friends provides us some understanding of the extent to which caste identity of Balmiki (and other Dalit) children mediated friendship relations for them. Table 5.3 provides the details about the caste backgrounds of the respondents' best friends.

Table 5.3: Caste background of the respondents' best friends

Caste background of best friends	Number of respondents n= 18	Number of boys	Number of girls
Only some Balmiki children as best friends	7	3	4
Only non-Balmiki best friends	5	3	2
Both Balmiki and non-Balmiki best friends	6	2	4
Total	18	8	10

Source: Children's interview, 2011-2012

As seen in the table, of the 18 respondents, 7 (3 boys and 4 girls studying in 6 government schools) had only Balmiki children as their best friends. However there were two patterns to such friendship. Three (2 girls and 1 boy) of them had only one/some of the other Balmiki children in the class as their best friends. But at the same time the other Balmiki children in the class were best friends with children from other backgrounds (Dalit, non-Dalit and Muslim children). Thus it was only for some Balmiki children in these classrooms that friendship came to be restricted to those from the same caste. However it was not the similarity of caste background as the respondents clarified that formed the basis of friendship between them. Rather, the major reason for choosing the best friend (s) was mainly the personal attribute of the other Balmiki friend especially his/her 'good nature' and the 'compatibility and understanding between them'. Same reasons were also put forth for the other prevailing relations of friendship in their classrooms.

The remaining four respondents (2 girls and 2 boys) said that all the Balmiki children in their class were each other's best friends and remained in a 'group'. What led to such a grouping was their common experience of a strained relation with some classmates from the non-Dalit and/or Muslim background. While 2 respondents (both boys) reported conflict with some of the non-Dalit (upper caste) and Muslim children, the remaining 2 (both girls) reported strained relations with Muslim girls in one case

and the '*Biharans*'- girls hailing from Bihar in the other. According to the respondents, such relations resulted out of the 'dislike' of the other children towards the aspects pertaining to the socio-cultural life of the Balmiki community. These included the occupation of sweeping traditionally associated with the caste and also engaged into by the parents of many Balmiki children in these classrooms and the practice of eating pork followed in many Balmiki families. While it was both these aspects that were highlighted as reasons for the 'dislike' of the Balmikis by the non-Dalit children, it was mainly pork eating that led to such feelings in Muslim children. This prevented the Balmiki general caste and Muslim children from inter-mingling with each other and also led to frequent conflicts between them.

Thus as it emerges, it was not only the caste identities that came to constrain the relations between the Balmiki and the general caste children in all the 4 classrooms, but even the community (religious) identity of Muslim children came into conflict with the caste identity of the Balmikis with detrimental implications for their relations with each other.

The 'proximity between best friends', made children across the 7 classrooms to interact and spend time more with each other. This was most clearly reflected in the spheres like seating, eating together as well as the give and take of academic support.

As mentioned earlier children across the classrooms sat with their best friends only and that the teacher largely did not intervene in this sphere. All the 7 respondents thus sat with their Balmiki best friends (s). In 3 classrooms a mixed seating pattern was prevalent for the Balmiki children, with some sitting with other Balmiki children and the rest with other classmates based on their ties of friendship. But in the remaining 4 all sat together as a group. Further the Balmiki children in these 4 classrooms sat not only separate from the Muslim and/or the other boys and girls with whom they were in conflict, but other classmates as well. As it appears there was more or less a deliberate self-exclusion by Balmiki children from interactions with other classmates. But it is also important to note that even others did not offer to sit with them. The Balmiki children as a result formed a separate group from rest of the classmates. The following responses very well reflect this.

'*All the Balmiki girls sit together in a group. We sit by our wish. The Muslim girls also sit separately. They do not sit with us. Nor do we'* (Girl,VII, Government School)

'*We sit by our choice. But all the Balmiki boys sit together. Neither we ask others to sit with us, nor do they ever say that we will sit with you or ask us to sit with them'* (Boy, Class VI, Government School)

So it was the strained relations between the groups of children that led to the emergence of caste-based segregation in seating. Teachers of these classrooms did not see such patterns as cases of deliberate segregation among the students. Rather they felt that seating was a matter of preference towards some classmates as partners as against the others. Surprisingly 3 teachers even denied the presence of any strained relation between the Balmiki and the non-Balmiki students in these classrooms. However, while two of them accepted the possibility of such relations between the Balmiki and Muslim children, but did not confirm their presence in their classroom. Interestingly such a 'possible hostility' was explained by them in terms of the larger discourse of the Hindu - Muslim hostility. They failed to recognize the specificity of the strained relation between the Balmiki-Muslim children which was actually rooted in the differences in the cultural practices (pertaining to eating of pork between the two communities.

As one teacher (of a girl respondent who reported such relations all the Balmiki girls and most Muslim girls) stated:

'*There is no such problem between the Balmiki and other (caste) girls. But yes there may be strained relations between the Muslim and these girls. There have been problems between Hindus and Muslims. They have disliked each other from so many years. These children also come to learn such things and start behaving like this……But I ensure that children don't learn such things. I often give them example of their own class that your class is like 'mini-India', with children coming from different backgrounds and that we should live with love with each other*'

One reason behind the denial of peer hostility could have been their own reservations about making any such disclosure to the researcher. But at the same time, it may have been due to their lack of information about the existence of such relation between both. The possibility of the latter emerges from the fact that students as will be seen, reported that the class teacher was never informed about any fights or other instances reflecting strained relations between the groups of students. However, irrespective of

the reason most teachers by and large denied the presence of peer hostility in their classrooms.

It was only one teacher who confirmed the presence of caste/community hostility between the Balmiki and Muslim boys in his class. This teacher preferred non-intervention as a strategy to deal with the issue at hand. By letting the respective groups sit separate from each other as he stated , he 'tried to minimize the contact and thus the chances of conflict between them'. So even if the teacher was aware of the peer dynamics in the classroom as it appears he did not intervene effectively in bringing about an improvement in their relation.

Eating and sharing of food was also restricted to best friends in all the 7 cases. But where children received mid-day meals in school, (in case of 3/7 respondents studying in elementary grades) sharing of food was less frequent. What remained common to all was 'eating with the Balmiki best friends'. Further a very critical aspect that emerged was that while the respondents who had only some Balmiki best friends also reported occasional sharing of food with the other classmates, with no deliberate exclusion of/by any classmate, in most (3/4) classrooms where all Balmiki children remained in a group, classmates with whom relations were strained were deliberately excluded from any sharing of food. As one girl stated :

' *We eat our food together. But at times we also share with other girls and they also share with us. But we never share with the Bihari girls and they also never. When we don't even prefer talking to them, then how can we share food!*' (Girl, X, Government School)

Best friends also visited each other's home. The reasons for such visits included the exchange of books and other study material, playing with each other as well as for inquiring about each other in times of ill-health. Neither the other classmates were reported to have ever visited their homes nor did they do so. The fact that other classmates were 'not their best friends and thus close' was put forth as the major reason for them and the other classmates for doing so.

The existing ties of friendships between these children also informed the give and take of academic help in all the classrooms. Such help mainly included the exchange of notebooks for completion of work, clarification of doubts and explanation of

concepts as well as helping each other to 'cheat' in tests/ exams. All children reported to ask their best friends for help (and vice-versa) first and it was largely when such help did not suffice that the other classmates were approached. However there was a pattern to the give and take of help from them as well. In the 4 classrooms where relations between the Balmiki and other caste/Muslim children were strained, help was asked (provided) from any other classmate barring these. But in the remaining 3 cases, children made no such exclusion in this respect. Moreover no respondent stated any of their classmate who was approached for help ever refused them and vice-versa.

Eleven respondents reported the presence of non-Balmiki best friends. Of these, 6 also had non-Balmiki best friends as well. These non- Balmiki best friends included children from the non-Dalit caste (11/11), other Dalit (7/11) and Muslim (3/11) and OBC (5/11) backgrounds. Similar friendship ties cutting across caste backgrounds were also reported for other Balmiki children in these classrooms. Thus, unlike the previously discussed 4 cases caste/community backgrounds did not appear to constrain friendship ties in these classrooms. Many of the reasons put forth by the respondents for such ties were similar to those stated by the earlier respondents. These included 'the best friend being well natured', 'being best friends since junior classes till date' etc. Also academic performance of the students became the basis of friendship ties with non-Balmikis in two classrooms. As reported by respondents who had only non-Balmiki best friends- including the non-Dalit (upper caste) and Dalit children, it was their good performance which brought them together as best friends. As one of the respondents maintained:

'We all are good at studies and are good friends since our junior classes. We sit with each other and help each other in studies.……..…My friends concentrate only on studies, do not bunk and so do I . We are all like each other' (A boy respondent, Class X, Government School)

Like the previous classrooms, seating, eating together and the provision of academic support were informed by friendship ties among children here as well.

Given the fact that the ties of friendships cut across the lines of caste in these classrooms and that no caste-based exclusion of any child/children by others from the relations of friendship was reported, segregation on the lines of caste in seating did not emerge in these classrooms. Interestingly in cases where the number of friends

was more than one, each friend ensured sitting with the other friend by changing them as partners from time to time.

Further sharing of food was also stated to happen with the best friends (of whatever caste/community origin). Most respondents reported taking food to school and sharing it with each other. Along with this they also stated an occasional sharing of their food with other classmates. So though eating and sharing of food usually happened between the best friends, it was not strictly restricted to them across these classrooms.

Further, while the respondents referred to earlier (7 with only Balmiki best friends) said that non-Balmikis did not come to their homes and vice-versa, home visits were reported by Balmiki respondents (6/11) with non-Balmiki friends. The major factor that enabled or constrained home visits by friends was that of distance. As children informed, only those non-Balmiki friends who resided near their residence paid visits to them and vice-versa. Two main purposes of such visits were stated. One was sharing of notebooks and books (6/6) and in times of ill-health (3/6). Further a few (2/6) of them also stated that they were called to attend birthday parties at each other's place. Both these respondents had both Balmiki and non-Balmiki best friends.

Further as the respondents informed, water, snacks and drinks were offered to the friends visiting them and to them in their friend's homes. However they also said that food and water was not accepted at each other's place at all times and that it was mainly on one's 'mood' that the acceptance/non-acceptance of food and water depended. Also none of the 6 respondents stated to have ever felt being treated unfairly or disrespectfully in their friends' homes.

What is crucial to note is that though non-Dalit (upper caste) classmates visited their homes (and vice-versa), no respondent stated the Muslim best friend (there were 3 such cases) having invited them to their homes. It was again the aspect of distance, which was put forth as the major reason for their non-visits. While 'distance' may have been one of the major impediments to such visits, reservations around the social intercourse between the groups due to the cultural practice of eating of pork among the Balmikis may have been another reason. Given such a possibility of strained relations between both the groups, parents may have been reluctant in sending their children to each other's residence. However none of the interviewed parents advanced this reason for doing so.

The remaining 5 respondents (2 boys with only non-Balmiki best friends and 3 girls with Balmiki and non-Balmiki best friends) never paid visit to any of their best friends' house. However some of their best friends did so. While it was 'distance' that was stated as the major reason by the boys, girls stated that despite that their best friend(s) resided in the nearby areas, they did not pay any visit to their homes. Other reasons for this included 'one's busy schedule post school' and most importantly the 'strict control over their movement outside home'. As they informed, it was their parents who did not allow them to visit any of their friends' houses out of the 'concern for their security'. As they stated:

'*We do not visit each other's house as none of us has time. My parents do not allow me to visit my friend's house. They do not allow me to be outside home or go here & there. They fear that some boy may tease me or some mishap happens. They feel insecure for me'* (Girl, IX, Government School)

'My friends come to my house, rest do not know my house. They come here and have food……I do not go to their house because my mother does not allow me to go to any friend's place. She fears in sending me to their house as there is so much crime that happens around' (Girl, VI, Government School)

Thus as we see it was the gendered control over the movement of girls that became a crucial factor in determining whether they visited their friends or not.

The give and take of academic help in these cases was also informed by the ties of friendship. It was again the best friend who was first asked for help and the other classmates were approached later.

So in a majority of classrooms, considerations of caste and community, did not determine the respondents' and other classmates' circle of friends in school. Friendship ties cut across caste and communities in most classrooms. However there were a few classrooms where the Balmiki children had strained relations with either some of the other general caste or Muslim children and so friendships for them became restricted to same caste peers.

Thus we see how while in some cases the caste/community identities of children interacted in a manner leading to certain caste/community specificities in friendships

among children, while in many the same differences in background did not intervene in forging of friendship ties that cut across these various backgrounds.

5.4.2 Peer conflicts

Peer conflicts may emerge as one of the potential sites in a classroom for the expression of caste prejudices and stereotypes in children (if any) towards each other (especially the Dalits). This may not only be true for classrooms where peer relations are constrained by considerations of caste, but even in those where caste background of students may not explicitly impact friendship ties and the patterns of inter-personal interaction between them.

Derogatory caste - based references and comments were made to Balmiki children by other classmates (including other Dalit children) during fights in 13 classrooms. These fights largely arose around different issues like location of seats, misplacement of each other's stationary items, books, notebooks etc. and even gossiping done against each other. While in classrooms where relations between the Balmiki and other caste/Muslim children were strained, such comments were made more often by the latter than the other classmates. But in the remaining 9 classrooms, no such fixity in the parties to the fight was observed. That is such comments were made by any child, given that the Balmiki children had fights with children across caste/community backgrounds.

As far as the content of the comments is concerned, then all the 13 respondents mentioned that they were called derogatory caste names like 'Bhangi / Chooda', were hurled abuses and/or made derogatory remarks related to their caste and family background especially pertaining to 'the low status' of the occupation of sweeping and eating of pork.

As children informed:

'In our class there boys (other caste and Dalit) call us (Balmiki boys) Bhangi when they fight with us . There are fights on different issues- on seats, on other personal matters. We also then say them very dirty abuses……at times we also beat each other in groups. My best friends (non-Balmiki) are always there to support me……But then we also often say sorry to each other to settle our differences' (Boy, X, Government School)

*We hear comments on our eating of pork. In our class whenever there is a fight between Muslim and Balmiki boys, Muslim boys often comment on this aspect. Also the Balmiki boys make comments in response to their comments. I had a fight with a Muslim boy in the class on some issue so he said that I am dirty (ganda) because I eat dirty thing (gandi cheez). Though he did not say 'pork', but the reference was to that only. So I said you also eat beef, so you are also no better than us. Then we had a furious fight where we called names to each other. Sometimes when things went beyond control we even bashed up each other badly……..We do not speak to them for some time, but after that things normalize and we start talking to each other' (*Boy, X, Government School)

'There are 2-3 Rajput boys and all Muslim boys with whom we are mostly into fights. They *actually dislike us (humse chidhte hain). Whenever we have fight with them they call us 'chooda 'and tease us by saying ' your father drives garbage van, your father cleans man holes……..Also they and the Muslim say to us you are 'dirty' because you eat dirty things. Here the reference is to the pig. They say this every time be whatever the issues of fight. We have even beaten each other in groups. But it is only our group that fights alone with their groups. We do not take help from others…….. We have even beaten each other in groups.'* (Boy, X, Government School)

'*They (the Muslim girls) don't like us (Voh hamse ghinn karti hain). They fight with us on petty matters. During fights they say abusive words to us and also often comment that we are dirty because we eat dirty thing (Tum gandi cheez khaate ho). Here the reference is to the pig……..Some of the Muslim girls also say that we are unhygienic because we eat unhygienic thing. We also then say abusive words to them'* (Girl, VII, Government School, case of strained relations between the Balmiki and Muslim girls)

'There are a few Gujjar and Muslim boys who call us as Bhangi especially for seats. When we (Balmiki boys) change our rows and sit where the Gujjar and Muslim boys sit, then the Gujjars specifically say you Bhangi sit with other Bhangis in other row, don't sit here. They don't like us at all……..The Muslim boys also don't talk to us much and during fights they say ugly things to us especially in relation to pork

eating .'(Boy, VII, Government School, case of strained relations between the Balmiki and non-Dalit and Muslim boys)

The above responses clearly reveal the kind of derogatory caste names, abuses and comments pertaining to the work of sweeping and cultural practices of the caste group, that were made by other classmates to the Balmiki children.

Along with this, some other important aspects also emerge from these responses.

Firstly, as reflected, along with the non-Dalit children, derogatory comments were also made by other Dalit classmates during fights. Such instances clearly reveal the presence of caste based prejudices against the Balmikis and thus the Balmiki classmates in these children. As this suggests the caste identity of the Balmiki children not only mediated their relations with the non-Dalit children, but also with the other Dalit children. These instances clearly highlight the need to look at the inter-Dalit caste relations in the classroom and the specificity of the school experiences of different Dalit castes rather than only looking at schooling of Dalit children as a homogeneous group.

Another crucial aspect that emerged was that the respondents informed that even the other Dalit children were also subjected to abuses and/or were called caste names (like Chamar, Dhobi etc). But unlike the Balmikis no comments on their families and cultural practices were stated to be made by others. This somewhere seems to suggest how the continuity in their engagement in the 'stigmatized' traditional work of sweeping (vis-à-vis the other Dalit sub-castes) has ensured a continuity in the social stigma attached to the Balmikis, which was clearly highlighted during fights. Thus in this regard, fights of these types are likely to become more derogatory for the Balmiki children than the other Dalit children.

Secondly children in most classrooms also tried to patch up the fights through ways like making apologies to each other, 'not talking to each other for some time until things became normal' with the passage of time etc. However in the classrooms where relations were strained, none of the respondents reported any such efforts from the either parties to 'patch up' the differences. The lack of efforts by children to resolve conflicts is not only a reflection of the prevailing strained relations between them, but at the same time it was also contributing towards a strengthening of these relations.

But a very important aspect that emerged was that it was only in the classrooms with strained relations between children that strong group loyalties prevailed amongst the Balmiki children. But in the other classrooms such group solidarity was not visible. It was rarely that one Balmiki classmate intervened in the fights involving other Balmiki children even if it entailed name calling by the other children. Thus solidarity among the Balmiki children appears to be weaker in most classrooms. It was the common experience of the dislike by the other classmates and the strained relationship with them that brought the Balmiki children together as best friends.

Lastly all respondents informed about the presence of support from best friends in both verbal and physical fights. These friends became important support during confrontations with other children.

5 children reported no instances of fights in their classrooms where a derogatory reference was made by any child to the other. However all children reported use of abusive language by the involved parties (including themselves) in these fights. The following responses suggest this:

'*When we fight with each other, then we mostly shout and also use abuses for each other….but no one says anything about anybody's caste or family'* (Boy, XII, Government School)

'*In fights when things go out of control, girls hurl abuses to each other, but no one says anything bad for any one's caste or religion'* (Girl, VI, Private School)

Further all respondents, like the previous cases, reported the support of the best friends in fights. Even where fights were initiated between two children, it took the form of group fights with the best friends of each child supporting him/her.

Most of the fights – both where derogatory references were made and those where this was not so, were largely not reported to the teachers by children. The reasons stated by the respondents for themselves and the other classmates for doing this included the fear of punishment (18/18), fear of calling of parents by the teacher and making of complaints about them (18/18) and the belief that they were grown up, hence capable of resolving fights their own ways, even if that meant resorting to physical fights (14/18). So it was out these reasons that children tried to resolve fights on their own.

However in cases where the teachers were informed about such fights or they themselves came to know of it, they intervened in different ways. These included scolding children for misbehaving in the class, punishing them which entailed beating them up for showing indiscipline in the class and counseling the students for not making such comments. Of these the last means of intervention requires some specific attention. As children informed teachers counseled children situating their discussions in the discourse on equality and dignity of all. As they stated:

When the 4 teachers were spoken about their intervention then 3 denied the existence of such fights, let alone their intervention. And the teacher who admitted the case also stated to be providing a similar 'counseling' to the students.

The following responses suggest this:

We do not tell the teachers mostly, but when they intervene..they do not say anything and beat us and them both' (Boy, X, Government School, Case of strained relations between Balmiki and non-Dalit and Muslim children)

When we (Balmiki and Muslim girls) fight over seats or other issues our class teacher says why you people fight and remain far from each other. We all have same blood & bodies, then why do you dislike each other (Girl, VII, Government School, Case of strained relations between Balmiki and Muslim girls)

'Our teacher scolds us and says that we should not say anything about each other's caste or religion and that all human beings are equal' (Boy respondent, IX, Government School)

As it emerges, teachers attempted to convey to the child the idea of equality of all human beings irrespective of the difference in one's socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. However they do not appear to be engaging with the subject of caste and caste discrimination more meaningfully. Nowhere do the teachers seem to problematize the institution of caste. Their ineffective intervention is well evident through the instances of frequent fights where caste-based comments were made by children.

Further along with their reluctance in informing the teacher, none of the respondents informed their parents about such fights especially those where derogatory comments

were made to them. The main reason for this was again their fear that if the parents came to the school, then the teachers may make complaints against them, which was best avoided by them. Thus it was due to these reasons that they preferred not to inform their parents about these fights. Moreover parental ignorance about such schooling experience of their children became evident when all refused receiving complaints about such peer dynamics in their child's classroom. As two parents stated:

'He has never reported any instance of caste based comments or discriminatory treatment by teachers or classmates. If it was there he would surely have told us' (Mother of Boy, IX, Government School)

'She has never made any other complaints about his classmates or any other teacher' (Father of Girl, X, Government School, Case of Balmiki- Muslim girls' conflict)

' *'He has never made any complaints about the teachers, students or any other thing. Everything must be fine'* (Father, Boy, VII, Government School, Case of Balmiki and non-Dalit and Muslim boys' conflict)

Thus the caste prejudices among the children involved in these fights and the derogatory experiences of the Balmiki children found no effective addressal either at school or at home. This mainly meant a reinforcement of such prejudices, animosity and derogatory experiences in the daily classroom life.

From the above discussion it emerges that in the view of the respondents, their caste identity as 'Dalit' did not influence their relations with the teachers spheres like that of pedagogy, their participation in the classroom, selection for co-curricular activities, allocation of tasks etc. In all these spheres teachers were perceived by most respondents to be unbiased and fair in their attitudes towards them. However what is clear is that while caste discrimination may not be explicit and overt, Balmiki children were at a disadvantage where teacher attention and classroom participation were concerned. Coming from homes where parents were often non- literate and poorly educated they lacked the cultural capital required to actively participate in the class, present themselves as 'intelligent' and hence receive teacher attention. The nature of pedagogy also did not encourage questioning and clarification of doubts. Hence there was a greater dependence on friends. Caste/occupation based prejudices and the

stereotypes pertaining to the Balmiki children, did emerge in teachers' interactions with them where the teacher sought to explain poor classroom performance and where children sought to resist doing what they felt was demeaning work. Thus, though the caste based mediation of pedagogy and teacher student relations was not overt in the daily curriculum transactions, it was present in subtle ways that placed Balmiki students at a disadvantage in the routine of teaching and learning. In situations of crisis and conflict its presence could be seen quite clearly – through references to the caste based occupations of the Balmikis.

Similar was the case with peer-relations. While in most classrooms friendship ties for Balmiki students cut across lines of caste, it was only in few that the caste identity of the Balmiki children intervened in forging of friendships with some children from other caste/community background. However caste identity of the Balmiki children did gain prominence again in times of crises and during peer conflicts when the Balmikis were called by derogatory caste names or were made unpleasant comments on the parental occupation. These fights became occasions for the expression of caste based prejudices in other children, which may otherwise not become explicit in the daily routine of the classroom.

Thus as the foregoing discussion suggests caste did find its way into the classroom sometimes in overt ways and at other times in subtle ways.

Chapter 6: Educational and Occupational Aspirations: Parents And Children

Given the parental value attached to education and what appears from the previous discussion about the (poor) quality of schooling that becomes available to the Balmiki children and the nature of their schooling experiences, two important questions arise. What are the aspirations of parents for their children's educational and occupational careers and the ways through which they strategize to ensure fulfillment of these aspirations and what do children think of the importance of education and their own aspirations for future occupational career? The present chapter seeks to answer both these questions.

6.1 Parental aspirations for children's future educational and occupational careers

As discussed, one of the most stated reasons for which parents valued education was for its potential to open up opportunities for salaried employment. It is this view that defined their aspirations for children's future occupational career. None of the parents desired their children to enter their work or other occupations that in their view become available to the poorly educated. All the parents aspired to upward mobility for children away from the low status occupations like those engaged into by them to the 'most respected one' opened up through education.

When asked for specific occupations aspired for their children, then some parents (7) listed those which their children wanted to pursue in future. All these parents clearly maintained that they wanted their child to enter whatever work he/she aspired for. Interestingly all were well aware of the child's occupational aspirations and stressed that these occupations were marked by both the attributes characterizing 'salaried employment' which they desired for their child. As some stated:

'*She says that she wants to be an IAS. I also want her to be one'* (Father, VIII, Sweeper, NDMC)

'He wants to be a police officer. I know this and will be happy if he enters the police officer' (Father, X, Security Guard)

The remaining parents however did not specify particular occupations. But all mentioned that they wanted their child to do an 'office job', entailing reading and writing work (likha-parhi ka kaam). As some stated:

'*I want him to work in office where he does the writing work in files and works as an officer*' (Father, Non-literate, Mechanic)

'*I want her to join some office where she does paper work*' (Mother, Non-literate, Non-working)

As reflected through the responses, though parents here did not specify the exact job profile, but the larger reference was to their child's taking up of the non-manual, white collar employment. However unlike the previous group, these parents were not aware of the child's occupational aspirations. Further they themselves also did not ever discuss their plans pertaining to the child's educational and occupational career with him/her. Rather parents and children stated to have postponed such discussion till the end of schooling as it was regarded as the 'right time for taking decisions for one's career'.

But irrespective of whether parents were aware of the child's occupational aspirations, what emerged to be striking was their willingness to support the child's education 'to the best possible way' in order to enable him/her to enter the 'aspired for occupation'. The former group of parents made this evident through their statements where they expressed their support to the child in securing the desired/professional qualifications to enter the aspired occupation. As they stated:

'She says I want to be an IAS…….I am with her and support her to pursue whatever study it requires to be an IAS' (Father, VIII, Sweeper, NDMC)

'He wants to be an accountant. I will make him do the course he wants to do' (Mother, VII, Sweeper, Private office)

While the other group of parents were unaware of their child's occupational aspirations, when asked if they would support the child in the accomplishment of his/her own occupational aspirations, most expressed their willingness to support him/her. However at the same time, some of them (5/8) confessed how the financial constraints may not allow them to support the child in pursuing careers that require

intensive financial investment like that of medicine, engineering etc., thereby stating how these courses may be ‘unaffordable’ for them. However investment in general degree and diploma courses as well as the skill enhancement courses especially that pertaining to computers were stated to be affordable and also seen as sufficient for securing their child entry into salaried white collar office job. All these parents stated how they planned to at least educate the child up till graduation or make him/her do some diploma course and learn computers which were seen by them to be important requirements for their child’s entry into this work.

Given the importance attached to their children’s entry into such work for occupational and social mobility and the financial health of the family, parents made a realistic evaluation of the available means and ends and thereby planned to find out the best possible and affordable way to accomplish this. However such planning on the part of these parents (and also the previous group in terms of securing the required qualifications by the child to enter the aspired job) suggests how even for ‘low caste’ families, ‘life did become a planning project’ (Chopra, 2005), where parents forethought the educational career for the child in order to achieve the desired mobility seen both in relation to education and occupation.

What made the parents hopeful regarding the successful access of their child to such jobs? The significance of the role models becomes important here. Of the 18, 15 parents cited their role models, who largely included acquaintances and relatives who were educated and pursuing ‘salaried employment perceived to have been opened up through education’. Of the 15, 10 parents stated specific examples of those who worked as managers, clerks, computer operators, police officer, teachers etc. Others cited those whose children were pursuing higher education and were regarded to be ‘walking on the pathways to salaried employment’. These individuals affirmed parental hopes about the potential of education to open up salaried employment for their child and his/her seeking of mobility both within the Balmiki community and the wider society as well. They became sources of motivation and optimism about the possibility of mobility through education for their children. Thus it was out of these hopes from education that parents were educating them. Many parents recalled citing the cases of role models to their children as examples, for them (children) to take inspiration from them.

'*My husband's cousin brother is not in sweeping but in some office where works as an officer. We tell our sons that they can have a same or rather better life than their uncle.*' (Mother, Non-working)

'*My brother- in – law is very well educated. He works as a manager in some office and earns well. I tell my girls that look at your Rajendra chacha. He has studied so much and is on a good post in the office. I ask them to become like him'* (Father, Plumber)

'We have one of our relatives who lives in Trilokpuri . He himself is a sweeper in NDMC. He has 5 daughters. One of them is a computer operator and others are studying in college. I site their example to my daughters and even sons and ask them to learn something from them. I even ask my daughter to take some guidance and counselling from them' (Mother, Sweeper, Housing society)

Moreover, given the success of these role models, parents also hoped that the caste background would not be a barrier in the educational and occupational mobility for their child. While research in the area reveals how the caste background (especially the low caste/class) of the applicants does intervene in their selection for jobs in the private sector (Newman and Thorat, 2007), the examples of the role models made the Balmiki parents believe that caste would not matter in the selection of their child in the desired job. The possession of the required education and the cultural capital were thus seen to be the basic requirements of getting into the desired work. As parents stated:

'The child has to have full education required for a job. If this is there, then whatever be the caste of the child he will succeed and go anywhere. Many of our relatives (role models) are working as office staff in airport, military etc' (Mother, V, Non-working)

'I do not think that caste will impact my daughter's chances of getting a job. If she has the right (required) degree and the ability she will get it. There should not be any discrimination and bias in recruitment as far as i feel. My brother in law is an officer (role model) in office, he also got his job! How did his caste come in between? (Father,VIII, Plumber)

'……..……If you are educated then you will get a job. The recruiter will not see your caste while employing you. After all, others in our caste are also in good jobs' (Mother, Non-literate, Sweeper, Housing society)

Thus it was the educational degree and credentials which were seen to be one of the most critical factors determining the chances of seeking a successful entry in the ' good salaried employment'. Further for one parent it was 'luck' than caste identity that was seen to play a more crucial role in recruitment. As he stated:

……Your luck (naseeb) is also important. I don't think that caste should intervene if a person is well educated and luck favours him' (Father, Non-literate, Mechanic)

Even though all the parents expressed their belief that it is the educational credentials, which was the major requirement for their children's access to the desired employment, at the same time they also identified the significance of social networks in furthering the possibility to achieve the aspired occupations. It is in this context that most of the parents tried to maintain cordial relationships with the role models and remained in constant touch with them. This was done to enable them to guide the child and even using their networks in order to seek information on the available work opportunities *(naukri ke bare mein jaankari paana)* and even 'seek recommendations' for recruitment. At the same time none of parents felt that such networks were indispensable for their child's access to the aspired employment.

Some parents also informed how they tried to work as efficiently as possible at their work place to keep their employer happy (*maalik ko khush rakhna)* and satisfied in an attempt to develop links with them which were in turn seen as crucial for enhancing the job prospects for the child. As some respondents stated:

'I try to work as efficiently as possible. I also greet the officers daily and talk very nicely to them. I try to maintain as good relations as possible with them and have even told some of them about my daughter. They were happy to hear about her studies. I have requested them to consider her for jobs in future and help us in some way if possible-I think they are pleased with my work, so they will be of help to us' (Mother, Non-literate, Sweeper, Government office)

'I work with full dedication in the hospital and ensure that the doctors remain happy with me. I have forged very good connections especially with one of them. I have told

him about my sons. He has said that once they pass XII. I should send them to him. He will counsel my sons and help them to chart out their future course of career' (Father,Non-Literate, Sweeper, Government Hospital)

'*In today's time along with education, links are also important. In a few houses where I work some 'sahabs' are in Income tax office, one is in a good company and earn well. I do whatever work they ask me to do even if I am not paid for that. I try to keep them happy with my work so that they can be approached for some help as far as my sons' jobs are concerned. I keep them updated about my sons' performance so that they know that they are studying well and are candidates who can be referred for jobs'* (Mother, Non-Literate, Domestic Servant)

What can be observed here is that these parents were trying to develop the 'right links' or the social capital in the fields which they otherwise lacked. As discussed while the Balmikis have intensive social networks as far as employment in sweeping is concerned they still lack the networks in relation to the 'high status job' which they wished their child to enter. Thus caste-based links were not much useful for them as far as the child's occupational career in 'modern' white collar occupations is concerned. Their attempt was hence to develop such links with their superiors in 'secular' work spaces in order to provide pathways to respectable employment and occupational and social mobility.

Along with such attempts to realize the future occupational goals for the child, parents also strategized for child's academic success, which was regarded to be a pathway to the former as reflected in their involvement in their schooling in different ways. Parental involvement could be seen at home and at school. As Lee and Bowen (2006) observe, the former may include providing help with homework, discussing the child's schoolwork and experiences at school, and structuring home activities etc, the latter may entail attending parent-teacher conferences, attending programs featuring students and engaging in volunteer activities.

Parents and their spouses were involved in their child's studies at home in two ways. One was assisting the child in studies, but not in all the cases did the child receive academic help from the parents. Of the 18 parents, 10 reported either themselves and/or the spouse to have provided such assistance to the child, which mainly involved helping the child in homework as well as teaching at home. However such assistance was mainly given up till the primary level of schooling. No parent provided

any such help to the child after this level. In the remaining 8 cases no parental assistance in studies was ever given to the child.

Looking at these patterns of assistance closely, then of the 10 cases where assistance was provided, in 5 both the father and mother were reported to have done so and in the remaining it was either of them who gave such help to the child. What came to determine the extent of parental participation and involvement in most cases were two factors- their educational levels and/or their working/non-working status. It were either or both these factors that became the major considerations that led the respective parent or both to involve themselves in their child's studies. These factors were also at work in the cases where no assistance was provided to the child at all.

In 5 cases where only one parent (3 mothers and 2 fathers) assisted the child, it was largely their educational levels that made them do so. Except for one case, in all the others the parent who assisted the child was more educated than the other parent. In the exceptional case as the father was posted outside Delhi, it was the relatively lesser educated mother who assisted the child. Similarly in the remaining 5 cases where both the parents assisted the child, it was again their educational levels that became an important determinant of their involvement. Unlike the previous cases where one parent was either not literate or only minimally educated as compared to the other parent, here the difference in the educational levels of the parents was close to each other. In one case the educational levels were even same for both parents. So at large, it was the relatively lesser gap between the educational levels of the mother and father that led both of them to be together involved in their child's studies.

Along with education, as mentioned the working/non-working status of the parents also impacted their involvement in their child's studies. Despite the fact that all the 10 children received assistance up till the primary classes, parents reported to have helped him/her rather irregularly. This is where the working status of the parent intervened in their assistance provision. Most of the working parents reported that it was their busy work schedules that did not give them time to help the child in studies daily. Along with this, mothers (both working and non-working) stated that it was the management of the household chores and child-care that also made the provision of regular assistance difficult for them. However the non-working status of the mothers especially in the latter group still led them to be relatively more involved with the

child in studies vis-à-vis the working fathers as a result of them being 'more available'. Thus assistance in a majority of cases was restricted to ensuring that the child completes the school work by 'asking him/her to sit with the work' and 'guiding him/her in doing it whenever possible'.

As mentioned, assistance in all these cases was provided up till the primary grades only. The most stated reasons for this included the 'rising difficulty level of the course' commonly articulated as the 'increasing hardness of the course', difficulty in time management either 'due to the increase in the responsibility of child-care due to birth of other children' or 'busier work schedule' and 'availability of older siblings to assist the child'. Parent of girls studying in private schools also informed how it was 'the English medium of the school and their lesser familiarity with the language' that restricted their assistance. As a result of these factors parents withdrew/reduced their help to the child. What is crucial to note is that even in the cases where both the parents were relatively better educated and involved in child's studies than those where the single parent was involved, assistance came to be limited to the same level of schooling as the latter. The advantage that could have accrued to their children due to relatively better levels of parents' education was attenuated by factors especially the lack of time and resources- in particular the cultural resources like knowledge of English.

In the remaining 8 cases where no academic assistance was given, it was again the poor educational levels of mothers and fathers that did not allow them to support the child in studies in a majority of cases. In 6 cases both the parents were non-literate and were thus unable to provide any academic help to the child. However in the remaining 2 cases, even though fathers were still educated it was again their busy work schedule which did not give them time to assist the child.

Thus the provision, extent and the nature of parental assistance in child's studies varied mainly with respect to their levels of education and the occupational status. But the lack of or provision of limited assistance to the child did not mean that the child was left unattended to in studies. The child in most cases was sooner or later provided with some other source of assistance. Along with assistance from older siblings and other educated relatives, 'tuitions' became one of the most significant support systems for 11 children. Rather as most parents stated this 'paid assistance' became a sort of

compensation for no/poor academic support by them'. Given the importance attached by parents to their child's educational success for entering the 'respectable salaried employment', tuitions were valued all the more by them. Thus in the absence of their academic support, tuitions were seen as more or less 'necessary' by the parents for child's success at school. Moreover, parental belief that their own limited educational success was largely a result of the lack of adequate academic support from their parents further strengthened their conviction about the 'necessity of tuitions' for the child. Thus tuitions came to be recognized as significant alternative for minimizing the impact of their poor academic support on the child's performance. As a result many children were made to join tuitions in early primary school grades (as early as class III) and were seeking this assistance till date.

It is interesting to note that despite tuitions became the major source of assistance for the child, parents continued to closely monitor the child's performance. Parents held frequent meetings with the tuition teachers to know about the performance of the child. Rather, now ensuring that the child attended tuitions regularly was stated to be one of the 'important responsibilities of these parents (and the spouses)'. As one mother said :

'*I see that he daily goes for his tuitions. I also have the number of his tuition sir. I try to speak to him at least once a month to know about his performance and his complaints if any. Though we have left him to sir's (tuition teacher) guidance, but I ensure that we are aware about his studies'*

A few parents had left it to their child and said that he/she never asked for tuitions and that is why they did not think about it. But they also stated that they were ready to provide for tuitions whenever the child asks for it. As it can be seen, unlike the previous cases where the parents themselves made the child join tuitions, these parents depended on the child's own discretion pertaining to taking of tuitions.

Along with supporting children in studies through the means of assisting them and/or by providing for other sources, all the parents (and spouses) also involved themselves by acting as disciplinarians to the child. They reported to have been monitoring the child to see ' that he/she does not while away time and studies', 'concentrates more on studies at home', ' inquiring about the completion of school work' and even 'ensuring that the child regularly attends tuitions'. This is again where we see the significance

attached to the performance of the child. Even though some parents were not able to assist the child in studies or could not have done so after a certain level of schooling, through such monitoring and provision of some source of assistance, they attempted their best to ensure that the child concentrates on studies and performs well.

Along with home, parents also saw the importance of their involvement in school. Their involvement in school was limited to attending meetings with the teacher. These meetings were mainly of two types – those specifically conducted for the discussion of the academic performance of all the students in the class and those for official work. While the former took place in all the schools attended by children except for 4 government schools, the latter took place only in government schools, wherein parents were called for the receipt of incentive money for the purchase of uniforms, stationary etc and special incentive money provided by the state to all the Dalit children studying in state schools. But these meetings also became occasions for the discussion of students' performance by the parents. Thus, as it emerges it was largely the academic performance of the child that formed the content of the teacher-student interaction in both meetings.

Taking into account the participation of the parents in these meetings, then all the parent respondents reported either themselves or the spouse to be regularly attending them. But, as Table 6.1 suggests, their participation was largely gendered. Both these meetings were largely attended by mothers.

Table 6.1- Parental participation in school meetings

Type of Meeting	Mother	Father	Total
For discussion of academic performance	10	4	14*
For official purposes	12	4	16**

Source: Parents' interviews, 2011-2012

*Excluding the 4 cases where such meetings did not happen

**Excluding the cases of 2 girls studying in private schools

As evident it was the mothers who interacted more with the teachers than the fathers. Specific reasons for the greater participation of mothers emerged through the discussions with parents. These included the mother especially where more educated than the father being considered 'more suitable for talking to the teacher', 'availability of the mother due to them being non-working' and 'relative flexibility of the working mothers' work schedule as compared to the father that allowed her to take out time than the father'. An important aspect to be noted is that even though fathers participated lesser in school meetings, all stated that they ask the mothers about the meetings and update themselves on the feedback. As one father said:

'I do not go to school to meet the teacher that much as I do not have time. My duty is from 9-5. It is her mother who goes. But I ask her as to what happened in the meeting' (Father, V Sweeper, NDMC)

As another said:

'I do not have time. So it's my wife who goes for PTMs. I ask her about the meetings and on the basis of the feedback I talk to children accordingly' (Father, IX, Sweeper, NDMC)

Thus as we see though the fathers did not attend the meetings often, they still stated to be aware of the child's performance as discussed in these meetings.

Where fathers were more involved, again specific reasons were stated for lesser participation of mothers. In one case the death of the mother made the father to attend these meetings himself. In other 2 it was the predominance of male teachers in the child's school that made the fathers feel reluctant in letting the mother attend the meetings. So they preferred themselves going to the school despite the fact that mothers were not working and were thus 'available', in the sense discussed above. In the remaining case, the school was situated far away and as the father cycled to the school, his attending the meetings proved to be much more economical than the mother's.

Parent-teacher interactions were largely restricted to 'asking and telling' (*poochna aur bataana*) about the child's performance. None of the parents reported ever contesting or challenging the teacher especially when complaints were made against the child. Nor did parents mention about the need of the child for focused attention in any

subject area. Specific reasons were cited for this. Most parents did not challenge the teacher out of their credibility of the latter and the assumption about 'them to be complaining of the child for his/her benefit', thereby taking these complaints in a positive spirit. Another reason for the passive acceptance of these complaints was the fear that their resentment may displease the teacher, leading him/her to develop a personal grudge against the child. This was anticipated to have unfavourable consequences for child's academic success.

Further as none of the parents were presently assisting the child in studies, they lacked knowledge about the course content and were unable to identify the areas where the child required individualized attention. It was this lack of knowledge that restricted their interactions only to the inquiries about child's performance in the exam. Even in the cases where the child attended tuitions they did not have information about his/her need for special attention by the teacher. Neither the tuition teacher provided such information to them, nor did they make any such inquiry. Thus we see how the poor educational levels of parents and their lack of familiarity with the syllabus placed them at a disadvantage where information about the academic progress of their children was concerned. They hence were concerned largely with examination marks. Also teachers on their part failed to meaningfully communicate such information to the parents who were merely told the examination results and that 'the child has to study more or their praise for the child's good performance'.

Thus we see that the location of the parents in the caste/occupational structure and their education as well as the poor institutional response to the schooling of their children constrained their involvement with their child's education in different ways. However despite this we have seen that the parents tried to strategise and negotiate with the circumstances to the best possible extent and involved themselves in the schooling of the respondents in their wake of aspirations and hopes attached to education.

6.2 Importance of education: Children's perspectives

The reasons for which children regarded education as important are stated in Table 6.2. A glance at the table reflects a similarity with the reasons that were put forth by the parents. However what differentiated children's responses from parents was the difference in emphasis and the context in which the reason was put forth.

Table 6.2: Importance of education for Respondents

Reasons	Number of children respondents n=18
Leading to the desired employment	18
Making the self knowledgeable	11
Developing proficiency in English	12
Creates possibility of seeking good match	7

Source: Respondents' Interview, 2011-2012

Like parents, all the children highlighted the importance of education with respect to the creation of employment opportunities. However, while both valued education for employment, the emphasis of children differed from that of their parents. While parents expressed the importance of education broadly in terms of making the child enter a respectable employment in contrast to their present employment, children spoke of its significance in terms of attaining the desired occupational ends. All stated that education was important for them because it was essentially required to enter the desired occupations. The kind of occupations they wished to pursue in future were those that required certain educational qualifications post schooling which thus made seeking education important for them. The following responses reflect this:

'*I want to be a teacher. And it is only through education that I can become this'* (Girl, X, Government School)

'*I am studying so that I can do a good job something related to computers and support my family financially'* (Girl, X, Government School)

'*I am studying because I have to become an accountant. I plan to take up commerce stream after class X and do B.Com. Through this I will come to have knowledge of accounts that I require to be an accountant* (Boy, IX, Government School)

'*I am studying as I want to become something in life. I want to become a manager in some company'* (Boy, XI, Government School)

The occupations which children aspired for were largely white-collar, a sharp contrast to their parental occupation which as it will be discussed they disliked. It was the dislike for the latter that formed the larger context that defined their occupational aspirations and thus the importance of education for them.

Gaining knowledge was another reason for which education was valued by many (11) children. The importance of education was stated by many (11) children in terms of 'gaining knowledge'. Again like some parents children stressed on how schooling and further education will make them knowledgeable about the world.

As children stated:

'*I have gained so much information about different things, events and happenings through the study of different subjects. A person who does not study cannot come to know such things*' (Boy, IX, Government School)

'Studying gives you knowledge about the world. You know what is happening around you. ……..At least you don't remain ignorant about the happenings' (Girl, XI, Government School)

Education was thus seen as making one aware of the world- in terms of different happenings, events etc. The poorly educated were seen as lacking in such knowledge. Most of the respondents (8/11) explained the importance of this knowledge with reference to getting the desired jobs. Respondents were of the view that along with the educational credentials, it was the knowledge gained at school or institutions of further education that was significant for getting through the job interviews. This knowledge was speculated to form the content of the job interviews and thus seeking it became important for them.

Respondents (4) also stated that being educated (knowledgeable) was very crucial for any individual and themselves for ensuring academic support to their children in future. These children were dissatisfied with the nature and extent of the academic support that they ever received from their parents. It was thus this feeling of dissatisfaction that led them to value education and the knowledge received through it thereby regarding it as crucial for becoming 'unlike' their parents and being much more helpful to their children.

One respondent (IX, Government School) also stated that it was her mother who told her about the significance of seeking education for gaining knowledge and becoming capable of helping her children in studies in future.

'*My mother tells me that education is so important for my future. If I am not educated then like her only I will also not be able to teach and help my children in studies and they will have to study on their own only. I also feel so. Parents should be educated otherwise children have to suffer in studies*'

Thus the respondent's mother herself played a significant role in shaping this view of the respondent, along with her own experience and feeling of dissatisfaction with the absence of parental support in her studies.

Gaining proficiency in English became another reason which made children value education. Twelve respondents mentioned that competence in reading, writing and speaking English was seen as an important requirement for seeking the desired employment. They shared the view that along with the requisite 'educational qualifications' and 'knowledge', proficiency in the English language was regarded as essential for getting through the job interviews. Completed schooling was seen as the basic requirement for gaining knowledge of it. Rather they felt that the lesser an individual is schooled the poorer will be his/her knowledge of the language.

Given this belief, children recognised that they were in the 'process of developing this competence'. But at the same time some children also highlighted that they still lack the 'confidence and the fluency in using the language' and 'were trying to improve upon it'. It is in this context that some of these children put forth their view that it is the kind of schools which one attends that becomes a critical determinant of the development of the competence in the use of English. Like the parents, even these children believed that it is the private schools that fare better in making one fluent in the language than the Government schools, because of the English medium of education in the former. They complained as to how it was the Hindi medium of instruction that did not provide them much opportunity to speak, read and write in the language in Government school. They maintained how it was the Hindi-medium of the language that did not allow them to be as comfortable with English as they were with Hindi. Four of them even mentioned their plans of joining English speaking courses soon. Thus these children felt that they were at a disadvantage by not studying

in private schools which were valorised for the development of the desired competence in English. This aspect was all the more highlighted by the two girls studying in private schools who came to see themselves at an advantage in terms of gaining proficiency in the language by studying in these schools.

However even though some children were dissatisfied with government schools they attended, all expressed their satisfaction with the fact of at least knowing English unlike the case of the poorly educated where even this basic knowledge was perceived to be missing. Thus while they regarded themselves as not being proficient in English and in the process of developing it, they still considered themselves to have at least the basic knowledge of the language unlike the latter. As children sated:

'At school we have been learning English since the junior classes and have knowledge about it, but I still think I need to improve upon it as I lack confidence to use it. But at least I am better than the poorly educated as I at least have knowledge about it unlike them (the former)' (Boy, XI, Government School)

'I know English though I am not fluent in it, but I can read and write it to some extent. But the person who has not been to school or has left it will not know this much also……I am trying to improve it through tuitions……' (Girl, XI, Government School)

Lastly importance of education was also stated by 7 girls in terms of getting an educated life partner. They believed how education makes it possible for them to seek an educated spouse who would posses all or most of the characteristics that make an individual 'distinct' from the poorly educated. All the girls aspired to marriage with an educated boy who is in a white collar employment, is knowledgeable and is competent in English .They specifically mentioned how they would never marry a boy who is in the occupation of sweeping. It emerged from their views that by being educated they saw their chances of securing an 'educated' life partner becoming bright. Thus marriage became another important purpose for which education was valued by them. This is reflected in the following responses:

'*Through education you gain knowledge…….. Also if I am well educated, I will get an educated and professionally well settled boy for marriage. I want to my life partner to be in a good job like manager'* (Girl, XII, Government School)

'*Also if I am educated, I will get an educated husband and will be married in a good family'* (Girl, Class VI, Private School)

'*If I am educated and do a 'good job', I will also get good marriage proposal. I want that my husband should be some officer in some office'* (Girl, X, Government School)

These responses (and other) suggest that the respondents saw their education as leading to the possibility of seeking a similarly educated life partner. Further as noted, what raised their hopes in this regard was their belief that in the present times an educated boy desires an educated wife. Thus it was this belief that somewhere provided them with the confidence about the potential of education in helping them to seek an educated life partner.

6.2: Educational and Occupational aspirations of children

The occupational and educational aspirations of the respondents were closely tied to each other. All the respondents aspired to enter specific occupations mentioned in Table 6.3 that required one to acquire some level of post school education in order to pursue them. It was at least this level of education which the respondents aspired to secure in order to fulfill their occupational aspirations. Their aspirations were also informed by their views on their parental occupation.

All the respondents except one where the father worked as a manager disliked their parental occupations. While the dislike was most strong in the cases where the parents (both or either) were in the sweeping work, even in the cases where they engaged in the non-sweeping occupations, the work was not preferred by children. As expected they did not want to enter their parental occupations. Further, while the respondents (except for one case) did not prefer their parental occupations, they also expressed their reluctance to join any other manual occupation. Interestingly like the parents who made a distinction between salaried employment and that engaged in by the poorly educated in their discussions on the importance of education, children also did the same. They placed sweeping and other manual occupations under the category of employment pursued by the poorly educated and distinguished it from that opened up through education in terms of societal status and income differential. Respondents believed about the primacy of the former over the latter especially in terms of the aspect of respect.

Sweeping was viewed to be 'the least respectable' in the society, commonly expressed through the phrases like '*chota kaam, neecha kaam'*, all referring to the low status of the work vis-à-vis other occupations. This low status was understood to result from the work being 'dirty' (*ganda*), involving dealing with other's filth and garbage. Most children highlighted the aspect of 'otherness' as far as cleaning of this dirt is concerned. They stressed that it was 'not their own but other people's garbage and filth' which their parents and other Balmikis (engaged in this work) dealt with, which brought a disrespectful status to this work. Rather many respondents were of the view that their parents (and others) in this sense worked 'as servants' and even 'slaves' of others expressed through the phrase '*doosron ki ghulami karna'*. Doing this work was believed to be 'disrespecting the self' along with the disrespectful status that is accorded to it in the society. It was this view that even made one of the girls to refuse to perform the task of washing the used *(jhoota)* tea cup for one of her teachers, as discussed earlier.

As children stated:

'I do not like my parent's job. It is a low job (chchota kaam)They have to actually pick dirt of others and work as servants for them and listen to their orders. There is no respect attached to it……..…I think you even lose self respect if you do this.' (Boy ,Class XI, Government School)

'I do not like cleaning and sweeping jobs. There is no respect in this work. It is considered to be a low status job. Does it look nice to sweep on roads and clean gutters? There is so much filth involved in it and that too it's not yours but the whole city's' (Girl, Class VI, Private School)

'*I do not like my papa's work at all. Though you get money in this, but you earn no respect. It is seen as a small and low job. You have no value in this work. Though, we sweep at home also, but then it is for our own self and home and for no one else. In this work you have to touch else's garbage and dirt, so what respect it has?....It is also disrespecting yourself*' (Girl, Class VII, Government School)

'*I do not like my parent's job. It is one of the most low status jobs in the society. It is considered so because it involves dealing with dirt and filth. They are like slaves to others (voh doosron ki ghulami karte hain). '* (Girl, Class X, Government School)

Sweeping work was also disliked by 6 children due to its hazardous impact on the health of the one who performs it. They mentioned that as the work requires dealing with garbage and waste (including bodily waste in the case of cleaning of toilets); it made those doing it prone to different diseases and has a detrimental impact on their health.

No respondent expressed their interest in entering any other manual work due to the significance attached to educated employment by them. The reason again pertained to the 'aspect of respect associated with the work'. Interestingly while children also admitted this work to be 'still better in terms of status' as compared to the sweeping work, but it was again considered to be less respectful and also less paid as compared to the employment which education was seen to be opening and which they aspired.

While the other children did not want to pursue the employment of the kind their parents were engaged into, one respondent (VI, Private School), whose father was a manager in a hotel, aspired for employment of the similar nature- white collar- like that of her father.

As the girl stated:

'*But I am very proud of my father. See he got educated and is now working at a good place as a manager, despite the fact that his father was a sweeper. My father tells me that it was his determination that made him reach at this stage.……If I also study well I will also become what I want- an IAS officer'*

In all the cases parents thus tried to instil in the child, faith in the potential of education to lead to the respectable (desired) employment. The foregoing discussion points to the efforts made by the parents to communicate to the child not only the significance of education in terms of moving away from the community's long engaged occupations of sweeping and cleaning and even other manual occupations, but also the hopes for this to happen.

Children aspired to enter specific occupations. These are given in Table 6.3 below

Table 6.3: Occupations aspired by respondents

OCCUPATION ASPIRED FOR	NUMBER OF CHILDREN n=18	NUMBER OF BOYS n=8	NUMBER OF GIRLS n=10
Working in office (Government or Private)	6	3	3
Accountant	1	-	-
Teaching	2	-	2
Medicine	1	-	1
Engineering	1	-	1
Police Services (Inspector)	3	3	-
Aviation (Air- hostess)	1	-	1
Civil Services	2	-	2
Defence Services (Fighter Pilot)	1	1	-

Source: Respondents' interview, 2011-2012

As evident, office work was aspired by 6 children. This work was perceived to be marked by certain characteristics as identified by these respondents. The following responses reveal these attributes:

'I want to operate computers and work on files in the office' (Girl, Class X, Government School)

'I want to take up some job in the office where I sit on the chair and table and write on the computer' (Girl, IX, Government School)

'I *want to be a manager and work on computers'* (Boy, Class XI, Government School)

'*I want to do a office kind job (Afsari Kaam). I want to sit on the table and work'* (Boy, Class X, Government School)

As reflected, the office work which these children aspired to pursue was stated to be requiring them to ‘sit on the table-chair’, ‘doing writing work (in files)’ and ‘operate computers’. Such characteristics seem to confirm their aspirations for white collar work.

Other respondents mentioned fields like teaching, Engineering, Medicine, Civil and Defence Services and Aviation, in which they wished to pursue their careers. As the table (Table 6.3) shows, career in teaching was aspired for by girls, career in the police forces was aspired for by boys. This partly reflects gendered perceptions towards such professions. While teaching in the popular perception is often described as a ‘feminine occupation’ and over represented by women, the latter emerges to be a reserve for men, with lesser number of females found in this field. Respondents, however did not state their preference for these occupations on these bases and it was mainly their ‘interest in the field’, ‘their liking and fascination for that occupation’ which were the major reasons that made them and other children decide in favour of the respective occupation.

Like the parents, a majority (13) of the respondents stated that they have role models who were largely the Balmiki youth who were again relatives or family acquaintances. Rather in a few (5) cases both the parents and the child had common role models. All respondents admired them because of their educational and occupational engagements. While in some cases these youth were pursuing post school education and were thus perceived by the respondents to be preparing for their entry into the ‘respectable educated employment’, the others had already entered such occupations . More importantly, what made the respondents seek inspiration from them was the fact that they could pursue such educational and occupational careers despite belonging to the family with poor levels of education and where parents were engaged in the work of sweeping and other manual occupations- a background similar to their own. They were regarded as examples of ‘how by seeking education and working hard’ an individual coming from such backgrounds can seek educational and occupational mobility. But at the same time the respondents also acknowledged the importance of parental support (financially and otherwise) for such accomplishments. It is this support, as we will see shortly that they also considered as important in their own cases.

The following responses very well convey how the role models motivated the respondents.

'There's a boy who lived in our neighbourhood. He is like a brother to me. His parents are safai karamcharis. He became a police inspector. He achieved this even though his parents were not educated and were in sweeping. So if he can do, why can't I . It was his dedication ,hard work and his parents' support that made him achieve this much' (Boy, X, Government School)

'*I am inspired by a cousin of mine who has done a course in computer hardware and is now works in some office. His parents were sweepers in MCD. He has proved that even if your parents are in such (low) jobs, if you study you and oyur parents are with you, you can have a different and better life than them'* (Boy, IX, Government School)

'*I want to be like my uncle (Chacha). He is doing his BA and he is also a Computer Operator in an office. My other uncle, father, grandfather are all sweepers but look at him he has studied and moved forward in life. I want to be like him and work in the office like he does'* (Girl, VII, Government School)

So the role models helped to reaffirm the confidence and hopes of these children with the potential of education to enable one to enter the desired employment. Interestingly a few respondents also aspired to enter similar occupations as that pursued by the role models. These included 2 children who wanted to become police officers and 4 who wanted to pursue office work.

But while the role models became their inspiration, not all the respondents wanted to enter the same occupations as theirs. It was mainly in 6 cases as mentioned, where the education and employment of the role models formed the larger context in which children's specific occupational aspirations took shape. These cases included one boy respondent who wanted to enter the police forces and the role model here was also a Balmiki youth who recently joined the police forces at the post of sub - inspector. The other 4 cases included those who wanted to 'work in office' like their role models who were the respondents' cousins in 3 cases and paternal uncle in one case.

Did children fear any impediments in the successful accomplishment of their occupational goals? Some interesting responses emerged in this regard. Firstly some

respondents expressed their fear of lack of their competence in the language English which was seen by most as one of the important requirements of the job market. There were also others who doubted that their knowledge of the language was 'enough' to make it into their desired jobs. It was due to this fear that many were not only taking tuitions to strengthen their knowledge base in the language, but at the same time we saw that there were those who decided to join English speaking courses with a hope of improving their command over it. The respondents were aware of the significance as well as lack of this cultural capital in their families and themselves, but they were still making an attempt to secure it to the best possible extent.

Children also believed how it was the financial and motivational support from the parents that was crucial for the fulfilment of one's occupational aspirations. This belief became all the more firm through the cases of their role models. While all the children were sure of the motivational support of the parents, given the poor economic condition of the family some children were not fully sure if parents will be able to support their studies financially. Interestingly this was stated especially by children who wished to enter fields like engineering, defence and aviation. All these respondents were aware of the fact that courses in these fields required intensive investment, which their parents may not be able to provide for. Rather this was what the parents also stated. Parents of these children, as seen, maintained that such courses were unaffordable for them, though they still stated to try their best to support them. Such a state of affairs, is likely to lead many children (especially those who wanted to pursue career in engineering, medicine and defence), compromising with their own career ambitions to settle for what the parents could afford for them. However despite such a possibility children still remained determined to pursue their future occupational choices.

Further 3 girl respondents were aware that their parents will not allow them to seek employment and that marriage after the completion of schooling was expected by them. But despite this, they still aspired to enter the occupations of their choice and most importantly as they maintained they were ready to 'fight' to their best with parents to achieve their goals. As they stated:

'*I want to do an office kind job (Afsari Kaam). I want to sit on the table and work. I have not told about my job aspiration to my father, I think I will have to fight for it.*

He always talks of marrying me away after class XII' (Girl, Class VII, Government School)

'*My only tension is that I should not be married away early and my dream is left unfulfilled. My father and grandmother say that they will marry me off after XII. They mention it to me and I fear that this may turn to reality. I do not want to leave my ambition unaccomplished. If required I will fight with them'* (Girl, Class VI, Private School)

Though here 'marriage' was feared to be a major impediment in the accomplishment of their occupational and educational goals, these girls were also determined to fulfil their aspirations. While such a resistance by the girls in future may/may not lead them to the desired outcomes, what needs to be acknowledged is their determination to accomplish the set occupational goals.

Thus, while the respondents on the one hand had set their respective occupational goals, at the same time there was also a sense of perplexity about the achievement of these goals. However what is important is the hope they had with education in enabling them to enter the respectable desired employment. Also what marks their views is the extent and degree of their awareness about the available career options and the careers of their interest. Further it is interesting to note how many of them had conveyed their occupational aspirations to the parents- that reflect not only their seriousness with regard to their future career, but also the clarity about their future occupational paths. Given the importance attached to education by parents, such a tentative career-planning (given the fear of the discussed impediments) creates a promising picture with respect to the possibility for them and others like them to achieve what is desired. However it is the structural constraints and the availability of parental support in future that will come to determine the fulfilment of these aspirations.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Dalits have socially and economically been one of the most disadvantaged groups in India. Placed at the bottom of the traditional caste hierarchy, they have not only held a low ritual status, but given the material inequality that underlies caste; Dalits also suffer from different forms of social and economic deprivation. Despite the specific measures introduced by the government for ameliorating their condition, they are still disproportionately concentrated among the India's poor in addition to suffering from the stigma and subordination associated with their low ritual status (Mendelsohn and Vicziany, 1998). Thus the caste hierarchy – both in its ritual and material aspect has placed Dalits at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the non-Dalits in different spheres of life. One of the most prominent of these spheres has been that of education, which over the years has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Scholars and researchers have very well highlighted how the Dalits lag behind the non-Dalits as far as their educational advancement is concerned (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002, Wankhede, 2002; Thorat, 2009). Dalits still show low levels literacy, poor school completion rates and abysmal representation in institutions of higher education as compared to their non-Dalit counterparts. At the same time a few have also highlighted how the quality of schooling experiences of dalit children is poor and marred by instances of caste discrimination and exclusionary practices by teachers and peers (Jha and Jhingran, 2002; Kumar,2006; Nambissan, 2010).

While such scholarly contributions to the study of the subject are acknowledged, at the same time, they remain limited in their focus. Most of the work in the area has largely focussed on the educational disparities between the Dalit and the non-Dalits. There has thus been a tendency in the scholars to view the Dalits as a homogeneous category. As discussed the category of Dalits is constituted by different castes among whom there is an intra-caste hierarchy based on the degrees of defilement and pollution associated with the traditionally assigned occupations of each sub-caste. Further scholars have also pointed to the existence of the 'untouchable Dalit caste', the Valmikis, who face discrimination not only at the hands of non- Dalit castes but other Dalit castes as well (Shah, 2002; Macwan and Ramanathan, 2007). The Valmiki community comprises of different castes that have traditionally been engaged into the work of sweeping and scavenging like the Balmikis, Mehtar, Dom etc. It is for these

castes that the low ritual status corresponds most strongly to their low economic and social and educational status. While some Dalit castes have been able to avail of opportunities for education, castes especially those belonging to the Valmiki community lag behind them and remain educationally more disadvantaged than the other Dalit castes. Thus, it becomes important that adequate attention is paid to such disparities, which a research focussing on the Dalits as a homogeneous category cannot provide for.

Given this context, the present study focussed on the education of the Balmiki caste children in a settlement in Delhi and attempted to capture a number of aspects pertaining to the education and schooling of these children. These included the value attached to education by children and their parents, schooling experiences of the Balmiki children as well as the educational and occupational aspirations of children and their parents.

The Balmiki caste along with the Bhangi caste constitutes the Valmiki community in Delhi. Mostly concentrated in the Balmiki bastis, they largely engage in sweeping work including cleaning of dry toilets still existing in some areas of Delhi (Singh and Ziyauddin, 2009), sweeping work as Safai Karamcharis with the Municipal Corporation (Karlekar, 1982; Sharma, 1995) and in government and private offices. While the engagement of most Valmikis in sweeping work reflects how the traditional-caste occupation link for the caste remains strong till date, at the same time the urban context has also provided opportunities to some to move away from this work. The existing studies report how some Balmikis and Bhangis have been able to enter other manual jobs, lower office staff work as well as white collar employment by seeking education (Karlekar, 1982 ; Sharma, 1995). It is in this context of change in urban areas - the weakening of the caste-occupation in and the spread of spread of educational opportunities, that the present study of Balmikis in Delhi is located.

A survey of 50 Balmiki households and an in-depth study of a selected sample of parents and children were carried out in a block in Trilokpuri, Delhi where many Balmiki families reside. During the in-depth interactions, parents reflected on their ‘traditional occupations’, their present work and their aspirations for the education and careers of their children and their efforts to enable occupational and social mobility for them. Children enrolled in 11 schools spoke of their experiences of

curriculum transaction and relations with their teachers and peers. They also reflected on the importance of education and their future occupational aspirations and the educational pathways to them. The discussion that follows brings together some of the main findings of the study and dwells on the issues that emerge.

A majority (90% males and 88.4%) of parents were still engaged in the work of sweeping and cleaning with the Municipality, in Government and private offices. In that sense there was continuity in the occupation that the caste system forced on them, in modern spaces (government and private organisations) as well. At the same time some change in work was also observable for some of the members who engaged in other skilled manual, lower technical, lower office staff and white collar work. Thus there was a small movement away from traditional occupation of sweeping and cleaning for a few Balmikis but in lower level occupations – in offices, as technical staff and labour, skilled and unskilled. Thus urbanization and spread of education especially in the urban context have enabled some Balmikis to move out of the stigmatised work of sweeping and scavenging. But in recognising this, it is important to note that while the shift into other manual work has still been possible for more number of Valmikis, mobility through education has largely been low for the group.

Further educational levels remained poor for most of the adult members with a considerable number of them being non-literate.

A very significant aspect that emerged was that given the low and stigmatized status attached to the work of sweeping and scavenging in the society, was the distinction that parents made between ‘least respected’ and ‘most respected occupations’. Any shift away from this work was seen by parents as a movement away from the ‘least respected occupation’, to a ‘more respectable one’, even if such a change entailed their entry into other manual work. However at the same time, they were also of the view that it was education that had the potential to lead to salaried employment that was regarded to be the ‘most respected work’ in the society. It is this kind of employment that they aspired for their children in future. Thus aspirations for respectable occupations was prominent among the Balmiki parents in the settlement and the value placed on education was informed by their view about the potential of education to lead to a respectable status in the society.

Further the significance of education was not only stated in terms of seeking a respectable status in the larger society, but also within the Balmiki community (*Balmiki Samaaj*). Parents were well aware of the dismal state of education in the Balmiki community and they understood that given such levels of education successful completion of education by their children and their entry into a 'salaried employment' that they aspired for meant going against the grain. So any such accomplishment on the part of the child was thus expected to bring to them respect in the eyes of the other Balmikis and enhance the social prestige of the family. So parents saw education as a source of status enhancement for not only the child but the family itself in the Balmiki community as well as the larger society.

What made the parents hopeful about such mobility into respectable work both in the Balmiki samaaj and the larger society, was the presence of a few Balmikis who made their way through the salaried employment which education was expected to open or were seeking education to enter it. These Balmikis were identified as role models both by the parents and children. Interestingly it was because of the presence of these role models that some parents also expected their children to play the same role for others in the community. As studies report the absence of positive role models makes the Dalits experience a sense of hopelessness regarding the possibility of mobility through education (Jha and Jhingran, 2002). An earlier study by Drury (1993) highlights the important role that role models play within the family, immediate and extended. In the case of the most marginalised and socially discriminated castes such as Balmikis, the role models play a role for the caste as a whole as well as bring respect for their individual families. Even a few role models in the community raised the hopes of Dalit parents and children that education could provide a pathway (in fact the only one) to secure occupational and social mobility. The presence of role models had a greater impact on the perceptions of parents about the value of education and their expectations from it.

Education was also valued for a variety of other reasons in addition to occupational mobility through 'respectable work'. These included making the child knowledgeable, developing in him/her proficiency in English and developing the 'cultivated person' – marked by a polite and well mannered conduct. It is in the context of the development of such speech and demeanour that the parents recognised the role of education in developing civilised and cultivated selves as also pointed out by Ciotti's study of the

Chamars in Northern India (2006). While elaborating on the value of education in these terms, parents made a clear distinction between the educated and the poorly educated. While the educated was seen to be possessing all the above 3 attributes, these were seen to be lacking in the poorly educated. Thus education in this sense was seen to be conferring a cultural distinction on the educated, which differentiated him/her from the poorly educated.

Education was also valued for mobility through marriage. Parents of girls also highlighted the importance of education for creating a possibility of seeking a good match for daughters. Their daughters were also clear that their husbands should be educated and in occupations other than sweeping. An important aspect that emerged was that despite the fact all these parents stated the importance of education for their daughters with respect to marriage; they also had high occupational aspirations for them as well. Even all the girls themselves were determined to enter the career of their choice and thus recognised the importance of education in this respect. Thus while gender did mediate parental aspirations for daughter's future occupational careers to some extent, it did not constrain most parents' decisions and willingness to educate their girls. So education for occupational mobility came to be valued for girls as well.

The importance attached to education and the parental faith in its potential to facilitate mobility for them is reflected in the high enrolment rates of children and the presence of only a few school drop-outs in the settlement. The school experiences of children was captured by looking at the experiences of the 18 respondents who went to 11 schools (9 Government and 2 private) located in Trilokpuri and the nearby areas. An attempt was made not only to capture the quality of teaching-learning that happened in schools, but also to look at whether the caste identity of the Balmiki children mediated their relations with the teachers and the peers.

In line with the popular perceptions about the teaching –learning that happens in Government schools, pedagogy in the Government schools attended by the respondents was largely teacher centric and textbook based. Further even though children reported that they were free to ask questions in the class only a few did so. Participation in the classroom was also restricted to the answering of questions posed by the teacher minimising their engagement in the classroom. Further it was largely the 'intelligent children' who participated most in class and few Balmikis included

themselves in this 'learner category'. The involvement of Balmiki children in the teaching-learning process hence remained limited. However no overt caste based patterns in the classroom participation of children was reported by respondents or their parents.

Contrary to the perceptions about the private schools as using a more innovative pedagogy, the teaching-learning that happened in the private schools attended by the Balmiki girls was more or less similar to that in the Government schools. Given that the kind of teaching-learning in schools is an important indicator of school quality, the presence of a teacher centric pedagogy in all the schools attended by the respondents confirms the inferior quality of schooling (both Government schools and the private) that became available to these Dalit children in Delhi as has also been highlighted in general through the existing research (Banerji, 2000; Jha and Jhingran, 2002).

In order to explore if the caste-identity of the Balmiki children mediated their relations with the teacher, a number of spheres like the seating pattern in the classroom, selection of children in co-curricular activities and assignment of tasks and responsibilities by teachers was looked at. Unlike the findings of the existing studies that report how the school experiences of the dalit children are often marred by various discriminatory practices for instance provision of inadequate pedagogic attention to these children, performance or non-performance of personal tasks for the teacher, segregated seating patterns, abuse etc (Jha and Jhingran, 2002, Nambissan, 2010), caste identity of the Balmiki and other Dalit children did not appear to overtly mediate their experiences in these spheres. None of the respondents reported caste based segregation in seating by teachers in any classroom, nor did they feel that teachers displayed caste based preferences in the allocation of tasks and responsibilities and the selection of children in co-curricular activities. But this is not to suggest that the considerations of the caste background of children did not pervade the classroom at all. Caste based prejudices and stereotypes in the teachers very well became evident in when the poor academic performance of the child had to be explained. This became most evident in 6 classrooms where teachers made unpleasant references to the Balmiki children in the context of the work of sweeping – traditionally associated with the Balmiki caste and also pursued by the parents of many Balmiki children in these classrooms. Not only was this work projected as a result of academic failure of those who engaged into it, but also the teachers

communicated their low expectations from these students by stressing on the fact that as they were not performing well, they (teachers) expected them to join the same work. Most importantly no comments pertaining to the family backgrounds and parental occupations were made to other children who also performed badly in exams. Thus there was unequal treatment (hence discrimination) by teachers vis-a-vis Balmiki children as they made a selective mention and derogation of their parental (and the larger community's) occupation by portraying it as reason for educational failure. Thus, it was the context of work, through which caste/occupational identity of the Balmiki children mediated their relations with the teacher in specific situations.

The study also explored the existing peer relations in the classrooms attended by the respondents. Like for the teachers, an attempt was made to see whether the caste identity of the Balmiki children mediated their relations with the classmates. This was looked at in terms of the relations of friendships of the respondents and the inter-personal interaction between them as well as peer conflicts.

All the children reported to have best friends in the class and friendships in a majority (11 of 18) classrooms appeared to cut across caste/community backgrounds.

Eleven respondents had friendship ties with non-Balmiki children that included the non-Dalit, other Dalit, Muslim and OBC children. Further of these, 6 also reported to have Balmiki best friends as well. All these respondents also informed their other Balmiki classmates to have friends from other caste /community backgrounds. For the remaining 7 respondents, friendships were restricted to the Balmiki caste children only. However there were patterns to it. While the reason for forging of friendship ties for three children did not relate to similarity of caste background, in the remaining 4 cases it did so. While the caste identity of the Balmiki children did not intervene in the forging of friendship ties in the classroom, it did gain prominence during peer conflicts where group dynamics in the class (Balmikis and other castes/Balmikis and Muslims) came into play. In four classes community based boundaries were clearly drawn and were linked to complex issues such as cultural practices and stereotyping. However other classrooms offered space of friendships across narrow caste/occupational identity and respondents reported to make up with their classmates after conflicts, consult them if necessary and so on. However what was important is that where Balmikis had non - Dalit friends they received academic support that was

critical for them and which was relatively not available within only Balmiki groups given that many were first generation to come to school or their parents were poorly educated. The importance of a broad social base of friendship to yield academic support has been pointed out in other studies as well (Nambissan, 2010).

Very significantly, parents had high occupational aspirations for their children. While some parents specified particular occupations they wished their children to enter, which was aspired to by children as well, many parents merely highlighted that they wanted their children to enter 'respectable work' or 'office work'. However all the parents were determined that their children would not enter their own occupations. In order to ensure this all the parents evolved different strategies in relation to the pathway to future mobility – the education of their children.

The involvement of parents especially in academic terms was restricted by their caste and class location and it needs to be acknowledged that they made special efforts to ensure the provisioning of some form of assistance to the child. Most parents, as we saw worked out or rather strategized alternative academic assistance systems in the form of tuitions in many cases and help from other family members including elder siblings and other educated relatives in some other cases. Their involvement in indirect ways as discussed suggests how they were concerned about the child's academic performance as well as success at school. This refutes the views of scholars about the lack of interest in the Dalit parents in their child's schooling. Rather the present patterns of parental involvement shows how even though the caste (class) location constrained parents' assistance, but at the same time they also tried to work out strategies, given the value attached to success in education especially in terms of entering respectable educated employment and thus moving away from the stigmatized association with their traditional occupations. There were variations in the parental involvement that resulted from the resources they possesed and the translation of these into educational advantages for children. Parents in non - sweeping jobs who were better educated were able to involve themselves in ways that provided greater academic support to their children. Others had to deal /negotiate with the constraints which the lack of such resources imposed on the family. Parental educational involvement and the negotiation strategies through such supports and strategies evolved by individual families may not have reduced the disadvantage that children experienced vis-a-vis those of the other caste/class backgrounds. It is

important to note that what constrains parents are the scarce resources and capitals within the family and not their aspirations for their children's future.

Balmiki parents were also found to strategise in their work spaces as they sought to build networks to yield capital for occupational mobility of their children. We have seen how parents employed in offices and even in homes said they tried to work as efficiently as possible at their work place to keep their employer happy (*maalik ko khush rakhna)* and satisfied in an attempt to develop links with them which were in turn seen as crucial for enhancing the job prospects for the child.

Parents also tried to maintain cordial relationships with the role models and remained in constant touch with them. This was done to secure their guidance and support for the child's future occupational career.

What can be observed here is that these parents were trying to develop the 'right links' or the social capital in the secular spaces that they were newly entering and where they lacked networks. As discussed while the Balmikis have intensive social networks as far as employment in sweeping is concerned they still lack the networks in relation to the 'high status job' which they wished their child to enter. Displaying key insights regarding the possibilities of secular as against caste-based links, Balmiki parents strategized and planned to the best of their ability for their children's future. The findings from the study support the existing research that highlights the increasing aspirations of the Valmiki community for education, recognising it as a means of enhancing their social status. What emerges clearly from the discussion is the hope for the latter to happen through education, which in turn motivates the parents to aspire for further education for their children. At the same time it is also reflected how parents not only strategized to support the child in studies at present- through the means of arranging alternative source of academic assistance or by playing the role of disciplinarians, but many also strategize for ensuring child's entry into respectable employment by building the required social capital seen as facilitating the child's entry into the desired work in future. It is these efforts by the parents that need to be recognised and appreciated.

It is significant that respondents appeared hopeful of what education could do for them, yet pragmatic about the real constraints they faced from their families due to the lack of academic and economic resources. They realised what the absence of

knowledge of English meant and those who had the resources went for tuitions to strengthen their knowledge of the language. They were aware of the significance as well as lack of this cultural capital in their families and themselves, but they were still making an attempt to secure it to the best possible extent.

All the respondents who aspired for prestigious courses such engineering, defence and aviation were aware of the fact that entry and success in these fields required intensive investment, which their parents may not be able to provide for. This may lead them to compromise with the situation and settle for the work, their parents aspired for and could afford. However despite such a possibility children still remained willing to pursue their future occupational choices.

However convinced about the importance of education for the mentioned reasons, all the respondents were serious about their education. It was the hope of the potential of schooling (and further education) to confer upon them the 'advantages', education was perceived to accrue that they entered schools. However we have seen that schools fail to pro actively provide the necessary academic support. As discussed the reality of the experience of schooling is likely to become one of the major impediments to the realisation of their aspiration and the possibilities that education can offer to the Balmikis.

How then do we view education in relation to the Balmikis? From the foregoing discussion it is clear that Balmikis view education as a critical resource. One that will enable conferring 'distinction' and enabling access to a more `respectable' social status and forms of behaviour (a person's demeanour, speech and manners), that tend to confer distinction in social situations which the Balmikis in particular are seen to lack (See Jeferry et.al, 2005 for discussion on education and `distincition').

Thus for Balmikis education is a contradictory resource today, especially in the urban context. It does not lead to complete reproduction of the dominant culture not can we say that it will transform their social and economic situation completely. It has opened up, some opportunities for them (Rao 2010). However , given the structural constraints of the occupations that most are still engaged in and the poor quality of institutions, education has failed to realise the possibilities that could have been made available to the Balmikis. However the study does show as scholars (Levinson and Holland, 1996 and others) have suggested that the Balmikis - the most disadvantaged

social group are constantly strategizing through education, and also as using this resource to seek an improvement in their position. In other words the agency of the Balmikis amidst structures that continue to disadvantage them must be highlighted. Their strategies and the decisions pertaining to schooling and education are important to understand as they are imbued with a range of meanings and values that reflect their aspirations for the future or their children.

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Annexure A

Site Map of the surveyed Block

Source: Delhi Slum Development Authority

Annexure B:

Interview Schedule for Parents:

Name-

Age-

House-number-

Education (completed) –

Occupation-

I. About the Balmiki community:

1. What work did your grand- parents do? Why?
2. What work did your parents do? Why?
3. What was the attitude of other castes towards the Balmikis in your grandparents' and parents' generation (in villages and /or cities)?
4. What change do you see in the life of Balmiki community from your grand-parents' times to the present times?
5. Has there been any change in the attitude of other castes towards the Balmikis over time (in villages and /or cities)? What kind of change has come about? Why?

II. Parents' education and occupation

6. Why could you not complete your education?
7. Did you want to study further? Why?
8. Do you regret for not having studied today? Why?
9. What was the kind of educational facilities available for Dalits in your time (in villages and/ or cities)?
10. Has there been any improvement in these facilities over time? What?
11. What did you feel about your parental occupation? Why?
12. Why did you choose this work?
13. Did you really want to pursue it? Why?
14. How did you get this work?
15. Did you ever tried to change it? Why/Why not?
16. Do people at your work place know your caste?

17. Have you ever told your caste at work?
18. Who are your friends at work?
19. Whom do you eat with at work?
20. Do you visit your staff's home and vice-versa? When? Why?
21. Do you eat at their house and vice-versa? When? Why?
22. How is the attitude of others towards you at work?
23. Are you offered tea/food at work? Are you served in separate utensils?
24. How does the employer treat you and other workers?
25. Do you have any complaints/dissatisfaction with your work? What and Why?

III. Importance of education for the child

26. Why are you educating your child? Till what level will you educate him/her?
27. What facilities are you providing to children for education?
28. Will child's education impact your family's prestige? How?
29. Has your low level of education impacted your child's education/performance in some way?
30. Do you help the child in studies? How?
31. Do you talk to him/her about school? When and what?
32. How do you motivate him/her to study?
33. What facilities are you providing to enable the child to pursue schooling successfully?

IV. About the child's school

34. Why did you choose this school for the child?
35. Does school calls you for meetings? When?
36. Who goes to school? Why?
37. What is discussed in these meetings?
38. Are you satisfied with the present school in terms of teaching facilities, infrastructure etc.?
39. How is your child's performance in school? Are you satisfied with it?
40. Has your child made any complaints about the school to you? If yes, what did you do?

41. Has your child made any complaints about other children /teachers' attitude/behaviour towards him/her? What?
42. If yes, what did you do?
43. Do you send the child to tuitions? Why?
44. Do your child's friends visit your home and vice-versa? Why?

V. Parental aspirations regarding child's future occupation:

45. Do you want your child to enter your occupation? Why?
46. If no, what occupation do you want him/her to take up?
47. What occupation does your child wants to enter?
48. Will your occupational engagement impact your child's future occupation? How? Why?
49. What efforts are you making for it?
50. What does your child feel about your work?
51. According to you what are the basic requirements for getting a job today?
52. Do you have any role model? Who? Why?

Annexure C:

Interview Schedule for Child

Name:

Age:

Class:

School:

I. Importance of education

1. Why are you seeking education?
2. Do you feel an educated person is different from poorly educated? How?
3. What do your parents feel about importance of education? Have they ever discussed anything with you in this regard?
4. Do your parents inquire about your studies and how often they do that?
5. Up till what level of education do your parents want you to study?
6. What are the facilities provided by your parents for your studies?
7. If your parents were more educated how would have their and your lives been different?

II. Experiences at school

Total Number of Children in the Class

SC Children

Balmiki Children

II.1 Teacher student relations

II.1.1Teaching-learning process

8. How do the teachers teach in the class?
9. Do they ask questions from students?
10. Whom do they ask mostly? / Whom do they not ask at all? Why?
11. Do children ask questions from teachers? Who mostly does this?
12. Do you ask questions from teachers? What do you ask? When?
13. If not, why don't you do so?
14. How do you perform in the class?

15. How do the other Balmiki/ SC children perform in the class?
16. Who are the highest scorers in the class?
17. Who are the lowest scorers in the class?
18. What is the teachers' attitude towards these children?
19. Has the teacher ever remarked /commented on your or other Balmiki's children caste background? What was said and why?
20. How did you feel on this?
21. Has the teacher ever commented on any other SC children's caste background or any other child's background? What and Why?

II.1.2. Assignment of tasks and responsibilities

22. Do you have class monitors? How are they chosen?
23. What responsibilities are given to them?
24. Are other children also given responsibilities? Who are given these and what responsibilities are given?
25. Do children perform any personal tasks for the teacher? Who does so and what tasks are performed?

II.1.3. Selection in co-curricular activities

26. Does your school hold co-curricular activities? What kinds of activities are conducted?
27. Do you participate in these? Why/why not?
28. Do other Balmiki children / SC children also participate?
29. How are the children selected for these activities?
30. Has the teacher ever refused from taking a child/you in these activities? Why?

II.2. Peer relations

31. Who are your friends in the class?
32. Do you know their caste backgrounds and vice-versa?
33. Why did you choose them as your friends?
34. Whom are the other Balmiki children in your class friends with?
35. Who do you sit/eat/play with?

36. Do you visit any of your friends'/classmates' house and vice-versa? Whom? Why? When?
37. Are you offered food/ drink at your friends' house and vice-versa?
38. Do children/you fight in your class? Why?
39. Do the teachers' intervene in these fights? How?
40. Have your classmates ever said anything about your family/ caste background? Who said this and why?
41. What did you do then?
42. Have you ever informed your parents about this?

III. Occupational aspirations

43. Do you like your grandparents'/ parents' work? Why?
44. Do you want to pursue it? Why?
45. Do your parents want you to pursue this work? Why?
46. Do your parents want you to enter any particular occupation? Will you take up this work?
47. What kind of jobs do you aspire for?
48. Do your parents know about your occupational aspiration? Why/why not?
49. Do your parents talk to you about your future career?
50. Are you making any preparations to enter your aspired work? How?
51. Do you have any fears about fulfilling your occupational aspirations?
52. Are you hopeful of accomplishing your future occupational goals? How?
53. Do you have role models? Who are they and why are they your role models?

IV. Child and work

54. Have you ever worked? Where? Why?
55. Why did you leave your work?