

**CASTE AND INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES:  
A STUDY OF ABILITY, SUCCESS, AND FAILURE AMONG  
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN DELHI**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of requirements  
for the award of degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy***

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**New Delhi, India**

**2019**



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DECLARATION

I, Shreela Misra, do hereby declare that the thesis entitled '*Caste and Individual Psychological Processes: A study of ability, success, and failure among university students in Delhi*' submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is my original work and has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree of this university or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We hereby recommend this thesis to be placed before the examiner(s) to be evaluated for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Lord Almighty for giving me the strength and courage to pursue this extensive and exhausting journey of Ph.D. The past seven years have been a process of continuous struggle between self-doubt and self-realization. The journey has been challenging and would not have been possible without the support of many. I would like to thank all those associated with this research for their contributions.

My grandmothers Annamayi Misra, Kausalya Misra, and my grandmother-in-law, Shanti Lata Panda have had a deep desire to see me conferred with a Ph.D. degree. Their aspiration has inspired me throughout; especially when times were challenging and things seemed unrealistic. I can feel that, at every moment, my grandfather, late Er. Somnath Misra continues to instill calm and composure in me from his heavenly abode.

I would like to thank my research supervisor, Dr Arvind Kumar Mishra for his constant support and guidance at every step of the journey. Not only has he been instrumental in my growth as a researcher but has also been a father figure to me. He has borne my incessant queries with utmost patience and instilled within me confidence in my own abilities. This Ph.D. would not have seen the light of the day without his vision and insight. Thank you, Sir, for your many inputs, I will be forever grateful.

I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to Prof. S. Srinivasa Rao for his valuable feedback on various aspects of this research. This work has taken the present shape due to some very valuable inputs provided by him.

I would like to thank Prof. Saumen Chattopadhyay and Dr Pradeep Kumar Choudhary for their support and encouragement throughout. The interactions with them have always left me smiling and renewed with enthusiasm.

I would like to thank the Indian Council for Social Science Research for providing me with their Doctoral Research Fellowship. The fellowship has been very beneficial in supporting various aspects of this Ph.D.

I am grateful to Dr Yashpal Jogdand and Dr Sammyh S. Khan for the opportunity to attend the workshop on thematic analysis at the Indian Institute of Technology, New

Delhi. The workshop was very useful and provided me with a sound analytic strategy to view my data.

I want to thank my professors, Prof. Namita Mohanty and Dr Jahan Ara Begum from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar and Rajdhani College, Bhubaneswar for their constant love, support and encouragement.

I want to thank all the participants who were part of this research; the interactions with them were insightful and helped in my growth as a researcher. Their narratives of struggle with failures, belief in their abilities, and coming out successful helped increase my self-belief as well. I would also like to thank everyone who helped me in approaching prospective participants for this work. I must also mention Daksha Yadav and Sugandh Gupta for helping me gain access to articles not available through the university's online resources.

I want to thank all the members of the research scholars group at our centre – Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies (ZHCES). Each and everyone one of them has a contribution, direct or indirect, in this research. Members of the group are Divya, Neha, Poonam, Mona, Priyanka, Vinika, Sidharth, Akanksha, Rashba, Savita, Mohna, Sonali, Ishnita, Richa, Subhra and Akanksha. A special word of thanks goes to Divya and Neha for their academic inputs and to Sidharth for helping with formatting and referencing.

I am grateful to Megha and Yamini for painstakingly proofreading my chapters and providing valuable inputs. Megha has also been my go-to person in all these seven years. Thank you, Megha!

On a personal note, I would like to thank friends and family for all the love and affection. My dear friends, Roma and Mani, have made hostel life fun and have always stood by me in times of need. A time had come in the past few days when I couldn't walk to the hostel mess for taking meals. Each time, they have taken turns to run errands for me. I am grateful for their support during that difficult phase. I will cherish their friendship for all times to come.

I have been blessed to have many relatives residing in Delhi. Though I cannot name every one of them, they have all been a source of strength and support in the many years I have spent living in the hostel. I especially want to thank my aunts, Madhumita Padhi and

Rinki Rath for always keeping their homes and hearts open for me. Space here is not enough to express the gratitude I hold in my heart for them. In fact, their being in Delhi was the reason my parents could send me here to pursue higher education in the first place.

I want to thank my family for their unconditional love and support. My (not so) new family, of which I became a part during the journey of PhD, has been immensely supportive. If everyone was blessed with in-laws like mine, pursuing dreams would be simpler and less challenging for women. My parents, Sasmita and Prem Shankar Misra have made many sacrifices for their daughters and have provided us with everything any child could ever ask for. My parents-in-law, Sanjukta and Sisir Kanta Panda, have always encouraged me. My mother-in-law especially is a true source of inspiration. My sister, Shreeya, has unwavering faith in me and is a constant support. She has never failed to answer my anxious calls and hopeless messages with the patience and calm of an elder sister rather than it being the other way round. My sister-in-law and brother-in-law, Shobhanika and Mrutyunjya Panda, have always showered me with love and warmth. I have been pampered beyond, both imagination and expression, on my numerous visits to their home in Gurugram. The fun-filled times spent with my niece Sadaakshi and nephew Shanav have been rejuvenating breaks from the tedious process of research writing.

Last, but not least, I wish to mention the love of my life, Somya Kant. Not only has he patiently endured my absence but also helped me evolve as a person. Dhana, it has been a little over two years to our long-distance marriage. You have understood the sacrifices that pursuing a Ph.D. requires and have made those sacrifices with me. You have, at every step, inspired me to give my best. I cannot thank the Lord enough for bestowing me with your companionship through this beautiful bond of marriage. From this day onwards, be it staying without electricity because of a cyclone (Foni) or eating chuda (beaten rice) for seven days in a row, we will be in it, together.

**I wish to dedicate this thesis to my family; Pandas and Misras, for their unconditional love and support. Whatever little I achieve is not only because of but also for them.**

**Shreela Misra**

## **ABSTRACT**

Social psychology has often been criticized for not being social enough. The founders of scientific psychology and early pioneers of social psychology had conceptualized social psychology as embedded in group membership. Over the years, this concern with the study of behaviour as derived from membership in groups has dwindled. Subsequently, research on social cognition has tended to portray a picture of the human mind as a cognitive schema, independent and autonomous of society. However, human behaviour is not independent and autonomous of the influences of society, culture, and the social structure within which it occurs. It is important to reiterate that the individual mind cannot be conceptualized without reference to the larger social structures within which it operates. With this background in mind the present research focused on studying implicit theories and attributions for success and failure. Both these areas of research have been primarily grounded in the American social psychology approach which views the mind as an information processor rather than as being socially structured. However, the focus of the study was on the mind as socially structured and social cognition as derived from social context and cultural processes.

For this purpose, implicit theories held and attributions made by participants pursuing higher education were studied. Participants were identified and recruited on the basis of their caste categories. This was because caste has more often than not been used as a mere variable rather than a part of social context which influences the functioning of the mind. Moreover, the present study was conducted with university going students. Instead of the usually followed quantitative paradigm to study implicit theories and attributions a qualitative method was used. A semi structured interview schedule self prepared by the researcher was used to conduct interviews with the participants. A total of 38 participants were interviewed of which 15 belonged to the unreserved category, 12 to the other backward classes category, and 11 to the scheduled caste category. Thematic analysis was employed as the methodological tool to analyse the data from the interviews.

In the context of implicit theories, it was found that participants in the present research mostly held an incremental belief about intelligence; that is they believed that intelligence was malleable and could be modified with effort and persistence. It was

observed that there was no impact of the caste of the participants on the kind of implicit theory they held. However, there was a difference in terms of the factors which participants believed helped in increasing and shaping intelligence. In the context of attribution for success and failure it was found that there was no dichotomy in making internal and external attribution for success and failure. Most participants made both internal and external attributions; that is, the usually claimed ‘taking credit for success’ and ‘avoiding blame’ for failure was refuted by the results of this study. Participants took equal responsibility for success and failure alike. Moreover, the role of the individual’s efforts and persistence emerged as the key causes of achieving success and overcoming failures. These results have important theoretical and practical implications.

Effort and persistence emerged as the most prominent factors among the findings of the study. Making effort and being persistent was emphasized by participants as indispensable to increasing abilities, to overcome failures, and also to achieve success. Reliance on effort is an indication of the role of culture (Indian) in determining social cognition. Hard work, effort, and persistence feature as core elements in the socialization of children from an early age. These values find place even the traditional Indian texts and folklore making them indispensable parts of the cultural and social processes in India. These cultural processes are reflected in the social cognition of the participants. Moreover, the attributions of success to a combination of internal (effort, hard work) and external causes (family support, reservations) by participants belonging to the reserved categories were accompanied by narratives of challenge and resistance to the status quo. This suggests that mere attribution of success to external causes does not imply an internalization of ideology. Moreover, reliance of quantitative paradigm to study aspects of social cognition is not enough and should always be accompanied with qualitative and in-depth analysis of participant responses.

Overall, the findings of the research highlight the role of social and cultural factors in determining social cognition. The research is a step closer to reiterating that social cognition is socially structured and culturally construed rather than originating in the individual mind, in a vacuum.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND THESIS OVERVIEW

### 1.1 Introduction

The founders of scientific psychology and the early pioneers of social psychology identified social psychology as the branch of psychological science concerned with the study of psychological states and behaviour oriented to the represented psychology and behaviour of members of social groups (Greenwood, 2004). For example, Wilhelm Wundt, recognized as the founder of scientific psychology, also opined that the experimental study of conscious experience ought to be supplemented by the comparative, historical study of socially embedded psychological states and behaviour. Similarly, both structural, as well as functional psychologists like Titchner and Angell, also followed Wundt in conceiving social psychology as a discipline concerned with psychological behaviour grounded in group membership. To quote,

“The subject-matter of psychology is human experience considered as dependent upon the individual. But since the individuals of the same race and epoch are organized in much the same way, and since they live together in a society where their conduct affects and is affected by the conduct of others, their view of experience under its dependent aspect naturally becomes, in certain main features, a common or general view; and this common view is embodied in those social institutions to which we have referred above, – in language, religion, law and custom.” (Titchener, 1910, p. 28)

Moreover, to quote Angell, “*Social psychology*, in its broadest sense, has to do mainly with the psychological principles involved in those expressions of mental life which take form in social relations, organizations, and practices.” (Angell, 1908, p. 4) In this way, the study of social behaviour had always been situated in the larger social structure in which it occurred. To give an example, Greenwood (2004) says that in early American studies of beliefs and attitudes the adjective “social” was prefixed to the terms

to refer them as social beliefs and social attitudes. Beliefs and attitudes were considered social by virtue of being beliefs and attitudes of members of social groups irrespective of the objects to which they were directed.

However, surprisingly, over the years, this concern with the study of behaviour as derived from membership in groups has dwindled. And, social psychologists have tended to pursue individual cognitive activities within a structural vacuum ignoring the influence of the environment (Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990). Much of this shift in focus can be attributed to the cognitive revolution, which led to the rise of social cognition within social psychology. This dominance of social cognition and cognitive psychology increased following the crisis period in social psychology in the late 1960s and 1970s (Operario & Fiske, 1998). What followed was an emphasis on the role of cognitive processes in social behaviours and the need to look within the individual for understanding social processes and social behaviour. Social cognition blossomed during this cognitive revolution and gave an enhanced understanding of how individuals process and store information about people and events and how this, in turn, influences social perception and interaction (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). In this way, following the social cognition approach, the current trend in social psychology has been to invoke the individual mind and individual mental processes to understand social behaviour.

However, such an understanding of the individual or social behaviour for that matter is very different from the one conceptualized by early thinkers of the discipline. Moreover, social cognition has been criticized on the grounds that there is very little 'social' in social cognition and the focus on cognitive structures has overlooked human interaction providing a reductionist and asocial account of human behaviour (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995). Human behaviour is not independent and autonomous of the influences of society and the social structure within which it occurs.

In fact, House (1977) identifies social structure and personality, psychological social psychology, and symbolic interactionism as three branches of social psychology among which the study of societal processes lies at the core of social structure and personality. He further says the study of social structure and personality was shaped by the need to counter psychological reductionism and should be central to the study of social psychological processes. Indeed, social structure and individual level processes are

closely related (House & Mortimer, 1990). House & Mortimer (1990) argue for deeper analysis of the role played by micro-social and psychological processes in influencing the relationship between macro-social structures to individual level processes of thinking, feeling, and acting.

In the same way, Turner & Oakes (1997) conceptualize the human mind as socially structured with its content, structure, and functioning, all being socially shaped and interdependent with society. Moreover and more importantly, it is not that the contents of the mind are simply derived from society but that the functioning of the mind evolves through interaction with social context and social processes. All social psychological phenomena do not arise from intra-individual processes but also have an origination in society (Tajfel, 1977). For Tajfel, social psychology is not about individual differences or individual exceptions but about the socially shared, collective aspects of conduct, and the social forces that shape the individual. The human mind is thus, socially structured and mind-society interactionism is or rather should be the focus of social psychology.

As can be gathered from the above discussion, the individual and the individual mind cannot be conceptualized without reference to the larger social structures in which they operate. The mind by virtue of being socially structured derives its functioning from the social context and social processes and all cognition by virtue of being derived from social experience is social cognition. For all these reasons, it is important to study the role of the larger social structure in which the individual operates to meaningfully comprehend all aspects of its functioning. Since there are many aspects of social cognition or individual psychological functioning in the present research focus will be on addressing one aspect of social cognition, that is, lay theories of both ability and causality. Lay theories are naïve theories which guide functioning of individual's in day to day life and are not necessarily always expressed explicitly.

Lay theories of ability focus on how individuals perceive their own ability in terms of whether ability is fixed or malleable. Similarly, lay theories of causality focus on how individuals explain the causes of success and failure in achievement or other, more general situations. Both lay theories of ability (implicit theories) and lay theories of

causality (attribution) have been much researched areas in social psychology, however; the focus has not been on studying these theories in their relationship with social structure. In the area of implicit theories it has now been firmly established that implicit theories of ability and/ or implicit theories, in general, affect how people understand and respond to the social world. But only of late has the role of social structure in determining these theories been explored. Recent research by Srinivasan, Dunham, Hicks, & Barner (2015) by focussing on the caste system in India has demonstrated that beliefs children and adults hold towards the Hindu caste system are related to differences in the implicit theories they hold about intelligence.

Similarly, in the area of attribution, both interpersonal and inter-group, research has focussed on the role of culture, group membership, group roles, as well as self-categorization in explaining attribution pattern. For example, it has been found that compared to East Asians European North Americans are more likely to attribute situationally induced events to the actor's dispositions (Choi & Nisbett, 1998), and also to attribute causes of social events to the actors' internal traits (Morris & Peng, 1994). However, most research has focussed on the collectivist versus individualist dimension of culture ignoring social structural aspects of culture like value, norm, and ideology. In the context of inter-group attributions, Hewstone (1990) has highlighted the study of self-categorization as imperative in the study of inter-group attribution. Group roles, as well as group memberships are inseparable parts of social structure and culture. Though these have not been highlighted explicitly, they have always been addressed by researchers in the area of inter-group attribution. However, despite studying these aspects of social structure, literature fails to highlight the role played by group dynamics, power relations, and status inequalities in influencing the attribution process. When there are different groups in society, there is bound to be power, authority, and dominance between and among these different groups and also status inequalities in society. These aspects of social structure have been overlooked in researching attribution within social psychology. Moreover, culture is not simply limited to individualistic and collectivistic. Rather it is a broader gamut which subsumes social structure, value, and ideology.

Thus, it can be said that culture and social structure, along with influencing all aspects of social cognition, plays an important role in determining lay theories. However, it has not received much attention in social psychological research. While research on implicit theories has recently begun to draw links between belief in caste and lay theory of ability research on attribution is yet to explicitly highlight the role of social structure in determining attributions. Thus, the aim of the present research is to study the role played by culture and social structure in determining the notion of ability (implicit theories) and also causal explanations of success and failure (attribution). For this purpose, the context of the study will be caste, which is an important aspect of Indian social reality.

Not only is caste a defining feature of the social structure of Indian society but also a system of stratification which has persisted over time. In fact, Karl Marx (1853/1975) had long ago predicted that the caste system in India will gradually disappear with the rapid growth of industrialization (as cited in Jogdand, Khan & Mishra, 2016). However, caste still continues to be an integral part of Indian society. In spite of undergoing several changes, caste continues to influence the political system as well as the economic functioning of Indian society even in the modern sphere of today's life. Indeed, caste has become an inseparable part of the democratic process in India (Gupta, 2005, Jogdand et al., 2016). Especially in the forum of reservations in education, government jobs and other elective bodies, people become quite emotionally charged when it comes to any aspect of their category or the issue of reservations in more general. The emergence of a collective identity among the caste groups sharing certain benefits or partaking in similar opportunities has further diluted the traditional role of caste in shaping several life outcomes. The long-established functions of caste in terms of ritual and cultural status have given way to caste as a form of power in the present competitive and political realms. Thus, it can be said that though the ways in which caste dynamics operate have changed over the years caste continues to exist in some form or the other even in present times. This shows that the ideological structure underlying caste has not changed (Jodhka, 2012). For all these reasons, this research studies how lay theories of ability and causality are shaped by this unique social structural aspect of caste.



## 1.2 Thesis Overview

This section provides an overview of the entire thesis. Out of a total of 8 chapters, chapters 2, 3, and 4 are review based chapters. The next chapter, that is chapter 2 presents an argument for incorporating social structure in researching individual psychological processes. While social structure is one of the most fundamental concepts in sociology, the discipline of social psychology has not been very prompt at addressing social structural determinants underlying individual behaviour. Although Doise's level two (societal) and three (ideological) of analysis in social psychology can be equated with the study of social structure, little empirical work has been carried out at these two levels. After reviewing empirical research incorporating social structure in studying individual psychology, the chapter contextualises social structure in the Indian context. There is no doubt that caste is a unique feature of Indian society. At the same time, it cannot be said that it operates in the same manner that it did five decades ago. All of this, which makes the concept of caste distinct in the Indian context is covered in the chapter.

Chapter 3 is also review based and focuses on lay theories of ability (implicit theories) and lay theories of causality (attribution). Research on implicit theories has flourished in the past two decades. There is hardly any area of research on individual and group behaviour to which these theories have not been applied. However, the sources of these implicit beliefs have started being investigated only recently. It is not as if the mind operates in a vacuum, and the implicit theories a person holds are solely the product of his individual functioning. These questions are yet to be explored in social psychological research. Similarly, in the area of attribution, research has tended to focus more on the role of culture in influencing the attribution process. At a time when the role of culture has been acknowledged in studying attributions, social structural aspects, which are both, part of culture and also inseparable from culture have not been addressed.

After these two chapters, chapter 4 outlines the theory, methodology, and method of the thesis. It is argued that lay theories; both implicit theories and attributions can be most appropriately understood through the social representations framework (Moscovici, 1972). So far as the methodological perspective is concerned, thematic analysis (Braun &

Clarke, 2006) was found to be most suitable. As a method, thematic analysis is not only flexible but also allows the researcher to approach the data without any presuppositions in mind. Such an approach is apt keeping in mind the aim of this research. The chapter also provides a detailed method of the research before commencing with the analysis based chapters. A qualitative design using semi-structured interviews was used to explore what ability, success, and failure meant for participants and also which factors they associated with these concepts.

The next three chapters, that is, chapters 5, 6, and 7 are analysis chapters. Since the mode of enquiry was qualitative in nature, it was though appropriate to devote a chapter each to lay theories of ability, and the ideas and attributions for success and failure respectively. Results are analysed and presented in terms of themes derived from the interviews conducted with participants. Many interesting findings surfaced which highlight the role of culture and social structure in influencing implicit theories and attributions. Finally, the last chapter, chapter 8, provides a synthesis of the findings in theoretical terms, along with the limitations of the study and directions for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES**

### **2.1. Conceptualizing Social Structure**

Social structure is one of the most fundamental units in a sociological analysis of society (Levada, 1973). Also referred to as social organization, social structure has been a core issue addressed by sociologists like Marx, Durkheim, and Weber since the beginning of the discipline of sociology (Knottnerus, 1996). However, M. N. Srinivas, (1964), claims that although sociologists had pointed out the importance of social structure the study of its concept and the bringing to light of a structural approach to social phenomena are specific contributions of social anthropology. Some social anthropologists like Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Prichard equate social structure with persistent social groups like nations, clans, and tribes which maintain continuity and identity despite changes in membership (as cited in Srinivas, 1964). Srinivas (1964) goes beyond such persistent groups to include persistent categories and persistent classes in the conceptualization of social structure. Within this conceptualization of social structure are included all dyadic relationships between people as well as classes on the basis of their role differentiation in society.

Two leading dictionaries of sociology have also provided definitions of social structure. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (1994) defines social structure as “a term loosely applied to any recurring pattern of social behaviour; or more specifically, to the ordered interrelationships between the different elements of a social system or society.” Similarly, The Collins’ Dictionary of Sociology (1991) defines social structure as “any relatively enduring pattern or interrelationship of social elements... The more or less enduring patterns of social arrangement within a particular society.”

In this way, social structure may be defined as a network of interdependent relationships among various components of a society which include modes of division of labour, interrelations between classes, nature of functioning of social institutions, as well as forms of social organization and action (Levada, 1973). Speaking of components of society, Runciman (1969) outlines groups, relationships, classes, roles, exchanges, norms, sanctions, as well as shared concepts and symbols as part of his understanding of society. He further says that social structure is an interconnection and interdependence of all the different classes of social relations found within a given society (Fortes, 1949 as cited in Runciman, 1969).

As can be gauged from the above definitions, the central idea of social structure refers to a pattern or arrangement of elements of society. However, what these elements are or how these patterns are sustained is not very explicit (Lopez & Scott, 2002). The same authors in their introductory chapter to the book *Social Structure* say that social structure as a concept is vague, implicit and also highly contested in sociological literature (Lopez & Scott, 2002). Social structure and its related terms have mostly been used as ways of describing the organization of social life, and the authors, by tracing the history of sociology bring to notice three kinds of social structure; institutional, relational and embodied. *Institutional structure*, they say, comprises of the cultural or normative patterns which set expectations about behaviours of members of society and organize their relations with each other. *Relational structure*, they say, refers to social relations as patterns of interconnection and interdependence among members of society, their actions, as well as the positions they occupy. Finally, *embodied structure* has emerged more recently as a new understanding of social structure, from developments in theoretical linguistics, anthropology, and evolutionary psychology. Embodied structure comprises of behavioural dispositions through which patterns of institutions and relations are produced and reproduced and transformed over generations. Embodied structure finds its reflections in the habits and skills of the human body and mind.

The proponents of each of these social structures advocate for the primacy of one kind of structure over the others. However, each is an aspect of the organization of social life and is in interdependence and complementarity with the other two (Loper & Scott,

2002). Moreover, the authors also say that human actions are always and necessarily structured by the social contexts in which they occur; there can be no action without structure (Archer, 1995 as cited in Lopez & Scott, 2001).

It has been argued in literature, that it is this concept of social structure through which sociology can help contribute to social psychology's exploration of how people's position in larger social structures influences their life conditions, personality, and behaviour (Kohn, 1989). As Gordon Allport (1968, as cited in Thoits, 1995) mentions, social psychology studies how the presence of others; actual or imagined, influences the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals. Thus, the unit of analysis in social psychology is the individual. However, this individual has come to be a social and decontextualized without group membership, political affiliation, or history for that matter. Too much importance on the individual has often left the discipline of social psychology guilty of overlooking how sociological mechanisms and structural phenomena can help explicate the facilitation or constraining of individual processes and behaviours (Thoits, 1995). And, sociology, through its focus on the study of social structure, can help contribute to this lacuna of social psychology.

### **2.1.1 Social Structure and Personality: A division of Social Psychology**

House (1977) identifies three faces of social psychology; i) psychological sociology or social structure and personality, ii) psychological social psychology and iii) symbolic interactionism. Among these, the study of macro societal processes lies at the core of the study of social structure and personality while psychological social psychology primarily focuses on individual psychological processes in relation to social stimuli and symbolic interactionism focuses on face-to-face interaction processes and situations. More than a decade after such demarcation, Kohn (1989) laments that much research in social psychology is still confined to micro-social and individual level processes. Moreover, while taking into account the immediate social environment in which the individual functions social psychology is limited to studying the environment as if it were the one and only part of social structure.

To give an example, research on attitudes, attribution or any aspect of social cognition for that matter, is concerned with the influence of others on the individual regardless of the individual's position or relationships with respect to those others (Thoits, 1995). However, it is also necessary to understand how the environment in which the individual making attributions or expressing attitudes about/towards others is or may be shaped by larger overarching social structures. According to Thoits (1995), this is the precise difference between psychological social psychology and social structure and personality. Social structure and personality directly examines the influence of individual's role relationships or social locations on their cognitions, affects and actions. And, because of this focus on macro level social processes, the study of personality and social psychology lies closer to the discipline of sociology with its roots in the works of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel (House & Mortimer, 1990).

Indeed, social structure and individual level processes are closely related (House & Mortimer, 1990). In their introduction to *Social Psychology Quarterly's* 1990 special issue on *Social Structure and the Individual*, House & Mortimer argue for deeper analysis of the role played by micro-social and psychological processes in influencing the relationship between macro-social structures to individual level processes of thinking, feeling, and acting. While arguing for greater emphasis on macro social phenomena as indispensable to a relevant and vital social psychology they also state that this trend alienates the face of social psychology from the other two faces and threatens to dissipate it as a branch of social psychology in totality (House, 1981a as cited in House & Mortimer, 1990). However, the study of major societal phenomena and processes is important and deeply linked to the individual and interpersonal concerns of the other two branches rather than segregated, as reflected in research and literature. House and Mortimer appeal for a bridging of this separation between these different branches of social psychology.

To continue this discussion in the same light, it will be appropriate to bring in the concept of levels of analysis in social psychological research as pointed out by Doise (1980, 1986). Just as House has identified different faces of social psychology, Doise

explains various levels at which social psychology must conduct its study and research investigation.

### **2.1.2 Levels of Analysis in Social Psychology**

Doise (1980, 1986) explained four different levels of analysis in social psychology; namely, i) intra-individual, ii) inter-individual and situational, iii) socio-positional, and iv) ideological. Identifying these as the levels at which social psychology approaches any phenomenon under investigation; Doise explained the first two as referring to individual and situational processes and the next two as referring to contextual and social processes. The intra-individual level focuses on the mechanisms through which people organize their perception of the social environment; the inter-individual level addresses interpersonal processes as they would unfold in a given situation. The social-positional level takes into account the factors which operate beyond the given situation such as group or categorical membership of individuals. Finally, the ideological level (which Hewstone, 1997, calls societal level) refers to the wider system of beliefs, values, norms, and representations which every person holds within him. The fourth level of analysis pointed out by Doise can be taken as similar to the importance that the study of social structure and personality has for understanding individual level psychological processes.

Doise has further identified that these four levels are addressed differently by both American and European psychology. While lamenting that both these dominant groups in social psychology limit their analysis to the first two levels, he states that it is European social psychology which has at least attempted to incorporate the third and the fourth levels in its analysis of social behaviour. While the American social psychology approach has largely been individualistic; viewing the individual as a decontextualized being and free from the social realm, the European social psychology approach views the individual as part of and in continuation with the social. To quote Doise, “If there is a case for distinguishing four levels of analysis, it is in order to unite them better in future research”.

Thus, it can be said that social psychologists (especially in the European tradition) also echo some of the concerns of sociologists and researchers of social structure and personality. However, this concern, may not always take the shape of research in social psychology. We now turn to empirical investigations of the role played by social structure in influencing individual psychological processes.

### **2.1.3 Research on Social Structure in Sociology and Social Psychology**

In emphasizing the analyses of the relationships between macro-social phenomena and individual psychological attributes and behaviours House (1981a as cited in House & Mortimer, 1990) suggested three principles for analysis; i) delineation of the components of macro-social phenomena, ii) specification of all possible micro-social stimuli and interactions through which such phenomena impinge upon individual phenomena, and iii) increased attention to the psychological processes through which individuals perceive, make sense of, and respond to these stimuli. Focus on one or more of these principles can enhance analysis and understanding of how macro-social phenomena are inseparably related to and influence individual level psychological processes (House & Mortimer, 1990). In fact, the special issue of *Social Psychology Quarterly* (1990) dedicated to *Social Structure and the Individual*, mentioned in the previous section, through its various papers reinforces this very claim.

The special issue covers a wide range of areas, from socio-economic status to social class location to gender and age status. Moreover, House & Mortimer draw attention to social stratification as most central to study of social structure and say that each can significantly contribute to the study of the other. While proposing that socio-economic status is the most salient manifestation of social stratification, the authors accept that the special issue is limited in that it doesn't include studies on race, ethnicity or religion. All articles in the issue take into consideration House's (1981a) principles for analyses of macro-social structural processes, and most of them are based on socio-economic status as an indicator of social stratification.

For example, Williams (1990) in his article on socio-economic status and health outcomes reviews the many ways in which social class position affects susceptibility to



illness. Socio-economic status, he finds, is related to stress, social ties, attitudes towards health and also health related behaviours, all of which together are proximal conditions through which social position influences health. Naoi & Schooler (1990) explore how Japanese women's working conditions influences their psychological processes. They particularly assess occupational self-direction and find that less self-directed work roles of women tend to reinforce their conformity to a more subordinate position in Japanese society. Their paper considers both social class position as well as gender status in analysing consequences for the individual. Similarly, Moen & Forest (1990) demonstrate how different occupational levels and conditions of work affect both the physical and mental well being of Swedish working parents. They specifically look into employment-related social policies and find that women seem to be more benefitted by changes in such policies of the Swedish government.

The papers of both Gecas & Ceff (1990) and Wiltfang & Scarbecz (1990) highlight the role played by social class on self-esteem with the latter focussing on the self-esteem of adolescents. Gecas & Ceff examine occupational prestige and job complexity and how these influence self-esteem depending on the psychological centrality of work. They find that when work is central to self-esteem, social class and other related working conditions will have a stronger influence on self-esteem rather than when work is not central. Wiltfang & Scarbecz, on the other hand, focus on what they term non-traditional indicators of family socio-economic position on adolescents' self-esteem. These non-traditional indicators include father's unemployment status, neighbourhood unemployment, family welfare status, and neighbourhood evaluation. Their exploration finds positive results suggesting that indicators which are more salient or closer to the lives of adolescents are more strongly associated with their self-esteem rather than those which are less salient or more distant.

Parcel & Menaghan (1990) move a step ahead in analysing social class effects in that they address the influence of mothers' social class location and associated working conditions on children's' verbal fluency and how that reproduces inequality across generations. They find that mothers' working part time hours (21-34 hours) had a positive

influence on verbal fluency, whereas mothers' working more than 41 hours had a negative influence on the same.

Apart from these indicators of social structure and structural position, individuals may also be located in broad macro structures defined by nation (Bronfenner, 1970) and historical period ((Elder, 1974) as cited in House & Mortimer, 1990). As can be seen, the study of social structure and its various indicators has been applied to many aspects of research on personality. We now turn specifically to the interrelationships between aspects of social structure and their role in influencing processes of social cognition.

## **2.2 Social Structure and Social Cognition: Influences and Interrelations**

At the beginning of the review, we outlined House's (1977) demarcation of the different faces of social psychology. We now refer to John Turner and Penelope Oakes (1997), wherein they say that social psychology is a branch of psychology and not a part of sociology. Turner & Oakes, in their 1997 chapter on *The Socially Structured Mind* recognize that there is a sociological social psychology; however, they differentiate social psychology from it. Social psychology, for them, is the branch of psychology which explores mental phenomena in their relationship to human social interaction and society at large (Turner, 1994 as cited in Turner & Oakes, 1997). They further suggest that the mind is socially structured, not individualistic. While the mind may belong to an individual, its content, structure, and functioning are all socially shaped and interdependent with society. Moreover and more importantly, it is not that the contents of the mind are simply derived from society but that the functioning of the mind evolves through interaction with social context and social processes. In other words, the mind is characterized by emergent psychological properties which are socially produced and reciprocally affect social behaviour.

Similarly, Henri Tajfel (1977) argued that all social psychological phenomena do not arise from intra-individual processes but also have an origination in society. Through a series of studies in the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, 1971) he advanced the social identity theory and proposed the concept of social identity, which he viewed as a

representation of social structure. Social identity he said, defines an individual in terms of a common social location shared with others in the same location. To quote Tajfel;

“Any society which contains power, status, prestige, and social group differentials (and they all do), places each of us in a number of social categories which become an important part of our self-definition. In situations which relate to those aspects of our self-definition that we think we share with others, we shall behave very much as they do... They acted together, but it was not because of any individual facts of their personal psychology”. (Tajfel, 1977, p. 66 as cited in Turner & Oakes, 1997)

Thus, for Tajfel, social psychology is not about individual differences or individual exceptions but about the socially shared, collective aspects of conduct, and the social forces that shape the individual. The human mind is thus, socially structured and mind-society interactionism is or rather should be the focus of social psychology. And social identity is, therefore, something that links us to the social world; it provides the pivot between the individual and society (Reicher, Spears, Haslam, 2010). In contrast, many social psychologists hold on to the thesis of individualism or reductionism which denies the mind the status of being socially structured (Turner & Oakes, 1997).

In fact, social identity is a relational term, defining who we are as a function of our similarities and differences with others. Secondly, it is shared with others and provides a basis for shared social action, and finally, the meanings associated with any social identity are products of our collective history as well as the present. Tajfel further said that people tend to seek positive differentiation from out groups along valued dimensions of comparison and have a general desire to maintain positive self-esteem. These group dynamics however, do not operate in a social vacuum and in an unequal world, many a time people are members of groups that are negatively valued in society (as cited in Reicher et al., 2010). In such instances, social identity theory advances certain strategies that members belonging to low status groups follow (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, when group boundaries are permeable attempt is made to move to a higher status group; when group boundaries are impermeable social creativity may be adopted to reconstruct the meaning of one's low status position. Moreover, members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to engage in collective action or resistance when

they perceive intergroup status relations as illegitimate and unstable.<sup>1</sup> In this way, social identity theory is as much a theory of resistance to discrimination and social change as much as it is a theory of inter-group relations (Reicher et al, 2010). It can also be said that Tajfel's social identity theory is a direct expression of the relational aspect of social structure and very clearly explains the influence of social structure on the individual mind as well as on collective action.

Returning to Turner & Oakes, it is said that the human mind cannot be fully understood without reference to the self and its activities and that it is the self which transforms cognition into social cognition and also which helps internalize the society as part of cognitive functioning. In fact, it is the self, which is the mechanism for the social determination of cognition. The self is a comparative and relational judgement which defines the individual in social relational terms such that there are varying social definitions of the perceiver (Turner & Oakes, 1997). Such varying self definitions which Turner et al., 1987 term self-categorizations determine cognition by directing the functioning of the self from a specific vantage point. Hence, "cognition varies as the socially defined self varies" (Turner & Oakes, 1997 p. 367). In essence, the authors argue for the point that the self is inevitably social and that it is the self which transforms cognition into social cognition and hence into social psychology.

As can be seen, both Tajfel and Turner, through their two very significant theories, account for the role played by social structure in influencing the mind, the self, as well as all other aspects of social cognition. It is here that we can bring back into discussion Social Psychology Quarterly's special issue on *Social Structure and the Individual* introduced in one of the previous sections. Morgan and Schwalbe (1990), in their contribution to the special issue, draw linkages between social cognition and social structure through metaphors of the mind and self. They say that the mind, self, and society are all intimately related to one another. In reiterating the divide between psychological social psychology and sociological social psychology, the authors state that

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<sup>1</sup> Tajfel's theory outlines that existing social structure may be perceived on the basis of legitimacy/illegitimacy and stability/instability.

very often psychologists pursue individual cognitive activities within a structural vacuum and thereby overlook the influence of the social environment.

Similar to Turner & Oakes (1997), who distinguish between interactionism and individualism/ reductionism, House (1977) reemphasizes that the development of sociological social psychology was shaped by a need to counter psychological reductionism. However, the rise of the cognitive revolution in the social sciences in recent years has led to a growing interest in social cognition within social psychology. Moreover, the social cognition approach's information processing model of the human mind belies any understanding of the individual as a social being (Morgan and Schwalbe, 1990).

Just like the attempt to reduce the self into a cognitive structure (Turner & Oakes, 1997), such a conceptualization of the individual as an independent and autonomous entity immune to larger societal influences is negated by the European approach to social psychology. The European approach to social psychology, represented by the social identity tradition, strongly criticizes such reductionist tendencies subscribed to by the American approach to social psychology. Instead, European social psychology focuses on concepts and categories jointly created and shared by members of a community (Moscovici, 1976, 1984; Parker, 1987 as cited in Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990). As already mentioned a few paragraphs prior, it believes that all cognition by virtue of being derived from experience is social in nature (Turner & Oakes, 1997).

Therefore, in the words of Morgan and Schwalbe, social cognition fails to address what is truly social in social cognition in particular and in social psychology more generally. Thus, a larger conceptual framework within which to place the individual and his/her functioning is required without which social psychology will continue to be "*psychologised*" (Liska, 1977). By "*being psychologised*" Liska (1977) means that social psychology has, over the years, attempted to explain individual behaviour in terms of psychological explanations abstracted from social influences. In pursuit of such an attempt, the discipline has gradually shifted from being multi-disciplinary to a discipline dominated by only those trained in psychology.

As is evident from the above review, researchers, both in the field of social psychology and sociology, advocate for greater emphasis on the investigation of the relationship between social structure and individual psychological processes studied under the area of social cognition. All aspects of cognition are deeply related to and derive from the social structure of a given society. Individuals' location in the system of society; be it status or class position, their membership in different groups, the relationship between these different groups all influence the individual and together account for a '*socially structured mind*'. Thus, it is important to study social structure and its role in influencing psychological processes, which in mainstream psychology are taken to be resulting from an individualized and cognitive conceptualization of the mind and self.

At a time when we have spoken of psychological reductionism and brought out the contrasts between mind as '*information processor*' and mind as '*socially structured*' in social psychology, it is necessary that we devote a few paragraphs to a similar debate in the field of sociology.

### **2.2.1 Agency-Structure Integration: Structuration**

The relationship between; or rather an integration of, agency and structure has been an important development in European social theory (Ritzer, 2004). Such integration follows from the sociological reductionist tendency to view all social activities and phenomena in terms of social structure while giving little or no importance to human agency. There are several theories which attempt agency-structure integration, Giddens' (1984, 1989) structuration theory, being perhaps the best-known (Ritzer, 2004).

In the words of Giddens, agency and structure cannot and should not be seen as separate forces but rather as a duality existing in a dialectical relation to each other. All social action involves structure, and all structure involves social action. He rejects all theories which begin with either the individual/agent or the society/structure and argues that one must begin from 'recurrent social practices', and further claims that practices are recursive. That is, by carrying out their activities or engaging in practice people are constructing their own individual consciousness as well as the overall structure.

Consciousness and structure are both produced and reinforced by practice and at the same time, affect the way in which practice is played out.

Moreover, in structuration theory, actors are reflexive, motivated, and are also capable of rationalization. About structure, Giddens says that structure exists through the action of human agents. Structures themselves do not exist in space and time; social phenomena have the capacity to become structured. In his words, “structure is what gives form and shape to social life, but it is not itself that form and shape” (Giddens, 1989 as cited in Ritzer). In this way, structuration involves the dialectical relationship between agency and structure. Structure and agency are a duality; neither can exist without the other.

Other theorists also attempt agency-structure integration; for example, Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984, and 1990) focuses on the relationship between habitus and field, and Jurgen Habermas (1987, 1991) talks about colonization of the life world. All these theorists write in the European tradition of social theory. Simultaneously, there is found a parallel attempt within American sociology to integrate the micro and macro levels of analysis. This attempt emphasizes the concern of the founders of the discipline of sociology who were concerned with finding links of micro level activities to macro level activities. But, over the years, focus shifted to the development of theories which addressed either one of these levels. In recent years there has been an attempt to reignite integration of both these levels. However, though the agency-structure integration and micro-macro integration are similar there is a fundamental difference between both approaches. While agency usually refers to micro level actors, it can also refer to macro-level collectives that act. Similarly, structure, though usually refers to macro-level structures, may also incorporate the micro-level phenomenon of human interaction. Thus, structure and agency include both micro as well as macro-level phenomena.

From the above discussion, it can be said that just as Turner and Oakes (1997) emphasize psycho-social interactionism Giddens’ also emphasizes structuration; an interaction between human agency and social structure. From Turner and Oakes, we understand that society makes the mind and also that the mind makes society. Similarly,

for Giddens, human agency and social structure are a duality; neither can exist without the other. Having outlined the importance of social structure in influencing psychological functioning and individual processes we now move on to locate what aspects or elements of social structure are prominent in India and could operate in influencing individual psychological functioning.

### **2.3 Contextualizing Social Structure in India**

Caste is probably one of the few or only concepts which occupies equal representation in the literature on traditional India as well as India in modern sphere (Deshpande, 2014). Of the variety of social groups (on the basis of religion, ethnicity, caste, geographical regions) comprising the Indian society, caste is undoubtedly uniquely Indian. It can be said that it is caste, which distinguishes traditional Indian society from western society which is stratified on the basis of race and class. India's Caste System has inspired scholarship, both national and international across all social science disciplines be it history, sociology, anthropology or political science. As a result, there is no dearth of literature on caste; its composition, functions and dynamics. However, when viewed from the disciplinary perspective of Psychology, caste has more often than not, been used as a mere variable.

The incorporation of caste in psychological and/or social psychological studies is a separate issue for discussion altogether. But, the question which remains is how the caste system has managed to persist over the years despite the processes of westernization and modernization. Caste was part of the traditional social system in India where the notion of purity and pollution was followed centuries ago (Jodhka, 2012). With the process of modernization, the spread of secular education and growing influence of urban culture it was believed that caste would gradually fade. M.N. Srinivas had also written an a-priori obituary of the caste system (Srinivas, 2003). In fact, Karl Marx (1853/1975) had long ago predicted that the caste system in India will gradually disappear with the rapid growth of industrialization (as cited in Jogdand, Khan & Mishra, 2016). However, caste still continues to be an integral part of Indian society. In spite of undergoing several changes, caste continues to influence the political system as well as



the economic functioning of Indian society even in the modern sphere of today's life. Indeed, caste has become an inseparable part of the democratic process in India (Gupta, 2005, Yogdand et al., 2016). Especially in the forum of reservations (affirmative action in education, government jobs and other elective bodies), people become quite emotionally charged when it comes to any aspect of their category or the issue of reservations in more general. The emergence of a collective identity among the caste groups sharing certain benefits or partaking in similar opportunities has further diluted the traditional role of caste in shaping several life outcomes. The long-established functions of caste in terms of ritual and cultural status have given way to caste as a form of power in the present competitive and political realms. Thus, it can be said that though the ways in which caste dynamics operate have changed over the years caste continues to exist in some form or the other even in present times. This shows that the ideological structure underlying caste has not changed (Jodhka, 2012).

For all these reasons, it can be said that caste is a defining feature of social structure in Indian society. Any claims to explore social structure in/of India will be incomplete without reference to this age-old yet persistent system. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the concept of caste, it is necessary to be familiar with the basic tenets of caste system before moving on to current debates on persistence and change.

### **2.3.1 Caste in India**

India's caste system has received worldwide recognition and scholarship. But, ironically, the term 'caste' itself is not of Indian origin, (Sharma, 2002, Jodhka, 2012). The term caste is derived from the Portuguese word '*casta*' literally meaning pure breed. In this sense, the term roughly captures the idea of endogamy. However, the caste system in India encompasses much more than only the practice of marriage within in-groups. This section provides an understanding of the basic tenets regarding caste, caste system and more the official categories with regard to affirmative action policy followed in India.

### 2.3.1.1 Caste as 'Varna'

Surinder Jodhka notes that various terms like 'varna', 'jati', or 'zat' have been used in different parts of South Asia to denote caste (Jodhka, 2012). In fact, in common language, the term caste is used to refer to both varna and jati with little or no distinctions between them. Researchers in the discipline of sociology may be well versed with these conceptualizations. However, it is a fundamental feature which needs to be touched upon before delving into deeper discussions. The Hindu caste system is a hierarchical system divided into four 'Varnas', namely Brahman representing the priestly caste/class, Kshatriya representing the warrior caste, Vaishya representing the occupational caste and Shudra representing the labour caste. Below the Shudras were the Ati-Shudras or the Avarnas (more commonly known as the Untouchables) who did not find a place in this hierarchy. The varna model largely originates from sacred Hindu texts and is based on the principles of karma and purity and pollution. Accordingly, the Brahmans enjoyed the highest ritual status and superiority followed by other varnas in the hierarchy. The Avarnas or the Untouchables though excluded from this formal hierarchy followed the other four varnas in status and superiority.

The varna model may be equated with Dumont's theory of caste system in India (Domont, 1980, 1991). The theory provides an understanding of the caste system as a hierarchical inequality, which is naturalized and inherently legitimized by the Hindu religion (as cited in Jodhka, 2012). For Dumont, "the opposition of the pure and the impure" was the ideology underlying caste and hierarchy was "the superiority of the pure to the impure". It has been argued that such a theory can explain stratification across the country but cannot account for regional variations in the expression of caste. The varna model is over simplistic and does not operate similarly in ground reality. Rather, each varna consists of an internal hierarchy of smaller units called jatis. While the varna model is uniform across India, the jatis comprising each varna are not (Dirks, 2001). Moreover, it is at the level of the jatis that rules regarding marriage, occupation and social relations are prescribed (Gupt, 2005a). In this way, the varna model is a book view of caste, whereas the jati model provides a field view of or actual reality of caste (Beteille, 1996).

### 2.3.1.2 Caste as 'Jati'

Jatis are the discrete social units that make up each of the four varnas. They differ with geographical region and are more flexible and much more complex. There are thousands of jatis or castes and these are further divided in up-jatis or sub-castes. The jati model of caste emerged from sociological and anthropological studies of village societies where caste relations operate in the real sense of the term. Such a model describes caste or jati as a social group which has certain unique features and is restricted by specific rules and regulations. G. S. Ghurye (1969) has identified such unique features to be ; i) Segmental division of society where membership is decided on the basis of birth rather than by choice, ii) Hierarchy where each caste had a specific status in comparison to others in the hierarchy, iii) Restrictions on social intercourse like inter-dining , iv) Civil and religious privileges and disabilities like segregation of certain caste in villages or denying them the right to read and write, v) Restricted choice of occupation decided by heredity; each caste had its traditional occupation and vi) Restrictions on marriage. Likewise, Bougle' (1958) identified three core elements of caste to be hereditary specialization, hierarchy and repulsion. For example, in a caste based society, the son of a potter will go on to do pottery just like the son of a blacksmith will be a blacksmith. Moreover, the notion of hierarchy is followed, wherein certain castes by birth enjoy status and privileges denied to others. And, as discussed earlier, hierarchy is based on the principle of purity and pollution. For example, the Brahmans by virtue of being the priestly caste enjoyed ritual status.

Discussion about status and privileges necessitates a distinction between status and power in the context of the caste system. While status and power go hand in hand in western societies in India, status is considered to be higher than power (Dumont, 1990). Status derives from ritual purity and is more important than power and economic resources. Those with economic and political power did not necessarily enjoy the highest status. Similarly, those who had the highest status, the Brahmins, could be economically weak with no political power. Therefore, status as a principle of social organization encompassed power (Jodhka, 2012). In fact, in the words of Max Weber, the caste system is an extreme form of status groups (as cited in Jodhka, 2012).

### **2.3.1.3 Caste as ‘Category’**

The framing of the constitution of India in 1950 brought about the grouping of various castes and sub-castes into different categories. This was mainly for the purpose of reservation (affirmative action) for underprivileged sections of society in educational institutions, competitive examinations as well as in all elective bodies. Two new categories of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) were created. The Scheduled Caste category comprised of all former untouchable castes. SC by definition is not a caste or a group but refers to all those castes which have been listed in the schedule of the Constitution as qualifying for seeking reservation. There are many castes grouped under the category of ‘scheduled caste’. The common feature they share is that they seek reservation (15%) in educational institutions and government jobs by virtue of belonging to the schedule in the Constitution listing all untouchable castes. Similarly, Scheduled Tribe (ST) category included all the tribal groups in India, which were to be assigned 7.5% seats in education and jobs in the government sector. More recently, in the 1990s, the category of Other Backwards Classes (OBC) was created mainly due to mobilization among the lower caste in India (Patil, 1990). The OBC category included mostly Shudra castes. Prior to this, there had been reservations for OBCs only in some states of India. Incorporating recommendations of the Mandal Commission, the OBCs were to be assigned 27.5% of seats. The remaining 50% of seats are unreserved or open to everyone and have been commonly termed as seats for the ‘General’ category. The General category comprises the upper castes or the so called twice-born castes, i.e., the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya castes. Muslim and some other minority groups also belong in the unreserved category.

Grouping of caste along these categories is solely for the purposes of affirmative action. In reality, there may be little or no resemblance among castes grouped within a category. For example, castes grouped under Scheduled Caste category may view themselves as distinct from each other in the traditional sense but when they get the benefit of affirmative action or have to get some work done in government offices may use their SC identity. So, SC as an identity, is not predefined but rather garners strength because of the reinforcements it brings with it. This can be discussed along the lines of

‘social categories’ and ‘human groups’ as described by Tajfel (1981). According to him, a social category is a statistically or constitutionally/officially defined category (like SC) whereas a human group is one on the basis of which an individual defines himself. There may be many social categories, but they become human groups only when they become part of one’s self-definition. This process of transition may be influenced by the common fate shared by the members of the social category which leads to identification with the category and reinforcement of its identity. In this way, the heterogeneous SC category by virtue of the reservation policy and economic opportunities provided to them may begin to identify with the category as a human group.

Understanding of caste in terms of categories is a simplification of the extremely complex caste system. Though such categorization is mostly for the purposes of affirmative action, it will not be wrong to say that in present times most debates around caste centre around the issue of reservations. Moreover, identification with category as a human group has brought solidarity among the reserved castes when they stand up for reservations. Similarly, members belonging to unreserved or general category feel that they have to face stiff competition to get admission in premier institutes and government jobs and sometimes feel that injustice has been done to them by being left uncared for by the government. For example, the inclusion of OBCs in the reservation process was faced with widespread protests and agitations throughout the country which included few suicides by students belonging to upper castes (Chakravarti, 2003). Such agitations are fed by and in turn, feed identity processes. Kancha Ilaiah (1990) notes, that it was the 1986 anti-reservation agitation in Andhra Pradesh which strengthened the class unity of BCs (Backward Classes), SCs and STs. Though OBCs have had better social and economic status as compared to the SCs historically, they have always been seen together in movements against Brahmanism and caste system (Singh, 1997).

The reservation policy, introduced as a measure for social justice aimed at uplifting underprivileged sections of society has no doubt brought about important positive changes in the lives of members of the so called lower castes. At the same time, there has also been a sharp rise in caste based crime and violence (Sharma, 2012). Such an observation is surprising considering that power relations in the traditional sense no

longer holds good today. But, caste nevertheless continues to persist in terms of both mobilisations by the lower castes and caste based atrocities by the upper caste. At a time when we claim that caste continues to persist in Indian society, it can also not be denied that the nature of social relations revolving around caste has undergone a complete transformation. More importantly, the integration of SCs, STs as well as the OBCs in mainstream education and government sector has given rise to a certain class consciousness in Indian society. In the context of education, researchers have also noted that caste discrimination continues to exist in the institutional context, be it in blatant or subtle forms (Deshpande, 2006; Rao, 2013; Thorat & Neuman, 2012). For all these reasons, it can be said that caste is an important defining feature of Indian society.

### **2.3.2 Social Class in India**

Social class, like caste, is an important aspect of social structure which has a bearing, not only opportunities and outcomes for individuals but also on their individual and social behaviour. Some influences of social class on different aspects of individual behaviour have been discussed in 2.1.3. Additionally, it has also been found that lower class individuals tend to focus on contextual patterns of cognition and other-oriented emotions while upper class individuals tend to focus on dispositional patterns of cognition and self-oriented emotions (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). In this way, some attempts have been made to study the role of social class in influencing social cognition. In the context of social structure in India, it can be said that while caste is the defining feature. However, as discussed, caste has lost its traditional, ritual status giving rise to a new kind of stratification of which the new middle class is most salient (Sheth, 2014). Other scholars have also noted that what operates today is caste in class rather than caste or class. In the context of conducting social psychological research, the problems of studying social class or socio-economic status have been many (APA Task Force, 2006; Sinha & Mishra, 2015, Sinha, 2017). According to the APA task force on socio-economic-status (2007), any one among the three indicators of father's education, father's occupation, and father's income can be used to measure SES. As arriving at a composite score of SES is both complex and difficult to measure, for the purpose of assessing socio-economic status, the present study made use of father's occupation. The

reason behind this selection was that the caste system traditionally divided different castes on the basis of occupation. Moreover, members of all castes aspire for social mobility on the basis of achieving certain occupations. For these reasons, father's occupation was decided upon as the measure of socio-economic status in the present research.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **SOCIAL COGNITION IN EVERYDAY LIFE: LAY THEORIES OF ABILITY AND CAUSALITY**

In the previous chapter, we presented an argument favouring incorporation of social structure in the study of social cognition. In this chapter, we take it forward by specifically focusing on one aspect of social cognition, that is, lay theories and building a case for researching them through the framework of social structure and culture. Lay theories or Naive theories, as they are also referred to, are areas which have received lot of attention in social psychological research. Research on attribution, lay theory of causality, spans more than five decades with around four major theories in the field (Heider, 1944, 1958; Kelly, 1967; Jones & Davis, 1965; Weiner, 1985, 1986, 2000 and more recently, Malle, 2003). Moreover, there is the area of inter-group attribution (Taylor & Jaggi, 1974; Pettigrew, 1969; Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Khan & Liu 2008) which has tried to provide explanations for existing issues of inequality, conflict and group differences in society.

On the other hand, lay theories of ability, are relatively new in the field of research on intelligence. While research on intelligence is almost as old as the discipline of psychology itself, lay theories of intelligence were put forward by Dweck and Legget in 1988 whereby they diverted focus from what constitutes intelligence to beliefs about intelligence. Since then, the lay theories or implicit theories (as it is more popularly known as) tradition has been a thriving area of research within social psychology. Initially developed to address the beliefs people hold about their intelligence research in the field has been extended to almost all other domains of personality such as; self-control (Job, Dweck, & Walton, 2010), weight management (Burnette, 2010), and the areas of emotions (Tamir, Srivastava & Gross, 2007) perception of categories (Wright & Murphy, 1984), and perception of groups (Chiu & Hong, 1999).



However, research, both in the areas of attribution as well as implicit theories of intelligence has tended to adhere to the American model of individualism. At the most, social aspects have referred to cultural differences in implicit theories held and/or attributions made (for example, Choi & Nisbett, 1998; Morris & Peng, 1994). The following sections present a review of literature directed towards highlighting the individualistic stance taken by research in the field of lay theories held and applied by individuals in everyday social life. It is argued that such theories are not impervious to the influences of social structure in which the individual operates. The chapter is divided into two parts; the first deals with lay theories of what, that is, abilities, intelligence and implicit theories more specifically. The second part is devoted to reviewing research on lay theories of why, that is, attribution as well as attribution in inter-group context.

### **3.1 Understanding Ability**

The terms ability and intelligence are more often than not used interchangeably; in common sense language as well in psychological research. However, research should not rely on such casual use of terms (Nicholls, 1990). In fact, Nicholls along with other colleagues over a series of research studies has differentiated between ability and intelligence (Nicholls, 1984; Nicholls, Patashnick & Mattetel, 1986; Nicholls, 1990). He argues that the concept of ability is more general, applicable to many domains of accomplishment and aids in knowing whether or not a person is competent; be it socially, athletically, musically or mathematically (Nicholls, 1990). Intelligence, he further adds, is more specific and focuses on one area of competence. Moreover, to understand ability it is important to distinguish it from luck, level of difficulty as well as from effort (Nicholls, 1990).

Adding on to this understanding of ability and intelligence, Sternberg, also over a series of articles suggests that intelligence represents a set of competencies in development which in turn represent expertise in development (1998, 2005). He refers to the term ‘abilities’ to understand intelligence and uses the terms interchangeably in most of his work while at the same time, referring to metacognition as an ability (1998). In this way, abilities, competence and expertise are on a continuum where ‘competent people’

are those who have developed their “abilities to a high level and experts are those who have developed their competencies to a high level” (Sternberg, 2005).

Drawing upon such works on abilities and intelligence it is not too difficult to arrive at the conceptual understanding that intelligence is one specific part of the more general abilities. However, what is problematic in true sense of the term is the conceptualization of intelligence itself. There may be several definitions of intelligence at any given time. And this very fact demonstrates that it is difficult to reach consensus on the concept even within a particular cultural environment (Tomic & Kingma, 1998).

Similarly, there are many more theories of intelligence. Most theories of intelligence focus on what constitutes intelligence like Spearman’s (1927) ‘g’ and ‘s’ factors of intelligence or Thurstone’s (1938) primary mental abilities like spatial ability, numerical ability, verbal comprehension and so on. To take a developmental perspective, Piaget (1972) suggested that intelligence in children develops through the continuous shifts between assimilation of new information into existing cognitive structures and accommodation of those structures into the new information. Vygotsky (1978), on the other hand, argued that all intellectual abilities are social in origin. Within his multifaceted field of intelligence research emerged a new tradition of research in the mid 1980s; the implicit theories or self theories of intelligence. This area of research on intelligence focuses on the beliefs individuals hold regarding their own intelligence. In other words, it calls for a shift in focus from what constitutes intelligence to what the person believes about his/her intelligence

What follows is a review of different areas of research which have incorporated the implicit theories framework like achievement goal theory and inter-group relations. However, it is seen that though implicit theories have been applied to a wide range of research areas not much thought is given to their origin. They have been treated as individual entities operating in individual minds as if in a vacuum. How this individual belief influences individual and social behaviour has gained research interest over the decades. But their origin, emergence and acceptance have not created much interest until

only recently. These individual beliefs are not devoid of social, cultural and ideological origins and these issues are raised through review of literature.

### **3.1.1 Implicit Theories: Lay Theories of Ability and Personality**

The implicit theory tradition has its intellectual roots in Kelly's (1955) theory of personality and Heider's (1958) field theory of social perception (Dweck et al., 1995). While Kelly proposes that naive assumptions about self and social reality are an important component of personality to Heider, lay people's latent theories of personality influence the way the self and others are perceived. The concept of implicit theories or self theories was introduced by Dweck and Legget (1988) in a seminal work wherein they argued that there are two views; *Entity and Incremental*, that people hold about their intelligence. While the entity view focuses on intelligence as fixed and unchanging the incremental view focuses on intelligence as malleable and that which can be influenced by effort. The concept is novel in the sense that instead of focussing on what intelligence is it chooses to focus on the beliefs people hold about intelligence.

### **3.1.2 Implicit Theories of Personal Attributes**

Implicit theories are so called because unlike scientific theories, they are most often not articulated explicitly (Chiu et al., 1997). Nevertheless, implicit theories are believed to provide a framework for processing of information and interpretation of human behaviour (Dweck et al., 1995). When applied to domains of personality other than intelligence, the implicit theory tradition suggests that people subscribing to an entity theory hold a fixed, stable, and non-malleable view of personal attributes and those subscribing to an incremental theory believe that personal attributes are dynamic, malleable, and can be changed and developed. Research on implicit theories of intelligence has demonstrated that people depending on whether they hold an entity or incremental view of their abilities differ in the goals they aspire for as well as their reactions to setbacks in life (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995). For example, those subscribing to an entity view of intelligence are more likely to adopt performance goals and those subscribing to an incremental view of intelligence are more likely to adopt learning or mastery goals (Dweck & Legget, 1988). Similarly, given their belief in

intelligence as fixed, entity theorists are more likely to respond with helplessness in the face of failure. Incremental theorists, in contrast, given their belief that intelligence is malleable and can be developed through hard work, are more likely to respond more adaptively (Dweck et al., 1995).

Other research has shown that holders of entity view of personal attributes are more prone to lay dispositionism (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997); lay dispositionism being defined as “the use of traits as the unit of analysis in social perception” (Ross & Nisbett 1991 as cited in Chiu et al., 1997). Apart from interpreting and determining behaviour of the self, implicit theories also hold importance for interpretation of the behaviour of others as well as judging their negative social behaviours (Dweck, Chiu, and Hong, 1995). For example, an entity theorist is more likely to explain behaviour in terms of traits and also to believe that such traits and corresponding behaviours are consistent over time. On the other hand, an incremental theorist is more likely to explain behaviour in terms of more specific mediational processes. In this way, the implicit theory tradition has been extended and applied to various domains of personality, especially intelligence and morality. In the domain of morality, it has been found that entity theorists, given their trait-based judgements, are more likely to suggest punishments for negative actions of individuals. Incremental theorists, in contrast, focus more on education, rehabilitation, or remedial action in response to the negative actions of others. This is in line with the more mediational factors they believe to have caused the negative actions of others (Dweck et al., 1995). In this way, it can be said that research on implicit theories has important theoretical implications for motivational processes, social perception and also social inference (Dweck et al., 1997).

### **3.1.3. Implicit Theories and Inter-group Relations**

Like many important dimensions of personality, the implicit theory research tradition has also been extended to the field of group based perception and intergroup relations (Chiu & Hong, 1997; Levy, Plaks, Hong, Chiu, & Dweck, 2001; Plaks, Levy, Dweck, 2009). These researchers suggest that just like in the perception of individual behaviours, in the perception of social groups and group based behaviours also, people

begin from different vantage points depending on the kind of implicit theories they hold. For example, Levy, Stroesnner, & Dweck (1998) found that entity theorists endorse stereotypes about out-groups (both positive and negative) more strongly than incremental theorists. Other research has found that entity theorists judged out-groups to be more similar than incremental theorists (Chow, 1996; Levy & Dweck, 1999). In this way, entity theorists are more prone to trait based and stereotypes based judgements while incremental theorists focus more on dynamic and context based processes which may explain the behaviours of out-group members. More recently, it has been suggested that entity and incremental belief systems are not self-sufficient. Rather, each theory carries with it an assemblage of allied beliefs which derive from the core belief to create two distinct meaning systems which serve as the basis of social cognition (Plaks, Levy & Dweck, 2009).

### **3.1.4 Implicit Theories and Attribution**

As mentioned earlier, implicit theories have their origin in the theories of Kelly and Heider, both of whom are well known for their contribution to the field of attribution. Dweck and colleagues (1995) accept that implicit theories by virtue of being relatively recent constructs in social psychological literature may be related with other individual differences constructs. They especially predict implicit theories to be closely associated with attributional style. For example, holding an entity theory in a particular domain is positively associated with the tendency to make internal, global, and stable interpretations of behaviour and outcomes in the domain (Dweck et al., 1995). However, in their model, they argue that causal attributions are part of a belief system which begins with implicit theories about the domain in question. In other words, for them, attribution pattern is determined by the kinds of implicit theories that people hold.

In contrast, Sandra Graham (1995) designates implicit theories as an extension of the stability dimension of attribution theory. Weiner (1985) provides an attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion in which he proposes three properties of causal attributes; locus, stability, and controllability; locus refers to whether the cause is internal (effort) or external (task difficulty) to the individual; stability refers to whether

the cause is constant (aptitude) or temporary (fatigue); and controllability refers to whether the cause can (effort) or cannot (luck or aptitude) be altered at will. Weiner further proposes that all attributions can be located within this three dimensional causal space and that these dimensions taken together influence the motivational consequences of causal beliefs.

The stability dimension in Weiner's attribution theory treats aptitude or intelligence as relatively stable and unchanging. Dweck et al., (1995) define entity theory as "the belief that intelligence is a fixed trait, a personal quality that cannot be changed." An incremental theory in contrast, "conceives of intelligence as cultivable (i.e., individuals may become more intelligent through their efforts.)" Similarly, attribution theory also allows for the possibility that ability can be unstable or incremental. In instances where ability connotes skill or knowledge instead of aptitude it is perceived to be unstable because knowledge or skill can be increased or enhanced (Weiner, 1986).

Therefore, Graham (1995) sketches great overlap between both theories and also states that it is difficult to pin-point whether implicit theories shape or are shaped by causal beliefs about the stability of ability. For example, holding an entity view of intelligence/ability can be the reason for perceiving one's ability as stable. However, it is also possible that one perceives his/her low ability as stable based on a history of achievement failure and this in turn leads to endorsement of entity view of intelligence. As can be seen, the relationship between implicit theories and attribution is still not clear.

Moving on to compare the two theories in the context of interpersonal evaluations, in attribution theory, judging behaviours of others is linked more to the controllability rather than stability dimension. The controllability dimension refers to whether or not the cause is controllable by the individual and hence is closely related to responsibility. It has been found that when the cause of failure is controllable (lack of effort) rather than uncontrollable (low ability) evaluative judgements will be more negative, that is more blame and punishment will be recommended. However, when evaluative judgements are used to predict future outcomes, the stability dimension is a more salient factor (Graham, 1995).

Finally, Graham (1995) argues that, in attributional analysis it is the emotional reactions invoked by the attribution which guide behaviour. For example, when people are held responsible for negative outcomes, anger is experienced which in turn determines allocation of punishment. In contrast, when people are not held responsible this elicits sympathy, which in turn results in more help than punishment. Thus, people's evaluations of the behaviour of others are mediated by emotions. Graham criticizes the implicit theory view for focussing on a single explanatory construct of differences in beliefs about ability to account for achievement and social behaviour. She further suggests that to study what people have in common may be more beneficial to understand the dynamics, complexity, and richness of human behaviour rather than focussing on the differences among them.

### **3.1.5 Implicit Theories: Sources**

After reviewing briefly the area of implicit theories, its linkage with inter-group relations and also the overlaps between implicit theories and attribution there is little doubt that these naive theories in some ways or the other influence important aspects of social behaviour. However, the question which remains unanswered is whether or not such theories are autonomous. Are these theories generated within and also by individual minds? Or is there any social force guiding the development of these lay theories. Chapter 2 provides a detailed review of social structure, its relation with social cognition and highlights the nature of the mind as being socially structured. An example of the human mind being socially determined and individual psychology being determined by existing social structure is the recent research by Srinivasan et al., (2015).

These researchers explored the role of culture in which an individual is raised in determining the kind of implicit theories he/she comes to hold. By focussing on the caste system in India they have demonstrated that beliefs children and adults hold towards the Hindu caste system are related to differences in their implicit theories about intelligence. More specifically, their study found that in children, attitudes towards caste were linked only to abstract beliefs about personal freedom whereas by adulthood attitudes towards

caste were also linked to beliefs about achievements of members belonging to different castes, personal intellectual ability, as well as personality attributes.

Researchers in the past (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Rattan, Savani, Naidu & Dweck, 2012; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992) have also traced the relationship between culture and children's attitudes towards intelligence and achievement and found that children from east Asian societies are more likely than American and Canadian children to believe in effort (incremental view). However, most of such relationships have been explained in terms of individualism versus collectivism (e.g. Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Morris & Peng, 1994; Triandis, 1989, 1995). While research on culture has been an important area of investigation in social psychology Srinivasan and colleagues argue for more direct exploration of the relationship between specific cultural factors like differences in social structure and beliefs about intelligence and have also demonstrated linkages between them.

Though the role of belief in caste in determining intuitive theories of intelligence/ability has been successfully demonstrated by Srinivasan and colleagues such results cannot be generalized on the basis of a single study. Moreover, it is also important to investigate whether similar results will hold true given a different set of sample characteristics or a different society altogether. Therefore, it is important to test the role of belief in caste in a replication study to be able to generalize the results found by Srinivasan et al., (2015). Moreover, apart from belief in caste and caste system there are other aspects of social structure which Srinivasan and colleagues have not addressed. And, more importantly, it has been demonstrated in Chapter 2 that caste and the caste system in today's times do not operate in isolation but in intersection with other social structural aspects like gender, class and geographic location. Therefore, investigating how implicit theories of intelligence held by youth in India are determined by its complex social structure has important theoretical implications.

### **3.2 Attribution: Lay Theories of Causality**

History of attribution within social psychology can be traced to the writings of Heider (1944) who defined attribution as the process of drawing inferences. Apart from making



inferences another meaning of attribution is to explain behaviour and provide answers to why questions (Malle, 2011). Attributions seek to explain events and outcomes associated with social behaviour and may be defined as the process of drawing inferences and explaining the causes of behaviour. Attributions are the why aspect of behaviour; they refer to naïve explanations about the causes of behaviour of the self or others (Kelly, 1967, 1973). The underlying assumption is that in social interactions there is a tendency to make inferences of cause-effect nature which are different from scientific explanations (Dalal, 1988). Attribution theory in social psychology is primarily concerned with everyday common sense explanations and the basic tenet behind its research has been that the interpretation of behaviour in terms of causes is important in determining reactions to the behaviour (Kelly & Michela, 1980).

While Heider (1944, 1958) was the first to lay the foundation of attribution research Harold Kelly (1967, 1973) and Edward Jones (1965) extended its applicability making the area popular and widely researched within social psychology (Weiner, 2008). Building on these seminal works research on attribution flourished in the following decades and as seen today attribution is probably one of the most researched areas within social psychology. Over the past 40 years several theories of attribution have been advanced to explore and also extend its applications to different areas (persuasion and attitude change, close relationships, aggression etc.).

Though several theories of attribution have inspired as well as dominated research in social psychology, there is no overarching attribution theory (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995; Weiner, 2008). Rather there are many attribution-based theories and Weiner (2008) prefers to characterize attribution as a field of study rather than a theory. This lack of theoretical unity makes it important to address the disagreements and contrasts between the different areas in attribution research. Hewstone (1997) has further classified attribution research across different levels of analysis (intra-individual, inter-individual, socio-positional, and ideological) as pointed out by Doise (1980). We have already discussed in the previous chapter the importance of integrating different levels of analysis in research. Reviewing attribution research at these levels is necessary to explicate its differential understandings across situations, to provide an integrated approach to its

comprehension as well as to address the issues highlighted by Weiner. Furthermore, attribution has been conceptualized in contrasting ways by American and European social psychologists. While the American approach has basically dealt with attribution at the first two levels of analysis namely; intrapersonal and interpersonal, it has been the European social psychological approach which has attempted to address the socio-positional and the ideological levels (Hewstone, 1997). Before discussing attribution research across the different levels of analysis, it is imperative to discuss Heider; the pioneer of attribution theory.

### **3.2.1. Heider's Theory of Social Perception and Phenomenal Causality**

Fritz Heider, credited with laying the foundations of attribution theory, developed attribution models for both object perception (1920) as well as person perception (1944, 1958). It was in explaining object perception, that he labelled the term attribution and defined it as the reconstructive process of generating inferences about relatively invariant qualities of objects from the variant effects they have on the medium of perception (as cited in Malle, 2004, 2011). His model of person perception though based on the tenets of object perception was more complex and has two distinct features in i) social interaction, variance refers to the person's ongoing behaviour and invariance refers to the inferred perceptions, intentions, motives, traits and sentiments and ii) causal analysis of human behaviour people follow any one of two conceptual models; either an impersonal model of causality or a personal model of causality.

### **3.2.2. Kelly's Analysis of Variance Model (Interpersonal Level)**

Kelly's (1967) paper on attribution theory is considered to be the first systematic attempt to understand causal explanations which basically focused on internal and external attributions in causal attribution (as cited in Malle, 2011). His analysis of variance model deals with how people make causal attributions of their own and others' behaviour by using three different types of information; consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness. These informations are then used to identify conditions which co-vary with a given event and thus cause it. It can be said that Kelly's theory of attribution is an example of attribution research at the first level of analysis which focuses on the internal

psychological mechanisms through which individuals perceive, evaluate, and behave in the social world

### **3.2.3 Inter-individual Level**

The second level of analysis i.e. the inter-individual level can be exemplified through Jones and Nisbett's (1972) hypothesis about the differences in the causal attribution of actors and observers. They suggest that the actor's perceptions about the causes of his/her behaviour are at variance with those held by outside observers. While the actor's explanations for the causes of his behaviour emphasize the role of environmental factors at the time of the action the observer's explanations emphasize the causal role of more stable and dispositional characteristics of the actor. Such differences may be partly due to the actor's more comprehensive and detailed knowledge of his motivations, experiences, and circumstances or for that matter due to the differential salience of information available both to the actor and the observer. This phenomenon of differential attributions in causal behaviour has been termed as the "fundamental attribution error" by Ross (1977).

The fundamental attribution error has been much researched especially with reference to the role of culture. For example, in a review article on *Psychology and Culture*, Lehman et al., 2004 find many instances of its linkage as well as the linkage of actor-observer differences in attribution to culture. For example, compared to East Asians European North Americans are more likely to attribute situationally-induced events to the actor's dispositions (Choi & Nisbett, 1998), and also attribute causes of social events to the actors' internal traits (Morris & Peng, 1994). In this way, members of collectivist cultures as compared to those of individualist cultures are less prone to the fundamental attribution error.

#### **3.2.3.1 Weiner's Attributional Theory of Motivation and Emotion**

An example of attribution research which combines the intrapersonal and the interpersonal levels is that of Weiner (1985, 1986, and 2000). As already briefly discussed in the section drawing links between implicit theories and attribution Weiner

provides an attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. In the theory, he proposes that an individual's attributions of success/failure to external or internal causes are related to levels of motivation in achievement situations. He outlines three properties of causal attributes; locus, stability, and controllability; locus refers to whether the cause is internal (effort) or external (task difficulty) to the individual; stability refers to whether the cause is constant (math aptitude) or temporary (fatigue); and controllability refers to whether the cause can (effort) or cannot (luck or aptitude) be altered at will. Weiner further proposes that all attributions can be located within this three dimensional causal space and that these dimensions taken together influence the motivational consequences of causal beliefs. What makes these causal properties important is the fact that they possess the ability to influence the major determinants of motivation, i.e. expectancy and value. For example, if failure in examination is attributed to an unfair teacher (external, stable and uncontrollable cause) then future tests by the same teacher will be believed to yield similar results resulting in decreased motivation to study and work hard.

While stability is mostly related to expectancy of achievement outcomes locus and controllability are related to the value of achievement outcomes. For example, attribution of success to hard work and level of intelligence (internal cause) evoke feelings of pride and high self esteem rather than attribution of success to a lenient teacher (external cause). Locus along with controllability further determines whether feelings of guilt or shame are experienced following failure. For example, attribution of failure to lack of effort (internal and controllable) often leads to guilt whereas attribution of failure to lack of aptitude (internal and uncontrollable) often leads to shame, embarrassment and/or humiliation. Likewise, a range of other affects can be experienced depending on the locus, stability, and controllability aspects of the causal belief. It is these expectancies of success/failure and the related emotional states which determine subsequent behaviours and motivations.

Similarly, when applied to an interpersonal level of motivation the search for a causal attribution is carried out on the part of an observer rather than the actor himself, such as parents, teachers, and peers. This causal attribution also exists in a three dimensional space which then influences the expectancy and emotional states of the

observer. For example, when the teacher attributes a learner's failure in the exam to a lack of aptitude (internal, stable and uncontrollable cause) he/she is not held personally responsible leading to feelings of sympathy. On the contrary, when failure is attributed to lack of ability (internal, unstable and controllable cause) on the part of the learner feelings of anger and apathy are developed. In this way Weiner's theory of intrapersonal and interpersonal theory of motivation from an attributional perspective is also explained at the level of the actor and the observer and has been successfully applied to educational and classroom settings (for example, Graham 1991, Weiner, 2000).

### **3.2.4 Inter-Group Attribution**

The first study on inter-group attribution was conducted by Taylor and Jaggi in 1974. Their study was located in South India against the backdrop of conflict between Hindus and Muslims. In their study Hindu participants were asked to attribute the behaviour of in-group (Hindu) and out-group (Muslim) members performing socially desirable or undesirable acts in terms of internal and external causes for the behaviour. Results indicated that for socially desirable behaviours of in-group members Hindus tended to make more internal rather than external attribution as compared to the behaviours of out-group members where results were found to be opposite. In contrast, for socially undesirable behaviours attributions tended to focus on external rather than internal factors for in-group members whereas those of out-group members were attributed to internal rather than external factors.

Hewstone incorporates this research in the socio-positional level outlined by Doise (1997). In this way the actor observer level of attribution has been attempted to be explained at the level of in-group and out-group and has yielded similar results but at a more contextual level taking into account the group identities and the wider contextual realities. Such a kind of approach Hewstone calls as an "intergroup" approach to attribution rather than an "attributional" approach to intergroup relations. While the former explains category based attribution along with interpersonal attribution the latter explains how by making different attributions for in-group and out-group members' stereotype change is blocked and intergroup conflict is maintained.

At a time when Taylor and Jaggi's study has demonstrated that attributions at the intergroup level are different for both positive as well as negative outcomes of in-group and out-group members, it still remains silent about the different modes of attributions for in-group and out-group members' behaviour. Their study fails to give justification for such differential modes of attributions based on group membership of the actor. This lacuna is somewhat bridged by research on the ultimate attribution error discussed in the following paragraphs.

#### **3.2.4.1 The 'Ultimate Attribution Error' in the Intergroup Context**

In the context of intergroup attributions, Pettigrew (1979) referred to an 'ultimate attribution error' which he defined as "a systemic patterning of misattributions shaped in part by prejudice". This error he stated is a conceptual extension of the fundamental attribution error (Heider, 1958; Ross, 1977), the tendency to underestimate situational factors and overestimate personal, dispositional factors as the causes of an actor's behaviour. In this way the attribution of internal features for negative behaviours of out-group members serves to maintain negative stereotypes about the out-group. When out-group members perform negative acts consistent with such negative stereotypes, the tendency to attribute causes to internal features is enhanced. However, when an out-group member is seen as performing a positive act which does not conform to the stereotype, the act is attributed to one or more of the following possibilities which Pettigrew developed by combining the factors of degree of controllability of the act as perceived by the observer (high vs. low) with perceived locus of control of the act (internal vs. external to the actor): i) The exceptional case (low and internal), ii) Luck or special advantage (low and external), iii) High motivation and effort (high and internal), iv) Manipulable situational context (high and external).

The two main predictions of the 'ultimate attribution error' are that across group attributions are more likely than within group attributions to focus on personal dispositional features for negative actions. Moreover, positive actions will be attributed to any one or more of the above mentioned four possibilities. Pettigrew predicts that while the 'ultimate attribution error' applies to the causal explanations of all individuals its

effect will be enhanced for prejudiced individuals; the ‘ultimate attribution error’ is most likely to occur when individuals are made aware of their group memberships; and that its intensity will vary across situations and will be greatest if and when the groups in question have a history of conflict, possess negative stereotypes of each other, and when racial and ethnic differences co-vary with national and socio-economic differences (Pettigrew, 1979). In this way Pettigrew’s was the first research to identify a phrase for the differential attribution of the behaviours of in-group and out-group members.

While many studies have attempted research along the same lines as Pettigrew (for e.g. Hewstone & Ward, 1985; Duncan, 1976; and Hewstone & Jaspers, 1982b) the area has had very little research and even more sparse relevant review (Hewstone, 1990). In the first review article on intergroup attribution Hewstone (1990) clearly defines the process as “how members of different social groups explain the behaviour (as well as the outcomes and consequences of the behaviour) of members of their own and other social groups”. Such attribution along with individual characteristics can also be towards the characteristics associated with the group or group membership. Moreover, the observer is also considered as a group member, which is also an influence on the intergroup attribution process. Such an approach to attribution is novel which brings into the picture the role of self-categorization. By grouping existing literature into three headings; attributions for positive and negative outcomes, success and failure, and group differences, Hewstone successfully presents evidences for the process of intergroup attribution bias and also for each of Pettigrew’s (1979) predictions. The evidences are much more and stronger for negative than positive outcomes as there has been little research on the attributions for positive actions and outcomes.

Hewstone argues that the categorization process plays an important role in the perception of intergroup relations and intergroup attributions but has not received the substantial amount of attention which it deserves. Self-categorization and salience of group membership are the most important cognitive determinants of intergroup attribution which though addressed by the American social psychological approach has been at a different level. Hewstone quotes the result of Taylor & Fiske’s (1978) study which showed that perceptually salient information is overrepresented in causal

explanations. For example, if there is a single Black person in a group of Whites his presence will be seen as disproportionately causal in the group's performance. Thus, when group membership is perceived it is linked to expectancies and schemas associated with the stereotypes about that particular social category (Deaux, 1976; Fiske & Taylor, 1984). For instance, when people perceive themselves as part of one particular group they tend to accentuate intra-group similarities and intergroup differences. This may associate their group membership with the existing stereotypes in society making them act and judge in terms of these activated social categories without considering other causal factors (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1981 as cited in Hewstone, 1997). In this way self-categorization is closely linked with both stereotyping and attribution.

Research on the ultimate attribution error in recent years has also yielded mixed results (for e.g. Khan & Liu, 2008). Khan & Liu assumed that intergroup attributions are influenced by group memberships and underlying this process is the establishment of a positive social identity. Consequently in their study of intergroup attributions among Hindus and Muslims in the Indian subcontinent they measured in-group identification and its influence on the differing patterns of attributions between the two groups. Results provided only partial support for Pettigrew's ultimate attribution error and the corresponding predictions leaving open areas for further exploration especially the role of self-categorization and in-group identification.

As can be seen from the above discussion on ultimate attribution error, attributions in inter-group situation are determined by the kind of relations that exist between groups in society, by the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as members of a group, as well as by the strength of these group identities. All these point towards the role of different aspects of social structure in creating, recreating as well as maintaining inter-group relations by influencing the attribution process.

### **3.2.5 Ideological Level**

Integrating the ideological (Doise, 1980) or the societal (Hewstone, 1997) level of analysis in attribution Miller (1984) explored the impact of cultural meaning systems in the development of social explanation in a cross-cultural study of Indian and American



children and adults. What was found was that Americans at later stages in life make more references to dispositional and less references to contextual factors as compared to Hindus. While references to dispositional factors undergo a developmental increase for Americans than among Hindus the developmental change for contextual factors is in the opposite direction. Dismissing the role of cognitive, experiential, or informational differences between attributors as insufficient in explaining such results Miller proposed that such differences in the attributional process are because of different cultural conceptions of the person as acquired in the American and Hindu cultures respectively. The more individualistic view of the person emphasized in the American culture as compared to the more holistic view of the person as emphasized in the Indian culture along with the structural factors traditionally studied in American psychology can provide a justification for such differential patterns of attributions.

Thus, as we move from the American to the European side of the globe one can find traces of integration of the different levels of analysis in research carried out in the field of attribution. While the American side of the globe gives a more individualistic picture of the self acting and making judgments in terms of fixed notions of consensus and distinctiveness or for that matter locus and stability, the European side gives a more relational picture of the self acting and judging in terms of the existing context and the realities operating in those contexts.

After reviewing research in the areas of implicit theories and attribution it can be said that the social and cultural determinants underlying them are yet to be analysed at a deeper level. Keeping in mind the argument made in Chapter 2 about the mind being socially structured and social cognition being socially and culturally construed, the next chapter lays down the theoretical and methodological framework of this research.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEORY, METHODOLOGY, AND METHOD

The chapter is divided into three parts, theoretical and methodological frameworks and the method undertaken in the research. The first part outlines the theoretical perspective of the thesis. The second part highlights the methodological framework of the thesis. Finally, the method followed in the research has been outlined.

#### 4.1 Theoretical Perspective

##### 4.1.1 Implicit Theories Framework

Dweck and Leggett (1988) in a seminal paper “*A Social-Cognitive Approach to Motivation and Personality*” introduced the concept of implicit theories also known as self theories. As already discussed, individuals hold either one of two theories; an entity theory wherein they believe that intelligence is fixed or an incremental theory wherein they believe that intelligence is malleable and can be increased. The implicit theories held by individuals determine the kind of goals they hold and also their reactions to achievement outcomes. Moreover, research on implicit theories has also been extended to research on lay dispositionism as well as inter-group relations.

There is no doubt that the implicit theories tradition is a thriving area of research and does influence several aspects of human behaviour. However, in this thesis, we are concerned not with the different influences of implicit theories but with their origins in the first place. Research addressing this question has investigated the role of culture in determining the kind of implicit theory an individual will come to hold. For example, it has been demonstrated that children from collectivistic cultures are more likely than children from individualistic cultures to hold an incremental view of intelligence (for example, Chen & Stevenson, 1995). Mahesh Srinivasan and colleagues (2015) argue for the role of more specific cultural factors. They have demonstrated that belief in Indian caste system plays a role in determining the kind of implicit theories an individual will

come to hold. While this is a step towards exploring cultural and social factors in determining implicit theories held, these factors need to be further investigated with different samples and different aspects of culture and social structure. For this purpose, the social representations theory (Moscovici, 1972) was found to be most suitable.

#### **4.1.2 Attribution Theory Framework**

Attribution as an area of research in social psychology has been dominant for more than five decades. Attribution process has been researched both at individual and intergroup level. This thesis majorly focuses on attribution in inter-group context. Attribution in inter-group context has mostly studied different religious groups, Hindus and Muslims to be more precise. While the first such study was conducted in India (Taylor & Jaggi, 1976) inter-group attribution has been studied in Pakistan and Bangladesh with Hindus and Muslims (Islam & Hewstone, 1993, Khan & Liu, 2008) and also in Malaysia (Hewstone & Ward, 1985) with Malay speaking and Chinese speaking groups of individuals.

There are two points to be noted in these studies; the first is that differential attribution for in-group and out-group has been taken at superficial level and explanation has been explained on the basis of long standing conflict between the groups. The second point is that research which has attempted to explain different pattern of attribution for in-group and out-group (Islam, Hewstone & Judd, 1993) has once again relied on culture as a determining factor. As has been discussed, culture is not homogenous and comprises specific social structural factors. While some of these factors like religion and gender have been investigated the explanations provided for differences in attribution pattern have always been provided at a superficial level. In an attempt to provide more coherent understanding of the attribution process, both interpersonal and intergroup the social representation theory (Moscovici, 1972) was found to be most suitable.

#### **4.1.3 Social Representations Theory**

The social representations theory proposed by Moscovici (1972) was an attempt to develop a more 'social' social psychology. At the core of the theory lies the study of

culture and ideology and the belief that psychological experience is a function of shared views, experiences, language and ideology. At a time when the theory views the individual as a product of the society, it also believes that the individual is also capable of bringing about change in society. According to the theory, beliefs are socially and culturally represented in the minds of the individuals. Since the argument of the research is that social cognition is 'social' by virtue of being socially and culturally shared this theory provides a suitable framework for the present research.

## **4.2 Methodological Perspective**

To decide the methodological perspective of the thesis, the first step was to review research on implicit theories and attribution. On reviewing literature in these areas, it was found that most empirical work has relied on questionnaire based tools for investigating both implicit theories and attributions. Research on implicit theories uses either one of three types of scales developed by Carol Dweck; a three item, an eight item and a sixteen item questionnaire. Scores on the mindset instrument determine whether an individual holds an entity theory or an incremental theory. Similarly, inter-group attribution is investigated by giving participants hypothetical situations about an actor either belonging to the same group as the observer or to an out-group. On the basis of these hypothetical situations individuals' attribute the behavior of members' of in-group and out-group.

The aim of the thesis is to study the influence of an individual's caste membership on the kind of implicit theory held and the attribution made for success and failure outcomes. For this purpose, a qualitative study was conducted to investigate how participants understand ability in the first place and what constitutes success and failure for them. They were also asked about the factors which help in developing ability and causing success and failure in their life. Interviews conducted with participants covered aspects of ability, intelligence and also attribution for success and failure. For analyzing qualitative data, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was found to be most suitable. This is because it is a simple, easy and flexible method which allows the researcher to deeply engage with qualitative interview data. By using coding as a procedure for conducting thematic analysis it is possible to familiarize with the participant interviews.

This further helps in developing sub-themes and the final themes. The method is apt to analyse participants' responses without imposing a priori conceptualizations and predictions. For these reasons, thematic analysis was decided upon as the methodological framework of the research.

### **4.3 The Present Study**

#### **4.3.1 Rationale and Overview of the Study**

Many a time, in research, we proceed to the field, not with our familiarity of the field but with the demands of a theoretical understanding. Contrary to the usually followed pattern of data collection through administration of questionnaires this study followed a qualitative design for studying implicit theories and attributions. The limitations of methodological inquiry in both these areas of research was the primary cause for following such a paradigm. While the questionnaire based research methods have provided useful insights into these areas of research, they have mostly been used within the framework of social cognition followed in American social psychology approach. Such an approach and method provides only a partial understanding of social cognition. Since the aim was to explore the cultural and social determinants of implicit theories and attributions, a qualitative research method was more appropriate.

#### **4.3.2 Method**

##### **4.3.2.1 Site of the Study**

The study was conducted in university set up on university students in Delhi. There is no denying the fact that education plays an important role in the overall development of an individual as well as to the long term development of any country. More importantly, higher education plays the dual role of not only imparting knowledge but also creating socially sensitive individuals. Universities hold this very vital responsibility of shaping intellectual minds and aware citizenship. In fact, Beteille conceptualizes the university not only as a centre for learning but also as a social institution which provide for distinctive kinds of interaction between men and women

and also between generations (Beteille, 2005). Indeed, university set up provides for a different kind of social life. While society may be classified and governed on the basis of many categories like religion, caste, and class the university, by virtue of being secular, allows for transcendence of these societal rules. Indian universities, Beteille (2005) notes, have also played a more crucial part in the social emancipation of women than any other public institution. Universities constitute an important part of civil society and are essential for the creation and sustenance of an informed citizenship. For all these reasons, university set up was thought suitable for the present study.

Interacting with university students provide an understanding of the youth's perception of ability and achievement. Universities being open to students of all castes, religions, classes, genders, physical abilities and also sexual orientations will also provide a picture of how social structure plays a determining role in shaping the lay theories of individuals across diverse social milieu. Delhi has always been cosmopolitan and also a desired destination for higher education since independence. Being the city with two of the premier institutions; University of Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru University, for higher learning in the country, Delhi is home to students belonging to different backgrounds from all over the country. The diversity of students coming to the city to pursue higher education is notable and conducting the study in Delhi will provide opportunity to interact with and generate responses from participants belonging from multitude of backgrounds.

#### **4.3.2.2 Participants**

Students pursuing higher education in two universities in Delhi, that is, Jawaharlal Nehru University and University of Delhi were considered for participation in the study. Participants of the study were enrolled in graduate, post graduate and research courses like M.Phil. and Ph.D. The total sample consisted of 38 (22 Male and 16 Female) participants of whom 11 were from Scheduled Caste category, 12 were from Other Backward Classes, and 15 were from Unreserved Category. Along with caste category and gender, care was taken to include students from different geographical location and economic backgrounds. This will account for gathering information from participants

belonging to diverse groups with diverse social backgrounds. Participants were in the age range of 18 years to 33 years.

#### **4.3.2.3 Measures**

A semi-structured interview schedule (see Annexure I, II, and III) was used to interview participants. The interview schedule was self constructed by the researcher. It comprised of certain leading questions which probed participants' views about ability and also which causes account for success and/or failure in achievement situations. The participants understanding of caste and how they perceive existing social system was explored along with their conceptualizations of ability, success and failure. The questions were directed towards understanding the social and cultural factors which determine implicit theories held and attributions made by the participants.

#### **4.3.2.4 Procedure**

Prior to proceeding with the first study in the research it was thought necessary to conduct a pilot survey. This was because the first study being qualitative in nature will engage with participants through in-depth interviews. Moreover, the study seeks answers to questions intimately related to participants' everyday lives. Matters pertaining to notion of ability and attribution for success and failure whether or not pondered upon explicitly are implicitly weaved into student life on day to day basis. For these reasons, it was thought necessary to conduct a pilot study. A tentative questionnaire (see Annexure I) was constructed; the same was used to conduct interviews with 11 participants. The chief purposes of pilot study were to ascertain whether or not the tentative questionnaire was able to capture social reality of the participants, to check the practicability of the questions as well as to ensure that participants were able to comprehend and answer the questions with ease or not.

On listening to interviews from the pilot study it was found that answers to certain question were repetitive, certain questions participants found difficult to comprehend and that some questions were leading participants to answer in terms of the social structural aspect of gender rather than caste which is the main focus of social structure in India. The

tentative questionnaire was then modified; few questions were merged in a single question; questions difficult to comprehend were reframed and overall attempt was to modify questions to be neutral and non-directional. The revised questionnaire (see Annexure II) was used to conduct interviews with 3 participants to check the practicality of questions. It was found that, after revision, participants were able to comprehend all questions and were more comfortable in answering. Certain minor changes in order and flow of questions were made and the questionnaire was finalized. The final questionnaire was used to conduct the rest of the interviews. It must be noted that all the interviews were included in the analysis.

In all the phases of conducting interviews there were many challenges to overcome. In university set up finding students is not a problem but the challenge is to convince them to participate. Students were approached on one-to-one basis and assured anonymity and confidentiality before seeking their consent for participation. Permission for recording the interviews was also sought. Many students seemed familiar with filling up questionnaires and requested to be given survey questions or to answer the questions through mail. They were explained that the study was exploratory in nature. It did not have provisions for selecting one option amongst certain predetermined responses and that its design required a little bit of their time.

The interviews lasted from 20 minutes to an hour and 50 minutes. It is interesting to note that while some participants gave pin-pointed answers to the questions asked to them, some had an experience to share every time they began to answer a question. Some others would give examples about their friends and relatives. It is true that humans are complex beings and it is difficult to understand what is going on in their mind. Some participants were very vocal and expressive while others reticent. Such participants had to be delicately probed to get deeper answers. Some participants, especially from unreserved category were not comfortable in talking about caste and would maintain that there is no relation between caste and intelligence as well as caste and success and failure. At times, the identity of the researcher encouraged them to make certain explicit responses about reservations or the ‘unnecessary’ advantages given to the reserved categories. On the other hand, participants from Scheduled Caste category and Other



Backward Classes would immediately focus on the resources available to the upper castes. Some participants from Scheduled Caste category and Other Backward Classes were also not very comfortable in sharing their experiences.

Another challenge faced was to find participants from Scheduled Caste category. By the time 30 interviews were conducted only 3 of the participants belonged to Scheduled Caste category. At this time, random selection of participants was stopped and effort was to approach participants through snowball sampling. Friends and friends of friends were approached to trace students belonging particularly to Scheduled Caste category. 8 such participants were located and interviewed.

In- depth interviews were conducted with each of the 38 participant to explore their ideas about ability, success and failure. The interviews were conducted in both English and Hindi. Only one of the interviews was conducted in Odia. The interviews were heard over and over again and transcribed and the translated into English. After translation, thematic analysis was conducted to extract themes from participants' responses.

#### **4.3.2.5 Analytic Strategy**

The aim of this study was to gather deeper understanding of how the complex social structure in Indian context influences notion of ability and attribution process in success and failure situations. For this purpose thematic analysis was considered to be suitable. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns from within data”. They outline six phases for conducting thematic analysis. These phases are, i) familiarising with data, ii) generating initial codes, iii) searching for themes, iv) reviewing themes, v) defining and naming themes and vi) producing the report. For conducting thematic analysis the interviews were first transcribed by the researcher. Later the transcribed interviews were translated into English and read over and over again. This helped in familiarising with the data. Then initial coding was done from the translated interview transcripts; similar codes were grouped under a particular heading which later went on to become sub-themes under a broader theme. The process was followed for three data sets; notion of ability and

attribution for success and failure. Analyses lead to identification of a set of themes for each of the three concepts under investigation, that is, ability, success, and failure. The results of thematic analysis conducted on each data set are presented in three different chapters. The next three chapters, 5, 6, and 7 present the three parts of the analysis consecutively.

## CHAPTER 5

# ABILITY, INTELLIGENCE, AND THEIR ASSOCIATED IMPLICIT BELIEFS

The presentation of empirical data of the research begins with this chapter. Notion of ability, intelligence and implicit theories of intelligence are discussed in terms of four themes. The first theme, distinguishing ability as performance (doing) aspect and intelligence as knowledge (knowing) aspect, discusses participants' lay understandings of ability and intelligence. It was observed that participants made a cognitive distinction between ability and intelligence. They believed that while understanding and knowing things were intelligence, to be able to express that which is known was ability. The second theme, intelligence as multifaceted rather than unitary discusses the varying constructions of intelligence that participants hold. It was seen that participants understand intelligence to be consisting of different abilities or qualities like decision making, maintaining social relations, exhibiting culturally approved behaviours and the like. The third theme, shared acceptance of ability and intelligence as incremental demonstrates that almost all the participants had an incremental implicit theory of both ability and intelligence. Participants believed that ability and intelligence can be modified through hard work and effort. Finally, the last theme, socio-cultural factors in influencing ability and intelligence, discusses the role of outside factors in influencing ability and intelligence. This theme has two sub-themes; the first sub-theme is that caste and socio-economic status pre-determine certain abilities and the second sub-theme is that belonging to the upper castes has a positive impact on self-esteem.

### **5.1 Theme 1: Distinguishing ability as performance (doing) and intelligence as knowledge (knowing) aspect**

The empirical study began with asking participants what they thought ability and intelligence were. While the terms are frequently used interchangeably research has distinguished ability as more general and applicable to multiple domains of competence

while intelligence is more specific to a particular domain of competence (Nicholls, 1984; Nicholls, Paashnick & Mattetel, 1986; Nicholls, 1990). When asked, it was noticed that participants also had a distinction in their mind regarding ability and intelligence. They conceptualized ability as a broader capacity to perform while intelligence appeared to be related to thinking, decision making, academic performance and the like. Consider what participants had to say when asked what ability is.

“I think ability is something, umm...being able. But then again I’m not explaining it... umm...I think it is being able to do and I think it is closer to a skill. So, I think abilities are learnt. I don’t think they are inherent.”

(Extract 5.1, Soni, UR, Female, 23, Masters Student, From Mumbai)

“Ability... is the talent... hidden in a person... or maybe his interest in a field... when he works hard in that area... that is ability.”

(Extract 5.2, Pooja, UR, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Bhiwani)

In the above extracts we see that Soni associates ability with a skill while Pooja associates ability with a talent. In both the cases however, ability is understood as doing something. Moreover, Pooja also associates ability with working hard. Similarly, other participants also shared similar understanding of ability. Consider the following extracts.

“Umm... ability... everyone has a different talent... someone has leadership ability...which I don’t have... I have hard working ability. Ability is what we can do in a particular field. What I can I do by myself without any help; that is ability.”

(Extract 5.3, Kritika, OBC, Female, 30, Ph.D. Student, From Balaghat)

“Ability is what we can do... what we are able to do. Anything... I mean, the capacity to do something is ability. Be it how fast we can read a book or how quickly we can climb up a tree.”

(Extract 5.4, Rajeev OBC, Male, 19, Bachelors Student, From Begusarai)

“It means that you are capable, your (*yogyata*) qualification, you can achieve this, you can get this, you are so powerful. I see all this as ability, or maybe what you cannot achieve you try for it, you work hard and then achieve it. I take it in this sense.”

(Extract 5.5, Sarita, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mohikheda, Unnao)

“Ability is a set of skills... umm...which... in which we are good... in which we can achieve success... in which we can move ahead.”

(Extract 5.6, Sridhar, SC, Male, 23, M.Phil. Student, From Balasore)

From these extracts, it is observed that ability is associated with terms such as capacity, skill, talent, and performance. Participants pointed to the fact that different people have different abilities and can work hard in order to enhance their abilities. Moreover, ability is considered as a quality which would help them to achieve and, as Sridhar says, to ‘*achieve success*’. Along with these conceptualizations, another understanding was that of ability as the capacity or potential to achieve according to the resources available to the person. For example, consider what Prakash and Priya have to say.

“Ability... according to me... is... your potential... to achieve what you wish to achieve... so that is ability. One is... like I have the ability... but I am unable to

achieve... because of extraneous factors... like lack of opportunities... or there are some other constraints on me... family constraints... financial or social constraints... in some circumstances people also have political constraints... so ability is... you wish... to do in life... or to change the present situation in your life... that you are able to do or not... that is ability.”

(Extract 5.7, Prakash, OBC, Male, 24, LLB Student, From Khetri Jhunjhunu)

“Ability... umm... now... it can be defined in many ways... umm... according to me... like, if you see at a very low level... anyone... like me... I have come from a very... according to me I am from a very... not a very good background... so from where I am.. now I am here and am able to cope up in this environment... so that is a kind of ability but... everyone has a different perception because if a person... if he comes from a very good family... for him getting into JNU isn't a very great thing... he might be able to do something more... so I think that is ability... and... it is also I think... we can modify it... like we study in statistics... if someone trains you then you will be better... obviously...”

(Extract 5.8, Priya, OBC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Allahabad)

To provide a background of these two participants, Prakash's father is a lawyer with his own private practice and his mother is a government school teacher. He has a younger sister and both of them are presently in Delhi to pursue higher studies. In the interview with him, he mentions that coming to Delhi has given him the exposure and awareness necessary to prepare for civil services examinations. Priya, on the other hand, planned to pursue Ph.D. after she couldn't qualify IIT-JEE entrance examinations. As it will be discussed in the failure episode of the research, she attributes her not qualifying the entrance to her social background and a lack of resources. From what both of them say, it can be inferred that according to them an individual's ability depends on the opportunities available to them. Resources and opportunities play an important role in shaping ability as will be discussed in later themes. Further, it can be said that, such

understanding of Prakash and Priya derives from their social position and their life experiences. Having experienced the positive support their abilities have received after shifting to Delhi, they understand and believe that ability is making the best utilization of resources. Another point these two extracts make and which is also stated by participants in the earlier extracts that ability is gained rather than inherited. The fact that participants mention hard work suggests that they believe in increasing their abilities.

Similarly, when asked about intelligence participants came up with many different views. However, a general understanding was that intelligence is an ability of the mind. Consider what participants had to say when asked what intelligence is.

“Intelligence is the ability to understand something... everyone has different level of intelligence... someone can pursue in little time and others can take longer time to understand something.”

(Extract 5.9, Kritika, OBC, Female, 30, Ph.D. Student, From Balaghat)

“Intelligence is my brain’s ability...what I think about something like what I think about you... my point of view actually.”

(Extract 5.10, Prisha, OBC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Gurugram)

“Intelligence... is insight... or we can say understanding. Like...all children study in the same class... there are some children who can grasp quicker...they can understand more actively and others may take time... so... those who have high level of mental ability...they can be called intelligent”.

(Extract 5.11. Shrirupa, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mahuazamgarh)

“Anything... any situation... being able to handle any situation is called intelligence... by using you mind or anyhow. By doing anything to come out of a situation... to solve a problem... to come out of a problem... to face the situation”

(Extract 5.12, Piyush, SC, Male, 21, Bachelors Student, From Dwarka)

In each of these five extracts presented consecutively it is seen that participants mostly understood intelligence to be a mental ability, an ability to understand, think and implement in actions like decision making and problem solving. For example, Yogendra says, “*intelligence is... intellect... ability of mind*”. From what participants say it can be said that participants adhere to the general conceptualization of intelligence defined as “*the ability to judge well, understand well and reason well*” (Binet and Simon, 1905). Thinking, reasoning, understanding and executing have been mentioned by all participants alike. This suggests that, generally, in an educational set up, this is the way in which ability and intelligence are understood; abilities or qualities which help in understanding and execution. Further, when probed about the relationship between ability and intelligence participants came up with interesting ideas, some of which are described below.

“They are different... it is like... someone is explaining something... let’s take the example of sports itself... for example... someone is explaining to us how to use our muscles in archery... some people take more time to understand... they are not able to use their intelligence properly... and those who are able to use their intelligence in a good way they are able to understand quickly... and ability is archery”

*When you say that ‘ability is archery’, what do you mean?*

“Ability means capacity... skill...doing that skill. Intelligence... is understanding that skill... refining your techniques... understanding the situation and taking decision according to the situation.”

(Extract 5.13, Vikas, UR, Male, 20, Bachelors Student, From Badarpur, Delhi )



Vikas is an undergraduate student and pursues archery. He has participated and also won at state and national level games. He takes the example of archery in explaining the difference between ability and intelligence. According to him, understanding the nuances of the game is intelligence and performing in the game is ability. Like him, there were other participants who also distinguished ability and intelligence similarly.

“They are different according to me... intelligence means taking good decisions and understanding things well... and ability means a talent... which many times we are unable to recognize.”

(Extract 5.14, Pooja, UR, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Bhiwani)

“Intelligence... I think it is slightly different... from ability... because I think it is totally concerned with the brain means... how active your brain is... how you think about things...and ability is how you perform something.”

(Extract 5.15, Ishan, OBC, Male, 29, Ph.D. Student, From Belurmath)

“Ability and intelligence...I think they are different...in one context that I can mention is... your ability is very specific or context dependent... but when you talk about intelligence...it is the overall personality of the person...you cannot define on the basis of one context... whereas abilities of a person can be... you can be active in one task and maybe not that active in another task.”

(Extract 5.16, Kanika, OBC, Female, 25, Ph.D. Student, From Lucknow)

“Ability... see it is not that someone is intelligent so his ability is very high... that he can do everything. It cannot be like that. But yes, to a certain extent intelligence can be related to ability.... according to me. For example, I have prepared for something. Suppose, I have to submit my PhD thesis, I have worked on it for 5 years okay. Now

when I present that in front of someone, that is my ability. Maybe I have done a good job but was not able to present it well. The audience will think that he doesn't know anything but it is not true right... he is intelligent but his ability is in question. Ability is related to performance.”

(Extract 5.17, Akash, SC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Asansol)

It is observed from these extracts that participants are quite clear in their understanding of intelligence as a knowing and understanding aspect and ability as a performance and doing aspect. The terms associated with ability are skill, talent, and performance while those associated with intelligence are understanding and knowing. Similarly, it can be said that though the participants mention different aspects of ability and intelligence, there is a general, shared understanding of these qualities as aiding in achievement. Such responses are not surprising considering the fact that participants are in a phase of their lives where performance and achievement are important to establish the careers they aspire for. It can be inferred from the participants' statements that these lay beliefs or understandings of ability and intelligence are socially shared. In fact, researchers have claimed that intelligence is culturally, socially, and historically shared (Vygotsky, 1978; Brody, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The social understanding that people have of intelligence or any concept for that matter is the product of the culture, context and social processes they are embedded in. These researches are supported by the statements of the participants.

Moreover, Guilford's (1967, 1982) Structure of Intellect Model organizes intellectual abilities along three dimensions, Operations (what is done); Contents (content of information on which operations are performed), and Products (the form of information processing). It can be said that, in a way, participants relate ability to the Operations dimension and intelligence to the Contents dimension of Guilford's model. Further, from their responses, it is seen that participants mention many aspects when asked about intelligence. For example, decision making, handling situations, working hard, and overall personality to name a few. From these responses it can be said that

intelligence covers many domains or abilities rather than being a unitary concept. This finding is further elaborated in the next theme.

## **5.2 Theme 2: Intelligence as multifaceted rather than unitary**

Histories of research on intelligence has revealed and reiterated it to be a multifaceted concept comprising of several components or abilities. From primary mental abilities (Thurstone, 1938) to multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), triarchic model (Sternberg, 1985) and the more recent self-theories (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) intelligence has been understood as a diverse concept. In the Indian context, a seminal work by Srivastava and Misra (2007) outlined four dimensions of intelligence-cognitive competence, social competence, entrepreneurial competence, and emotional competence. Similarly, in the present study, participants also came up with many disparate views of intelligence. For some intelligence included only cognitive aspects like thinking, understanding and problem solving while for others, intelligence also incorporated maintaining good social relations, demonstrating pro-social behaviours and contributing to society. However, in the case of all the participants, intelligence was conceptualized as comprising of more than one feature and understood as being multifaceted in nature. Consider what participants said about intelligence.

“Intelligence... a person who has certain abilities can only use when he has knowledge... and those who are intelligent have knowledge... without knowledge no person can become intelligent. Whatever your field is... you have to have knowledge in your field.”

(Extract 5.18, Piyusha, OBC, 18, Bachelors Student, From Moradabad)

For Piyusha, knowledge is an important aspect of intelligence. Pooja and Akash also understand intelligence in terms of similar abilities; the ability to understand

situations, to manage situations, and take proper decisions. Moreover, in the extract below, Kanika says that intelligence is reflected in the overall functioning of the person.

“See... an intelligent person... when we can say that a person is intelligent it is an overall analysis of that person... yes he is academically great... he is good in other fields...he is able to take a very well balanced decision... in any task which comes ahead of him or her... by using his skills.”

(Extract 5.19, Kanika, OBC, Female, 25, Ph.D. Student, From Lucknow)

“What I think, that if a person presents something rationally I mean if he... if he is saying something or something about a subject. It is not always about the right answer or the wrong answer... the one who understands and then responds, he is intelligent. Not that you just memorise things. Intelligence is to understand the situation and then respond accordingly.”

(Extract 5.20, Akash, SC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Asansol )

“Intelligence... (laughs) I feel that everyone is intelligent in their respective fields... some are intelligent in studies... some have other skills... some speak very good English (emphasis)... so we judge that the person is very intelligent... having a particular skill doesn't make you intelligent... there are so many fields and then taking proper decisions and understanding things is also intelligence.”

(Extract 5.21, Pooja, UR, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Bhiwani)

Going through the above extracts, it is observed that intelligence is mostly understood as cognitive and academic competence. While cognitive abilities like thinking, understanding and decision making are emphasized by participants, intelligence

in academic domain is also equally valued. In their study of lay understanding of intelligence Srivastava and Misra (2007) found that 30% of the responses were related to cognitive aspects like context sensitivity, decision making and planning. The remaining 70% of the responses were covered by emotional, social, and entrepreneurial competencies. Only 6% of the participants mentioned aspects related to academic competence like being good in studies and being educated. The reason for this may be that the participants in their study were lay persons. However, in the present context, the study was conducted in university set up. Participants have gained admission in these reputed central universities by meeting cut-offs and clearing entrance examinations. In such a scenario it isn't surprising that academic competence is valued. At the same time, participants maintained that academic competence was not the only aspect of intelligence and also that intelligence could be worked upon. For example, Naresh says,

“See, if a person is good in decision making... then yes he is intelligent. If he is able to take the correct decision at the correct time then it's okay he is intelligent... otherwise later anyone can take a decision... it's not a very big thing. Then... if he is able to understand others... and adjust... like different people have different mentality... everyone cannot adjust accordingly. If someone can understand others and adjust according to them then he is intelligent. Then, in the matter of studies... everyone can be intelligent... if they work hard... so according to me we should not see this as intelligence.”

(Extract 5.22, Naresh, UR, Male, 23, Bachelors Student, From East Champaran)

It can be seen that Naresh gives more importance to decision making and adjusting with others instead of academic intelligence. He says that in academic domain, hard work matters more than intelligence. Interestingly, working hard was also considered to be an intelligent behaviour for many participants. For example,

“You can say the features of intelligence are how hard working the child is... how much knowledge he has...how much he is ready to work and gain more knowledge”

(Extract 5.23, Priya, OBC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Allahabad)

“According to me...how can I say...if you are hard working...you will automatically become intelligent...there is no one word to describe... if you are dedicated and hardworking in what you are doing then the person becomes intelligent by himself.”

(Extract 5.24, Debanjan, UR, Male, 19, Bachelors Student, From Gwalior)

“Intelligence... see... a child...who is able to adapt to his culture and environment and get maximum benefits out of it. I mean, whatever resources he has... whether he is SC or whatever category he is from... whatever limitations and whatever resources he has... how he is able to make maximum effort keeping that in mind... he is able to adapt in that environment and that culture...”

(Extract 5.25, Sridhar, SC, Male, 23, M.Phil. Student, From Balasore)

These three extracts demonstrate that the ability to work hard and make efforts were also subsumed within the overarching conceptualisation of intelligence. Hard work, in Srivastava and Misra’s (2007) study was an aspect of entrepreneurial intelligence which included other qualities like patience, discipline and being organized. Along with hard work, these two extracts also mention knowledge, dedication and adaptability with culture as intelligent behaviours. While knowledge can be subsumed within cognitive competence adaptability with culture can be grouped under what Srivastava and Misra (2007) term social competence. It can be said that the social aspect of intelligence is emphasized and valued in the Indian context along with the emotional aspect of

intelligence. Consider some extracts wherein participants mention social and emotional competencies of intelligence.

“An intelligent person is one who is calm and uses technique in doing things. Many times we judge that someone who is wearing specs is an intelligent person... but it is not so.”

(Extract 5.26, Nitin, UR, Male, 18, Bachelors Student, From Dehradun)

“Time and situation... to do your work on time and in the proper manner is intelligence. Another important thing is to take into account other persons point of view... many times we feel that what we are doing right but we also need to take opinion of others and their point of view.”

(Extract 5.27, Sjreeja, UR, Female, 26, Ph.D. Student, From Kolkata)

The one who can talk about his rights... know his rights...knows about equality...can take action about it that is intelligentsia...right?

(Extract 5.28, Sarita, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mohikheda, Unnao)

“Intelligence...I would think mostly in terms of how...you...you think about your emotions in... and by emotion I mean not only personal but also at a connective level to the larger society in thinking about you know like at a initial age, at a younger age about... in terms of what you want to do and all but those questions changes as you go ahead in life. So, basically I think, I would consider emotion in that way, whether you know... how you connect or not able to connect not only at a personal basis from people to people.”

(Extract 5.29, Keshav, SC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Patna)

These extracts point towards the social and emotional aspects of intelligence mentioned by participants. Maintaining an emotional connect with others, being calm and composed, understanding others perspectives and being socially aware were all considered to be part of intelligent behaviour. These findings are contrary to the singular, unitary, and concrete conceptualization of intelligence as maintained in both, mainstream social psychology as well as in western cultures. In fact, it can be said that western societies focus on technological intelligence (Mundy-Castel, 1974) and consequently emphasize more on cognitive and performance aspects of intelligence. On the other hand, it is claimed that, non-western societies like Asia and Africa emphasize on social or integral intelligence (Mundy-Castel, 1974). In these cultures, social relations and group behaviours are appreciated. However, in the present study, it is seen that participants mention all aspects of intelligence, that is, cognitive competence, social competence, emotional competence, entrepreneurial competence and also academic competence. At a time when cognitive and academic competence was mentioned, participants also said that such an understanding of intelligence is limited unless a broader perspective is taken. For example, consider what Prakash has to say.

“It depends on how much equilibrium you are able to maintain in your life... equilibrium in the sense that... to work along with many things... a stable life... that will be intelligence... rather than just limiting it to only academic intelligence... it should be a broader concept... that how much you are able to contribute to the society also... intelligent person will be that only. To be able to lead a good life... an overall good life... a balanced individual... is an intelligent person... but for that ability is also important.”

(Extract 5.30, Prakash, OBC, Male, 24, LLB Student, From Khetri, Jhunjhunu)

On the basis of the above presented extracts, it can be said that, in the present study, intelligence was conceptualized as a heterogeneous concept involving a wide range of skills and abilities in all domains of life; performance as well as social. Another point



to be noted is that as lay people, the idea of intelligence and ability was not clearly demarcated by the participants as we as researchers make them out to be for the purpose of conducting research and analyzing data. After discussing the features of intelligence, the next theme takes up discussion regarding the fixedness or malleability of intelligence.

### **5.3 Theme 3: Shared acceptance of ability and intelligence as incremental**

Dweck and Legget (1988) in a seminal paper, '*A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality*', redirected attention from what constitutes intelligence to beliefs about intelligence. They proposed two lay beliefs that individuals might hold about their own intelligence; either an *entity theory* or an *incremental theory*. An entity theory or belief of intelligence suggests a fixed mindset about intelligence. However, an incremental theory or belief suggests a growth or malleable mindset about intelligence, thus, suggesting that intelligence can be modified through effort. These lay beliefs individuals hold are commonly referred to as implicit theories of self (Dweck & Grant, 2008). Not only did the implicit theories tradition initiate a new debate in intelligence research but also provided researchers and teachers a different perspective with which to view academic competence and motivation. Research in this area suggests that incremental theorists are more likely than entity theorists to hold mastery goals (Dweck & Legget, 1988), show adaptive behavior and motivation (Lou, Masuda & Li, 2017) and also persist in the situation of failures (Dweck et al., 1995). Therefore, the two implicit theories are viewed as contradictory to each other which are held by individuals in an either-or fashion. Moreover, research provides a superior picture of incremental theory while painting a maladaptive picture of entity theory.

In the present study, implicit theories of participants was assessed through qualitative method, that is by asking questions about whether they thought intelligence was fixed or that it could be increased. Other researchers have also advocated the use of semi-structured interviews to assess implicit theories (for example, Quihis, Bempechat, Jimenez and Boulay 2002) rather than forced choice questionnaires. Results of the study indicate that almost all participants adhered to the belief that intelligence was malleable

and could be modified. Before extracts from participant interviews are presented a tabular presentation of the number of entity and incremental theorists is presented in table 5.1

**Table 5.1**  
**Frequencies of Implicit Theories of Intelligence held by Participants**

Implicit Theory held by participants	Frequencies		
	UR Category (N=15)	OBC Category (N=12)	SC Category (N=11)
Entity Theory	0	3	0
Incremental Theory	15	9	11

The table shows that out of 38 participants, only 3 participants held an entity view of intelligence and the remaining 35 participants had an incremental view of intelligence. Most of them believed that intelligence could be increased by working upon it. Consider the following examples of incremental theory of intelligence.

“Intelligence is basically... according to me, intelligence... I don’t believe in any intelligence it is a fact. I believe it is acquired. It can be acquired. Many believe that it is genetic. That it is congenetically passes to some and not to others. But according to me intelligence is how you develop yourself. According to that you mind broadens and your understanding increases. Like if you are weak in a subject but if you study and read it, it can become your strong point. So, intelligence is not means inborn type of thing. I don’t believe in this kind of...”

(Extract 5.31, Akash, SC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Asansol)

“No, didi... they are not fixed... as we grow... as we interact with people... like I was in the village... now I have come here... so I have grown as a person... my

knowledge is critical... by vision has broadened... I know about other people now... so intelligence is not fixed... as we grow older... as we see the world... the more we interact with others... are exposed to other cultures... our abilities and our intelligence will grow.”

(Extract 5.32, Sridhar, SC, Male, 23, M.Phil. Student, From Balasore)

“Fixed... no... it can be increased... and I think it can decrease as well. It can be increased... we provide... opportunities... and all the tools and resources necessary for learning... like lab equipment for science students... we are from computer science so we want computers... internet... if we provide all this. It can be decreased... like if I don't study for a few days then I begin to forget... so if the person will not do anything then it will definitely decrease. So, practice is very important.”

(Extract 5.33, Priya, OBC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Allahabad)

The extracts demonstrate that participants clearly have an incremental theory of intelligence wherein they believe that intelligence is not a fixed, unchanging entity. Rather they believe it to be malleable, that which can be changed through efforts, resources, and exposure. Moreover, what Priya says about intelligence has been reported as a decremental view of intelligence (Lou, Masuda & Li, 2017). These researchers have incorporated a third understanding of intelligence along with entity and incremental beliefs; the decremental belief of intelligence which says that intelligence can be reduced and decreased. In fact, there was another participant who also mentioned that intelligence can also decrease over time. Consider what Prakash has to say when asked whether intelligence is fixed or not.

“No... intelligence can be changed... maybe different people will take different amount of time... it is subjective thing.. it can increase and also decrease... it will

depend on which environment he is in... the opportunities he is getting... it is at all stages... first the family... then cluster of families forms community... cluster of communities forms society... at all stages there should be opportunities and conducive environment.”

(Extract 5.34, Prakash, OBC, Male, 24, LLB Student, From Khetri Jhunjhunu)

When participants say that intelligence can also decrease, in a way it can be said that it is an extension of the incremental view of intelligence; that is, intelligence is not fixed and can be changed. Whether the change will be positive or negative will depend, as Priya and Prakash say, on practice and resources. Similarly, there were participants from unreserved category who also believed in an incremental view of intelligence. For example,

“Na...you can attain it through practice. Yes, by practice... means you can train your mind or train yourself.”

(Extract 5.35, Yogendra, UR, Male, 24, LLB Student, From Maski, Ujjain)

“See...hard work can beat your talent... so you have to work hard in everything. If a person does not have ability he can develop it through his hard work. If you don't work then your ability and your intelligence are of no use. So, you can increase them through hard work”

(Extract 5.36, Pooja, UR, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Bhiwani)

As is evident from these extracts, participants endorse incremental view of intelligence and at the same time focus on practice, training and hard work in gaining both ability and intelligence. It can be said that effort and hard work are given prime importance in Indian culture and children are socialized to develop these values from a very young age (Mahadevan, 2012). Many participants mentioned role of hard work,

effort and persistence in increasing intelligence. Moving on to discuss the participants with entity view of intelligence, it was observed that participants gave scientific explanations to support their belief. Consider the following extracts.

“I’m not sure about intelligence. I will not say it is not fixed... but there cannot be many changes because in scientific sense the neurons at birth... the division and development of neurons stops...so it could be a reason that intelligence is fixed.”

(Extract 5.37a, Kritika, OBC, Female, 30, Ph.D. Student, From Balaghat)

It can be seen that Kritika gives a biological answer when asked whether intelligence is fixed. However, when she was asked if ability was fixed, she denied saying that ability can be improved upon.

“Up to certain extent it is given...but someone can pursue by their hard work and curiosity... ability can obviously be pursued...if you are curious you can achieve.”

(Extract 5.37b, Kritika, OBC, Female, 30, Ph.D. Student, From Balaghat)

As discussed in the first theme, participants made a cognitive distinction between ability and intelligence. While ability was considered to be the performance aspect, intelligence was considered to be the knowledge aspect. Therefore, it can be said that, Kritika holds an entity view in one domain of intelligence (cognitive competence) and an incremental view in another (performance) domain. The same belief was found in another participant as well.

“Intelligence.... it is very much biological according to me... some inherent things which you gain from your parents... either in childhood... because I have read somewhere that what you teach in childhood... that becomes eidetic and as you grow... you gain experience... you interact with society... your practical knowledge increases but intelligence... which according to me is very crude... very pure... biological... that... can only develop till 5-10 years of life... after that the individual becomes practical.”

(Extract 5.38, Vijay, OBC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Varanasi)

It can be seen that like Kritika, Vijay also gives a scientific explanation as to why he considers the cognitive aspect of intelligence to be fixed. For him, the practical aspect of intelligence is the one which is incremental in nature while the cognitive aspect is that which is fixed and unchanging. From the extracts of Kritika and Vijay it is seen that individuals may hold different implicit theory in different domains. This is precisely what is being argued by recent research and by the critique of the implicit theories tradition. For example, in the research conducted by Quihis et al., (2002), it was found that regardless of the implicit theory held by students according to the implicit theories questionnaire, all participants mentioned incremental beliefs in subsequent qualitative interviews. Moreover, it was possible that participants could hold both entity and incremental view in the same domain. For example, it may be believed that one is inherently not good in maths but can become better through effort and practice. In fact, some traces of such a finding were also found in this research. For example, Kritika says that *‘up to a certain extent it is given...but through curiosity you can attain’*. Similarly, Manish says,

“I don’t consider it to be fixed... it can... because whenever we learn we learn through understanding okay. It can be possible that our mental ability ... has some genetic influence... but it can definitely be

increased if given proper training. If the *mahaul* (environment) is conducive then ability and intelligence can both be changed.”

(Extract 5.39, Manish, SC, Male, 33, LLB Student, From Siwaan)

On the basis of this discussion, it can be said that participants in the present study held an incremental theory of intelligence. Moreover, it was believed that hard work, effort and persistence were the key to increasing intelligence. Apart from these internal factors in modifying intelligence, participants also mentioned certain socio-cultural factors which help in increasing intelligence. These are discussed in the final theme.

#### **5.4 Theme 4: Socio-cultural factors in influencing ability and intelligence**

The themes presented so far have discussed the lay understandings of ability and intelligence held by participants in the study. It was observed that a wide range of behaviours are considered to be intelligent; from academic performance to handling difficult situations to exhibiting pro-social behaviours. Participants irrespective of their caste categories shared this understanding of intelligence. It was a shared understanding that abilities and intelligence help in performance and achievement and that they can be gained and improved upon. The important personal factors for increasing ability and intelligence mentioned by participants were effort and persistence. In fact, they were considered to be most important in increasing intelligence; all participants mentioned that without effort nothing is possible. As discussed earlier, effort and persistence are given prime importance in Indian society and culture. Similarly, it can be said that stratification based on caste is an important social reality in India. As discussed in the review, caste continues to determine several life opportunities for members belonging to the so called ‘low castes’ even today. Moreover, in the case of implicit theories of intelligence, Srinivasan et al., (2015) have demonstrated that belief in the Hindu caste system influences implicit theories held by individuals. Following from these findings, participants in the present study were asked whether caste had any influence on an

individual's intelligence. Participants mostly answered in the negative. However, they did believe that belonging to the upper sections of society provided better resources, more opportunities and also a confidence which not only shapes abilities but also helps in their optimal utilization. These social and cultural factors are discussed in the following sub-themes.

#### **5.4.1 Caste and socio-economic status predetermine certain abilities**

Participants were of the opinion that some abilities depended on the social and cultural background of the individual. This socio-cultural background they referred to was mostly caste and social class. While some participants were open in discussing the role of caste, most of them preferred to use the terms social class or 'socio-economic status' to encompass the influences of both caste and class. Consider the following extracts.

“Some abilities are given... like one child is from a rich family... one child is from a poor family... so economic ability... the rich child has easily got... the poor child will have to work to earn his economic ability... socio-economic factors are also a source of ability... they influence the development process of the child. So this ability is given but there are certain abilities which can be developed... like intelligence and knowledge... they are not given... they can be developed by the person but abilities like your family background are given... they cannot be created... you can use or expand on those abilities. Intelligence can be affected by the surrounding environment... the ethical and moral values of the family... all this influence the intelligence of the child.”

(Extract 5.40a, Shirupa, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mahuazamgarh)

Shrirupa belongs to a middle class family; her father is a government school teacher and her mother is a housewife. She has a younger sister. Originally, hailing from Mahuazamgarh, her family shifted to Allahabad when she was in school. This decision,



as will be discussed in the success episode, was a major determinant of her educational career. What Shrirupa says is that, socio-economic status plays an important role in shaping abilities and intelligence. At another point in the interview she gives the example of efficiency in English and says that, at times differences in resources lead to differences in abilities. In educational set up however, evaluation is on the basis of abilities. It is very rare that the causes behind those abilities or lack of abilities be assessed or evaluated. Consider what she has to say.

“Let us take the example of private school...there are so many good schools in Delhi... the children who pass out from these schools... their English is so good.. it is in-built in them... they have good command over English. And... if you see higher education is in English... academic writing is all in English... now to enroll in private schools requires a lot of money...so those who are from good economic background have that facility. On the other hand, someone coming from a low socio-economic background... he will enroll in a government school. He will obviously not get the same resources and the same facilities... English is not much emphasized in government schools. So, if we compare... there is a gap in the resources... English was easily accessible to one child but not to the other... that child will have to work extra hard to bridge that gap... while for the other child it will act as an advantage... it will provide a strong platform or base to the child... that base decides the future in many ways... someone who is swimming along the current of the water will have more speed than someone who is swimming against the current. How long he can continue to swim against the current is his capability or his ability.”

(Extract 5.40b, Shrirupa, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mahuazamgarh)

From this extract, there are many things to be derived and discussed. Firstly, Shrirupa talks about certain abilities which are dominantly recognised as intelligence and required to perform in achievement domain; skills in English in this context. Then she refers to the accessibility of private, English-medium schooling which may be accessible to all children alike. The resources available are not equally distributed in an unequal society resulting in differences in performance. This performance or rather lack of

performance is interpreted as an inability or low intelligence in most cases. Finally, she emphasizes the role of the individual and his/her persistence in coping with these differences in resources. It can be said that she realizes that poor performance will, most often, be evaluated as a lack of ability. However, she does not accept it in an unchallenging manner. Similarly, Sunaina also says that when resources are unevenly distributed, there is lack of a common ground for comparison.

“No... it is not that... I mean... between both of us the one who is intelligent is first and other is second. Because you got better opportunities and I did not get so you become first and I was put in 2<sup>nd</sup>. This is not justified right... If you want to know proper results then give equal facilities to both. But this doesn't happen in reality right... some are ahead because they got better facilities.... (not clear).... So just because they are lower caste they are exploited... how will they move ahead?”

(Extract 5.41, Sunaina, SC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Kalchini,  
Alipurduar)

Sunaina reiterates what Shrirupa has already said. Sunaina belongs to a lower class family; her father is a vegetable vendor and her mother is a housewife. Apart from her, there are three daughters and two sons in her family. It was her sister who first stepped out of their hometown Kalchini to pursue graduation from St. Xaviers' College in Kolkata. Since then, there has been no looking back for Sunaina as well as both her younger sisters. It is observed that both participants are aware that socio-cultural factors like the socio-economic status of their family are an important determinant of the resources and opportunities available to them. However, both have belief in their abilities to cope as well as compete when provided with equal opportunities. Similarly, Sarita also mentions family background, socialization and resources as important in influencing abilities.

“Which factors can increase intelligence... we can say that some factors are genetic, some you get from your generations... okay. For example, there may be a 1<sup>st</sup> generation learner, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation learner, a 4<sup>th</sup> generation learner... there will be a difference between them right? Take for example; I am a 1<sup>st</sup> generation learner so my ability is not same as theirs. But, whatever I can achieve I will claim as my ability and say that I have achieved that much. Maybe a time will come when someone will refer to me as very able and intelligent. Similarly, my children will... I will be able to give them something more than what I have got. So they will definitely be better than me, more intelligent than me. So these things definitely matter, our family and generations; what and how they have gone through, what opportunities we have been given, our socialization, our socialization... the people we interact with... everything.”

(Extract 5.42, Sarita, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mohikheda, Unnao)

Sarita also belongs to a lower class family; her father is a farmer, her mother is a housewife and she has six siblings. Being a first generation learner, she says that certain aspects of ability and intelligence are determined by the family background. However, she also believes in her ability to achieve and to provide better opportunities for the next generation. In all the three extracts presented above, participants emphasize on the role of socio-cultural factors. These socio-cultural factors mentioned by participants can be understood in terms of the concept of cultural capital proposed by Bourdieu (1979). Bourdieu used the concept to provide explanations for the under achievement of students belonging to lower socio-economic status and also for the perpetuation of social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997). Cultural capital referring to social knowledge and cultural resources is more likely to be found in families of higher socio-economic status and is also directly related to educational outcomes and success (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Research in western countries has found cultural capital to act as a function of race and socio-economic status (Bourdieu, 1979; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Farkas, 1996). In the Indian context, research has indicated that the disadvantaged students who are also underperformers most of the times belong to

scheduled caste, low income families, mostly from rural areas with low education level of the father (Srivastava & Seth, 1982). While there is a lot of research evidence for the low intellectual abilities and underperformance of students from marginal backgrounds (for example, Dixit & Moorjani, 1982; Gupta, 2014) research focusing on the active agency of the individual is relatively lesser. However, in the present study it is found that participants recognize the importance of outside forces while at the same time expressing the tendency to resist those forces with individual effort and persistence. Most participants recognised the importance of caste, class and parental support in influencing intelligence. Consider the following extracts.

“No, I don’t think so... I feel irrespective of the caste... if the environment is good... exposure is good... in family, support is good... if teachers are responsible then caste will not matter. Then again... maybe I am saying this because I am from an economically stable family... my perception is so... but someone from a poor background... like my friends used to go to work... so they had to miss school frequently... maybe their ability was being effected... not because of caste but the financial... what do you say social-economic status.”

(Extract 5.43, Sridhar, SC, Male, 23, M.Phil. Student, From Balasore)

“Yes, definitely, I think so and this is... you may call it my positionality; my caste positionality because naturally, umm.. if you have social capital, economic capital, intellectual capital so you already are put in a place like you graph will anyway be higher than anybody from a lower caste background because you will be studying in better schools, you will have access to better gadgets and... better networks... so ya, I think so that social position matters

(Extract 5.44, Sangeeta, SC, Female, 31, Ph.D. Student, From Guwahati)

“Firstly ability and intelligence cannot be judged on face value... by looking at a person we cannot say he is intelligent or not... but we can definitely judge on the basis of performance...by encouraging or discouraging the child you can boost his capacity to utilize his potential...then there are other factors like economic conditions... it is a big factor...whatever examples people may give... that for example Lal Bahadur Shastri had crossed the river to go to school... and.... (not clear)... that person you saw who could cross the river... what about the many who drowned in their attempt to cross the river.. no one sees them. So... the economical condition plays a role in providing resources and facilities to the child... it is a comparison of resources. Then if we take caste... even till very recently... they never went to school... they were enveloped in the chores of the home itself.. so it is not that they did not have ability... or intelligence.. or talent...they were never given the opportunity to evolve... then what matters is which place you are in... the lower caste child who is in Delhi will get certain benefits from the government which a child from the village will not get... he will get more facilities... he will not be affected by climatic conditions... Delhi will never experience floods... they will get better teachers and better exposure... good teachers want to stay in the cities... why will they go to the villages. There will definitely be a difference in the abilities of children belonging to upper caste and lower caste because there is difference in opportunity. Every child from lower caste cannot become Bhim Rao Ambedkar... Ambedkar will only be one... but from upper castes you will find 50 or 100 educated examples. So...there are many influences of caste hierarchy.”

(Extract 5.45, Ishan, OBC, Male, 29, Ph.D. Student, From Belurmath)

It can be seen that participants believed caste and class intersect to influence abilities and intelligence. Along with caste and class participants also bring attention to differences in ecological upbringing between students belonging to urban and rural areas. This distinction is also made on the basis of the resources and opportunities available in urban and rural areas. However, participants from unreserved category when asked the same question, answered in the negative. For them caste had no role in determining, influencing, or modifying intelligence. Their answers were limited to lack of resources

and opportunities. For the women participants, it was the social stereotypes which they thought restricted ability and influenced career choices. Some participants brought up the example of Ambedkar in justifying the stance that caste had no relation to intelligence. However, like Ishan says in the above extract, Ambedkar is the only example, the only reference point as far as the marginalized communities are concerned. Consider the following extracts from interviews conducted with unreserved category participants.

“It is not related to caste also... there are so many students from low caste background who are doing so well... there is no such rule that one belonging to general category will be intelligent.”

(Extract 5.46, Pooja, UR, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Bhiwani)

“No... it is nothing like that... we can take the example of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar... he was so brilliant... despite all odds we was able to educate himself and has founded our Indian constitution. Dr. A.P.J. Kalam... he was Muslim.. he has still achieved so much in his life.”

(Extract 5.47, Vikas, UR, Male, 20, Bachelors Student, From Badarpur, Delhi)

“Intelligence may be it influences little but according to me it does not influence...it does not...there are many example, take B. R. Ambedkar or take JyotiBa Phule those who have at that time when education level in India was nothing at that time they have received such good education...they have gone abroad and studied...they brought about reforms in society so it depends from person to person”.

(Extract 5.48, Ajit, UR, Male, 23, LLB Student, From Delhi)

“... I wouldn't say that it entirely influences but it definitely influences it. Always preferences are given to men... as I said that men should be in the field of military.. or police... girls should always be related to teaching... so there comes a time when there are expectations... when you are born these are given to you that you should be in this or in this...that is very distinct...you cannot think of doing something different...girls also tend to accept these things...that academics is safest...if you do something which is out of the norm then it is not appreciated...women who are very courageous and self-confident they do go forward...but you will not be appreciated so if you are strong enough then criticisms won't matter but if you are not strong enough then it might influence you and you might do something else...so that might influence you”

(Extract 5.49, Meenu, UR, Female, 25, Ph.D. Student, From Kolkata)

It can be seen from the above extracts that, participants belonging to the unreserved category claimed no relation between caste and ability and intelligence. Such similar pattern of responses was also observed in their attributions for success and failure. Participants mostly made attributions to either the availability or lack of resources and opportunities for success and failure respectively. However, on the other hand, participants from scheduled caste and other backward classes category were quick to draw connections between caste and the shaping of abilities. It can be said that privilege makes one oblivious of social reality while experience makes one mindful of the processes and realities unfolding in the social world. Along with the socio-cultural factors influencing ability and intelligence participants also mentioned that though caste does not influence ability directly it may do so indirectly by influencing the person's confidence. It was believed that confidence influenced the utilization of abilities either positively or negatively.

#### **5.4.2 Belonging to upper caste has an impact on self-esteem**

Another manner in which caste influences ability, or rather the utilization of abilities is through the confidence it either provides or denies to individuals. The upper castes have been dominant in the caste hierarchy since time immemorial. Moreover, the attributes of abilities, intelligence, achievement and success have all been given to them. On the other hand, members belonging to the disadvantaged castes have been denied basic opportunities and have been oppressed for centuries. The affirmative action policy provided by the constitution of India though has provided access to educational institutions and government jobs does not necessitate changes in social status and respect. Members of subordinate castes are continued to be viewed as lacking in ability which many a times has bearing on their confidence, mental health and also emotional well being. This sub-theme particularly discusses self-esteem which is given to the upper castes by virtue of their ascriptive caste status. Participants mentioned that confidence associated with belonging to a particular caste often influences the utilization of abilities.

“Upper caste... what they do... they get stickers on their cars...”...Rao Sahib... Jatt... others cannot do that and they cannot understand that also. It will become a problem if they do so...”

(Extract 5.50, Piyush, SC, Male, 20, Bachelors Student, From Dwarka)

“I...don't...I don't know about intelligence but it will definitely affect their confidence level... not caste but the socio-economic status the person comes from... I don't think caste plays much role in confidence... or maybe it does... but I can say that people who are... generalized... no exceptions... according to me I think... people who are well off because... they are brought up in that way and I think they are confident enough... naturally... but others maybe they are not that confidence enough... so that might influence.”

(Extract 5.51, Chitra, OBC, Female, 23, Masters Student, From Hyderabad)



“See, it doesn’t influence intelligence but will definitely influence the confidence level. When you belong to a group which... for a long time... has been associated with authority then you have a confidence that...this is my group and it has been dominant. And when you belong to a group which in the social strata... has always been lower in authority then it is definitely there in your mind right. This does have an effect on your level of self belief and then you will not be able to use your ability in the same way that someone belonging to the upper strata of society can use.”

(Extract 5.52, Manish, SC, Male, 33, LLB Student, From Siwaan)

“Sometimes when there is debate on reservations in class these people very easily say that reservation should be revoked. They don’t think for a minute or two. What are their sources? I have seen around me; there is nothing of this sort...What is this ? Like... study properly then say... like this on reservations... like you do feel that like you are not able... like you got it as a ‘*firaaq*’... like that. So, somewhere or the other your confidence is lowered. So, that will influence your performance, you will feel like giving up”

(Extract 5.53, Sunaina, SC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Kalchini, Alipurduar)

In each of the four extracts, participants talk about the role of raised self-esteem resulting from belonging to the upper castes in influencing abilities. Belonging to the group which has enjoyed dominant status for long has an impact on self-esteem. Self-esteem is an important concept in social psychology and has been found to be positively related to a wide variety of outcomes be it motivational consequences, educational outcomes, mental health as well as social relationships (Ross & Broh, 2000; Leary & Baumeister 2000; Mann, Hosman, Schaalma & deVries, 2004). It is important then to note that belonging to the disadvantaged group in society may have adversarial impact on the individual’s self-worth thus in turn negatively impacting the utilization of their abilities.

## 5.5 Discussion

The chapter discussed the notion of ability and intelligence among participants. Following from Nicholls (1990) and Quihis et al., (2002), the study followed a qualitative method to understand what participants understood by ability and intelligence. This helped to situate the implicit theories held by participants in a social and cultural context and also gain understanding as to what the common understanding of intelligence is. Several interesting and important insights about lay understanding of intelligence were noted. It was found that participants distinguished ability and intelligence to be performance and knowledge aspects respectively. The well-established understanding of intelligence as a multifarious entity rather than a unitary concept was once again reiterated by the findings of this research. Moreover, in terms of the implicit theories held by the participants it was found that most participants operated with an incremental theory in mind. Also, effort, hard work and opportunities were mentioned as the factors which lead to an increase in intelligence. Finally, it was found that participants belonging to unreserved category focused on opportunities and resources as factors which increase ability and intelligence. However, it was the participants belonging to the reserved category who pointed out that opportunities and accessibility to resources are easily provided to the privileged sections while the others have to earn them. These findings taken together suggest that the individuals are not asocial and decontextualised beings but rather should be viewed as a function of the context in which they operate (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978; Quihis et al., 2002).

These findings when discussed in theoretical terms have important implications. Firstly, the theoretical understanding is that intelligence is an amalgamation of abilities, that proficiency in those abilities leads to competence and then finally expertise (Sternberg, 1998, 2005). Participants understood intelligence as a set of abilities; the ability to understand well, the ability to manage everyday problems, to make good decisions, the ability to maintain social relationships and also to manage one's emotions. Interestingly, all the participants understood intelligence as that which would help them achieve in life; a set of skills and abilities which takes them closer to accomplishing their goals and succeeding in life. Sternberg (1999) proposed the concept of *'successful*

*intelligence*' which is driven by performance and success. It can be said that participants are at a stage of their lives where performance and success matter most and therefore are reflected in their responses as well.

Another important aspect of intelligence mentioned by participants was the ability to work hard. As compared to the western understanding of intelligence as a construct within the minds of individuals which make them able and competent, such an understanding of intelligence brings focus to the role of culture in conceptualizing intelligence. As argued by Misra and Srivastava (2007), intelligence as understood in the Indian culture is very different from the American culture. In fact, Indian culture is different from western culture in terms of the value it places on context-sensitive as compared to context-free cognitive orientations. Highlighting the role of culture in the study of intelligence, Sternberg (2004) says, "*Intelligence cannot be fully or even meaningfully understood outside its cultural context. Work that seeks to study intelligence acontextually risks the imposition of an investigator's view of the world to the rest of the world.*" (p. 325). Along with control of emotions, sensitivity to context, and hard work were found to be the most important aspects of intelligence in the Indian cultural context (Srivastava & Misra, 2007). This discussion leads way to the next finding that, almost all the participant held an incremental theory of intelligence.

Research on implicit theories and culture has found that children from East Asian societies hold incremental theories of intelligence as compared to their American and/or Canadian counterparts (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Ratan et al., 2012; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). While the results of this study supported these researches, it was also found that some participants believed ability to be incremental and intelligence to be fixed. As mentioned, participants distinguished ability and intelligence to be different domains of competence. It can therefore be said that participants held different implicit theory in different domains. Recent research in the implicit theory tradition has critiqued the dichotomous nature in which they are propagated to be held by participants. In fact, it has been demonstrated by Quihis et al., (2002) that the individual may hold aspects of both incremental and entity theory and depending on the situation make use of either one of them.

Moreover, all participants believed that effort and hard work were instrumental in increasing intelligence. This finding also has important implications because making effort is viewed as negatively related to possessing inherent ability in American culture and also in mainstream social psychological research (Kumar & Maehr, 2007) In fact, the findings suggest that working hard and making effort are considered to be intelligent behaviours in the first place. Along with the role of culture, this research also raised questions regarding the role of the individual's caste in determining their implicit theories. Srinivasan et al., (2015) have demonstrated that the stronger the individual's belief in the Hindu caste system, the more likely he/she is to hold an entity theory of intelligence. The present study did not find any evidences for the caste of the individual to be influential in determining the kind of implicit theory held. Participants from all caste categories believed that intelligence could be increased through hard work, effort and practice. However, an important difference was noted in the responses of the participants. While participants from the unreserved category believed that there was no relation between caste and intelligence, participants from the reserved categories responded that the caste an individual belonged to has positive impact on confidence and self-esteem. These in turn influence the utilization of abilities and intelligence and also in shaping them. These responses of the participants have two meanings; firstly, life experiences are shaped by the groups we belong to and also the power dynamics between different groups in society making social position of individuals determining agents of their social cognition. This finding is further elaborated in the next two chapters. Secondly, for dominant caste groups, caste and also their own privilege may become invisibilized (Padalia, 2019). Not only does privilege make one oblivious of the detrimental social and psychological influences of caste but also ignorant of one's own advantages (duBois, 1935). The next two chapters discuss analysis regarding attributions for success and failure respectively. Along with unfolding novel aspects of the attribution process some of the findings presented in this chapter are reemphasized.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **ASPIRATION, ACHIEVEMENT, AND ATTRIBUTION: THE IDEAS OF SUCCESS**

The chapter presents the second part of the analysis in this research; that is attributions for success. Three themes were identified from the data; firstly, social position of individuals determines their construction of success. Secondly, it was found that there was a shared attribution of success to a combination of internal and external (social) causes. Finally, it was found that there was a universal acceptance of persistence in achieving success among all the participants.

#### **6.1 Theme 1: Social position of individuals determines their construction of success**

In order to study attribution for success, it is imperative to know the construction of success. How do participants understand success? What meaning does success hold for them? Answers to these questions will aid in analyzing participants' attributions for success. The first theme provides answers to these questions. Discussion is centered on different constructions of success held by the participants. Participants, when asked whether or not they have experienced success at any point of time in their lives, came up with diverse responses. While some believed that success was achieving a goal, some believed it was to be happy and free at mind. Amongst these, there were some who believed that success and failure are sheer possibilities and do not deserve much thought. Participants were also asked to share their experiences of success. This brought further clarity to their personal constructions of success. It was noted that almost all participants reported success as being subjective; that what is success for them may not be so for another. Moreover, all of them associated success with happiness and satisfaction. However, while for some happiness denoted helping a friend, for some happiness was to elevate their father's social and economic status. The following pages demonstrate how

participants construct different meanings of success and how these meanings are in turn shaped by the positions in which they are located in society

### **6.1.1 Achieving goals and aspirations**

Most participants' related success with achievement and the terms commonly associated with achievement were goals, aims, and aspirations. Such associations are not surprising considering age range of the participants and the setting of the study. The study was conducted in university set up and students enter university keeping in mind future career prospects. Therefore it is natural for participants to associate success with achievement. In fact, research in psychology has also demonstrated goal pursuit as being important to well-being and a good life (Frisch, 1998). Secondly, the theme claims that '*social position influences construction of success*'. The first aspect of positionality that reflects social reality in India is the individual's caste. Consider the following extracts about what participants belonging to different caste categories had to say with regard to success.

“Success is... like... achieving what you want in life. It may be... like financial achievement, it may be like... relationship achievement. It can be like personal to professional, it can be anything.”

(Extract 6.1a, Payal, SC, Female, 28, PhD Student, From Tiruchirappalli)

The above extract is from the interview with Payal. Payal has been staying in Delhi for more than 10 years. She shifted to Delhi for higher studies and has been living in hostel since then. Both her parents are working; her father in a commercial bank, her mother in the postal department and she has two sisters. From her parents' profession we can infer that she belongs to a middle class family. For her, success is to achieve any aspiration, whatever it may be. When asked to describe a successful experience of her life, Payal says,

“Aaah!! like yes... from my background, I am the only one PhD candidate. I’m not saying all my cousins or my siblings are uneducated. But, they are like... confined themselves as I am a South Indian. They have confined themselves to like doctors and engineers so... I want to break that scenario because there in our South India, basically Chennai and other places also South India also, like Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala, wherever... Arts... especially History, is an ICU. They consider very bad okay. They think that it is the third rated subject. If a person flunk or fail okay... when he don’t have any other option he goes to history...”

(Extract 6.1b, Payal, SC, Female, 28, PhD Student, From Tiruchirappalli)

As can be seen, studying Humanities is success for Payal. She considers pursuing a PhD in History to be an achievement, a success. For Manish, success is also about achievement, but, at the same time he opines that “*there is nothing great about success*”.

“Umm...basically my schooling has been from Siwan district... it is a small town... my graduation is also from there. So, when I gave entrance in BHU for the first time... there used to be coaching at that time. I was from a small town and there were many boys from very good institutes to give the exam. I thought that I will not be able to pass amongst them but when the results were declared... my rank was 24<sup>th</sup>. That was the first time... I felt that my preparation was up to some level... that I can clear an entrance examination... I felt that I had succeeded, but...unfortunately, I had to leave BHU after some time. So... whatever my experience is till now, I feel that there is nothing great about success or failure in life. It is only a possibility...when you achieve something you feel that you are successful.”

(Extract 6.2, Manish, SC, Male, 33, LLB Student, From Siwan)

Manish has completed graduation from Siwan, has a master’s degree from IGNOU, and was pursuing Law at the time of this research. He has spent a few years in

Delhi owing to his preparations for civil services examination. While his father is employed in Bihar judicial services, his mother is a house wife, and they are three brothers. From his fathers' occupation we can say that he belongs to a middle class family. Moreover, his father being in the government service not only elevates the family status but also provides encouragement and support to pursue aspirations. Though Manish acknowledged success and failure to be simple probabilities he does associate success with achievement of aspirations. Similarly, Akash also associates success with goal achievement, as he states

“A person's success is that in which he is satisfied. If he wants to achieve some goal and is able to do that then it is a success for him.”

(Extract 6.3a, Akash, SC, Male, 28, PhD Student, From Asansol)

Akash shifted to Delhi after completing graduation and post graduation from Bangalore. He has completed M.Phil. in molecular medicine and is presently pursuing Ph.D. in the same subject. His father retired as chief research officer at the central testing department, his mother is a housewife and he has a younger sister. Like Payal and Manish, he also belongs to a middle class, service household. When asked whether or not he has experienced success this is what he had to say.

“Success... I think my biggest attempt was that I clear JNU PhD entrance exam. I had already qualified NET/JRF and have given many interviews... so I will consider that as my success career wise. And in childhood the entrance exam in my school was very tough... in Ramakrishna Mission so that was a also a success at school level”

(Extract 6.3b, Akash, SC, Male, 28, PhD Student, From Asansol)



As can be seen, Akash's experience of success is also related to academic domain and takes him a step closer to achievement of his aspirations. After getting an idea of what some participants belonging to scheduled caste category think about success let us consider what participants from the other backward classes and the unreserved category have to say about success.

“Success is... a... satisfaction you can say is success. For example, for someone... the success is to become... an IAS officer. For someone... to become an Sub-Inspector... for someone to become an scientist. So, success... is also depends from person to person... the satisfaction. If the person is satisfy... that I had to achieve this and after that I am satisfy then he is a success (emphasis). Then if... umm... there are many person who have... the... umm... cleared the IPS examination but they don't consider it as their success because they... want to do something... more further. So, success... it depends again from person to person.”

(Extract 6.4, Ajit, UR, Male, 23, LLB Student, From Delhi)

“Success is achieving your goal... whatever your goal is, which you have chosen. If a person... is able to achieve the goals which he has set for himself then it is a success for him.”

(Extract 6.5, Yogendra, UR, 24, LLB Student, From Maski, Ujjain)

Both Ajit and Yogendra, when asked to describe successful experiences of their life, said that success was achieving a rank in their respective law entrance exams. While Ajit had stood 4<sup>th</sup>, Yogendra had secured 8<sup>th</sup> position in the same exam. Ajit's father is employed in Delhi Police as sub-inspector and his mother is a housewife. He has an elder brother and a younger sister. Yogendra's father, on the other hand, is a lawyer who practices privately, his mother is a housewife and he is a single child. He came to Delhi to pursue higher studies and after completing graduation is now pursuing law. From the

family background of Amit and Yogendra it can be said that both of them belong to middle class families. For both of them, success is achieving a goal, an aspiration and also satisfaction with what one has achieved. Chitra is also of the same opinion. Chitra shifted to Delhi to pursue graduation. Her parents are both working; her father is a lecturer, her mother works in an NGO and she is a single child. Consider what she has to say about success:-

“Success... umm... don't know... maybe... how satisfied we are with what we wanted to do.”

*Can you describe a successful experience of your life?*

“Maybe getting in JNU... yes that...”

(Extract 6.6, Chitra, Female, 23, OBC, Masters Student, From Hyderabad)

As can be seen from the above presented extracts, success for these six participants is pursuing and achieving goals and all their goals are related to the academic domain. Each of them relates success with achievement of goals and satisfaction with their achievement. For Naresh, however, success is achieving the goal of fame and recognition. Originally hailing from East Champaran in Bihar, Naresh's family migrated to Delhi when he was in class 8. He said that his father is in a private job but was slightly hesitant to share details of the occupation. His mother is a housewife and he has two younger sisters. He has completed his schooling from a government school in Delhi and was in the final year of his graduation at the time of the interview. The college he was in is reputed for its physical education and sports department. Naresh pursued archery and had participated in many games at the state and national level. When asked whether he

has ever experienced success, Naresh said: - *“Successful... there is nothing like this in my life... my life is very normal”*. When implored to explain further, he added:-

“There are... but success... my 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> was average... my graduation was also average... here also I have played only at the national level... so that is also average compared to others on this ground.”

*Then what according to you is success?*

“My goal... my aim is not to play international also... even if I win Olympic medal I will not be satisfied because my goal is something else... fame... becoming famous is my aim... I want to be world famous... I want that not only in India but all over the world everyone recognizes me... like everyone knows Sachin Tendulkar... he is famous... money doesn't matter ... if I wanted money then I would be working somewhere now... I would have started a business... but a business man doesn't have that much fame as compared to a sports person... Sachin Tendulkar... Usian Bolt... they have all achieved something.”

(Extract 6.7. Naresh, UR, Male, 22, Bachelors Student, From East Champaran)

For Naresh, success is to achieve fame and recognition. He modelled his goals and aspirations according to reputed sports persons recognised for excellence in their respective sports. Upon going through these narratives, it can be said that for these seven participants success is associated with achievement of goals and aspirations. While they belong to different caste categories, the meaning that success carries for each of them is similar. Does caste hold no significance in the construction of success? Perhaps it is too early in the discussion to arrive at such a conclusion. Research has found that environment and culture play an important role in the type of goal a person will tend to

have (Kasser, 2003, Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). In fact, why a goal is being pursued is more important rather than content of the goal (Brdar, Rijavec & Miljkovic, 2009). The next sub-theme demonstrates why individuals may develop certain kinds of goals or aspirations. In other words, it discusses how caste and class intersect to determine a person's construction of success in terms of goal achievement.

### **6.1.2 Achieving economic stability and elevating social status**

Success has predominantly been associated with the extrinsic goal of achievement in the previous sub-theme. In this sub-theme, it is made evident that holding extrinsic aspirations may not always be personal and individual. For many, it is their social position and circumstances which bring them to develop extrinsic aspirations. Consider the following extracts.

“Success... is achieving what you imagine (laughs)... but then... there are also many ifs and buts... at every level you will have increased aspirations and you will have to negotiate according to your conditions at every stage. At this stage... clearing an exam... some job... some goal... getting a permanent source of income... it depends on your social background as well... like for someone from an economically well established family... for them getting a job is not important. Like see... these days many people are into standup comedy and random stuff like that... it is not something that you and me cannot do... but they can afford to give time to that... we cannot give time... for us success is getting a stable job... for them success is not getting a stable job but to have job satisfaction.... their definitions.. of success... their goals, aspirations are all different... (After thinking a bit)... some people make a career out of their hobbies and some have to kill their hobbies and develop a goal.”

(Extract 6.8, Vijay, OBC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Varanasi)

Vijay shifted to Delhi after completing his graduation from his hometown. After completing masters and M.Phil., now he is in the first year of PhD. His father is a government school teacher, his mother a housewife and he has a younger sister. From his narrative, it is evident that, for him success is to achieve a stable job. What Vijay has said is somewhat repeated by Suresh. The desire to achieve economic stability appears to be intrinsically linked with an individual's social class, which in turn creates the desire to achieve and provide for their family and significant others. Suresh said: -

“My success is... ma'am... it was that I achieved good marks in 12<sup>th</sup>. Since the beginning I was... in government school so government school... it's not that government school is in bad condition. It depends on the student he wants to do or does not want to do. In the beginning I was not good in studies... Before 10<sup>th</sup> I was a little... more into friends... I was too much involved in then, I was not in archery also at that time. When I came to 11<sup>th</sup>... I took Arts stream. After taking Arts stream... I understood... what can be done through studies. It's not necessary that if someone... if in sports... thousands... lakhs... crores of children pursue in sports and among them only one or two emerge. Like cricket is a team of 11... 11 players make a team and cricket is played in every nook and corner. Now every child from every nook and corner cannot enter the team right... If we study then we can make it... even if we do not reach aim of sports... but on the basis of studies we can start some personal business... we can do anything to support our family. So, I understood this thing. Then... in 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>... I studied day and night. Then I... achieved good marks.”

(Extract 6.9, Suresh, SC, Male, 18, Bachelors Student, From Burari, Delhi)

Suresh belonged to a lower socio-economic class family residing in Burari, in north Delhi. His father sold vegetables and his mother was a housewife. Suresh had four brothers in different stages of education. For Suresh, success was performing well academically as it increased his chances of becoming an earning member of the family. It was not surprising then that Suresh has extrinsic aspirations to achieve an economic goal. It was his social position that drove him to this construction of success. In fact, research

has demonstrated that lower middle class youth pursue education with the aim to either create or recreate social status (Deuchar, 2013). For them, success is to elevate the social status of the family by achieving economic security through stable jobs and education is a means to achieve that success. Similarly, Shrirupa, also says that success differs from person to person depending on their socio-economic status.

“The parameter of success varies from person to person... according to me... the satisfaction we get after reaching a level... and we get happiness after reaching that level... then it is success... and I mean... if it is... if the person thinks that it is good for him... then it is a success. The level and standard of success for everyone is different... like for someone... success is becoming an IAS officer... for someone just getting a job is success. So, the person defines success according to his thinking... his status and standard. The person’s social stability and economic stability also influences his parameter of success... for example... a film star success will be different and for someone who does farming in his village... success will be different. Achieving what the person desires is success and that depends from person to person.”

(Extract 6.10, Shrirupa, SC, Female, 27, PhD Student, From Mahuaazamgarh)

Shrirupa hails from Mahuaazamgarh in Uttar Pradesh. Her family migrated to Allahabad when she was in school and she opines that this step taken by her father has played a huge role in her educational outcomes. Her father is a government school teacher and her mother, a housewife. She is very clear in thinking that subjective construction of success differs according to social and economic stability, the very point being reiterated by this sub-theme. What is interesting to note is that while research has mostly demonstrated a negative correlation between financial aspirations and other such constructs and overall life satisfaction (for example, Richins & Dawson, 1992; Chan & Joseph, 2003; Diener & Oshi, 2000) the same does not hold good for individuals from moderate or low income households (Nickerson, Schwarz, & Diener, 2002, 2007). Other

research has also found that family income moderates the relation between financial aspirations and subjective wellbeing (La Barbera & Gurhan, 1997). It is not surprising that for many participants' success, financial aspirations, and happiness are linked together because of their social position.

While there is no narrative which supports the role played only by person's caste in shaping their ideas of success, there are narratives which do so for only the person's class. Consider what Raj has to say about success.

“I worked hard in class 10<sup>th</sup>...I got 78%...I worked hard in 12<sup>th</sup> also...I got above 60%... then I got admission in college... that is a success. When we achieve something it is a success...”

(Extract 6.11a, Raj, Male, UR, 19, Bachelors Student, From Nawada)

Raj's father is a private security guard, his mother is a housewife and he is the only child. Like Naresh, his parents also migrated from their village in Nawada to Delhi when he was young. Belonging to a lower socio-economic class does influence his cognition and for him academic performance is an achievement as it enables him to gain economic stability and elevate his family's status. Though he pursues archery in his college his primary focus is to pursue higher education and enter academics as an assistant professor in Sanskrit. He mentioned that

“I am more into studies... I want to become a teacher... but if there is any vacancy on the basis of 12<sup>th</sup> standard I try for it... like railways group D... this game (archery) is very expensive... if I take up a job somewhere then I can focus on the game and also on my career. My aim is to do PhD, like you... and then become assistant professor.”

(Extract 6.11b, Raj, Male, UR, 19, Bachelors Student, From Nawada)

Raj is clear about the course he has to take; but to continue his education, first he has to take up any possible job. Only achieving economic stability can take him closer to his career aspirations. For him, success is associated with extrinsic, financial goals. The narratives presented in this section highlight the role played by caste and class together in determining how and what participants think about success. A point to be noted is that participants mention achievement of goals as a means to provide for the family, to elevate their status, both economic and social. However, one of them mentions happiness and associates the emotional state with achievement. Research on the emotion of happiness is abundant; what is relevant to our discussion is the construction of happiness. Just like social construction of success differs, so does social construction of happiness. Most research in positive psychology has focused on sources of happiness in different cultures. The most popular explanation is that individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ in the sources from which they derive happiness. In European and American cultures happiness is mostly associated with personal achievements whereas, in East Asian cultures happiness is associated with social harmony and social relationships (Uchida, Norasakkunkit, & Kitayama, 2004). Similar results were reported by Lu and Gilmour (2004) who compared spontaneous essays written on happiness by American and Chinese students. They found that despite obvious similarities between the two cultures, for the Chinese, happiness was a state of harmony within the individual and also with the society. Americans, on the other hand, highly valued happiness as a state that can be achieved and accomplished. In line with this discussion consider what Kritika has to say.

“Success is to achieve your goal... what you want to do in your career... but then this is not complete... when you are happy and satisfied with it. Happiness is more important than achieving even the economic goal. If someone is not able to achieve his goal but still he is happy with what he has then it is a success for him.”



When probed further Kritika said,

“For me success will be when I am happy... if I’m able to give time to my family... if I’m able to do something for them financially... even if it is a little less it’s okay I should be happy.”

(Extract 6.12, Kritika, OBC, 30, PhD Student, From Balaghat)

Kritika does speak of social relationships and social harmony, about giving time to her family and providing for them but, she proposes to do so in the process of and after her achieving career goals. The happiness she imagines experiencing in future is or rather will be derived from providing material possessions for her family. Though India is widely recognised as a collectivistic culture our study provides evidences for the presence of both personal and social achievement in the experience of happiness. Happiness experienced through achievement (extrinsic aspirations) and happiness derived through personal growth (intrinsic aspirations) are also discussed in the next sub-theme wherein we see how caste, class, and gender intersect to determine participants’ constructions of success.

### **6.1.3 Personal growth versus breaking barriers**

Having discussed how caste and class intersect to determine the understanding of success we turn to discuss how caste and class intersect with gender to further increase their influence on participants’ social construction of success. Consider the narratives of Pooja and Sunaina wherein sharply contrasting constructions of success are presented. They are both young girls, pursuing graduation. For Pooja, participating/winning (in future) in the Olympics will be a success; for Sunaina, the fact that she is continuing her education is a success.

“Till now I have not experienced success...

*Why do you say so?*

“What is success for me...? I have selected my field... archery. I want to achieve a lot in this field... I don't want to be confined to a small area... I have sacrificed my studies for this... I was a medical student... my mother wanted that I study further... but my father supported me so, I have been able to pursue the sport. I am giving my 100% here and want that my hard work is rewarded. I want to represent India at international level... at Olympics, I want to win a medal.”

(Extract 6.13, Pooja, UR, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Bhiwani)

On the other hand, Sunaina, says,

“I think getting admission...in 10<sup>th</sup>. Like... my father... he was not getting me admitted in 10<sup>th</sup>... in 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>... because we had to wear skirt. So dress code was very... that is a rural area... like that time I was 15-16 years old... so by that time wearing skirts is completely stopped. So, I mean... then, somehow... I mean I did natak-watak... I cried a lot.....”

(Continues to describe how she stood up to the challenge of continuing school)

*So, what according to you is success?*

“I am studying... that in itself is a big (laughs sadly) success. Like most of my friends... like most of them are married, some even have children. Some younger than me are also married. Like, I don't know... since the beginning all this marriage and all didn't go well with me. In my family, my parents have many fights. So, like

every time it is only fighting... this housewife and all I don't find it right... I always wanted to study and earn independently... so, I used to say that I will study... that is why I used to go to school... like most of my friends don't used to go school... it was just... Because I don't like housework so I used to run away to school (laughs). So, going to school was a habit.”

(Extract 6.14, Sunaina, SC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Kalchini, Alipurduar)

Sunaina belongs to a lower class family; her father sells vegetables for a living, her mother is a house wife and she has three sisters and two brothers. Just like getting admission in class 10 was a challenge, coming to Delhi to pursue higher education was also a challenge. Overcoming that challenge and continuing education with the future aspiration of economic independence is success for Sunaina. On the other hand, Pooja, when asked about her father's occupation, very proudly says “*he is reader to Deputy Commissioner*”. Her mother is a housewife and she has an elder sister and a younger brother. It can be said that she belongs to a middle class family. Though she has experienced her share of challenges in pursuing a career in sports, her aspirations are starkly contrasting to those of Pooja. Both aspire to achieve extrinsic goals but, for Pooja success is to achieve name, fame, and recognition. For Sunaina, though success is achieving an extrinsic goal of economic independence, behind it is the intrinsic goal to break out of the stereotypical life prescribed for girls belonging to lower-middle class and lower class families. Sarita's experience is somewhat similar to Sunaina's:

“Success...in the sense...see like I entered high school...I will say these small, small things only... everything is a success. These small things take you towards success. If I have reached up to this point then it is a success only right...”

(Extract 6.15a, Sarita, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mohikheda, Unnao)

Sarita says that reaching a stage where she is now pursuing PhD is a success, an achievement. She belongs to a lower class family; her father is a farmer and her mother is a housewife. They are seven brothers and sisters. Like Sunaina, she also had to break the shackles of patriarchy; further, she faced the economic challenges of pursuing higher education. Now that she has cleared UGC Rajiv Gandhi national fellowship her burden has been reduced, she is also able to support parents and sisters in their education. According to her, she never aspired to reach this level, her aspiration to delay marriage and move out of her village were the goals which led her to this point. At another point in the interview she shares,

“So, that is what I am saying success is... both direct and indirect. One is that you know you have to achieve something... the second is that you don't know anything but still you are getting it. Both are success. I never intended to be here but here I am... when in MA I came to know that there was a post like professor I wanted to be one... even then I did not know the requirements of being one.”

(Extract 6.15b, Sarita, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mohikheda, Unnao)

Viyakumar (2013) in a qualitative study of young men and women working in BPOs has found that “non-elite young women and women from lower strata of the middle classes” have “flexible aspirations”. That is, because of the changes they seek in the social structure, their futures are more uncertain than men thus limiting their plans for the future. Therefore, many a time they continue with the flow, like Sarita mentions in the extract above. From Sunaina and Sarita's accounts we may infer that pursuing education and achieving economic independence are not simply extrinsic goals but also a means to bring about positive change in their life. So, distinguishing intrinsic and extrinsic may not be that simple in case of every individual. For some, however, the distinction may be clear. Consider two narratives wherein participants associate success with achieving personal growth and intrinsic aspirations.

“If I’m measuring my own success then what I do is how well or how better can I do in comparison to my previous achievements... So, for me that is success. So, if I can better myself in some way or give out like... a... qualitatively... better output, then I would consider myself successful... so there is no... such an end product...”

*Can you describe a successful experience of your life?*

“Umm... umm... I’d like to think that I have had a lot of successes but umm... academically or non-academically?”

*Whichever you want to share...*

“Right... so I never learnt any musical instruments like, before...and... umm... but I like music a lot and I know like I’m good with rhythm because I was a dancer. When I went to Shillong, there was like a... immediately in front of my hostel like... this is my hostel and the opposite building was like, a music school. So I use to live very close to it and it was really, really... really cheap. So, almost everybody from my hostel enrolled... in the music school there. But due to a lot of constraints...like my class used to be at 7 in the morning and it was hell because Shillong gets really cold and it was very difficult to get up and have a bath and go for the class at 7’o clock drum class. But, umm... like fortunately I could continue for like two semesters and ya, I leant to play the drums and I was very happy with myself.”

(Extract 6.16, Unnati, UR, Female, 23, M.Phil. Student, From Pune)

“Success... for me... I find success in very small things also...if tomorrow I have to give a presentation... if I devote the entire day and night in preparing that

presentation... I will say that I'm successful in presetting it. Then since childhood I wanted to be in the field of academics... so in the next 2-3 years if I am able to join somewhere as an Assistant Professor then that will be a success for me. A goal is always necessary for you to be called a successful person... without goal how will you assess yourself that you are successful? Presence of a goal is very important to achieve success.”

(Extract 6.17, Kanika, OBC, Female, 25, Ph.D. Student, From Lucknow)

Unnati belongs to a middle class family; her father retired as an architect and her mother is an artist. She is the only child. After completing her graduation she pursued Masters from Shillong. She shifted to Delhi to pursue M.Phil. and is now working towards submission of the thesis. Kanika, on the other hand has spent quite some time in Delhi, her Masters and M.Phil. both are from Delhi. She belongs to a middle class family; her father is an administrative officer in an insurance company, her mother is a housewife, she has two younger siblings, a sister and a brother. For Unnati, success is learning to play a musical instrument as it adds to her artistic senses. For Kanika, success is making effort towards achieving extrinsic goals. Both of them focus on intrinsic goals of improvements in performance and satisfaction with efforts made.

As can be seen from the narratives of these five girls, when gender interacts with caste and class it has a much stronger effect on life experiences, opportunities, and social support. All of these go on to determine how they understand and think about success, aspirations and happiness. The same is true for caste and class as well. It can be said that aspirations for success are never equal (Nathan, 2005). In totality, this theme highlights the complexity of social reality. It demonstrates how the social position an individual occupies in society shapes his/her idea of success. The theme has discussed some narratives of participants in terms of their caste, class, and gender membership. However, overarching most of the participants' responses were descriptions of success as subjective, success as achieving goals, success as happiness with achievement and also

success as providing for the family. Having discussed the construction of success, the next theme goes on to discuss participants' attributions for success.

## **6.2 Theme 2: Shared attribution of success to a combination of internal and external (social) causes**

Mainstream social psychological research on attribution for the outcomes of success and failure has overlooked social factors. The four fold causal factors (Weiner, 1985, 1986) widely researched in achievement domain are ability, effort, luck and difficulty of task. Of these, the external and uncontrollable (but unstable) causes are also confined to a deterministic factor like luck and characteristics of the task at hand. Moreover, the dominant trend in analysis has been to clearly distinguish between internal and external locus of causality in making attributions. However, attributions may not necessarily, always be very clearly demarcated along the internal-external dimension. People may, and in fact, often make both internal and external attributions for the same event or outcome and these need not always be viewed as contradictory (Billig, 1982). This is precisely what the findings of the present research demonstrate. As can be seen from the table below, many participants made attribution to both internal and external causes at the same time.

**Table 6.1**  
**Frequencies of Internal and External Attributions made by Participants**

Locus of Causality	Frequencies		
	UR Category (N=15)	OBC Category (N=12)	SC Category (N=11)
Only Internal	4	2	1
Only External	0	0	0
Both Internal and External	11	10	10

A simple categorization of participant responses presented in Table 6.1, suggests that of the 38 participants, 7 made only internal attributions for success while the

remaining 31 made both internal and external attributions for success<sup>1</sup>. Consider some examples of such attributions made by participants.

“Causes are many... the person’s own abilities... effort... social background to some extent... what kind of push up the person received... his social networks... the kind of environment he stays in also matters a lot.”

(Extract 6.18, Shrirupa, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, Mahuazaamgarh)

“Knowledge! Now a day’s... your degree may or may not give you success but your knowledge... the way you work... if I am a businessman... I don’t have any degree but I work well... if I am honest to everyone... if I respect every customer of mine... then I can be successful. You just have to be motivated... that I want to do it so I will do it. Then your financial condition... like college is not providing shoes and all... so we have to buy.”

(Extract 6.19, Prisha, OBC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Gurugram)

“Hard work... (emphasis)... ummm... good companionship... labour as I say... and ... to an extent luck as well...family support is very important, that mental support is very important... it is basically a combination of luck and your effort. Efforts matter a lot. And... ya... ya... that’s it”

(Extract 6.20, Meenu, UR, Female, 25, Ph.D. Student, From Kolkata)

These extracts serve as examples to suggest that participants mostly made both internal and external attributions for success. Similarly, Antaki (1985) has demonstrated

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<sup>1</sup> This is a simple categorization of participant responses. When the dimensions of controllability and stability are included a more nuanced understanding of attribution is achieved.



that people rarely make single cause attributions. Also, effort as an internal cause of success was emphasized by almost all participants. Further analysis of responses indicated that luck and difficulty of task as external and uncontrollable (unstable) causes of success were only, rarely mentioned. Moreover, external and uncontrollable causes brought up in participant interviews were mostly social background, economic resources, social capital, opportunities and the like. At this stage, not much difference is found in the attribution pattern of participants. This preliminary reporting of attributions for success simply indicates them to be both internal and external at the same time for participants belonging to each of the three caste categories. The following tables present a break up of specific causes of success reported by participants and provide better understanding of differences in attribution pattern. Participants, in the interview, were asked about the causes of success and also the causes of academic success. They were also asked to share a successful experience of their life and the causes of that success. These causes are presented in tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 respectively.

**Table 6.2**  
*Participants' Attribution for Success*

Causes	Frequencies		
	UR	OBC	SC
<b>Internal Causes</b>			
Hard Work	6	7	0
Effort	4	2	4
Ability	0	2	2
Intelligence	0	1	0
Passion	3	0	0
Determination	2	2	0
Focus	2	3	1
Dedication	2	1	0
Persistence	2	4	0
Will	1	1	0
Desire	1	2	1
Honesty	1	1	0
Self-Belief	1	0	0
Self-Analysis	1	0	0
Dedication	0	1	1
Discipline	1	0	0
Concentration	0	1	0
Time Management	1	0	1
Maintaining Positivity	1	1	0
Investing Time	1	0	0
Ability to face challenges	0	1	1
Desire to achieve for family	1	0	0
<b>External Causes</b>			
Social Background (Caste and Class)	0	1	1
Social Background (Caste and Gender)	0	0	2
Family Support	2	3	0
Good Environment	1	1	0
Accessibility of Resources	1	1	0
Supportive Peer Group	1	2	0
Economic Stability	0	3	1
Importance of Role Model	1	0	0
Opportunities	1	0	0
Early Determination of Goal	2	1	0
Guidance	0	1	0
Luck	1	0	1

The table indicates that participants from all three caste categories place equal importance on internal causes like effort and hard work and also external causes like family support. However, the difference is in attributing success to social factors like

caste background and gender. While participants from scheduled caste and other backward classes categories mention caste and gender as possible causes of success no such attribution is made by participants belonging to unreserved category.

**Table 6.3**  
*Participants' Attribution for Academic Success*

Causes	Frequencies		
	UR	OBC	SC
<b>Internal Causes</b>			
Hard Work	2	5	4
Effort	3	2	5
Ability	0	3	3
Ability to memorise	0	1	0
Passion	1	0	1
Determination	0	2	1
Focus	0	2	0
Persistence	2	2	1
Desire	0	0	3
Self-Belief	1	0	0
Self-Analysis	1	0	0
Knowledge	0	1	0
Discipline	1	0	0
Patience	0	1	0
Time Management	1	0	0
Interest	0	2	1
Investing Time	0	1	0
Ability to face challenges	0	0	1
<b>External Causes</b>			
Social Background (Class)	4	0	0
Social Background (Caste and Class)	0	1	1
Social Background (Caste and Gender)	0	0	2
Family Support	1	3	2
Good Environment	0	2	0
Accessibility of Resources	1	1	1
Accessibility of Resources (Urban Area)	0	1	0
Supportive Peer Group	1	0	1
Economic Stability	0	2	2
Role of Teachers	5	1	2
Early Determination of Goal	1	1	1
Guidance	0	0	1
Role of Institution	4	2	0
Luck	0	0	1

The table indicates that academic success is attributed to internal (effort, interest) and external (family support, role of teachers) similarly by all participants. However, it can be seen that participants belonging to unreserved category attribute success to class. On the other hand, participants from scheduled caste and other backward classes category mention caste, gender and also economic stability as important causes of academic success.

**Table 6.4**  
*Participants' Attribution for their own experience of Success*

Causes	Frequencies		
	UR	OBC	SC
<b>Internal Causes</b>			
Hard Work	6	7	4
Effort	2	4	1
Ability	2	4	1
Passion	0	0	1
Determination	1	1	2
Focus	1	0	1
Persistence	0	1	1
Desire	3	3	3
Self-Belief	1	1	1
Self-Analysis	1	0	0
Consistency	0	0	1
Maintaining Positivity	2	0	0
Patience	1	0	0
Time Management	0	1	0
Interest	0	1	1
Investing Time	0	1	0
Confidence	1	0	0
Motivation	0	0	1
Desire to achieve for family	1	0	0
<b>External Causes</b>			
Family Support	2	5	3
Good Environment	0	1	0
Accessibility of Resources	1	1	0
Accessibility of Resources (Urban Area)	0	1	0
Supportive Peer Group	1	0	0
Economic Stability	0	1	1
Role of Teachers	4	2	2
Opportunity	2	0	0
Early Determination of Goal	0	1	0
Family Expectations	0	0	1
Role of Institution	0	1	0
Reservations	0	1	0

Table 6.4 reiterates the importance of effort and hard work along with family support in achieving success.

Frequency analysis from tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 demonstrate that effort attributions are more common as compared to ability attributions. In case of external attributions, family support is emphasized as compared to luck and difficulty of task. This indicates the role of culture in influencing attribution. India is a country with a predominantly collectivistic culture where family relationships are given much importance and are highly valued. Also highly valued are effort and hard work. It is not surprising that these causes were recurring in the interviews. Research on collectivistic and individualistic cultures has found that people from collectivistic cultures tend to make more external/situational attributions while those from individualistic cultures make more internal/personal attributions (for example, Morris & Peng 1994; Choi & Nisbett, 1998). Specifically, in the context of success and failure, it has been found that there is a tendency to take credit for success while denying responsibility for failure. This tendency, though in varying strengths, has been demonstrated in different cultures across the world (Fetcher & Ward, 1988; Kashima & Trandis, 1986; Zuckerman, 1979).

However, as can be seen in the present research, there is no distinction in attributing success to internal and external causes. Participants attribute success to the internal causes of effort, ability and hard work. At the same time, they also attribute success to the external causes of family background, family support and other social factors. This was a common tendency across most participants. In fact, differences among participants were in terms of the specific external causes reported by them. Participants belonging to unreserved category, along with family support, tended to highlight class background, economic stability and resources as the external causes of success. Participants belonging to scheduled caste and other backward classes category brought focus to caste background, gender and overcoming barriers associated with these to achieve success. Their narratives included the challenges they and their families faced in pursuing education and achieving success. Among the social causal factors reported by participants, caste background may be considered a stable dimension of causality. However, in comparison, class background is an unstable dimension of causality and it is

this class background which most participants aspire to achieve. The responses of participants provide an insight into Indian social reality. Moreover, they also reiterate the point that individual psychological processes do not operate in the individual mind in vacuum. The social context in which individuals operate has bearing on their social cognition; attribution process in the present context.

Differences in the attribution pattern of participants belonging to different caste categories are presented through the following sub themes. It must be noted that effort and hard work were emphasized by every participant. Therefore, the sub-themes discuss only the recurring external causes which came up in the interviews.<sup>2</sup>

### **6.2.1. Role of Family Support**

Along with ability, effort and hard work, family support as a cause of success came up in many interviews. The family, being the first agent of socialization, has a crucial role to play in the overall development of an individual. From instilling values in the child to providing necessary resources, parents play an important role in providing support to individuals throughout their educational career and also otherwise (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Role of family support and especially parental support in achieving success has been widely reported by research. For example, it was found that family is important in preparation for success even before Black students entered college (Hendron & Hirt, 2004). Similarly, Roosa et al., 2012 found that parental education and family role models were important along with internal factors in determining academic success in the case of Mexican American adolescents. While these studies have investigated family support in case of minority students, family support is important for everyone alike. Participants in the present study also mentioned that the family is crucial in providing support, both financial and mental. Decisions taken by the family and resources provided by them are significant causes of success. Consider what participants had to say about the causal role of family in achieving success.

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<sup>2</sup> Causal factors mentioned by participants when asked what the causes of their own success were are mostly used in discussion. However, at some instances, participants made references to siblings, friends and known persons in making attribution. These are also included in discussion.

“The causes of this success... the biggest cause is that my family is very supportive... there is economic stability in the family... these two things are very important... and... my effort... I have always been very serious with regard to my studies... then my father has always been encouraging... he has always motivated... all the girls my age... like... our hometown is Mahuazamgarh... my father migrated from there to Allahabad... so we... in terms of social environment we have received an urban environment... if we had not been in Allahabad... if we had been in our village environment then... maybe I would not have been here... because our father migrated... we got this environment... we got exposure... we got such a culture... so family support and family’s decision play a very important role. I mean... village environment is very different... so that definitely influences... the entire generation gets a base... because all my friends from the village... all are married... with 3-4 children. If we had been in the village because of social pressure my father would have got me married as well. So... the societal pressure on my father to get his daughter married has reduced in an urban setting... which would have magnified in the village... now we get to hear this only once in a year (smiles). So... one thing... my father has a progressive mindset... he is encouraging towards education and career... so it was a positive point for us. Educating girls beyond graduation is not considered necessary and important... even today... it is a big thing.”

(Extract 6.21, Shrirupa, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mahuazaamgarh)

Shrirupa’s narrative is an illustration of the fact that education continues to remain an aspiration for many girls. Even today many girls are denied opportunities to pursue education and if they happen to belong to castes lower in the traditional caste hierarchy the barriers become stronger. As mentioned in 6.1.2, Shrirupa’s father is a government school teacher. His decision to migrate from their village to Allahabad created opportunity for Shrirupa’s education. It has been found that the desire to provide children with better educational and employment opportunities is the major motive behind migration to cities (Hagelskamp, Suarez-Orosco & Hughes, 2010) and children from such families also fare better in academic domain. Today Shrirupa attributes pursuing Ph.D. and clearing UGC junior research fellowship to the decision to migrate to Allahabad. The

influence of stereotypes associated with educating girls and their traditional role as home makers and care givers had diminished value in an urban setting. Thus, family support was a significant external cause in Shrirupa's success. Prakash has a similar anecdote to share.

“Umm... I got admission in law faculty... because I had a good rank I got the hostel also... causes were that my parents understood that it was important that I come to Delhi for further studies... I don't think many people from where I belong come to Delhi... maximum 5-10%... that is one achievement... it was their vision to send me here... then after coming here it was my effort and hard work... once you get the exposure you can decide what you want to pursue... you can take guidance.”

(Extract 6.22, Prakash, OBC, Male, 24, LLB Student, From Khetri, Jhunjhunu)

Effort and hard work reappear yet again in this narrative along with family support. Prakash's father is a lawyer with a private practice and his mother is a government school teacher. He has a younger sister and both of them are presently in Delhi to pursue higher studies. He attributes his success to the resources and opportunities available in Delhi. To discuss the rural-urban divide in education, it can be said that there is a negative correlation between quality of education and the distance of schools in rural areas from the nearest urban area (Mitra, Dangwal, & Thadani, 2008). It is not surprising then that Prakash has felt this to be an important cause which determines his academic performance. His parents' support and decision to send him from Khetri, a small town in Rajasthan to Delhi for higher studies has been an important cause of his achievements and success. Similarly, Ajit and Prisha also highlight the support of their respective families. Ajit, after completing bachelors wanted to pursue Law so that it would help in preparing for civil services examinations. He attributes his achieving a position in LLB entrance exam to his family support. As mentioned earlier, his father is a sub-inspector in Delhi police. Ajit's father's service might have been a factor in influencing not only his aspiration of entering the government services but also the capability of his family to



provide him with the necessary support and resources. Prisha's success, on the other hand was to have represented the sport of weightlifting at the Republic Day parade. She was happy to have made her parents proud. Being from a conservative place like Haryana, her father, like Srirupa's father had overcome many challenges to support her aspiration to pursue sports as a career. Consider what Ajit and Prisha have to say about the causal role played by their families in their success.

“The causes for this was... umm... actually I was preparing for the UPSC, I want to make my career out of the academic thing so I did coaching for the UPSC and my family supported me for all these things... and after that... my parents asked... instead of the doing the post graduation and M.A. or... they... supported me for doing the Law as I was interested in the Law so one is... passion, zeal again... family support again same... these were the causes. Hard work for success... hard work and smart work... zeal, family support, passion these all are the cause for success”

(Extract 6.23, Ajit, UR, Male, 23, LLB Student, From Delhi)

“My parents, obviously my father... he supports me in everything. I was an athlete and he is also an athlete... so we used to practice together. Now, I have joined weightlifting 5-6 months back... so he has supported me in that also... he has never been orthodox regarding my clothes or demeanour... even though I'm from Haryana... the mindset in Haryana is like that... but it's not like that... my family is very supportive. I am from a joint family... in joint family there is lot of restrictions... but I have been lucky in these matters. My teacher is also very supportive. Also... financially my family can afford... some people can't so...”

(Extract 6.24a, Prisha, OBC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Gurugram)

Ajit and Prisha are from similar backgrounds because they have been brought up in the National Capital Region of the country. In terms of ecology both have received urban environment with all opportunities and resources to pursue their aspirations. However, for Prisha, her caste as well as ties with ancestral village served as barriers which she overcame with the support of her family. This is what she had to say:-

“See... it is all... because of the family... see my family... was different okay. Both me and my brother are pursuing education. But otherwise nobody in our caste studies... we are Yadav, Yadavs don't study, even the boys... it is not a culture to study... now a days at least... girls are completing graduation. But in my family... now if I don't do anything... then obviously I'll be married... they have been broadminded... since my grandfather's times. My grandfather was in the army. He encouraged my father to study... it was unfortunate that he couldn't get a job... so he had to get into property dealing... now you have to do something to earn a living.... Then our village, it is nearby so we have to keep going there... I cannot go like this (pointing to her training suit). There are so many issues, their thinking... it is of some other era altogether. So, my father doesn't give much importance to all this... he is supporting me, sending me to college, spending money for my training... so it is my duty to perform for them.”

(Extract 6.24b, Prisha, OBC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Gurugram)

The narrative illustrates the stereotypes associated with girls pursuing education and also sports. Moreover, the mention that *'Yadavs don't study'* is an example of occupational preferences on caste basis. It is known that there are many castes which even today, prefer to take up family business rather than pursue education. In fact, Prisha mentions that some cousins who are of her age are already married and some have also joined the family business. That she is continuing education and pursuing a career in weight-lifting is because of her family's support.

All the extracts presented in this section reiterate the finding that family support, for participants, is a significant causal factor in achieving success. This finding has two implications; firstly, it highlights social causes other than luck and difficulty of task as external causes of success. Secondly, emphasis on family support highlights the role of culture in making attributions. At a time when role of social context in influencing achievement outcomes has been extensively studied, its role as a cause in attribution theory and research is yet to receive attention. The findings suggest that social factors like family support are accepted as causes of success by participants. Also, the attributions individuals make depends on their social context and their life experiences as a result of that context. Like family support, support from teachers was also acknowledged as a cause of success. This is discussed in the next sub-theme.

### **6.2.2. Role of Teacher Support**

After family support, the next recurring cause of success mentioned by participants was the role played by teachers in providing encouragement. It has been demonstrated that teacher support is linked to academic engagement, academic performance and also overall subjective wellbeing (Suldo, Friedrich, White, Farmer, Minch & Michalowski, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2009). Participants mentioned that they received support from their teachers which was instrumental in their success. Consider the following extracts.

“I... quite a few... like my teachers also... after 9<sup>th</sup> a lot of things changed. Till 8<sup>th</sup> we used to study locally so those teachers never taught anything, we didn't know what was happening, we just used to go and come, I used to go to a tuition so I used to study something there. Basic English I learnt from there. So, in 9<sup>th</sup> the school was of CBSE board so there were many activities... classroom, assembly everything changed. It was in air force campus so many officers used to come and give talks... so from there we got to know many things. Only me and another friend had gone there. Teachers were very good, they said go to a good university. Some of the teachers' children were in BHU ... so they used to encourage to go out and study... because in North Bengal we don't have any good university. So, they said that even if you go to Calcutta it's okay but at least go. Don't continue here... it will be

restricted. So from there the desire to out emerged. They were so nice that even in our parent- teacher meeting they used to pressurize our parents... like one of my teacher's was from JNU... he was very good... he was the main person... he supported me the most. They used to say please let her continue her studies... send her outside. So, these things also had an impact on my family. "Luckily some instances in my life helped me... like teachers were good. Most of the time, you don't get good teachers in KV. Then somehow I got admission in 9<sup>th</sup>. Also... it wasn't that I was completely *gawar* (ignorant)... I used to go to tuition so I knew something. So like this..."

(Extract 6.25, Sunaina, SC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Kalchini, Alipurduar)

"Then in 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> ... I studied day and night. Then I... achieved good marks. Was 2<sup>nd</sup> in class, I couldn't be 1<sup>st</sup> but... I felt good that first time in life I did something like this... that I planned that I will do means I'll do... whatever I need to do... and I did. And today, I have entered this college through merit list. I couldn't get admission through sports quota because my national level certificate was not eligible. So the only option was merit list... I felt very good because it was a dream that I come to this ground... that I come to this college because I knew how students of this ground...this college are... how the *mahaul* is.... in this my... friends... my tuition teacher... my parents supported me. Everyone's parents support... their children to study... I did not pay attention at that time. When my mind started working... then I understood that yes... parents were right... then I studied. Then I came here. My teacher helped me a lot. I practiced all question answers with her. She was a big support."

(Extract 6.26, Suresh, SC, Male, 18, Bachelors Student, From Burari, Delhi)

As discussed earlier, both Sunaina and Suresh belong to lower class families. Their fathers work very hard to support their education and that of their siblings. Their narratives also suggest that many times students from lower SES families are first generation learners and may not have role models to look up to. In such cases, teachers play a pivotal role in encouraging and supporting students. The above narratives demonstrate that teachers can be important sources of support and encourage students to aspire. Both participants mention that their teachers have been instrumental in their success. After family and teacher support, a cause mentioned by participants belonging to SC and OBC category was the reservation policy which helped them in achieving success. The reservation policy followed for admissions in educational institutions and recruitment in government sector jobs had been introduced with a vision for bringing about social change in the country. The policy has restored social mobility to quite an extent. However, there is also widespread agitation surrounding the issue especially amongst the castes higher up in the traditional hierarchy. The next sub-theme discusses the social change policy as a cause of success mentioned by some participants.

### **6.2.3 Social change processes as creating opportunities and conflict alike**

The policy of reservation was adopted by the Constitution with a vision to bring about positive changes in social mobility and provide opportunities to low status caste groups for education, employment and also development. While a lot has been written against the policy, especially since the implementation of suggestions of the Mandal commission report in 1991, there is little research on the benefits of the policy (Das, 2000). Some participants in the study, mentioned that the reservation policy was a cause of their success along with others; both internal and external. They asserted reservations as a constitutional right given to them for their disadvantaged positions and acknowledged it to be a positive advantage to overcome the negative outcomes associated with their caste background. Consider the following extracts.

“... first the OBC quota was very much beneficial for me... and then... ummm... my reasoning was quite good so that helped me a lot in the entrance examination.”

(Extract 6.27, Rajeev, OBC, Male, 19, Bachelors Student, From Begusarai)

“Like... I am also OBC... I got admission through quota... where would I have gone if I was from general category... I’m fortunate that I have got the opportunity to enter college so it’s a good thing right...”

(Extract 6.28, Prsiha, OBC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Gurugram)

“We can say that OBC get quota and that SC get more quota... then in jobs... women also get certain percentage of quota... but it is a good thing right... then we will get help in achieving success.”

(Extract 6.29, Piyusha, OBC, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Moradabad)

“... the state works on the theory of social welfare and is trying to provide inclusive education... be it women... disabled... all the castes... that is why a positive biasness is provided on the basis of caste and religion... so until inclusive policies are built... it is not possible for all sections of society to develop. There should be equity... that is the difference between equity and equality right... see... biologically men and women are different... women can bear children... that makes them more emotional and there are times when they need more support than the men... because of these biological differences... they have to make compromises in education... in the family in their career... at every stage of life. So... there should be equity... that is everyone should have the equal opportunities... and... umm... that is why government has provided for positive biasness so that availability of resources should be same for everyone... If you distribute 1 rupee among 3 people... as per equality you will give 33 paise to each... but for some that 33 paise is a lot and for

some it might still not be enough... so equity is related to welfare and reservations are based on equity.”

(Extract 6.30, Shrirupa, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mahuazamgarh)

In each of the extracts, participants accept that reservation policy is beneficial in achieving success. Reservations attempts to neutralize the disadvantageous position of certain sections of society and in doing so provide for equity and social mobility. It may be noted that a constitutional means which is acknowledged as a cause of success is both external and also uncontrollable. However, in mentioning reservations as a cause of success, by no means are the beneficiaries of the policy undermining their abilities and efforts. In every extract presented above there is an undertone of assertion of one’s constitutional right. Therefore, such external attribution should not be interpreted as an undermining of the internal causes of ability and effort.

Along with bringing about social change and creating opportunities for upward mobility, the reservation policy, at the same time, also creates certain conflict and agitation. There were participants from unreserved category who expressed bitterness towards the policy and argued that it undermined ability and merit. This is evident from the following extracts.

“... getting admission in DU is very difficult... so I have been able to get admission in general category when there is so much reservation for SC ST... I had a friend who had scored 64%... he was ST so with 90% as the cut off also he was able to get admission... so it is very difficult, I feel this is also an achievement.”

(Extract 6.31, Naresh, UR, 22, Bachelors Student, From East Champaran)

“what I also believe that just because you are SC or ST doesn’t mean that you are not (emphasis) in a good condition ... might be other way round also... so what one needs to see is that you are giving the privileges just because you are SC ST... it is about giving the privileges if you are deserving (emphasis) it... that is what I always

thought... because it should not be... there might be people who are Brahmin but they may not have the money to feed their children... but sometimes you might see someone belonging to an SC ST category... but staying in a full ac room... is not even utilizing the facilities that is given to the person so, it is all about the mindset... if you are having sympathy towards the SC ST doesn't mean that the person is deserving.”

*How will you know whether the person is deserving?*

“Through the actions... if you have achieved something means... that... you have put your hard work... effort and... one can understand... like... if you have got... let me give just a small example... if you have been given some scholarship for some academic work and you are not using that in academics so that means that you are not being just to that... but it is not the... not always the same case because there are people who get it, are very happy and they make full utilization of that... you see so many SC STs becoming doctors... this and that... that is there... but it also happens other way round also...”

(Extract 6.32, Meenu, UR, Female, 25, Ph.D. Student, From Kolkata)

“Yes... the lower castes are given quota... general category does not get quota so a lot of students are not happy about this. Like I had two friends... one was from SC caste and the other was from general caste... He had 48-50% something like that... and he was selected for IIT and the other had secured 98% but still he could not clear... so somewhere or the other these things do come to the minds of general category... that I had more ability than him but still I couldn't clear... this is the biggest advantage given to them because of which students think...that because we are general category we will have to work harder in compared to other category.”

(Extract 6.33, Pooja, UR, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Bhiwani)



These extracts indicate that social change policies are not universally accepted. For participants availing benefits of reservation, it is an opportunity for social mobility and a cause which enables them to enter the mainstream. On the other hand, for participants from the upper castes the policy increases competition levels in admissions and recruitment. It is evident that those who oppose the policy are the dominant groups in society who have reaped the traditional benefits of the caste system in terms of social status, educational opportunities, and also employment (Das, 2000). In recent times, disapproval of the policy has intensified with rising debates on the issue of merit versus reservations. The instances of student suicides resulting from harassment and humiliation are also on the rise throughout the country. This discussion does not relate directly to the present study of attribution for success and failure. However, it is the narrative of merit and ability which is often used to shield underlying caste discrimination. As one participant mentioned,

“See... like... discrimination earlier used to be on the basis of touchability and untouchability; purity-pollution concept. Now it has just shifted to ability; ability in the sense that... there was this umm... person, I’m forgetting his name but there was a sort of a upper caste people meet in Britain okay. And, in that, one of the speakers; who is a famous... I think he is a writer or something... I am forgetting sorry... he said that he doesn’t want to be treated by a by a... by a person who has got reservation and qualified as a doctor. So, these are the ways in which discrimination is now reinterpreted.”

(Extract 6.34, Sangeeta, SC, 31, Ph.D. Student, From Guwahati)

The extract illustrates the manner in which caste discrimination is manifested in the present times. More such narratives are discussed in the next chapter wherein participants share their experiences of failure or rather the experiences of overcoming failure. Having outlined some of the important external and/or social causes of success the next theme discusses the importance of effort, hard work and persistence in achieving success.

### 6.3 Theme 3: Universal acceptance of persistence in achieving success

The third theme of the success episode in this research discusses the importance of persistence. As discussed in the previous theme, participants recognised the important role that family and teachers played in achieving success. This, however, did not undermine the importance of effort for them. The frequency analysis presented in tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 indicates that effort, hard work and persistence as internal causes of success have been emphasized by most participants. In fact, as discussed in the previous chapter, participants conceptualise hard work as a part of ability and intelligence (Srivastav & Misra, 2007). It can be said that, in Indian cultural context, ability and effort are not entirely demarcated as they are in western cultures and also in mainstream social psychology. Moreover, effort and persistence are important values which children are socialized to inculcate from a young age. All the participants believed that working hard and continuing to do so even in the face of challenges would definitely lead them to success. Consider the following extracts wherein participants highlight the importance of effort and persistence in achieving success; be it their own or more generally.

“This success, I think... umm... aah! what I can say, my consistency, what I can say, not giving up. Yes, my will power, my determination. Yes, I think this is applicable to all the PhD students because at times we feel like giving up but then we are like no, no let's do it”

(Extract 6.35, Payal, SC, , Ph.D. Student, From Tiruchirupalli)

“So, you have to be selective in your aim first and then you have to work hard. If you work hard you will definitely achieve it in the end.”

(Extract 6.36, Akash, SC, 28, Ph.D. Student, From Asansol)

“For me, the main thing is will power... because if you talk about other things; you talk about luck and destiny these are very deterministic things but if you have the

will to do something and often times people fail... fail in achieving something but still they go and do it again because of their will power because they want to do it. So, I think drive and will power are the main factors”

(Extract 6.37, Sangeeta, SC, 31, Ph.D. Student, From Guwahati)

“Causes... perseverance is most important to me... you will have to withstand all the conditions... that is the first cause... if it is your goal you have to do it... then your ability to face pressure situations... I think that is more important than your intelligence... then there are outside factors like... economic stability... an encouraging and supportive friend circle... family background... especially the economic status of your father... somewhere it becomes a bench mark for you... that whatever you do you have to... move to a level above that... that is an aspiration which the person will definitely have... whether or not you are able to achieve it... a doctor’s son will never be a clerk!!! Then... there can be many factors... after the family comes your surroundings... your society... many social factors are supportive and many are not supportive... when they are supporting it will help you in achieving your goal...”

(Extract 6.38, Vijay, OBC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Varanasi)

“Causes can be... whatever your goal... if you are determined to achieve that goal then move in that direction... because if you choose a right path then one day or the other you will definitely achieve one day or the other... so your hard work... persistence... determination these are the causes.”

(Extract 6.39, Ishan, OBC, Male, 29, Ph.D. Student, From Belurmath)

“... basically the first thing is hard work... if you don’t work hard nothing can happen. Then after that... you need a proper direction... for that also hard work is the key... because when will you get the direction when you think about it a lot...”

research a lot then you will get direction... then guidance... then if your background is good it matters a lot... your schooling and economic condition..."

(Extract 6.40, Priya, OBC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Allahabad)

In each of the above presented extracts, effort, hard work, consistency and persistence are emphasised by participants, irrespective of the caste category or the social class they belong to. Though participants accept the role played by external causes (discussed in the previous theme), it can be said that the internal causes of effort and persistence are given prime importance. For example, Sridhar says, "*Obviously hard work... I had worked very hard to reach here.*" It is believed that without the individual's own efforts achieving success is not possible. This finding is important as it highlights the importance of effort and persistence over and above ability. For instance, Priya focuses on hard work in saying that, "*Determination... hard work... focus towards the goal...if you are focused and work hard then you can easily achieve success.*"

Mainstream social psychological research on attribution has tended to overlook the difference between ability and effort attributions; considering both to be internal causes (Hewstone, 1990). On the other hand, research in the implicit theories tradition has sketched a very narrow meaning of effort and persistence which is devoid of cultural influences. As discussed earlier, research has demonstrated that incremental theorists (malleable belief regarding intelligence) are more likely to persist at a task. In comparison, entity theorists (fixed view of intelligence) are more likely to quit when faced with challenges and/or failure (Renaud-Dube, Guay, Talbot, Taylor & Koestner, 2015; Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). However, in the present research we have seen that all participants believe in the malleability of intelligence. Moreover, all participants emphasize the importance of effort and persistence. Thus, it can be said that in the present sample, role of culture cannot be overlooked in explaining the importance given to effort and persistence. This emphasis on effort and persistence irrespective of implicit theory held by and irrespective of the caste background of the participants can be

explained in terms of the socially shared cultural representations of hard work, effort and persistence. For example, Snehashish says:

“the biggest thing is effort... if a person works hard in everything then obviously there will be success. If you have worked hard then you will never lag behind.”

(Extract 6.41, Snehashish, UR, 18, Bachelors Student, From Khajuri, Delhi)

While persistence emerged as an important theme in exploring the causes of success, another important finding was that desire, interest and intrinsic motivation are crucial in determining persistence.

### **6.3.1 Importance of desire, interest and intrinsic motivation in determining persistence**

At a time when participants mentioned effort and persistence as important causes of success, they also stated that interest and desire were what kept them moving ahead towards their goal. So, interest, desire and intrinsic motivation are important factors which help in determining persistence. In fact, several researchers have found that interest is crucial in influencing the amount of effort and persistence invested in a task (for example, Smith, Sanson & White, 2007; Harackiewicz, Barron & Elliot, 1998). Consider what participants in the present study had to say about persistence in achieving success.

“I could clear PhD entrance because obviously I had an interest to do PhD... from a good institute... not just from anywhere. You can say it was my passion. And my family also has expectations from me... I had tried very hard. My marks in M.Sc. were not very great but I worked very hard for this. Like... I tried for this... this, worked very hard for this”

(Extract 6.42, Akash, SC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Asansol)

“Then somehow... I mean I did *natak-watak* (drama)... I cried a lot... this and that... I stopped eating... so my father got me admitted there. I stitched a very long skirt, like it will be okay. I got a long skirt stitched but in school they were not accepting it, they wanted me to get it shortened. Then somehow or the other... I used to hide from papa... I used to go to school when he was sleeping so that he wouldn't see. Whenever he would see he would scold mummy... then there would be problem at home. So, slowly, slowly our family became liberal like we... it was a difficult process...”

(Extract 6.43a, Sunaina, SC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Kalchini Alipurduar)

As mentioned earlier, Sunaina's success is the achievement of completing schooling and entering an undergraduate course in a reputed university in Delhi. While her intrinsic motivation to pursue education has already been discussed in theme 1 what she said at another point in the interview seems relevant here.

“Leading a decent... like... leading a meaningful life... where you are placed... getting out of there and making, at least some improvement in your life... so that the next generation does not succumb into that kind of life. That is success.”

(Extract 6.43b, Sunaina, SC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Kalchini Alipurduar)

It is evident from the extract that in case of Sunaina intrinsic motivation led to persistent efforts to convince her father to allow her to pursue education. The desire to elevate the present status of her family, the desire to contribute something positive for the next generation was the determining factor of her persistence. In the study of African-American students' college success, research has demonstrated that intrinsic motivation is an important factor along with family and teacher support in determining persistence

(Russell & Atwater, 2005). It can then be inferred that in case of individuals belonging to disadvantaged backgrounds the intrinsic desire to change their present circumstances is crucial in determining persistence. Sarita shares a similar experience.

“Actually... I had the potential... I had it in me that I want to study... I don't know from where... I wanted to study... I wanted to do something. That is why... I used to travel daily... around 200-300 kilometers... I used to get 400-500 rupees everyday... that is why my grades were also bad in graduation (laughs)... I never got the time to read. First I used to take a bus to Unnao, that took an hour... then from there I used to take the train to Lucknow... that took another hour and half... then my college used to take half an hour from Lucknow station. I used to return home by 8 at night... so, sometimes I used to walk to the bus stop... or sometimes I would skip some meals... sometimes I didn't feel like eating... so you can save money of you want to. So, that is how I filled my M.A. form and no one knew about it also...(Continues to narrate how she went on to convince her parents to pursue masters).”

(Extract 6.44, Sarita, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mohikheda, Unnao)

Sarita's anecdote is another example of how intrinsic motivation to pursue studies leads to persistence. Other participants also have similar thoughts to share.

“Causes... what were the causes of clearing JRF? It was something I needed... I needed the money... that is why I worked so hard... then family support... my consistency... hard work.”

(Extract 6.45, Kritika, OBC, Female, 30, Ph.D. Student, From Balaghat)

“Till the time you don’t achieve your goal you are not successful... till then you have to continue working hard. If I speak for myself, I am not at all satisfied with my performance in nationals... I couldn’t realize when it came and when it went away... I still feel like I am a beginner... I have just started. I still have to work very hard.”

(Extrat 6.46, Naresh, UR, Male, 23, Bachelors Student, From East Champaran)

It may be recalled that Kritika had defined success as being able to do something for her family. For Naresh, success was to achieve fame and recognition. In both their cases, it can be said that desire and motivation were the determinants of persistence. As can be seen, interest and desire play an important role in determining persistence. Persistence in turn, plays an important causal role in achieving success. This theme has demonstrated that for the participants in the present study, persistence is a highly valued quality. Moreover, unlike the negative connotation that persistence mostly holds in mainstream social psychology, participants tend to focus on persistence as an important cause of success. In fact, effort and persistence were more frequently mentioned in comparison to ability. It therefore, appears that effort and persistence are highly valued aspects of Indian culture.

## **6.4 Discussion**

The chapter presented analysis of the data with respect to ideas of and attributions for success. Several important insights about attributions for success were brought forward. Three themes were discussed. The first theme described that the position in which individuals are located in society determines their construction of success. It was observed that meanings of success varied from personal growth to pursuing education to elevating family status. These meanings depended on the caste categories, gender and also the class of the participants. This finding has important implications for research in social psychology. Social psychological research on academic success for minorities and also otherwise is abundant (for example, Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1987; Russell & Atwater, 2005; Klem & Connell, 2009). Research, in general, has paid attention to the



more dominant understanding of success in academic domain. However, not much has been on studied about what constitutes success to those whose success is under analysis.

In a qualitative study, Romney, Smith, Freeman, Kagan and Klein (1979) generated statements about success and failure from participants in Los Angeles in USA. It was found that success is culture bound, multidimensional, and peer-relative; that is, compared with reference groups. Particularly, they found that success was related to economic factors, interpersonal skills, and also life adjustment. These conceptualizations of success were found to be differently graded by college going and working class individuals. In the same way, in the present sample, it is found that the meaning of success varied according to the social position of the participants as a function of their caste, social class and also gender. While aspiration and achievement were important for all of them; some aspired for personal growth and some aspired to change their current circumstances. For some, success was to pursue a Ph.D. while for some it was to enter the job market. Moreover, in all these meanings of success, there was also the desire to achieve for the family, provide for them or make them proud. These differences in the ideas of success suggest that the social position and context in which individuals operate has a bearing on their social cognition. Moreover, the desire to provide for parents and the family highlights the role of culture in cognizing about success. This has implications for the attribution process as well.

The next theme discussed the attributions made for success. It was found that there was a shared attribution of success to a combination of both internal and external (social) causes. Most participants made both internal and external attributions for success rather than the usually reported either-or attributions. Moreover, the external causes of success were social in nature rather than luck and difficulty of task, as advocated in Weiner's (1986) theory. The social causes of success mentioned by participants were the role played by the family and teachers in providing the necessary support and encouragement. Research has found that attribution of success to internal causes of ability and effort leads to increased self-esteem rather than attribution to external causes like luck and difficulty of task (Zuckerman, 1979; Miller & Ross, 1975; Duval & Silvia, 2002). However, in the present study, it was found that external attributions were mostly social in nature and also

accompanied by internal attributions at the same time. Attributing success to family and teacher support was a naturalized tendency on the part of the participants. This finding points to the role of culture in influencing the attribution process. India is a collectivist culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) wherein family, interpersonal and social relationships are given prime importance over the individual self. It is not surprising then that along with ability and effort, participants also mention family and teachers as causes of success.

Another external cause of success according to participants was the reservation policy followed in education and employment. Many participants said that the policy has positive implications and was a cause of their entering certain educational institutions or clearing certain examinations. While such an attribution is external in nature, it does not imply lack of self-belief or self-esteem as mostly implied by mainstream research in attribution theory. While such attributions were accompanied by the assertion of reservation as a constitutional right, they were also accompanied by internal attributions. This finding implies that attributions are much more complex than the internal-external dichotomy typically prescribed and researched in attribution theory.

Moreover, among the internal causes mentioned, effort, hard work, and persistence were most prominent. These were further discussed in the third theme; universal acceptance of effort and persistence in achieving success. Research has demonstrated that in western cultures, effort attributions suggest low ability (Kumar & Mahaer, 2007). This is because of the focus on the individual self in western countries wherein the self is considered to be the central driving force. However, in eastern countries, especially in Indian culture, importance is given to relational self rather than the individual self. Moreover, Indian culture also emphasizes on effort in comparison to ability. The important values of effort and hard work are taught since early childhood. In fact, as discussed earlier, the ability to work hard is considered an act of intelligence in itself (Srivastav & Misra, 2007). For these reasons, the attribution of success to effort over and above ability can be understood as an impact of culture on the attribution process. Putting in effort was considered to be an irreplaceable internal cause which when backed by the

external, social causes would lead to success. This is another important finding which provides novel insights to the research on both areas; implicit theories and attribution.

Overall, it can be said that the results of the study provide important findings on research in the area of attribution for success. The different social groups participants belong to, the different experiences they go through as a result of those specific group memberships have a significant impact of their construction of as well as attribution for success. Apart from their social identities, the broader cultural framework also determines the attribution pattern of individuals. Continuing the same strategy of analysis, the next chapter will report the failure episode of this research.

## CHAPTER 7

### FAILURE: OUTCOME OR PROCESS?

The chapter presents the third and final part of the analysis in this research that is attributions for failure. Analysis of the results is presented as four themes. The first theme suggests that there was a shared acceptance of failure as a positive experience rather than a negative outcome. The second theme demonstrates that participants took equal responsibility for failure rather than making external attributions and blaming the circumstances. The third theme highlights the importance emphasized upon the values of effort and persistence in overcoming failures. Just as these values were considered to be indispensable in achieving success they were also mentioned as major causes in overcoming failure. Finally, the last theme focuses on external, social causes like social inequalities and discrimination which is beyond the individual's control and at times impossible to rise above.

#### **7.1 Theme 1: Shared acceptance of failure as a positive experience rather than a negative outcome**

The first theme of the failure episode discusses the very meaning that failure holds for participants. Failure conventionally has a negative connotation. In fact, there is plethora of research addressing academic failure at school level (Roth, 1956), failure in the domain of maths and sciences (Beilock & Carr, 2005; Boaler, William, & Brown, 2000) and also failure of students belonging to marginalized communities (Folay, 1991; Misra, 1988; Erickson, 1987). Failure is typically viewed as unfavourable and detrimental to the growth and progress of students. However, in the present research, it is observed that participants held a positive connotation of failure. All of them acknowledged the dominant understanding of failure held in society; some of them had even failed in a class or a specific subject. However, every participant believed failure to be a process, a journey rather than an outcome about which nothing can be done. Apart from the academic domain, failure in family and social relationships was also mentioned by them.

Participants came up with multiple explanations of failure; failure is not achieving goals, failure is a journey, failure is necessary to explore one's potential and to learn from mistakes. These different meanings are discussed in and as the following sub-themes.

### **7.1.1 Failing to achieve goals**

The first and foremost explanation of failure which came up in the interviews was that not achieving a goal or an aspiration is a failure. If success is achieving goals and being happy with the achievements, it isn't surprising that the opposite be termed as failure. Many participants said that when they don't achieve what they wanted to it is a failure for them. At the same time, not being happy with achievements was also counted as as failure. Consider what participants had to say when asked about failure.

“Not meeting the benchmark broadly is termed as failure. Like, not meeting the pass percentage is failure or like not being able to make it through to a conference is a failure. So... just, not being able to make it to the benchmark... that is failure.”

(Extract 7.1, Sangeeta, SC, Female, 31, Ph.D. Student, From Guwahati)

“Failure... like a person... he... he is doing everything but... he has planned everything from before... but he is unable to achieve. Then it will be failure.”

(Extract 7.2, Suresh, SC, Male, 18, Bachelors Student, From Burari, Delhi)

Suresh's background has already been familiarized; he belongs to a lower class family; his father sells vegetables for a living, his mother is a housewife and he has four brothers. He was pursuing graduation at the time of this research. Sangeeta belongs to a middle class family; her father is an MBBS doctor and her mother is a teacher in a private school. Sangeeta shifted out of Guwahati to pursue her graduation. After completing graduation from Bangalore she shifted to Delhi and has been here since then. Both Sangeeta and Suresh say that not being able to achieve goals is a failure. When asked to share their experiences of failures, it was revealed that both of them had failed an

academic year in their school. They agreed that their academic performance was a failure at a point in time. At the same time, they also shared how they overcame that failure and went on to make certain achievements in later years (these have been presented in the previous chapter). Therefore, it can be said that along with failure, they also shared experiences of overcoming those failures. There were other participants who agreed with Sangeeta and Suresh in saying that not achieving goals and aspirations is a failure. Consider what some of them had to say.

“Umm... yes... failure ... negation of success, (laughs) yes not being able to achieve your goal... even though I tried really hard for it. But at that time... resources were lacking so that’s why... so, yes not achieving your goal you can say.”

(Extract 7.3, Priya, OBC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Allahabad)

“Failure can be not achieving success... not achieving your goal... there may be certain conditions or maybe because of not working hard.”

(Extract 7.4, Piyusha, OBC, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Moradabad)

“Failure is something ...when I am... something that I was looking forward to but... it ... I couldn’t get it, I couldn’t make it to that point.”

(Extract 7.5, Saarika, UR, 23, Masters Student, From Kolkata)

“Failure is some... umm... which I want to achieve but was not able to achieve due to some... circumstances or my ability, not able to do things or I did not get much support for that thing. So it is a failure that what I wanted to achieve I could not so for me that is a failure. It might be success for someone else... but for me it is a failure.”

(Extract 7.6, Ajit, UR, 23, LLB Student, From Delhi)

In each of the above extracts, participants say that not achieving a goal can be broadly termed as a failure. Ajit's background has been familiarized in the previous chapters; his father is employed in Delhi police department, his mother is a housewife, and he has an elder brother and a younger sister. To discuss the family background of the rest, it can be said that all of them belong to middle class families. However, there have been differences in the environments in which they have grown up. Priya's father is a lawyer in Allahabad, her mother is a housewife and she has an elder brother. Saariika's father runs their family business in Kolkata, her mother is a housewife and she has an elder brother. Finally, Piyusha's father is a farmer in Moradabad district, Uttar Pradesh, her mother is a housewife and she has two younger brothers. While Piyusha has grown up in a rural area, Priya, Saariika and also Amit have grown up in urban environments. When asked about their experiences of failure, all four of them narrated experiences related to their respective careers. Priya considers not having cleared Indian institute of technology (IIT-JEE) joint entrance examination as a failure. Piyusha's failure was that she couldn't get admission in Delhi University in her first attempt due to financial constraints. Not clearing UGC-CSIR junior research fellowship was a failure for Saariika. Similarly, for Ajit, not clearing the preliminary test of the civil services examination twice in a row was a failure. It can be seen that though participants belong to different caste categories and different ecological background, what they think about failure is the same. That is, for all these six participants, failure is associated with goal pursuit and goal achievement. Keeping in mind the setting of the present study, such findings are not unexpected because individuals enter university with a vision of their career and futureselves.

While failure was described as not achieving goals, there was also an indication that lack of happiness with achievements is also considered as failure. Consider what Chitra, Shrirupa and Shridhar have to say about failure.

“Failure... again... not doing what you wanted to do or not reach where you wanted to be... or maybe sometimes... it's not realizing... umm... what you did... as in maybe you are successful but you are not happy with it.”

(Extract 7.7, Chitra, OBC, Female, 23, Masters Student, From Hyderabad)

“Failure... is not fulfilling your aspiration... or if you regret after doing something... if you are not happy with it... or if you achieve something but are not able to maintain stability in it.”

(Extract 7.8, Shrirupa, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mahuazamgarh)

“Umm... failure... as a student if you don't perform well... as a person if you don't be happy with your life then it is a failure.”

(Extract 7.9, Shridhar, SC, Male, 23, M.Phil. Student, From Balasore)

In the above extracts, participants also relate failure to a lack of happiness. Happiness was discussed to be an important element of success in the previous chapter and these extracts simply reiterate the importance it holds in one's life. There was an agreement among the participants that failure is related to not achieving goals or not clearing exams and in fact related to one's career goals. However, there was a lack of acceptance of failure as a final outcome. All participants believed that failure can be worked upon and emphasized its importance as a learning process.

### **7.1.2 Positive benefits of failure**

There was a shared, common belief among participants that failure is a stepping stone to success. Many participants said that failure was an important learning process which makes one stronger and more adept to face challenges. Consider the following extracts wherein participants highlight the positive aspects of failure.

“Failure is like a step to success. It will help you in like two steps ahead of success according to me. So, I don't see failure as a failure that's it.”

(Extract 7.10, Payal, SC, Female, 28, Ph.D. Student, From Tiruchirappalli)

As can be seen, Payal describes failure as '*a step to success*'. Similarly, Vijay, Kanika, and Debanjan also associate failure with constructive experiences like exploring different possibilities and making improvements in performance.



“When you are not successful (laughs) There are phases of failure... a person is not fail on a particular day... the entire time period until you achieve your goal is a failure... it is a journey... and it is important... unless you learn from your mistakes... I remember what Shah Rukh Khan had once said... the one whose career is set at an early stage... usually become bankers (laughs)... those who take time... they can fulfill their aspirations... unless you face failure... you will never explore different possibilities... unless you experience failure you will not be able to define success completely... otherwise it will remain purely monetary. See... not achieving your aspirations is failure definitely... but then... there is not one goal in life... you keep setting further goals as and when you achieve them.”

(Extract 7.11, Vijay, OBC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Varanasi)

“Failure is not that you have not been able to do something... but an opportunity which allows you to change direction and take a new approach and makes you stronger... it gives you the opportunity to start again with a new approach and complete the task. So, failure... in your life is necessary and it’s always temporary... it is never permanent... it should always be taken with a positive bent of mind so that it acts as a catalyst to improve yourself and go ahead in the direction of your goals.”

(Extract 7.12, Kanika, OBC, Female, 25, Ph.D. Student, From Lucknow)

“... it is very important to be positive... when it happened with me... I thought that I can work hard in some other field... it gave me another opportunity to try in another game... in Sainik school also... maybe I could have got it in next attempt but... I did not try again because we shifted to Delhi. You must have heard of Thomas Alva Edison... he invented the electric bulb... he failed 2000 times... but what did he say... he said I did not fail 2000 times but I learnt 2000 ways in which it cannot be done... so it was a process... it is important to look at the positive side of things.”

(Extract 7.13, Debanjan, UR, Male, 19, Bachelors Student, From Gwalior)

While Vijay terms the entire journey towards achieving success as a failure, for Kanika, failure is temporary, a transient experience which gives one opportunity to reconsider the path towards achieving success. Similarly, Debanjan also believes that failure gives the opportunity to keep trying and persist at the task in hand. It is observed that failure is viewed positively by all these participants irrespective of the caste category they belong to. Participants belonging to the unreserved category also shared similar views about failure. Consider the following extract.

“Umm... the opposite, not... not umm... I don't know how to define failure coz see... if I don't match the level of success I would have expected for myself... then I don't know, I would use that experience... the next time. I don't know if I should look at it as a failure or not. So right... so when people say that you failed... so you've not been able to do whatever you wanted to do and you took out negative experiences from it...that's what I think people mean as failure. But if you don't take negative experiences and you take positive experiences out of them then I don't think it should count as failure... right? I've had one time when I did actually fail like an academic paper but then... thankfully... I have very supportive parents who are just like... 'So, you try better next time'. So, I failed umm ... yeah... conventionally but I don't know. So thankfully I really got really high marks the next time so... ya...but then that would be considered as success, do you get it? So, because you didn't do something... but then you used it and did something better next time, so that would still be success... so, failure would be... so, I guess it's an experience? To put it more...yes, of course... it's temporary.”

(Extract 7.14, Unnati, UR, Female, 23, M.Phil Student, From Pune)

Unnati also resonates what is presented in the other extracts, that failure is temporary, an important learning process and can definitely be improved upon. Apart from this, another representation which came up was that ceasing to attempt was a failure. This is elaborated upon in the next sub-theme.

### 7.1.3 Giving up hope as a failure

Participants were of the opinion that one must keep working towards their goals despite setbacks. However, when one gives up and stops trying it would be considered as a failure. Once again, these ideas were irrespective of the case categories of the participants. Consider the following extracts.

“If you haven’t achieved success and you are giving up before time then that is the biggest failure. According to me if you target something from your heart and work hard towards it you will definitely achieve success. But, if you give up before time then it’s a big failure.

(Extract 7.15, Akash, SC, Male, 28, Ph.D. Student, From Asansol)

“Giving up, like if I would have given up when my father was insisting to not pursue studies then that would have been a failure because now I think that it’s great that I did not give up. So you need to keep on showing effort... there is so much pressure that you feel that you should give up that it is useless to fight... so giving up is failure”

(Extract 7.16, Sunaina, SC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Kalchini, Alipurduar)

“Failure is basically... I mean... when you stop working... towards your goal... then it is a failure. When you stop that I cannot do it anymore... then it is a failure.”

(Extract 7.17, Shreyashi, OBC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Patna)

“Failure... according to me there should be failures in life. If you want to achieve something and you are not able to achieve it at a particular time then if you give up... you think that it is the end then it is a failure. If you remain positive... you will

achieve it someday or the other... in a year... two or three years... so it becomes a ladder for success. For me failure is when a person stops thinking and gives up.”

(Extract 7.18, Soham, UR, 22, M.Com. Student, From Delhi)

In each of the four extracts presented above, participants in their own different ways repeat the same understanding of failure. It can be said that the understanding of failure is very simple; as long as one is trying, it is a positive approach, and, when one stops trying to work towards their goal, it is a failure. On the basis of the discussion so far, it can be said that failure has a very positive connotation as compared to the dominant understanding of failure as an absolute, final and negative outcome. Apart from achievement, failure was also associated with social and family relationships. This meaning of failure is discussed in the next sub-theme.

#### **7.1.4 Failing to contribute to family and relationships**

Another important finding was that family and social relationships were also included in the domain of failure. For example, some participants mentioned that not being able to provide for the family, both monetary and otherwise, was also a failure. Being a good person, taking care of the family, and maintaining relationships was also equally valued. Consider the following extracts.

“Failure can be failed not just in academics... like if I can’t, if I failed to be a good person... as in for your family and if you fail to be for them at the time of need, these are like subtle signs. You don’t know how far you go as in... you drift apart from your family and when you don’t talk when you have time and you delay meeting with your friends, they think we are too busy but we are not, we can still manage. I think there comes a time when everything is ...so .... dispersed. So I think that is a failure, you have failed as a person. .. so you could have helped at that time.”

(Extract 7.19, Saarika, UR, Female, 23, Masters Student, From Kolkata)

“... if you’re irresponsible, an irresponsible person and you are not affectionate, like you don’t care and respect, then you are a failure... any kind of relationships, teacher-student, parent-child whatever kind of relationship... even stranger and stranger... I think there is a moral responsibility that people have to each other and if you can’t be nice, at least you don’t be nasty to people. Like then you are a failure... ya... and also if you can’t provide for your family, if you can’t raise your kids right and I guess like materially take care of them... then also you have kind of failed.”

(Extract 7.20, Soni, UR, Female, 23, Masters Student, From Mumbai)

It can be seen that failure, for participants, was not limited to academic and career achievements. However, what must be noted is that both these participants are from well off families; while Saarika’s family is engaged in business, Soni’s father works for a private multinational company and her mother is a school teacher. Moreover, both of them belong to urban metropolitan cities, Kolkata and Mumbai respectively. It may be that belonging to a well established background gives them the freedom to overlook the failures in academic domain. For most others, success and failures are both related to education and academic domain since it provides an opportunity for social change and mobility (Breen & O. Johnson, 2005; Neelsen, 1975). In fact, it was discussed in the success episode that, some have the privilege to overlook traditional domains and careers and explore hobbies and alternate areas of interest. The same was noted by some participants in their interviews. Consider the following extracts.

“Mostly we perceive success and failure through academics only ... especially in middle class and lower middle class families... higher class or in lower class we don’t see so much of this... emphasis on academics in evaluation success or failure...”

(Extract 7.21, Prakash, OBC, 24, LLB Student, From Khetri, Jhunjhunu)

“If you are not good academically then the chances of economic success will be reduced... because the knowledge he has attained is limited.”

(Extract 7.22, Shirupa, SC, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mahuazamgarh )

What Prakasha and Shrirupa mention has already been presented in the previous chapter though in a different context and through different expressions. Academic achievement and career goals are valued and sought as a means of achieving success and happiness for most persons. This is even more evident for those belonging to disadvantaged backgrounds since it increases the chances of social mobility (Krauss, 1967; Loveday, 2015). However, irrespective of being associated with academic and career domain for most participants, failure had an extremely positive undertone. Failure was believed to be temporary and a necessary step to success. Just like participants held a positive understanding of failure, their attributions for failure were also made such that they could be overcome actively and with vigour. The next theme discusses the attributions participants made for failure.

## **7.2 Theme 2: Taking responsibility as opposed to blaming the circumstances: Both internal and external attribution for failure**

Attribution for success and failure are the two sides of the same coin, that is, attribution theory. As discussed in the previous chapter, literature in mainstream social psychology has, more often than not, overlooked social factors as the causes of both success and failure. The four causal factors most commonly studied are ability, effort, luck and task difficulty (Weiner, 1985, 1986). Social factors such as culture, social structure, and the social setting in which individuals function and make attributions have largely been overlooked by this trend of American social psychological research. However, the main argument of this research is that the individual is a social individual and that the mind is socially structured. Therefore, the social structure in which individuals are embedded has a bearing on their mind as well as on their psychological functioning; attribution in this case.

Moreover, the internal and external dichotomy has been clearly maintained in studying the attributions made by individuals. However, many times, both internal and external attributions are made at the same time (Billig, 1982). This possibility is supported by the findings of the study, as presented in the previous chapter and is reiterated again in this chapter. Participants made both internal and external attributions

for failure, just like they did for success. Table 7.1 below displays the frequency analysis of internal versus external attributions made by participants for failure.

**Table 7.1**  
**Frequencies of Internal and External Attributions made by Participants**

Locus of Causality	Frequencies		
	UR Category (N=15)	OBC Category (N=12)	SC Category (N=11)
Only Internal	3	3	1
Only External	0	1	0
Both Internal and External	12	8	10

It is observed that of the 38 participants, only one made only external attribution for failure and 7 made only internal attributions for failure. The remaining 30 participants made both internal and external attributions for failure. Some examples of both internal and external attributions made by participants are presented below.

“See, one is our effort, how hard we try for something... secondly, our ability... our dedication... our ability and finally our circumstances... you can see it as social set up... you can see it as luck... but that is also equally important. If these three are comparatively favourable then you achieve success and when these are in negative then they lead o failure... when we are not dedicated... when the structure has some hurdles for us...”

(Extract 7.23, Manish, SC, Male, 33, LLB Student, From Siwaan)

“We have already spoken about the causes of success... when those factors work negatively it causes failure... the major cause is disinterest... lack of meaningful choices... lack of awareness... way of teaching... lack of effort... then you have to leave some percentage for chance.”

(Extract 7.24, Prakash, OBC, Male, 24, LLB Student, From Khetri, Jhunjhunu )

“... not setting your goal can be a cause... when you don't know your goal then no matter what you do... you cannot move ahead... you will not get any result. Then if you don't have awareness... like what to study... how to prepare... family plays an important role in this you can say... if your family is not educated how will they guide you... then of course your hard work... you have to put in effort.

(Extract 7.25, Naresh, UR, Male, 22. Bachelors Student, From East Champaran)

It is observed that participants in the above extracts attribute failure to the internal causes of ability and effort. At the same time, they attribute failure to the external causes of the role played by resources, guidance, and teachers and also luck. It is observed that individuals are aware of the influences of both internal and external determinants of failure, and also success. Moreover, just as effort and persistence were given priority over ability in achieving success, lack of effort was seen as the foremost cause of failure. In fact, some participants said that they always put in effort and that if they fail, they should have put in more effort. For example,

“Umm...for me I think it causes are very mostly personal, like something... so in failure something that a person can really take care of. I think, for me, if I say that my relationship failed, I think I made it... of course the other person is there but I think I didn't work at it in time. I didn't give it enough time or when I had time, I didn't care about it in relationships And like in academia that I didn't try hard, I could have tried harder. I think it is totally my fault. I think I should have worked more hard.”

(Extract 7.26, Sarika, UR, Female, 23, Masers Student, From Kolkata)

The above extract suggests that Saarika takes complete responsibility for her failures. At the same time, there is another participant who believes that given the amount the effort she puts in, she will never fail. If she does, it will be because of external factors.



“The type of person I am, I always put my effort... for example, if this is the goal... I will put my effort... if it doesn't work out its fine with me. I will feel content that I have put my effort it's not a failure for me... no. But, when I am trying to do something... and... it is not within my control... so for example, I think that had this been this way or had that been that way then I would have been able to do it better... or things would have been different... that is failure for me but when everything is in my support... there is no obstacles in my path... if I study I can do it..”

(Extract 7.27, Meenu, UR, Female, 25, Ph.D. Student, From Kolkata)

From Meenu's statement, it may be inferred that she believes she will not fail because she puts in a lot of effort. It may be said that the causal role of effort in the achievement domain was highly valued among participants in the present study. What is to be noted in both the above presented extracts is that they have been derived from interviews with participants belonging to unreserved category. There is no denying that all participants emphasized effort. However, the participants belonging to scheduled caste and other backward classes category brought up external causes such as caste discrimination, internalization of inferiority, inaccessibility of English-medium schooling, lack of role models and other such social factors. While they believed that effort and hard work were important both to achieve success and avoid/overcome failure they did mention that effort wasn't enough to overcome failure when uncontrollable, discriminatory behaviours were the cause. Moreover, though luck as an external cause of failure was mentioned, participants also said that believing in luck was too deterministic. Overall, it was observed that participants prioritized the causal role of lack of effort over luck, difficulty of the task and also lack of ability. External causes of failure were described mostly in terms of social factors. The specific causes mentioned by participants are presented below in three consecutive tables. Just like for success, in the case of failure also, participants were asked about the causes of failure, causes of academic failure and also causes of a 'failure experience' of their life. The causes reported by participants are reported in tables 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4 respectively.

**Table 7.2**  
*Participants' Attribution for Failure*

Causes	Frequencies		
	UR	OBC	SC
<b>Internal Causes</b>			
Lack of Hard Work	5	2	0
Lack of Effort	2	3	2
Lack of Ability	0	0	1
Lack of Interest	2	3	0
Lack of Passion	1	0	0
Lack of Motivation	1	0	0
Lack of Focus	1	1	0
Lack of Dedication	1	0	0
Lack of Persistence	1	1	0
Lack of Concentration	0	3	0
Lack of Consistency	0	0	1
Lack of Patience	0	0	1
Lack of Self-Realisation	1	0	0
Pessimism	1	1	0
Overconfidence	0	1	0
Laziness	0	1	0
Procrastination	0	1	0
Fear of Failing	1	0	0
<b>External Causes</b>			
Social Background (Caste)	0	0	3
Social Background (Gender)	0	0	2
Lack of Family Support	2	3	2
Lack of Reference Points	0	0	1
Lack of Resources	3	0	0
Inappropriate Peer Group	0	1	0
Economic Constraints	2	2	2
Teacher Biasness	0	1	0
Caste Discrimination	0	1	0
Class Discrimination	0	1	0
Lack of Guidance	0	2	1
Luck	0	2	1

From Table 7.2 it may be inferred that participants, irrespective of their caste categories, make both internal and external attributions for failure. Among the internal causes of failure, all participants emphasize lack of effort, lack of hard work, and lack of interest. However, in terms of the external causes of failure, it is observed that participants belonging to unreserved category tended to emphasize upon economic constraints and lack of resources. On the other hand, participants from scheduled caste

and other backward classes category mentioned factors associated with their caste and/or gender as possible causes of failure.

**Table 7.3**  
*Participants' Attribution for Academic Failure*

Causes	Frequencies		
	UR	OBC	SC
<b>Internal Causes</b>			
Hard Work	1	1	1
Lack of Effort	2	5	6
Lack of Ability	0	1	1
Lack of Consistency	1	0	1
Lack of Motivation	1	0	1
Lack of Dedication	1	0	0
Lack of Focus	1	1	1
Lack of Patience	0	0	1
Lack of Concentration	0	3	0
Lack of Self-Realisation	0	0	1
Lack of Determination of Goal	1	0	0
Lack of Knowledge	1	0	0
Not giving enough time	2	0	0
Overconfidence	0	1	0
Procrastination	0	1	0
Lack of Interest	4	4	2
Inability to face challenges	0	0	1
<b>External Causes</b>			
Social Background (Class)	1	0	0
Social Background (Caste)	0	0	3
Social Background (Gender)	0	0	1
Lack of Family Support	0	2	3
Lack of Good Environment	2	0	0
Lack of Resources	3	0	2
Inappropriate Peer Group	2	1	1
Economic Constraints	4	1	4
Role of Teachers	3	3	1
Lack of Awareness	1	1	0
Lack of Guidance	0	0	1
Role of Institution	1	0	0
Luck	0	0	1
Health Issues	3	0	0
Caste Discrimination	0	1	1
Criterion of Evaluation	0	0	1

Table 7.3 indicates that all participants attributed academic failure to internal causes like lack of effort, lack of interest as well as external causes like economic constraints and role of teachers. However, in case of the external attributions for failure, it is observed that participants from the unreserved category made attributions to lack of family support and resources and lack of a good environment. At the same time, it was the participants from scheduled caste and other backward classes category who brought up discrimination and inequalities as causes of academic failure.

**Table 7.4**  
*Participants' Attribution for their own experience of Failure*

Causes	Frequencies		
	UR	OBC	SC
<b>Internal Causes</b>			
Lack of Hard Work			
Lack of Effort	4	4	4
Lack of Ability	0	0	2
Lack of Interest	2	2	1
Lack of will	1	0	0
Lack of Dedication	1	0	0
Lack of Focus	2	0	0
Lack of Realization	1	0	0
Lack of Concentration	1	0	0
Lack of Consistency	0	1	0
Lack of Self-Belief	0	1	0
Not giving enough time	1	1	1
<b>External Causes</b>			
Lack of Family Support	0	1	0
Lack of Awareness	0	1	0
Educational Background (Hindi Medium Schooling)	0	1	3
Inappropriate Peer Group	1	0	0
Economic Constraints	2	2	2
Role of Teachers	1	1	1
Lack of Guidance	0	0	1
Family Expectations	0	0	1
Criterion of Evaluation	0	0	1
Competition because of Reservations	2	0	0
Situational Constraints	1	0	0
Health Issues	1	1	0
Luck	1	0	1

Table 7.4 also echoes what has been presented in tables 7.2 and 7.3. The importance of effort is reiterated in achieving success and avoiding failure. A point to be noted is that some participants from scheduled caste and other backward classes categories mentioned the discrimination which they had faced or the feelings of inferiority which they experienced at a time. However, some participants from the unreserved category attributed their failure to the reservation policy which results in higher cut offs for their category.

To summarize the results presented in tables 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4, it can be said that participants attributed failure to a combination of internal and external causes. Just as success was primarily attributed to effort, lack of effort emerged as the most prominent cause of failure. As far as the external causes are concerned, participants from the unreserved category emphasized upon the lack of family support and resources while participants from scheduled caste and other backward categories emphasized caste and gender based factors. Another point to be noted is that, research has mostly demonstrated that individuals attribute success to internal causes and failure to external causes (for example, Fetcher & Ward, 1988; Kashima & Trandis, 1986; Zuckerman, 1979). It has already been discussed that family support and effort have been equally valued as causes of success. Similarly, in the case of failure, it is seen that, participants take responsibility for their actions. They believed that lack effort is a cause of failure except in the case of certain circumstances which are beyond their control. Moreover, the fact that some unreserved category participants attribute failure to the reservation system and some scheduled caste and other backward category participants attribute failure to the discrimination faced by them suggests that their social context influences their attribution process. It is found that social reality is much more complex and is not appropriately represented by the four-fold causal structure suggested by Weiner (1985, 1986). This complexity of social reality and especially in the Indian context is presented in the following pages. Since, lack of effort and hard work were emphasized by all participants alike, they are dealt with in the third theme. The recurring external, social causes of failure mentioned by participants are presented in five sub-themes. These are the role of caste discrimination and teacher bias, role of educational background and skills in English language, the role of environment, role models and reference points and the role

of internalization of ideology. Finally, the competition created through reservations was mentioned as a possible cause of failure by participants belonging to unreserved category.

### **7.2.1 Caste Discrimination and Teacher Bias in failure**

Along with the internal causes of failure, participants also mentioned many external causes of failure. Among these, the most prominent cause was discrimination based on caste and biasness on the part of the teacher. It was observed that the role of the teacher as a cause of failure was also mentioned by participants belonging to unreserved category. However, these instances were limited to teaching method and teachers' competence in generating interest in students. On the other hand, participants from the reserved categories shared experiences in which they or their known persons had experienced discrimination, which in turn had hindered their performance. Consider some examples,

“... teachers... teacher gives special care and interest to students belonging to same caste background. You have to create interest in students otherwise how will they show potential. Till you create interest in children they will never want to learn... marginalised will remain marginalised. Classroom judges many different abilities... in a very rude sense... like appearance and hygiene; you have to look like mainstream and merge into mainstream... if you look little different... teacher will not take interest... I have faced all this... at that time I couldn't connect all these things... but now when I look back I can understand...”

(Extract 7.28, Vijay, OBC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Varanasi)

Vijay recollects experiences from his school days when he had been ignored and overlooked by his teachers because of his caste. He believes that discrimination on the part of teachers was a cause of achieving low grades in certain subjects except for maths. He also believed that had the teachers encouraged him he could have done better in other subjects as well. Studies in Indian context, have demonstrated that there is negative evaluation on the basis of caste (Sinha & Upadhyay, 1969). Moreover, it has also been

shown that high caste teachers do not evaluate low status caste groups positively (Rath, Dash, & Dash, 1979; Singh, 1979). Such evaluations on the part of the teachers have an influence on students belonging to these caste groups and their school performance. At times, students may not be able to comprehend the effects of such dynamics of the classroom and like Vijay, are appraised much later. Sridhar also shares how teachers never took an interest in him. He believes it wasn't because of his caste; however, he does mention some instances of discrimination experienced by his peers.

“I was not able to interact with teacher... then teachers also... like I feel that I was not very good in school... so the teachers there also never took interest... they were not caring... family will obviously scold because they want you to perform well... but in the village it is different... teachers are never much interested. So, when I came to junior college... it was a reputed college... I got two-three good teachers... they used to encourage... so teacher student relation is also important. So, it was different in school... teachers used to only focus on the good students... I wouldn't say it is because of caste... I have never experienced it... because I have been in Odisha for the maximum time... so most of us are poor... SC, ST, general... the general are also mostly poor... even though they may be upper caste... the teachers are also mostly Brahmins but they are also from poor background so that is not a cause... the teachers only focus on the students who perform well and don't care at all for the poor performers. I only felt it when I entered \_\_\_\_\_ University... that also... I have never felt it... some students have had such experiences. My classmates have shared their experiences of being discriminated on the basis of caste. They feel that teachers don't give them marks... don't include them in discussion because of their dress, their looks.”

(Extract 7.29, Shridhar, SC, Male, 23, M.Phil. Student, From Balasore)

What Sridhar mentions is a shared experience of many students belonging to the reserved categories. In fact, research on the Pygmalion effect and the self-fulfilling prophecy (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) has shown that teachers exhibit the tendency to pay more attention to the more intelligent and better performing students which in turn

helps them perform than the other students. There is ample research to support the effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy, both in western and Indian context (Cooper, 1979; Smith & Luginbuhl, 1976; Sharma & Tripathi, 1988).

There is another interesting point to be noted in the above extract, Sridhar denies it as his own experience in presenting it as another's (classmate in this case). Such a tendency of participants to maintain aloofness from certain sensitive issues has been widely reported in qualitative research (Wilkinson, 2000). Whether it is claimed as one's own experience or presented as an experience of another, caste discrimination is an important cause of failure for participants belonging to the marginalized groups of society. While caste discrimination is a reality, caste also manifests in determining opportunities for members of low status caste groups. Some of these are discussed in the next two sub-themes.

### **7.2.2 Educational Background and Lack of Skills in English**

Another cause of failure mentioned by participants was their schooling, their educational background and for some, their "substandard skills in English". Many participants belonging to low status caste groups, lower socio-economic class and also from rural backgrounds attended Hindi-medium, government schools. Since higher education and especially academia requires proficiency in English, many of them attributed their experiences of failure to a lack of fluency in English. Consider the following extract.

"I had appeared for the paper on Constitutional Law. Constitution is my favorite (with emphasis) but when the results were declared I had scored 39 out of 100. The cause was that I had written the paper in Hindi and in \_\_\_\_\_ University, there are very few teachers who know Hindi. So, only your knowledge is not important... the whole academic set up... how much it favours you... all that matters. So, this was not my fault... it was because of the set up."

(Extract 7.30, Manish, SC, Male, 33, LLB Student, From Siwaan)



Manish attributes his low scores in a particular paper to his preference to write the exam in Hindi rather than English. Hailing from Siwaan district in Bihar, Manish has completed his education up till graduation in Hindi medium. Research has investigated the relation between skills in English abilities and economic and occupational outcomes (Azam, Chin, & Prakash, 2013). Moreover, in the academic domain, it has been found that *second language anxiety* has a negative effect on oral performance of individuals who speak English as a second language (Woodrow, 2006). Lack of abilities to speak and write English fluently, as can be seen, was mentioned as a cause of poor academic performance by participants. In the case of Manish, the choice of medium of education was because of the restricted opportunities available in his home town. However, for Sarita and Priya it was the socio-economic status of their family which determined their educational background which in turn went on to cause failures for them.

“My failure in life is... not clearing IIT-JEE (laughs). I was so depressed at that time... after 12<sup>th</sup>... we are children right... I had gone to Kota in 10<sup>th</sup> class... so when I went there I felt that the students who come there... their parents are from very high class. My family was very ordinary... my father sent me there that itself was a very big thing.... for that also he had to borrow money from relatives... so we were somehow able to manage... then... I think... after going there only I came to know that there were so many students who had been preparing since class 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup>. I was from a government school so my educational background was also not of the same level as them... moreover I was from Hindi medium... there students were from English medium so I had to face some problems... but because I had gone from 10<sup>th</sup> it was okay... still I was able to cope somehow. Because IIT-JEE is a competition level right so we had to compete with one another... so I was behind many people... many were behind me... but still only 10,000 are selected. So, I did feel that... so how... I'll... I count it as a failure... in the terms that if I knew when I was in class 7... what IIT-JEE was then maybe I would have studied a little... umm... I did not know there... there is such good coaching... that it helps in IIT... that after that you get good jobs. So, you can say lack of information which was because of my background because my schooling was not good... yes you can say that. You can trace like that... see my father did the best as per him... as much his finances

allowed for his children... he could educate us that itself is a big thing because we are three children... all of us are educated... that is very good. But I feel that if my schooling was better then, I would have got better exposure... I could have done better. Even though I tried as much as I could, it is still a failure.”

(Extract 7.31, Priya, OBC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Allahabad)

“I put in effort... language was new... it was academic language... I couldn’t cope... everyone knows basic English... even my parents know that *chaku* is called knife in English... I also knew English.. I could read even though not very fluently... I had English in 12<sup>th</sup> standard... but the thing is that they used to translate in Hindi and teach... so the cause of my failure was language... secondly I couldn’t understand ... I couldn’t understand what to write... it was a very bad experience. See, in my case it was because of language... for someone else maybe his social... his schooling was not good... my schooling was also not good... because where I studied from ... what I studied was limited. The course here was so huge... so many thinkers... many whom I had not heard of.. For example, I have done graduation from Lucknow... so there is a lot of difference in students from there and students from here... in their capacity... in their knowledge. Over there, there is no discourse... students here have the ability to carrying out discourse. M.A. students from here can compete with PhD students from there and the PhD students will fail (agitated). So, schooling is important... family... family’s education... parent’s education... peer group... so many things are there.”

(Extract 7.32, Sarita, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mohikheda, Unnao)

Priya and Sarita attribute their respective experiences of failure to their schooling and especially the difficulties they had to face because of the English language. While caste was definitely a factor, other factors along with their caste influenced their educational background. These were the socio-economic status of their families; while Priya’s father is a lawyer with his private practice in Allahabad, Sarita’s father is a farmer in Mohikheda. The resources available to them were limited and so was their awareness

and also that of their parents. In fact, Priya mentions, her father did as much as he could but, still it wasn't enough to compete with those belonging to privileged backgrounds. It can be said that many social factors together create possibilities for success and failure alike. Another such factor brought up by participants was the negativity of the surrounding environment, which hindered educational aspirations and achievements.

### **7.2.3 Environment, Role Models and Reference Points**

A significant factor brought up by participants was the decisive role played by the immediate environment in which they function. In the study of minorities, it has been found that Black males' educational performance is highly related to their surrounding negative cultural and environmental factors (Noguera, 2003). Also, the home and the surrounding environment have been found to be indirectly related to the child's academic achievement (Davis-Kean, 2005). In a study on the educational aspirations of the residents of Balmiki Colony in New Delhi, Ganguly (2018) found that the participants referred to their surrounding environment as a negative influence on educational pathways resulting in lack of interest, poor academic performance, and failure and also drop out.

In the present study also, many participants mentioned '*mahaul*' as a cause of failure and poor academic performance. However, the environment was a broader cause mentioned which included many factors like certain widely existing stereotypes, which act as barriers to achievement. Similarly, participants shared the apprehensions experienced by their parents and the non existence of reference points to look up to. Overall, there was a general mention that lack of a good environment negatively impacts the individual and is an important cause of failure. Consider the following extracts.

“Because society is very... I mean, very patriarchal so, obviously their thinking is like... that women... are limited to the home. Also, there is no example in near vicinity which we can look up to and think that so and so has educated their daughter and their condition has improved so you should also do the same. So, if there is an example then parents feel that our daughter can also do the same. There was nothing like this in my case so it is very difficult to trust just like that... it is

very expensive also. My sister was in Calcutta so there was expenditure in everything... so my father thought it might all go waste. Also, like... marriageable age was passing by. Over there, by 16-17 girls are married off and she was 21 already so... where to get dowry from... all that... in the end they do feel that girls are a burden so they should be married soon and be done with it. Nobody wants to educate their daughters... and when you don't have money... you will obviously educate your son first... so there are many problems... not one."

(Extract 7.33, Sunaina, SC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Kalchini Alipurduar)

It may be recalled that Sunaina's father is a vegetable vendor and that they are five siblings. Her struggles to pursue have been discussed earlier, so has the fact that she believes she hasn't failed as yet. Her caste background, her father's stereotypical thinking and economic constraints are the possible causes of failure which she has taken up as a challenge and overcome through her efforts and persistence. There were other participants who also agreed with Sunaina in saying that when faced with economic constraints, parents would prefer to educate the male child rather than the female child. For example,

"... like if there is a middle class family or a family slightly lower than that economically... if they have four children... two sons and two daughters, then, they will obviously educate the boys first. They will be sent to English medium and convent schools and the girls will... if at all... be sent to a local school at the most."

(Extract 7.34, Rajeev, OBC, Male, 19, Bachelors Student, From Begusarai)

"It is a belief that a girl will be married off into another family... this belief affects the girls' education for no cause of her own... similarly there are other beliefs... like the lower caste are uneducated... they cannot do anything... it is a belief... but the reality is that they were not given opportunities in the first place... in fact...

opportunities come much later... we make assumptions on the basis of our beliefs... so we need to work on these beliefs.... Like... girls cannot do maths and science... but in reality... you do not want to spend on engineering education for daughters as they will marry into another family.”

(Extract 7.35, Shirupa, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mahuazamgarh)

Both extracts present widely existing stereotypes in society which many times act as invincible challenges. Caste inequalities continue to account a major portion of inaccessibility of education even today. When caste intersects with social class and gender, as mentioned by participants, it is the women who have to forego their aspirations. Along with these stereotypes related to ability, participants also referred to ‘*mahaul*’ (environment), or rather, lack of it as a cause of failure.

“Earlier it was... I had ignored studies... in 10<sup>th</sup>. I had never given importance to studies. Maybe the environment was such. I had though it’s okay... if I study this much it’s enough to pass. I had never thought of securing 1<sup>st</sup> position before class 10. I was only concerned with passing. Family members also... then later... I thought of studying.. I saw the students around me... then I thought... what is the point of all this... I will remain like this forever if I don’t do anything. I must get of this *mahaul* (environment). I realized how much my father is struggling to educate us. Then... suddenly one day I realized what all I can do by studying.”

(Extract 7.36, Suresh, SC, Male, 18, Bachelors Student, From Burari, Delhi)

“About the failure... call it childishness or whatever... I didn’t give time... I was more into friends... I don’t want to repeat that mistake again... that is why I am working so hard to achieve success. There was no problem at home... I used to get money easily... so I used to roam around with friends all the time... there has to be a limit for everything right... the place where I come from... it is all about money... we are into property dealing, so, we have lot of money. But, I did not know anything... how to talk... how to present myself... now I am slowly learning. The

people here are nice... they don't abuse... they have the manners to talk... here everyone focuses on hard work. That area is not well developed... the *mahaul* (environment)... it is not conducive... there are a lot of Jat and Gurjar there... I used to talk like them... (Gives a couple of examples in Haryanvi) I have changed a lot after coming here. I am more disciplined... more focused. Slowly, slowly... I changed my language... the way I speak... I improved a lot. If you are from a good *samaj* (society), you will have a good feeling and if you are from a bad *samaj* (society) then you have to make effort to change.”

(Extract 7.37, Snehashish, UR, Male, 18, Bachelors Student, From Khajuri, Delhi)

Suresh and Snehashish both stress on the negative environment which was the major cause of their academic failure. While Suresh had secured low grades in the 10<sup>th</sup> standard board examinations, Snehashish had failed a year in school. What is interesting to note is that while Suresh belongs to scheduled caste category Snehashish mentioned that he was Brahmin by caste. So far as their economic status is concerned, it can be said that Suresh belongs to a lower class family while Snehashish himself mentions that finances have never been a problem for his family. However, the common cause of their failure is the environment or *mahaul* as they term it. They have both grown up in environments which, according to them, were not encouraging. Since their parents were also not very educated, there were no role models they could interact with and aspire to follow. Though a lack of a good environment may seem as a rather simple cause, it is observed that this particular cause has many layers of understanding to it. In fact, Ganguly (2018) found that terms like '*sangat*', '*mahaul*', and '*samaj*' were used by participants to refer to lack of a good environment, absence of role models and also parental support which negatively affected educational aspirations and occupational choices.

The causes discussed so far were mostly drawn from interviews with participants belonging to the reserved categories (except Snehashish). As far as participants from the unreserved category are concerned, discrimination was mostly absent from their discourse. They tended to focus mostly on economic constraints and lack of a good

environment as the external causes of success. Apart from these, they also mentioned competition created by the reservation system as a cause of failure. Some expressions of distaste towards reservations have been discussed in the previous chapter which presented the success episode. In the next sub-theme, particular instances wherein participants mentioned reservations as a cause of their failure are discussed.

#### **7.2.4 Attribution of failure to social change policies by participants from unreserved category**

The argument of this research is that individuals' cognize about the world through the social context in which they are embedded (Tajfel, 1977; Turner & Oakes, 1997). It is observed that participants belonging to the reserved categories made attributions on the basis of their social position and their own, personal experiences. Similarly, participants belonging to the unreserved category made attribution from their vantage point. All participants from the unreserved category denied the necessity of caste in today's times; they pointed out that caste system is an age-old tradition which doesn't hold a place in a modern democratic set up. Some went as far as claiming that caste does not exist in urban contexts. Along this line of thought claiming reservations to be uncalled for, many of them attributed their failure to reservations. In the times of competition and struggle and also widespread agitations regarding the issue of reservation vis-a-vis merit, such attributions are not surprising. The debates on reservations and merit are on-going and a cause of much debate, discussion and research (Ilaiyah, 2006). Some participants were vocal in sharing that they failed to clear a cut off because they belonged to the so called '*general category*'; had they been '*SC or ST*' they would have done so easily. Others were subtle and diplomatically attributed their failure to '*competition*'. Consider the following extracts.

“I was not selected in Sainik school, that was a major failure... of my life... being general was the cause of failure... if I would have been SC then ma'am my scores were much higher than the cut off, I had got 76%. See... ma'am your intelligence is your ability right... this rule has been made by us that... that they will be given

reservation... the purpose was to uplift the castes which were marginalized... when they are at par with us... then it should have been cancelled... then what happened... because of corruption... because of jack... it was not enforced properly... and now when it should have been revoked by now... it is increasing even more... our generation has to suffer because of that... if they had been given at a proper time when it was required then they would not be asking for reservations now... they are still demanding reservations. We are suffering... we are seeing what is happening... with even 40% I have seen boys getting admission in a college like Hindu college which will never be possible for us. It was not because of his ability...because of quota... it is not his ability or else he would not have scored 40%... his ability is not to study... it may be something else but still he is getting priority before me.”

*Why do you think that someone belonging to a category is scoring 40% and someone from general category is scoring 76%?*

“No ma’am, there are so many from general category who score 40% (in an aggressive tone). It is not necessary... it depends on ability and intelligence... not on your caste... your abilities should decide your opportunities not your quota.

(Extract 7.38, Debanjan, UR, Male, 19, Bachelors Student, From Gwalior)

“I have not experienced failure... yes I have had many downs in my life but not failure. But I can tell you one thing that after my graduation I gave MBA entrance exams. Even after getting a good percentile in CAT I could not get admission anywhere, I wasted a full year... I kept thinking what when wrong... what did I do. Then next year also it was the same story... but luckily I got admission in M.Com. The second year I had scored more but still I couldn’t get admission... so I was very disturbed and my father was also disturbed because of this. I was losing focus.... The cause of my failure... it was because of so much competition and obviously



reservations. There is so much competition these days... my percentile was very high but still I couldn't get through in any good college. So... ”

(Extract 7.39, Soham, UR, 22, M.Com Student, From Delhi)

Both participants differed in the manner in which they expressed their attributions. While Debanjan was agitated and angry Soham was more composed in saying the same thing. However, in both cases, it was evident that the issue of reservations was a trigger in making caste identity salient. The same can be said for participants belonging to the reserved categories; issues of reservations, questions regarding their ability were the triggers to identity salience. These participants, along with the causes of failure discussed in 7.2.1, 7.2.2, and 7.2.3 also mentioned the psychological and emotional consequences of these causes. They shared that social inequalities, discrimination, and social comparison led them to feel alienated, segregated and also created insecurities in them.

#### **7.2.4 Feelings of Insecurity, Alienation and Internalisation of Ideology**

The barriers of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination faced by participants in educational institutions and otherwise lead to the obvious effects of anxiety, alienation and a continuous questioning of their abilities. Consider some examples.

“Fees... fees here is very high. And language is definitely a problem so coming from Hindi medium and then here everything is in English. Person cannot deal and feels like giving up. Like there are so many opportunities but... everything is very elitist in nature so you feel anxious like you are not from that strata, so you feel secluded. So you may give up because you feel where have you come to. This is not our area. Social background matters a lot.... In class also there is segregation of like 4-5 people. Those from similar background are together. And the upper caste of Delhi... they also will never roam around with us... there is segregation... intermingling is not possible. There is a lot of difference... perspective wise... looks... way of living... they obviously judge. For that those from marginal section always feel alienated. Social background is very important. Also, in class when someone is sharing their

experience... those who are from a good background... mostly their fathers are lawyers... or... at that time you feel that you are an alien... that you don't know anything. Because they can afford they have more experience of certain things.”

(Extract 7.40, Sunaina, SC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Kalchini Alipurduar)

Even after overcoming the challenges limiting her educational opportunities, Sunaina shares the challenges she continues to face in the university set up. Social psychological research on the effects of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) and stigma (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998) have demonstrated that when valued aspects of identity are threatened there are negative undermining effects in the academic domain. These effects are further heightened when the domain is valued or of high interest to individuals. Other participants also shared similar experiences of feeling anxious, secluded and the awkwardness because of ‘not fitting in’. Consider the following extracts.

“See, like I told you about caste... that is there...secondly it is the psychology thing... the thinking of the people... in whatever situation... take the example of UGC-NET form; for general category it is 1000, for OBC it is 500 and for SC it is 250... so we get to hear things like... *“I wish I was SC”*... I am taking of their psychology okay... or even those who are OBC they say *“I wish I was SC”*... and we SCs think *“why the hell are we SC”*. (Agitated and showing gesture of hands). It comes to our mind right when we get to hear such comments... that we get it easy because of reservation... it is so... how much of reservations are being fulfilled?? Half of the people don't even know what reservation is. And what percentages of those who know are able to avail it? So, this is a mentality... I think that you can afford it that is you're your fees has been kept at that much... so all this prejudice... stigma it matters a lot in influencing psychologically. Then again... also, there is groupism... dalit students with dalits and upper castes with upper castes...

once or twice I have experienced... once people judge your background they don't want to further interact with you..."

(Extract 7.41, Sarita, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mohikhea, Unnao)

"If a boy is born in a category... if he takes reservation on basis of category... however good he scores, whatever his rank is.... Like take my case... my interview went very well but whatever it is everyone will say that I am SC. But I know what my score was.. in my centre everyone says it will be easy for me to get job... it is like in minute my intelligence, my hard work is all gone into the dustbin or out of the window.

(Extract 7.42, Akash, SC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Asansol)

"But, yes, financially we are getting support definitely. But still that socially handicapped thing still it is there. For example, some people say acha acha you are SC like that. You are ST, like that. Still it is there. So, these things force you to question yourself... make you think. Even though you know what you are capable of doing but still..."

(Extract 7.43, Payal, SC, Female, Ph.D. Student, From Tiruchirappalli)

"As an OBC I realized after coming to ..... As an SC I have many stories because I have many friends but as an OBC after coming here I felt... *"see Priya... you have to read less because you are OBC so you will get through easily."* OBCs don't get much reservation... General and OBC in today's date are the same... they have to work equally hard. This is a rule made by our government... we were deprived at a time. That is why we have been given reservations. And in OBC also there in non-creamy layer and creamy layer and I come in non-creamy layer... so even if I am getting something, it... so... such taunts should not be made... Brahmins... sorry I should not say like this..."

*There is nothing to say sorry... please continue...*

“See... general category will never face this that... “*arre... you are general*”... we have to face that.. “*arre... you are OBC... you are lower than us*” that is how they make it out to be... so this I have faced more after coming to ..... in my own centre... in my friends... I won’t say friends, classmates.”

(Extract 7.44, Priya, OBC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Allahabad)

In each of the above presented extracts there is an undertone of anger and exasperation. Participants mention that certain experiences and taunts made by members of upper caste groups instill in them feelings of seclusion and self-doubt. Such experience also increases the salience of their caste identity. Oakes (1987) says that “salience is heightened by any factor which increases the “separateness” and “clarity” of a category”. In this case, it can be said that the institutional context plays an important role in determining identity salience. At a time when participants speak of their negative feelings induced by such discourse, there is also an assertion of their identity and also of reservation as a constitutional right. It can be said that there is a constant struggle for power and resources, a struggle between self-doubt and self-realisation. While participants may have been brought up with a particular kind of socialization pursuing higher education and the socialization they go through in university definitely aids in this process of self-realisation. Sangeeta, very meaningfully, explains this. Consider what she has to say.

“See... there are contradictions within oppressed communities also. Like, I’ll just give one example which is... sort of like a self... internalized discrimination. See, Assam is often said to have not a caste system but a caste-like stratified system which isn’t true. In the practical sense, Assam has a fairly rigid caste system so, now what happens is that people from my community, my own cousins, my own village people; they have internalized an inferiority complex; that... that we will not do good

because we belong to this community; I mean how much can we do. I mean, we come from this community; we don't have this, we don't have that. So, yes, they also have certain beliefs... in themselves only that we can't do or maybe the upper caste people are inherently (shows quote symbol through hand gesture) better than us. So, those kind of reverse and self-discrimination happens”.

(Extract 7.45a, Sangeeta, SC, Female, 31, Ph. D. Student, From Guwahati)

In saying so, Sangeeta accepts that when dominant ideologies are internalized and certain groups are accepted to be superior to the self, the person moves towards failure. However, at the same time, gauging the potential of the self and working towards self-realization are emphasized by her.

“Umm... See, I will tell you, it has been a journey of self-realization also. When I... of course I was aware of my caste position at a very late time because I grew up in a tribal society. So, it was when I moved to Guwahati and very late at that, that I realized that I realized exactly what caste is because tribal societies don't have caste system so... but, I grew up in a household where people were not confident.... So, we were not taught confidence from the beginning... because of, of course the social position. So, people were not really confident about what they would do... they were not confident even if they would do they would succeed. So, that, kind of internalized in me. For a long time, I had a little bit of.. not a little bit, quite a lot of inferiority complex... because of these negative visualizations around me, so... umm it took a.. it took me a little time to break out of that. Yes... but ya.. I think I have done well (smiles).”

(Extract 7.45b, Sangeeta, SC, Female, 31, Ph. D. Student, From Guwahati)

As mentioned by Sangeeta and other participants, the entirety of causes mentioned in this sub-theme and also the overall theme is negative experiences which caused failure or acted as hindrances to achieve success. While discussing these external causes of

failure it is important to keep in mind the points discussed in the first theme. Failure had a constructive connotation for participants and that participants believed that they could overcome and change it. Even during the discussion of this theme it was observed that while participants mentioned these factors as possible causes of failure, at no time, did they provide any indication of giving up. In fact, all had overcome those challenges or were continuing to face them with their final goal in mind. These internal and controllable causes which enable participants to stand up to failure are discussed in the next theme.

### **7.3 Theme 3: Effort and Persistence as key to overcome Failure**

The third theme resumes argument in favour of the optimistic attitude with which participants approach failure. Throughout the discussion in this chapter, internal causes like effort, hard work, desire and self-belief have constantly recurred. Even as participants narrated their negative and failure experiences most of them maintained that they had either overcome or were continuing to resist those negative external forces. Similarly, participants belonging to the unreserved category also valued effort and persistence as key causes of overcoming failure to achieve success. As mentioned before, some participants had failed in the academic domain and they also emphasized the importance of effort and persistence in overcoming failures. Just as effort had emerged the central cause of success it reappears as an equally important cause in overcoming failures. This demonstrates the crucial role effort occupies in Indian culture and Indian social reality. Almost all participants irrespective of the caste they belonged to and irrespective of whether or not they had failed during school years prioritized effort as an important virtue. Consider some examples in the following pages.

“It can definitely be done. If you practice something you can definitely overcome it. If someone is weak in maths it doesn’t mean that he will always remain poor in the subject. If he practices he will be able to understand. It cannot be generalized. Through hard work you can definitely overcome any situation”

(Extract 7.46, Akash, SC, Male, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Asansol)

Akash firmly believes in practice and trying to overcome obstacles. In fact, he is preparing for competitive examinations and is continuing to make effort despite repeated failures to clear the cut off. Similarly, Sangeeta, in the following extract, narrates how she held herself together and reappeared for 12<sup>th</sup> standard boards exams after failing in them the first time.

“Umm... of course you can overcome failure through effort and hard work. Also, I think you can overcome failure by having a vision because when you are at a place when all your friends are doing well but you are not and you have actually failed or flunked... so you are at that place where you have no imagination of future, you are just desperate to get out of that position. So, having a vision of where you see yourself can help; in addition to hard work”.

(Extract 7.47, Sangeeta, SC, Female, 31, Ph.D. Student, From Guwahati)

Like Sangeeta, Ishan had also failed though not in school. While appearing for Ph.D entrance examinations, he had failed to qualify in all the three subjects he had applied for. Though it was disappointing, he did not give up. He persisted and continued to study and qualified the entrance examinations in the next attempt:-

“The point when ... I had qualified in the first instance itself... in three centres... I appeared for interview in three centres... but couldn't qualify in any of them... I felt that it was a big failure for me... I am telling you a fact... I was very disappointed... I couldn't believe that I couldn't clear even one...but I feel that nature and God also gives chances to those who persist... even if you don't get a chance you should believe that you can achieve something better. I was persistent... I worked hard and achieved it next time.”

(Extract 7.48, Ishan, OBC, Male, 29, Ph.D. Student, From Belurmath)

As can be seen effort and persistence are viewed to be key aspects of working on failure. Failure is never an end result, rather participants believed that one should keep persisting and making an effort to overcome it. Like Ishan, there were many other participants who believed that continuous effort and hard work is essential to overcome failure. Consider what some of them had to say.

“We need to work constantly... constant and continuous hard work. Then we can definitely overcome failure.”

(Extract 7.49, Sheyashi, OBC, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Patna)

“The biggest is losing hope... getting demoralized. You have to be focused... you have to be motivated and you have to try again and again. It doesn't matter if you fail, you must keep trying and if you work hard you will never lag behind.”

(Extract 7.50, Prisha, OBC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Gurugram)

“Yes... yes... because it is not fixed... it is not something you have got from your birth right... It is not as if that if you fail then your life is doomed... so, as long as you put your effort... your hard work I think it is going to help. Hard work only thing is hard work and family support and faith in yours self.”

(Extract 7.51, Meenu, UR, Female, 25, Ph.D. Student, From Kolkata)

“Of course failure can be overcome... through hard work and positive mind set. It is very important to remain positive. I gave you the example of Thomas Alva Eddison right... what did he do? He kept trying... you have to try doing different things... life doesn't stop there... you can achieve it. If you don't fail you will not learn anything... you have to keep improving on your mistakes and keep learning from others' mistakes.... You have to keep trying and keep making effort. It is about making improvements in your life.”

(Extract 7.52, Debanjan, UR, Male, 19, Bachelors Student, From Gwalior)



The importance of effort and persistence has already been discussed in the previous chapter. The extracts presented in this theme simply draw attention to their importance in overcoming failure in addition to achieving success. Making effort and persisting, even in the face of failure, was valued by all participants. In fact, despite the implicit theories held by them, all participants believed in making effort and persisting at the task in order to achieve goals. It can be said that effort and persistence are given primacy in Indian culture. That these values occupy a central position in Indian belief system reiterates the role of culture in influencing social cognition; attribution in this case.

Moreover, research in mainstream social psychology has mostly emphasized ability over effort. It has been observed that those who need to make more effort are considered to be dumb in comparison to those who achieve on the basis of their ability (Kumar & Maehr, 2007). However, in the present research, it is observed that making effort is given priority over possessing ability. In fact, as discussed earlier, effort and hard work are considered to be important aspects of ability and intelligence (Srivastav & Misra, 2007). Just as participants believed that intelligence can be gained through effort and success can be achieved through persistent efforts, they also believed these values to be instrumental in overcoming failures. It can be said that, overall, the participants in the study had a high regard for effort and persistence. This finding has implications for viewing and studying these concepts through a new lens; that is, the cultural construction of effort and persistence. While effort and persistence have a different, narrow meaning in the more western, American culture their conceptualization in Indian culture is more positive and also highly valued.

At a time when the values of effort and persistence were emphasized, it was also maintained that they are not enough to overcome certain external causes which are beyond the individual's control. Some participants believed that while effort was important and no matter how hard they work, it wasn't possible to combat with some causes. The next theme discusses the invincible nature of these causes.

## **Theme 4: Social Inequalities as inevitable and invincible causes of failure**

Most participants believed that effort and persistence can overcome the external barriers and causes of failure. However, there were some who said that effort wasn't enough to rise above them and emerge successful. Amongst these external causes, economic constraints were the most prominent. The external cause of caste discrimination, as was discussed in the previous theme, participants believed could be overcome that through self-realization, self-belief, and effort. However, there were some who believed that these would continue to overshadow the individual's hard work. Moreover, the social class or economic status of the family was considered as an invincible, external cause. Consider the following extract.

“Yes, of course failure can be overcome by hard work. But, I feel that at some level hard work also has a limit. In some aspects hard work will not work. For example, there is lot of biasness in some institutions; at school level especially in public schools it is very much evident. Many times even if your work is good you are not given recognition. So in that case...”

*What kind of biasness are you referring to?*

“Biasness means... you can see... for example... umm... whoever the controller in the classroom, what they think is right, who according to them performs well... and those children who come from a particular background... you can take caste... you can take class.. Many teachers think who will deal with such children? They are dirty, filthy and their noses are flowing even though their work maybe okay. It depends... I'm not saying it is universal but it matters. So because of these factors it takes more time for your hard work to be recognized.”

(Extract 7.53, Asha, OBC, Female, 25, Ph.D. Student, From Pratapgarh)

Asha mentions discrimination and bias as a cause which hard work cannot overcome. No matter how much a person works, if the teacher doesn't believe in their ability and doesn't work on them, then their hard work is bound to be overshadowed. Research has also demonstrated that teachers play an important role in evaluating students. When teachers work with stereotypes in their mind or do not pay attention to students negative effects on performance are usually found (James, 2012; Sharma & Trpathi, 1986). Along with discrimination and bias, economic constraints were also mentioned by participants.

“Many times failure is because... I will say this directly and you also must have heard... many times there is prejudice... people don't want Dalit students to move ahead or OBC students to move ahead... so they knowingly give lesser grades. They are given grades not on the basis of what they have written but on the basis of what is the minimum marks required by them... in that case many students fail to qualify entrance examinations... so these are external causes of failure... cannot be overcome by hard work. Then also teachers are not bothered with what problems he student is facing... they are only concerned with the external... with what can be seen that is the performance. See, if something unfortunate happens with me.... If my fellowship is stopped then I cannot continue (very prim and matter of factly) I will go back home. My reaching here also depends very much on economic factors... financially. I have RGNF... whenever I get my installment I send money to my sister... to my parents... if I don't get fellowship I will be frustrated.. I will have to search for a job... I cannot continue... then I may be a failure for others... I may be judged by others.”

(Extract 7.54, Sarita, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Mohikheda, Unnao)

“No... we are working hard like... there are other things as well like... which may force you to give up. These things will have to change. Like the issue of fee hike... if that happens then no one like us will be able to study”

(Extract 7.55, Sunaina, SC, Female, 20, Bachelors Student, From Kalchini Alipurduar)

In these extracts, Sarita and Sunaina mention caste discrimination and economic constraints as the causes of failure, which cannot be overcome. In earlier discussions, it has been observed that they have stood up to the prejudices and biases faced because of the caste they belong to. However, the economic aspect, according to them, cannot be overcome. While for Sarita, her fellowship is the source of her sustenance, Sunaina says that if the fee structure of the university is remodelled then it will be impossible for many students from lower socio-economic classes to pursue education. It may be recalled from the previous chapter that for both these participants, pursuing education was a success which gave them the aspiration to bring positive changes in their existence. Like them, Priya also mentions economic factors as invincible.

“In many things failure can be overcome and in many it cannot be overcome... ummm... but in most cases it can be overcome... it is said right... money has never bound the mind... I think if you work very hard then you can gain but then circumstances should also be favourable... like in my father's case... he worked hard... he came to Allahabad... he could have done better... started his own practice... but then the economic condition was such that he had to take up whatever job he got. So... situation also is important.”

(Extract 7.56, Priya, OBC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Allahabad)

It may be recalled that Priya had said that she was not able to clear IIT-JEE because she wasn't aware about the training it required. By the time she had joined coaching, it was late, and she was lagging behind. While she agreed that her father had done his best as per his circumstances, it is these circumstances which she attributes the failure to. Being the only person from their village Sonbhadra in Uttar Pradesh, her father was the only one who migrated to Allahabad. Being the only member from a large joint family, he had responsibilities towards his family along with the education of his children. These situational constraints led to a lack of awareness and resources for Priya. Though she has made up her mind after joining M.Tech in a reputed central university in

Delhi she still considers that phase of her life as a failure. Like her, Piyusha also attributes external economic conditions as an invincible cause of failure.

When there is a lack of hard work we can cope up by working hard... but that will not work all the time... what is most important is money... at least in today's times. To achieve everything... money is very important... be it a small goal or a big goal. Everyone will work hard right... after that it is his condition and his situation. In my case it was a financial problem for me... I had to lose a year because my parents couldn't pay for the arrows and college cannot provide to all the players... my family is not that well off... then in my village there are so many things we have to adjust to. There is no girl amongst my relatives or in my entire village... who has studied in CBSE board and who has come to Delhi. I am fortunate that I have got parents who are working so much for me... who are supporting me... they have not done as much for my brothers as much they are doing for me.”

(Extract 7.57, Piyusha, OBC, Female, 19, Bachelors Student, From Moradabad)

Piyusha belongs to Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh where her family is into farming. While she had been selected through sports quota in a college in Delhi University reputed for sports she couldn't take in the first year. This was because her father couldn't arrange for the required fees to fund sports activities. Indeed, many times, the economic conditions of individuals operate with their ethnic and racial identities to determine their educational pathways (Reay, Davies, David & Ball, 2001; Burney & Beilike, 2008). As Piyusha says where there is a lack of effort, it can be increased but when there are economic constraints, hard work takes the back seat.

Going through the extracts presented in this theme reiterates two important findings apart from the main argument presented. It is observed that attributions for failure are both internal and external and that effort is prioritized in all cases. However, there are times when participants' believe that effort cannot do much when external and uncontrollable forces are at work. In fact, what Manish says sums up the discussion in brief.

“I consider both the individual and also the external equally important. What I mean to say is that some things cannot be changed... until we reach the top of that system itself... only then will I be in a position to change the system. So, when I say set up is more important I say so because it is not in my control. Other things are in my control I can change them through my hard work.”

(Extract 7.58, Manish, SC, Male, 33, LLB Student, From Siwaan)

Like Manish says, some things are beyond our control and effort cannot do much to alter them. It can be said that there are certain external, uncontrollable factors which lead to failure and which cannot be overcome through effort. At the same time, the cultural socialization is so strong that participants continued to place high regard to effort and persistence.

## **7.5 Discussion**

The chapter presented the analysis of data with respect to the meaning of failure held by participants and also the attributions they made for failure. Several important insights about attributions for failure were brought forward. This episode presented four themes elaborating different aspects of failure. The first theme described the positive construction that participants had of failure. It was believed that failure is a stepping stone to success that it is important to learn from mistakes and that losing hope and giving up was a failure rather than persisting to make attempt. This finding is important because research has mostly addressed the conventional meaning of failure in terms of poor performance, adjustment problems and dropout rates. While research has actively addressed these ideas of failure in school and also in higher education, not much attempt has been to study what failure may mean to different individuals and different cultures.

In a qualitative study, Romney, Smith, Freeman, Kagan and Klein (1979) generated statements about success and failure from participants in Los Angeles in the U.S.A. it was found that failure was related to the personal traits of individuals (e.g., manipulation, lack of self-discipline), bad habits (e.g., smoking), and interpersonal skills. Moreover, college-going individuals focused more on the traits like lack of motivation

and lack of self-discipline in defining failure as compared to working class individuals who focused more on personal habits and interpersonal skills. In the context of the present study, it was found that participants viewed failure as a process rather than an outcome. While participants believed in and worked towards goal achievement they also focused on the process or the journey toward that achievement. This finding is consistent with the finding that Indians equally emphasize goals related to process and also outcome rather than only outcome related goals in western countries (Singhal & Misra, 1989). This finding not only shows the role of Indian culture in influencing the social construction of failure and types of goals aspired for but also paves way for the optimistic nature of attributions individuals make for failure.

The second theme described that participants mostly attributed failure to a combination of internal and external factors. Amongst the internal causes, lack of hard work and lack of effort were the most prominently mentioned causes. These were further elaborated in the third theme. Amongst the external causes, caste biasness and discrimination on the part of teachers, lack of good schooling and skills in English language, lack of a good environment and internalization of ideology were mentioned. So far as the attributions of unreserved category participants were concerned, external causes of failure included the reservation system. These findings have many important implications in theoretical terms. Firstly, it is seen that attributions do not always fall in the internal-external dichotomy as usually noted by researchers (Weiner, 1976; Misra, 1988; Singhal & Misra, 1989). This also has to do with the methodological limitations of research on attribution theory. Most research provides participants' forced choice items based on the three dimensional causal structure. In the present study, it was seen that when participants were asked open-ended questions they responded with both internal and external causes.

Moreover, the external causes were mostly social in nature and highlighted social inequalities and discriminatory mechanisms of society. Research has found that attributions are always self-serving, that is, internal for success and external for failure (Zuckerman, 1979; Miller & Ross, 1975; Duval & Silvia, 2002). In some studies on inter-group attribution, however, it has been found that members of subordinate groups make

out-group serving or in-group derogating attributions (for example, Hewstone, Jaspars & Laljee 1982; Feather & Simon 1975; and more recently, Misra & Mishra, in press). These researches have also relied upon quantitative, forced choice questionnaires in studying attributions as a result of which the intention behind the attribution may not be clearly interpreted. By conducting a qualitative study, the present research was somewhat able to close that gap. Just because participants from the subordinate group (the reserved category in this case) attribute success to the external cause of reservations it does not undermine the belief in their abilities and effort. Similarly, when participants mention the threat they face in the institutional context or their constant struggle with feelings of anxiety, it also demonstrates their individual agency in resisting and fighting the status quo. It is their self-belief which gives them the confidence to battle with the challenges and follow their goals.

So far as the attributions of the participants from the unreserved category are concerned, it can be said that their external attributions of failure to the reservation system highlight the competition surrounding the educational and employment spheres in today's times. This also reflects the present reality in terms of the conflict surrounding the system of reservations and discourse on merit (Das, 2000, Ilaiah; 1990; Deshpande; 2014).

Moving on, the third theme discussed the importance of effort and persistence in overcoming failure. As already discussed, participants placed the highest value on effort, hard work and persistence in the context of achievement. This finding once again highlights the role of culture and shared representation in understanding the values of effort and hard work. It has been long observed that the internal abilities are prioritized in the western context because of the individualized view of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, in the Indian context, the values of effort and persistence are ingrained in children through socialization since the early ages. Finally, the last theme of the chapter discussed the external causes of failure which cannot be overcome by effort and hard work. Prominent among these were the economic constraints which participants had to face which only heighten when they intersect with the caste, class, and gender of the



participants. Therefore, a multidimensional analysis provides a complex picture of individual's constructions of as well as attributions for success and failure.

Overall, it was observed through the discussion of the four themes that both failure and effort had a highly positive connotation. Failure was believed to help improve performance and effort was believed to be a significant cause of achievement. Though participants believed some causes of failure to be unbeatable, it did not dither their belief in the values of effort and persistence and also in their individual abilities to resist the status quo.

## CHAPTER 8

### GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The discipline of social psychology was originally conceptualized for the study of social behaviour as embedded in a social context (Angell, 1908; Titchner, 1910). However, over the years, attention shifted from the ‘social individual’ as a member of a ‘social group’ to an asocial, a-historical, and decontextualized individual operating within a structural vacuum (Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990). This shift is credited to the rise of the cognitive revolution in social psychology after which the mind began to be understood as an ‘*information processor*’ rather than as being ‘*socially structured*’ (Operario & Fiske, 1998). Following such a trend, research and analysis in mainstream social psychology has always evoked the individual mind to study psychological processes and also social behaviour. However, the question of what is social in social psychology has been raised by many researchers (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995; Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Turner & Oakes, 1997).

Of the many aspects of individual psychological functioning, lay theories of ability (implicit theories) and causality (attribution) were the focus of this research. Both implicit theories (Dweck & Legget, 1988) and attribution theory (Weiner, 1976, 1985, 1986) have been areas of research primarily grounded in the American social psychology tradition. The relationship between culture, social structure and implicit theories has only recently been investigated (Choi & Nisbett, 1988; Srinivasan et al., 2015). On the other hand, research in the area of attribution has largely been at the intra-individual and inter-individual levels prescribed by Doise (1980, 1986), as pointed out by Hewstone (1997). While such research has been carried out by the American social psychology tradition the European tradition has focused more on the inter-group and ideological levels of analysis. Research on inter-group attribution (Taylor & Jaggi, 1974; Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Khan & Liu, 2008, Khandelwal et al., 2014) and attribution and culture (Miller, 1984) are subsumed at the third and fourth levels of analysis respectively. Though such research has incorporated inter-group behaviours there is still a lack of clarity regarding the role of

the social self in the process of making attributions (Hewstone, 1990). Similarly, in the area of interpersonal attribution also the role of the self and its motivational mechanisms in making attributions has been overlooked (Augustinous & Walker, 1995). Implicit theories held by individuals and/or the attributions made by them are aspects of lay understanding which guide everyday social functioning. Having being limited to an individualized and decontextualized paradigm of research (Quihis et al., 2002; Augustinous & Walker, 1995), these areas of research provide only partial understanding of the complexities underlying individual psychological functioning.

Keeping this background in mind, the thesis aimed to relocate focus on '*the social*' in social psychology. For this purpose, implicit theories held and attributions made by participants pursuing higher education were studied. Participants were identified and recruited on the basis of their caste categories. This was because caste has more often than not been used as a mere variable rather than a part of social context which influences the functioning of the mind. For example, research has focused on the differences between different castes in terms of intelligence (Das & Khurana, 1988) and academic achievement (Srivastava & Seth, 1982; Gupta, 2014). Secondly, the discipline of social psychology has not given much attention to the study of caste except a few researches in the context of stereotype threat (Hoff & Pandey, 2003, 2006, 2011) and inter-group attribution (Misra & Mishra, in press). Moreover, the present study was conducted with university going students because the time spent in pursuing education is crucial in terms of aspirations and achievement and therefore important for studying implicit theories and attributions for success and failure.

In studying the implicit theories held by participants and the attributions made by them for success and failure the usually followed quantitative paradigm was avoided. Instead, following from the arguments in favour of qualitative inquiry for studying notion of ability (Nicholls, 1990; Quihis et al., 2002), a qualitative method was used to study both implicit theories and attributions for success and failure. Analysis of the results provide several insightful evidences which highlight the role of social and cultural factors in determining individual psychological functioning. Moreover, certain questions regarding the theoretical assumptions of the implicit theories and attribution research

traditions are also raised. As far as the determining impact of caste is concerned, it was found that though caste continues to operate in the urban context (Deshpande, 2006) it does so in intersection with social class (Mukherjee, 1999).

## **8.1 Revisiting the findings of the study**

This research followed a novel method in studying lay theories of ability and causality. It may be noted that Quihis et al., (2002) have already employed qualitative interview along with implicit theories questionnaire (Dweck & Henderson, 1989) in studying the implicit theories held by low-income adolescents of Mexican origin. However, no such qualitative enquiry has been followed in studying attributions for success and failure. In the context of implicit theories, it was found that participants in the present research mostly held an incremental belief about intelligence; that is they believed that intelligence was malleable and could be modified with effort and persistence. It was observed that there was no impact of the caste of the participants on the kind of implicit theory they held. However, there was a difference in terms of the factors which participants believed helped in increasing and shaping intelligence. Moreover, in some cases it was found that participants held both entity and incremental beliefs of intelligence.

In the context of attribution for success and failure it was found that there was no dichotomy in making internal and external attribution for success and failure. Most participants made both internal and external attributions; that is, the usually claimed 'taking credit for success' and 'avoiding blame' (for example, Zuckerman, 1979) for failure was refuted by the results of this study. Participants took equal responsibility for success and failure alike. Moreover, the role of the individual's efforts and persistence emerged as the key causes of achieving success and overcoming failures. These findings of the research are discussed in theoretical terms in the following pages.

### **8.1.1 Role of culture and social structure in influencing social cognition**

The results of this research can be analyzed in terms of the influence of culture and social structure in influencing individual psychological processes. In contrast to the

asocial understanding of social cognition in particular and individual psychological processes in general, the study refocuses attention on the social and cultural determinants of social cognition (implicit theories and attribution). It can be said that effort and persistence emerged as the most prominent factors among the findings of the study. Making effort and being persistent was emphasized by participants as indispensable to increasing abilities, to overcome failures, and also to achieve success. Reliance on effort over and above ability is a clear indication of the role of culture (Indian) in determining social cognition. While the division of culture into individualistic and collectivistic has been criticized (Triandis, 1995; Killen & Wainryb, 2000, Sinha; 2000) there is no denying that culture has important implications in determining social behaviour (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Misra & Gergen, 1993; Oyserman, 2011). And this influence of culture is highlighted by the findings of the present study. Effort and hard work are inseparable parts of Asian cultures (Larson, Stephan, Bonitz, & Wu, 2014). Especially in the India, in the context of science achievement, it has been found that effort is more salient than academic confidence in predicting achievement (Dandy & Nettlebeck, 2000).

Hard work, effort, and persistence feature as core elements in the socialization of children from an early age. Even the traditional Indian texts have special reference to '*karma*' (actions and efforts) irrespective of its outcomes. For example, the sloka of the Bhagvad Gita, "*Karmanyevadhikarasthe, Ma Phaleshu Kadachana Ma Phala Hetu Bhurma Te Sangostvakar*" places importance on hard work irrespective of the outcomes. When translated in English, it means that "*You must work hard but not think about the benefits of hard work. The fruits of your efforts should never be the motive behind your hard work*". The individual is encouraged to work hard without focusing on the outcome of hard work. It can be said that making efforts is considered to be a pious act, the value of which is never decided by the outcome. Along with the mention of effort in traditional Hindu texts, the folk tradition in India is also known to value effort and hard work. For example, there are many Hindi proverbs which speak of hard work, effort and persistence. For instance; the proverbs "*Kal kare so aj kar*" meaning "*That which is to be done tomorrow better be finished today*" and "*Karat karat abhyas*" meaning "*Persistence leads to perfection*" are the best exemplars of hard work and persistence. These proverbs are always mentioned to children and are repeated time and again in their

growing up years. Similarly, there are proverbs in the Odia language as well which emphasize on hard work and efforts in order to achieve something. For example, “*Kasta na kale Krushna mile nahi*” means that “*If you don’t work hard you will never achieve anything*”. In the same way, different proverbs form the content of traditional folklore in different parts of the country. However, all these emphasize one and the same thing; the role of effort and hard work in achievement. Moreover, it can be said that the intention behind making efforts and persisting in them is never decided by the outcome and the proverb “*karm karo phal ki chinta mat karo*” is a fitting example. It was not surprising then that in the present study, failure for participants was a journey, a process rather than an outcome. All of them emphasized on the positive aspects of failure and attributed failure to a lack of persistence and effort.

Similarly, attributions for success were both internal and external. Among the external causes, support from parents and teachers was primary. This finding also points to the role of culture in determining social cognition as expressed in the attribution process. While scholars have pointed out that in India, there is a coexistence of individualism and collectivism (Sinha & Tripathi, 1994; Mascolo, Misra, & Rapisardi, 2004), it is also established that in Indian culture, emphasis is more on relational self. That is, the distinction between the self and the other is merged and overlapping rather than strict and exact. Drawing from this line of literature it can be said that participants in this study valued both the individual aspects of efforts (internal attribution) and also the social aspects of parental and teacher support (external attributions). Moreover, the importance given to effort is also culturally derived. All of these findings point to the role of larger culture in determining social cognition. As is well established, culture encompasses social structural properties and maintaining social structure requires culture. In this way, culture and structure are intermingled and co-existent; discussing one without reference to the other will provide only a partial picture of social cognition.

To discuss the findings in terms of the role of caste in determining social cognition, it was found that there was no direct influence of caste except in the forum of reservations. Participants from the reserved categories viewed the policy as a means to balance the negative effects of the traditional backwardness associated with their castes.

On the other hand, participants from the reserved categories blamed the policy to be creating struggle and competition which, for them, was uncalled for. However, more than caste by itself; it was found that caste and class together determined certain aspects of social cognition. For example, participants mentioned that increasing intelligence and achieving success is most of the times dependent the availability of resources and opportunities which mostly originate from their social position. And, social position is determined by a combination of caste and class rather than only caste or only class (Mukherjee, 1999).

Another important point among the findings is that the external attributions for success to the reservation system were not viewed negatively (as has been portrayed in the literature) by participants from the reserved categories. Narratives from interviews with the participants assert and reiterate reservations as a constitutional right and at the same time reflect belief in the abilities and efforts of the self. Rather than an acceptance of the inferiority of abilities, external attributions made by participants in the present study, were accompanied by a resistance to the status quo. While acknowledging the role of reservations as a (external) cause of success there is also a challenging of the traditional barriers of caste which question their ability and merit. Once again the role of the self as derived from culture and social structure is presented through the attributions of the participants belonging to the reserved categories. Not only do they aspire for a change in status but also actively participate in that process of social change. As a participant pointed out,

“Ability, success and failure, all three are inter-related. You are researching and I am like saying it. I would say this... ability is like; ability to face failure is success. I would term this. With ability if you meet failure you can achieve success, and I am terming ability equals to effort, hard work, will power, determination and conviction.”

(Extract 8.1, Payal, SC, Female, 27, Ph.D. Student, From Tiruchirappalli)

What Payal points out, is an indication of the active participation and individual agency with which members belonging to the subordinate groups in society aspire for social change. This has important implications for the study of social cognition which has more often than not overlooked the social, cultural and motivational aspects of social functioning and behaviour. While research on attribution in particular has interpreted external attributions for success as a form of internalizing ideology (Feather & Simon, 1975; Misra & Mishra, in press) there has been a more general, similar trend in other research traditions on social psychology as well (for example research in the stereotype threat tradition, Steele & Aronson, 1995). However, the qualitative nature of the present research provided the opportunity to go beyond restricted results of the quantitative paradigm and explore the cultural and structural determinants of social cognition. Overall, on the basis of the results and findings, it can be said that social cognition is socially structured and culturally construed rather than originating in individual minds, in a vacuum.

Another important point of discussion is the role of education and educational institutions in influencing process of social cognition. Education is not value neutral; it has its own ideology, and is also an important agent of socialization which influences the overall world view of individuals. As has already been discussed, all participants viewed education as a process of accomplishment and achievement. However, for the participants belonging to the reserved categories, education was also a means of social mobility and social change. Moreover, the university along with being a centre for learning is also a social institution which provides for distinctive kinds of interaction between men and women and also between generations (Beteille, 2005). In this way, universities are responsible for shaping intellectual minds and aware citizenship. While society may be classified and governed on the basis of many categories like religion, caste, and class the university, by virtue of being secular, allows for transcendence of these societal rules. In fact, research on contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) and contact theory (Hewstone & Brown, 1986) has empirically proved that inter-group contact reduces inter-group prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). And, university set up provides a suitable environment for intergroup contact.



However, in the context of the present study, it is observed that there is no such reduction of inter-group prejudice. Rather than prejudice reduction, there is emergence of social clash, particularly in the forum of reservations, with participants from unreserved category negating the policy and participants from the reserved categories resisting and challenging the traditional barriers. All of this also leads to the generation of a social context which influences the processes of social cognition. Such a context should also not be overlooked in the study of individual psychological processes.

## **8.2 Contributions, limitations and directions for future research**

The thesis began with the aim to relocate focus on the social in social cognition. The results and findings suggest that a small step has been taken in the direction to achieve this aim. Several important findings helped to reiterate the importance of social and cultural factors in determining social cognition. Therefore, a more holistic and contextualized understanding of the human mind in general and implicit theories and attributions in particular were achieved. However, the research was not devoid of limitations of its own. These limitations should be kept in mind while conducting future research in similar areas. The foremost limitation was the use of only qualitative method of inquiry in studying implicit theories and attributions. The usage of both quantitative questionnaire based design and also qualitative semi-structured interviews would have allowed for comparison of results of both quantitative and qualitative nature. Such a method has already been applied by Quihis et al., (2002) in studying implicit theories held by low-income Mexican adolescents. Such a method yielded much richer data and also pointed out the limitations of solely relying on the experimental paradigm. Moreover, McGuire (1973, 1983, and 1997) has advocated the use of mixed method inquiry wherein qualitative studies can be used to generate hypothesis and quantitative studies can be used to test hypothesis. The use of such methods, it is thought will provide more detailed and richer accounts of the processes involved in social cognition.

Secondly, another major limitation of the study was its deficit in applying the intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) in analysis. As pointed out in the review, caste is considered to be the defining feature of social reality in India. So, the participants were

contacted and data was gathered on the basis of the caste categories the participants. However, as the analysis unfolded, it was realized that the social reality is much more complex than a simple identification and classification on the basis of caste. And, that the mode of operation of caste is through social class and is also deeply mingled with the aspirational identities of the participants. Though this research has attempted to use both caste and class in understanding the social position of the participants, a more sound and nuanced strategy is required to understand complexities of social reality. Future researchers may use the intersectionality theory in analysis of these complexities.

Another limitation of the study was the role of the researcher in influencing the research process and data gathered from the participants. A couple of participants were known to the researcher by virtue of residing in the same hostel. In addition to them, most participants could judge the caste background of the researcher through her physical appearance (vermillion and red bangles). On some instances, this encouraged the participants from the unreserved category in openly making statements on ability, reservations, and merit. One participant (unreserved category) even mentioned that “*By looking at you, I can say that you are Brahmin*”. At the same time, it may have also been instrumental in influencing the responses of participants belonging to the reserved category. It could have been a possible reason for them not opening up or deciding to make a certain kind of responses. While this is an unavoidable part of social reality and also the research process, it is necessary to make note of it. Future research in the area of social cognition should keep in mind these limitations in attempting to study the social and cultural determinants of social cognition.

Certain important questions with regard to the theoretical limitations of the research areas taken up in this thesis also arise, for example, the dichotomy of the entity-incremental beliefs about intelligence. Moreover, the negligence of social factors in studying external attributions and also the distinction between ability attributions and effort attributions though taken up here should be further investigated. The findings of this study not only highlight the role of ‘social’ in social cognition but also raise important question in terms of the core, foundational structures of implicit theories and also attribution theory. Future research should address these questions.

Overall, it can be said that the thesis has taken a step forward in answering the question ‘what is social in social psychology?’ By studying social and cultural factors in influencing individual psychological processes the journey towards a more ‘social’ social psychology is resumed.

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## Annexure 1

### CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

**Description of the project:** This study attempts to examine how university going students understand ability, success and failure.

**What will be done:** First you will have to provide your demographic information (like name, age, gender, educational attainment etc.) Then, there is a set of questions with the help of which the researcher will have a discussion with you. There is no right or wrong answer; your opinion is what matters to the researcher. Cellular phone will be used to record your responses.

**Benefits of this study:** There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. The researcher may learn more about how university going students understand ability, success and failure.

**Confidentiality:** Your participation in this study is confidential. Only the principal investigator of this project will have an access to the information you provide.

**The decision to participate is your choice:** You may decide not to take part in the study or you may choose not to answer a question. However, skipping a question effectively ends your participation in this study. You may exit the study at any time.

**Your questions, concerns, rights:** If you would like more information about this study now or at any time or if you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the researcher at [shreela\\_misra2008@yahoo.com](mailto:shreela_misra2008@yahoo.com)

**Participants Agreement:** If you agree to participate in this study, please enter the following details to indicate your consent.

**Name (Optional):**

**Age:**

**Gender:**

**Caste Category:**

**Home Town (Urban/Rural):**

**Father's Occupation:**

**Mother's Occupation:**

**Number of Siblings:**

**Educational Qualification:**

**Present Course of Study:**

## Annexure II

### TENTATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE 1

#### **Notion of Ability**

1. What do you mean by ability?
2. What do you mean by intelligence?
3. What makes a person intelligent?
4. What can be some markers of intelligence?
5. Is ability or intelligence a given?
6. If you think intelligence is fixed why may it be so?
7. Can intelligence be increased?
8. If intelligence can be increased what do you think are some factors which can contribute to its enhancement?
9. If a person secures 1<sup>st</sup> position or fares well in studies can he be called intelligent?
10. Do you think intelligence is confined to only to the field of academic performance?

#### **Attribution for Success**

11. What is success?
12. What defines success in a person's life?
13. Do you think that success can only be related to a person's academic career?
14. How do you think success can be measured?
15. What are possible causes of success?
16. What are/can be some factors which facilitate success?
17. What according to you are the factors which may help a person in his/her academic career?
18. Describe a successful experience in your life?
19. What do you think were the causes of your success?

#### **Attribution for Failure**

20. What is failure?

21. What defines failure in a person's life?
22. Do you think that failure can only be related to a person's academic career or that there may be other instances of failure as well?
23. If a person is unable to fare well in school or in academic career can it be termed as a failure?
24. What are the possible causes of failure?
25. What are some factors which may lead to failure in academic career?
26. Do you think by hard work failure can be overcome?
27. How do you think success can be maintained and failure can be overcome?
28. Can you describe an instance where you experienced or felt that you experienced failure?
29. What according to you were the reasons for which you experienced failure?

### **Role of Social Structure**

30. Do you think society has a fixed notion or idea of what intelligence is?
31. Do you think society prescribes certain given ideas of success and failure?
32. Are ability and success given much importance in our lives?
33. Do you think intelligence, success and failure are related to or can be influenced by certain features of our society as well?
34. What can be such features of our society?
35. In our society are there any given criteria to evaluate other people in terms of success and failure?
36. What do you think are certain societal factors which contribute to certain given or fixed ideas about intelligence or success and failure?
37. Do you think belonging to a particular gender or social background leads to evaluation on the basis of that particular group membership?
38. Are there certain specific beliefs associated with a particular gender or people belonging to certain specific social backgrounds?
39. Do you think society contributes to the creation or maintenance of such beliefs?
40. If so, how does this happen?
41. Does belonging to a particular gender, a particular caste, or certain social background influence intelligence?

42. Does belonging to a particular gender, a particular caste, or certain social background influence a person's success and failure in certain situations?
43. If yes, do you think certain groups are at an advantage in comparison to other groups in terms of privileges enjoyed by them?
44. Do you think there is any hierarchy in our society?
45. Is there any need for hierarchy in society?
46. Do you think in society hierarchy is created on the basis of ability and performance?
47. Can it be said that such hierarchy in society has evolved over the years based on the ability and performance of certain sections/groups in society?
48. Do you think such hierarchy is justifiable?
49. If yes, why do you think so?
50. If no, why do you think so?



### Annexure III

#### TENTATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

##### **Notion of Ability**

1. What do you mean by ability?
2. What do you mean by intelligence?
3. Who can be called an intelligent person?
4. What can be some features of intelligence?
5. Is ability or intelligence fixed?
6. If you think intelligence is fixed why may it be so?
7. Can intelligence be increased?
8. If intelligence can be increased what do you think are some factors which can contribute to its enhancement?
9. Do you think intelligence is confined only to the field of academic performance?
10. If a person secures 1<sup>st</sup> position or fares well in studies can he be called intelligent?

##### **Attribution for Success**

11. What is success?
12. Do you think that success can only be related to a person's academic career?
13. How do you think success can be measured?
14. What are possible causes of success?
15. What according to you are the causes of success in academic career?
16. Describe a successful experience in your life?
17. What do you think were the causes of your success?

##### **Attribution for Failure**

18. What is failure?
19. Do you think that failure can only be related to a person's academic career?
20. If a person is unable to fare well in academic career can it be termed as a failure?
21. What are the possible causes of failure?

22. What are some causes of failure in academic career?
23. Do you think failure can be overcome by hard work?
24. Can you describe an instance which for you was an experience of failure?
25. What according to you were the causes of your failure?

### **Role of Social Structure**

26. Do you think in society there is any fixed idea about intelligence?
27. Do you think in society there is any fixed idea about success and failure?
28. Do you think intelligence and success are given much importance in society?
29. What do you think are certain societal factors which contribute to fixed ideas about intelligence or success and failure?
30. Do you think intelligence, success and failure are related to or can be influenced by certain features of society as well?
31. What can be such features of society?
32. Do you think people are evaluated on the basis of belonging to a particular social background?
33. Are there any specific beliefs associated with certain social backgrounds?
34. Do you think society contributes to the creation or maintenance of such beliefs?
35. If so, how does this happen?
36. Does belonging to a particular caste, gender or certain social background influence intelligence?
37. Does belonging to a particular caste, gender or certain social background influence a person's success and failure in certain situations?
38. Do you think there is any hierarchy in society?
39. How do you define hierarchy?
40. Do you think certain groups are at an advantage in comparison to other groups?
41. Is there any need for hierarchy?
42. Do you think hierarchy is created on the basis of ability?
43. Can it be said that such hierarchy has evolved over the years based on the ability of certain groups?
44. Do you think such hierarchy is justifiable?

45. If yes, why do you think so?

46. If no, why do you think so?

## Annexure IV

### QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **Notion of Ability**

1. What do you mean by ability?
2. What do you mean by intelligence?
3. Are these two similar or different?
4. Who can be called an intelligent person?
5. What can be some features of intelligence?
6. Are ability and intelligence fixed?
7. If you think intelligence is fixed why may it be so?
8. Can intelligence be increased?
9. If yes, what do you think are some factors which help in its enhancement?
10. Do you think intelligence is confined only to the field of academic performance?
11. If a person secures 1<sup>st</sup> position in class or fares well in studies can he be called intelligent?

#### **Attribution for Success**

12. Have you ever experienced success?
13. Why do you think it was a success for you?
14. What do you think were the causes of your success?
15. Can you describe what success is?
16. How do you think success can be measured?
17. What are the possible causes of success?
18. Do you think that success can only be related to a person's academic career?
19. What are the possible causes of success in academic career?

#### **Attribution for Failure**

20. Have you ever experienced failure?
21. Why do you think it was a failure for you?

22. What do you think where the causes of your failure?
23. Can you describe what failure is?
24. What are the possible causes of failure?
25. Do you think that failure can only be related to a person's academic career?
26. If a person is unable to fare well in academic career can it be termed as a failure?
27. What are some causes of failure in academic career?
28. Do you think failure can be overcome by hard work?

### **Role of Social Structure**

29. Do you think in society there is any fixed idea about ability and intelligence?
30. Do you think in society there is any fixed idea about success and failure?
31. Do you think in society, ability, intelligence and success are given much importance in society?
32. Why do you think this is so?
33. What do you think are certain societal factors which contribute to such fixed ideas?
34. Do you think people are evaluated on the basis of belonging to a particular social background?
35. Are there any specific beliefs associated with certain social backgrounds?
36. Do you think society contributes to the creation or maintenance of such beliefs?
37. If so, how does this happen?
38. Do you think intelligence, success and failure are related to or can be influenced by certain features of society as well?
39. What can be such features of society?
40. Does belonging to a particular caste, gender or any other social background influence intelligence?
41. Does belonging to a particular caste, gender or any other social background influence a person's success and failure?
42. Do you think there is any hierarchy in society?
43. How do you define hierarchy?
44. Do you think certain groups are at an advantage in comparison to other groups?
45. Is there any need for hierarchy?

46. Do you think hierarchy is created on the basis of ability?
47. How do you think such hierarchy has evolved over the years?
48. Do you think such hierarchy is justifiable?
49. If yes, why do you think so?
50. If no, why do you think so?