

**EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS OF SCHEDULED CASTE WOMEN
ADMINISTRATORS IN CHENNAI: EXPLORING CASTE, GENDER AND SOCIAL
MOBILITY PROCESSES**

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation titled “Educational Pathways of Scheduled Caste Women Administrators in Chennai: Exploring Caste, Gender and Social Mobility Processes” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy to Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. It has not been previously submitted for any other Degree to this or any other University.

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Abbreviations

AISHE - All India Survey of Higher Education

ASI - Annual Survey of Industries

BC - Backward Caste

MBC - Most Backward Caste

B.E - Bachelor of Engineering

B.Sc - Bachelor of Science

CM - Chief Minister

CMNNMP - Chief Minister's Nutritious Noon Meal Programme

ECE - Electronics and Communications Engineering

GER - Gross enrolment ratio

IAS - Indian Administrative Services

ICDS - Integrated Child Development Scheme

IES - Indian Engineering Services

IPS - Indian Police Services

IRS - Indian Revenue Services

IT - Information Technology

LLB - Bachelor of Laws

MBBS - Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery

MA - Master of Arts

MBA - Master of Business Administration

M.Ed - Master of Education

MGR - M. G. Ramachandran

M.Sc - Master of Science

M.S - Master of Science

M.Phil - Master of Philosophy

NPE - National Policy on Education

NREGS - National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

OBC - Other Backward Classes/Castes

Ph.D - Doctorate of Philosophy

PUC - Pre-University Course

RTE - Right to Education Act

SC - Scheduled Caste

ST - Scheduled Tribe

TNPSC - Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission

UPSC - Union Public Service Commission

VCK - Viduthalai Ciruthaigal Katchi

WIPS - Women in Public Sector

Chapter 1

Introduction

Social mobility as a concept is integral to understanding change and continuity in society. Studies on social mobility have largely focused on intergenerational occupational mobility of individuals using what has been termed as the ‘status attainment’ or class structural approach (Savage, 1997). These studies do not explore the processes of mobility, or the ways in which families (and individuals within them), mobilise resources, strategise and negotiate to attain higher social and economic status in competition with others thereby charting diverse and complex pathways. The social location of the family (class, caste, ethnicity and minority status) and intra-familial relations (gender is particularly important) frames the interface of structure and agency and thereby dynamics of processes of mobility. Education is a key pathway for mobility especially for marginalised and socially discriminated groups. In India Dalit (Scheduled Castes) communities have suffered historically from social discrimination because of their location in the caste system. Constitutional provisions for affirmative action to better the economic and social status of Scheduled Castes (SC) have led to affirmative action policies in education and access to public sector occupation.

Studies on mobility of SC largely treat the category of Dalit as a monolith, and do not delve into the differences among the Dalits, which are mediated by social class, sub caste, gender and so on. The structures of caste, class and gender identity mediate aspirations for mobility in complex and diverse ways given their varied social and contextual locations. In this regard, to understand the social location of a Dalit women and the agency it allows her is of utmost importance. A Dalit woman is located within a grid of intersectionalities of caste, class and gender and the interface of these structures makes them triply oppressed (Chakravarti, 2013). Guru (1995) argues that it is important to look at internal (Dalit patriarchy) and external (upper caste, brahmanical patriarchy) factors to understand the Dalit women’s need to ‘talk differently’, to understand their discourse of dissent against the upper caste, middle class women’s movement, and Dalit men (ibid: 2549). He emphatically states the significance of the social location of the

Dalit women in understanding the perception of reality as experienced by them, for him non-Dalit woman representing Dalit women issues is “less authentic” (ibid). In response to this, Sharmila Rege (1998) has argued for a Dalit feminist standpoint to create an incorporative epistemology, which she states underlines the need to “unflinchingly view and analyse our histories of silence and separation” (Rege, 2013: 92). Dalit feminist standpoint emphasises the importance of locating Dalit women within the intersectionalities of the caste, class and gender mindful of their local and historical contexts.

Through the lens of Dalit women administrators, and by tracing their pathways, this study proposes to understand the interface of caste and gender as it influences social mobility. It also attempts to unpack the differences within the Dalit women themselves in terms of their social class, family background, and regional differences. The study is located in the city of Chennai in Tamil Nadu, which is seen to have performed well in terms of socio-economic development and also has high human development indicators in comparison with other states in India. The comprehensive nature of the state policies and provisions were crafted bearing in mind the diversity of social groups in the state. Tamil Nadu is also a state with a unique affirmative action policy with a total of 69 per cent reservation in public education and employment, to enable entry of traditionally discriminated groups into higher education and government occupations.

This study will focus on Dalit women in a high status occupation as administrators in Class-I government positions in Chennai, Tamil Nadu and explore their social and educational pathways to mobility. It will focus specifically on women administrators as located within the family, their educational trajectories and experiences and the role of affirmative action programmes, to understand how different “vectors of oppression and privilege” (Ritzer, 2007: 204) interact with one another in influencing their experiences in education and access to high status occupations. The interface between structures, institutions and their own agency will be kept in mind.

Caste, Gender and Social Mobility: Theoretical Perspectives and Review of Literature

Social mobility has been broadly understood as the ‘movement of individuals and groups between different socio-economic positions’ (Giddens, 1991: 327). Mobility studies have largely focussed on what is called ‘intergenerational mobility’, i.e. the movement of individuals across generations (ibid: 328). Early studies saw occupation as the most important factor in determining social status and hence social mobility. These studies focussed on the movement of individuals (males i.e. fathers and sons) across occupations arranged hierarchically on the basis of social and economic criteria. Sophisticated statistical analysis (regression and path analysis) was used in order to understand the magnitude of movement across stratum and also to the relationship between the occupation and education and other variables across generations (Savage, 1997; Bertaux and Thompson, 1977). These were called the ‘status attainment’ studies (ibid). Savage observes that the ‘status attainment’ approach was followed by the ‘class structural approach’ where occupations are not ranked but grouped into various classes on the basis of certain features. These studies focus on the ‘origin’ and ‘destination’ across generation in relation to class (again usually the origin in relation to fathers’ occupation and that of destination – son’s occupation). Recent studies such as that of Vaid and Heath (2010) also use a reframed the ‘origin – destination’ approach and include both sons and daughters, and different dimensions of stratification. For instance, Vaid (2016) conceptualises social mobility as “the movement between social origins and social destinations, where origins are indexed by parental social class position and destinations are indexed by individuals own class positions" (ibid: 2).

The ‘social attainment’ and subsequent ‘class structural’ approach have been critiqued for a number of reasons which include the overemphasis of occupation as the main indicator for social mobility, the ranking of occupations, and the focus on the survey as the main method in these studies. Further these studies focussed only on males and excluded women. The dimension of gender was ignored. This was seen as a serious drawback. The complex processes that underlie the movement of individual and groups in specific contexts require more qualitative methods that are hardly given attention

(Savage, 1997). Individuals are seen as isolated rather than as embedded in family, occupational and local contexts where diverse mobility pathways interface, providing opportunities and constraints. These opportunities are accessed depending on economic, cultural and relational resources that are available and can be mobilised by individuals and families.

Thus conceptualisation of mobility in these studies did not factor in the experiential dimension of social mobility that is the people's experiences of social mobility, the different strategies and micro-sociological mechanisms adopted and employed by families and communities in which they are located, to become upwardly mobile (Drury, 1993; Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). While the conceptualisation and operationalisation of social class is important for studying social mobility (Vaid and Heath, 2010: 130), so is caste mobility (Srinivas 1966, Ram 1988). This is especially so in case of social mobility for Dalits and other lower castes. The existing body of literature contributing to the study of social mobility among Dalits shows us that caste is as much a dominant factor as social class and intersects with it, in strategizing upward mobility among Dalits (Deshpande and Palshikar, 2008; Ciotti, 2006; Naudet, 2008; Benei, 2010).

In the Indian context the coexistence of multiple social hierarchies, namely, social status as defined by caste affiliation and social status as defined by occupational prestige makes the study of social mobility extremely complex (Naudet, 2008: 432). While pathways to social mobility are strongly influenced by caste identity, scholars have pointed to continued caste based discrimination experienced by Dalits who are economically mobile (Thorat, 2002; Thorat and Newman, 2007, 2010). This has us leading to the question – Is it possible to speak of social mobility in the Indian context, and especially in the case of social mobility among Dalits (Naudet, 2008).

The importance of education as a major catalyst for creating and securing social mobility opportunities is well established in sociological research (Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980, Vaid 2016), especially in the case of Dalits (Desai and Kulkarni, 2008, Ciotti, 2010, Vaid, 2016). A major thrust in India's educational policies is ameliorating inequalities suffered by economically and socially disadvantaged groups and encouraging their upward mobility. The system of protective discrimination in the form of reservation

policies, or policies of affirmative action in education and employment has also contributed significantly in the upward mobility of Dalits (Weisskopf, 2004). However, despite such efforts, one still sees the persisting effects of caste, gender and, class of origin in gaining access to education (Desai and Kulkarni, 2008) and occupational positions (Kumar, Heath and Heath, 2002a, 2002b).

With affirmative action in public education and employment along with privatisation and globalisation, there has been an extraordinary diversification in employment. Consequently, this has led to opening up of new employment opportunities in urban areas. As a result of this, a small but significant proportion of Dalits have managed to enter occupations associated with the Middle classes. This had led to the rise of the Dalit Middle Classes. It is important to acknowledge that even though they may occupy lower fractions of the middle class; their entry into the Middle class in itself is noteworthy. Fernandes (2006) identifies the rise of the ‘new middle class’ characterised by the emerging IT professions. Dalits have also entered these globalised professions and can be seen entering the ‘new middle classes’ However, apprehensions regarding if the Dalit Middle class is accepted as part of the larger middle-class which is mainly shaped by upper-castes, or are they continued to be marked by caste identity are questions that concern scholars (Srinivas, 2016).

Despite the existence of considerable body of literature and research underlining the continual effects of caste, gender and class of origin, we do not have much in the way of the in-depth, micro analysis of the social mobility processes – institutional pathways, choices and strategies employed by Dalits to gain upward mobility. This study proposes to explore the educational pathways to mobility of Dalit women who have gained access to high status occupations. More specifically, the study looks at the lives of Dalit women administrators by exploring the role of various social institutions such as the family, education, community, and government in mediating access to their current bureaucratic position as administrators, which is considered to be a high status occupation due to the prestige, social status, and authority associated with it (Weber, 1946; Davies, 1996). There exists an implicit assumption of bureaucracy as masculine, which represents the worldview that men are independent, autonomous, agentic selves who deny emotional

ties and interdependency (Bologh, 1990; Davies, 1996) and project an image of "a detached leader, who controls bureaucracy by maintaining distance" (Davies, 1996: 666). This interlinking of bureaucracy with masculinity leads to lack of acknowledgement of women's presence in the bureaucracy or at the very least diminishes their access and thereby their visibility in such occupational positions.

Vaid (2004) points out, that the parameter of caste becomes insignificant in the last transition stages of education (high school and above), unlike father's class which is statistically significant into making a successive transition. This is because, "caste no longer distinguishes among the 'survivors' of later stages, as there has been already a natural selection at each stage in which only the most determined women or men from the backward castes have made it" (ibid: 3935). However, Vaid is quick to caution that caste does play an important role in social interactions, especially in blocking certain avenues of education to the backward castes (ibid). In addition to this, as Naudet (2008) states at the outset in his study that among his fifty-eight interviews of persons belonging to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Castes communities who had achieved prominent positions in private sector (with degrees from IITs and IIMs), in public service (the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the Indian Police Service (IPS), the Indian Revenue Service (IRS) and academia (researcher and faculty), only one was a woman. Hence he states that, "it proved to be extremely difficult to find women from the Scheduled Castes and other backward communities' who had achieved such sharp mobility in India and that the impossibility of finding such women is in itself a significant finding" (Naudet, 2008: 414).

Family and Social Mobility

At any given point in time, the range of possibilities for an individual is seen to be facilitated or constrained by the availability of economic, social and cultural resources that his/her primary group, that is, family has access to (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). Further, the social location of the family largely influences its chances of upward or downward mobility. For example, what may be easily accessible to upper caste, middle class groups due to their combined social capital, may not even figure as a choice for a

person from the Dalit community as the family in comparison is unable to mobilize these resources. Thus, the primary site of generation and transmission of resources and capital lies within families, which provide ‘social and emotional launch pads for individual take-off’ (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997: 2). It is important to note that social status is primarily carried by families and groups rather than by individuals. Hence, individuals are always embedded in contexts – family, occupational, community. Therefore, mobility is as much a matter of family praxis as individual agency, because it is families which produce individuals and rear them with specific social skills and characteristics, thereby endowing them with moral energy, along with social, cultural and economic resources (ibid: 7).

It is important to place the family in a larger context in the Indian society, which is differentiated by caste, gender, class and other dimensions of stratification. Hence, a study of mobility processes must include the families’ strategies by understanding the social processes that mediate upward social mobility. Studies have pointed out to the diverse processes and practices within the family for the mobilisation of cultural capital and social networks varies across class and caste mediated by gender. For example, Drury (1993) explains in a middle class family, where woman (the mother) is educated, takes on a more active role in decision making of her children. He also observes that in middle class families, decision making by the parents is tied to independence in income and financial arrangements for schooling (ibid: 168). Whereas, in case of working class parents this is not the case because parents are mostly migrant workers and the children are left in the care of other agnates, and decisions about the migrants’ children is usually made by country kinsmen (ibid).

As Drury (1993) points out, crucial decisions regarding education, such as decisions about school, college, career paths and other academic activities is taken within a family is mediated by caste and class. Among factors most emphasized is that children from poor, low caste families are pulled out of school to tend to the economic needs of the family (Drury, 1993: 2). This even more so in case of girls, where the drop-out rates are seen to be higher than that of the boys (Drury, 1993), and most girls are forcibly withdrawn from schools after the primary level for taking care of siblings and other

household chores. Parental apathy and existing cultural norms of the community further affect the education of Dalit girls. Still (2014) finds from her study that education of Dalit girls is seen to be incongruous with marriage, this is because the cultural norms of the community dictate that educating girls will spoil them, which will directly reflect on the family and the community. As most girls reach the puberty stage on completion of primary education, withdrawing them from school is seen as a way of controlling their sexuality. However, as Dasgupta and Tilak (1982) observe, this is not the case with children from higher caste and even average income families, as they are vastly overrepresented in higher education.

This may lead us to ask questions such as, why do some parents/families not make use educational facilities despite it being free and nearby, while some others insist on higher education, no matter the costs and risks involved? Drury (1993) points out that much of this educational decision-making at the family level is largely based on the resources, social relations, perceptions, goals and information available, and they are not available to all equally. Thus, “family mobility strategies”, “school related competences” and the “desire of education”, vary significantly based on the family's caste affiliation, their class origins and the gender of the members of the family (ibid: 4). Crucial decisions such as, the relevance and the usefulness of education for a son and a daughter of a family may be guided by completely different rationales. Similarly, while education may be seen as a rational investment in middle class families; low caste, poor, working class families may consider it as an expenditure that they cannot afford due to the foregone earnings of their children and the high opportunity cost associated with it. Hence, educational decision-making not only varies from family to family but is significantly dependent on their social location and vantage point. Families invest part of their wealth into education, and convert their economic capital into certified cultural capital, to give their children access to privileged positions in the economy (Bourdieu, 1984). It is here that education as cultural capital becomes a huge asset and can be transmitted from one generation to the next. It is in this context that the family's involvement becomes crucial when it comes to schooling. This is because decisions regarding school are made by the parents and not by the individual herself, for in most Indian middle class families, the parents provide the financial support for education of their children. It is here that the

gender of the individual also plays a role in the familial decision-making regarding education (Drury, 1993). For example, sons are educated because they determine the status and future security of the family, while the daughters are not educated or educated only till the primary or secondary level because of the fear that they may get corrupted due to education and hence not be preferred for marriage (Still, 2014; Drury, 1993).

However, as Benei (2010) points out in her study, education was not only central for the betterment of the Pundat (a Dalit) family and its socio-economic status, but the quality and medium of instruction were also deemed important, because both reflected their “status aspirations and facilitated their realisation” (ibid: 206). An important finding of the study was the educational choices were carefully calculated according to the children’s “declared potential”, that is, regardless of gender, those deemed able were sent to English medium schools, whereas the others were sent to Marathi medium. Therefore, in the Pundat family’s case, the reproduction of the family’s business, “determined the destinies of the children and grandchildren through a selective family process of advancing their career while strengthening the in determination of the destinies of others” (ibid). With the expanding economy and diverse opportunities these kinds of decisions are increasingly taken by families for upward social mobility through economic advancement in their career paths.

Education and Social Mobility

As mentioned earlier, education is viewed as the most crucial pathway to social mobility. Important decisions about access to education, choice of institution, financial arrangement for it and so on are made within the family. However, after decisions have been made and the child is sent to school, the experiences at these institutions are solely hers. Studies have shown that the experiences of a child in school are guided by her social location and identity. The experiences of an upper caste child may be different from that of a Dalit boy, which may be different from a Dalit girl at school, because for a Dalit child, her caste identity mediated by gender shapes her experience of schooling (Nambissan, 2009; Vaid, 2004). Even before looking at the experiences at school, it is important to note that in most rural areas the physical location of school is such that,

children have to travel more than a few kilometres, mostly on foot, to reach the school (Drury, 1993).

Distance is not the only factor that hinders these children; there is also the fact that the school sometimes is located in the part of the village dominated by the upper castes, hence inaccessible to the low caste children. Still (2014) points out in her study, the village of Nampally was commonly referred to as *Urutpalli*, meaning it was divided into *uru*, where the upper castes lived and *palli*, where the Dalits lived. The best schools were situated in the *uru*, and hence not accessible to the Dalits, who ended up going to the government schools near the *palli*, or some unrecognised English medium schools in the town. As Bama (2012) writes in her testimonio, that her school was located in the other side town, closer to the upper caste settlement, and since children from the *cheri* were not allowed to go through the upper caste settlement, they had to go all the way around the town to reach their schools. Therefore, the physical distance and social distance and the influence of the former on the latter become a source of disadvantage for Dalit children.

Research on discrimination against Dalit children in schools is scarce. Nambissan and Sedwal (2003) argue that “policy fails to acknowledge or confront the role of discriminatory caste relations that pervade the educational experiences of Dalit children.” They direct their attention to the social processes in education such as “teacher attitudes and peer relations (that) critically define the educational experience of Dalit children, their dignity and sense of self-worth” (ibid: 83). Therefore there is an immediate need for further research on these processes and their implications for child development. Studying the experiences of Dalits, along with other social groups such as Adivasis and religious minorities, who consist of 30% of the Indian society, and who face discrimination in schools will help us understand the need for a societal discourse to ameliorate this situation (Balagopalan and Subrahmanian, 2003). School is a site of both opportunity and discrimination, and as Nambissan (1996, 2006) notes, these opportunities and discriminatory practices manifest themselves in different ways, such as, social relations with peers and teachers, participation in curricular and extra-curricular activities, access to school facilities and resources. Dalit children face hindrance in

accessing these very resources and facilities, due to the role of caste in education that continues to 'lock' them out from full participation from schools. In her study of a village near Jaipur, Rajasthan, Nambissan (2009) identifies the different processes and spheres of exclusion and caste based discrimination experienced by Dalit children at schools. Her study shows that the school remains a domain of serious caste based prejudice and discrimination. Further social identities of caste and class were found to constrain peer relations and interactions, particularly for Dalit children, as it dictates their interpersonal relations with children from upper castes for seeking support in academic and extra-curricular activities (ibid: 18).

Another important dimension, the study points out is the agency of the teacher and their interaction in general and in addressing these discriminatory practices in particular (ibid: 23). It was found that the teachers themselves engaged in such discriminatory practices or at the very least ignored such practices by non-Dalit children. The labelling of Dalit children as 'weak' by teachers and making them sit behind in the class is also highlighted by the study. This kind of unequal and discriminatory treatment by the teachers and discourages full participation of Dalit children at schools and severely detrimental to their self-worth and self-esteem. This is often the reason why a majority of Dalit children drop out of schools. While experience in schools is more stratified for Dalit children due to existing practices of discrimination and exclusion, these differences become more pronounced in higher education.

A school child is seen as someone who is free and unburdened, as someone who needs care and is capable of giving focused attention to learning; this “ideal child learner” typically emerges as middle class, urban and male (NCERT, 2006a: 21). Manjrekar (2013) points out, “the lived realities of ‘other’ categories of children in Indian society, marked by class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religion and region are removed from this ideal” (Manjrekar, 2013: 160). In post-colonial India, “normativizing the notion of childhood” in discourses of education involves denial, of the ‘other’ children’s experiences and their absence from the knowledge presented to learners (NCERT, 2006b: 13, Vasanta 2004). Ethnographic studies (Kumar, 1989; Scrase, 1993; Talib, 2003), in the Indian context show how children who fall outside the normative ideals of everyday

school life – the poor, peasant, Dalit, Adivasi – transactions in the classrooms and textbook knowledge, create a sense of backwardness and social and educational failure. The “symbolic violence” exercised through the curriculum deems their knowledge as “illegitimate” and “unworthy” and such children are placed outside the boundaries of educability and they internalise this as an aspect of their identity (Manjrekar, 2013: 160). As Talib’s study shows, a child belonging to a community of quarry workers saying, “My head does not carry a brain, it is actually filled with *bhoosa* (hay)” (Talib, 2013: 148)

Feminist scholarship also emphasises on the ways in which educational ideals is represented in the school curriculum and practices is mediated by gender and identity. In the Indian context, many feminist sociologists have pointed out to how patriarchal controls arising from caste, class and religion have reinforced gender hierarchies and asymmetries that act to reproduce inequalities in the access and attainment of education by girls, particularly those from the marginalised sections (Chanana, 1990, 2003; and Velaskar, 1990). Velaskar (2005: 479) in her study on access to schooling of girls in Maharashtra observes the influence of caste persists in the form of educational exclusion of various Dalit castes.

Higher Education

Higher education in India is a privilege of a few, and not many belonging the disadvantaged groups make it there. The implementation of the affirmative action policies through the system of reservation in institutions of higher learning such as state colleges and universities has facilitated the entrance of a few from these disadvantaged sections. These policies are the major thrust behind the movement of Dalit students from school education to higher education. The major factors that influence an individual's access to higher education are caste, gender and class. As discussed earlier, Dalit girls are withdrawn from school immediately after primary education and only a handful continue, but even this handful do not necessarily make it to higher education (Still, 2014). Dalit middle-class families understand the importance of education in becoming socially mobile; encourage the education of their children. As Benei (2010) notes, children and grandchildren of the Pundat family that she studied in the city of Kholapur, were sent to

different schools, English and Marathi mediums based on their capabilities. Here, the family realises the significance of education for upward social mobility and building different forms of capital.

More than sixty years after the formal adoption of the Constitution that explicitly forbids discrimination in educational spaces based on caste, the dominance of the Hindu upper castes in higher education is still substantial and the lower castes, especially the Dalits are significantly underrepresented (Deshpande, 2006). A large chunk of higher education is accessed by the upper caste (also the affluent class), and middle class which is mix of intermediate castes, who form the Other Backward Castes, and though the Dalits (majorly Hindus) account for 13 per cent of total urban population, they are only around 2 percent of the higher professional courses such as in engineering and medicine (ibid). Looking at this phenomenon he states that, “it is clear that there is something in the gate-keeping mechanism which regulates entry into higher education that makes it discriminate in favour of “upper” and against the “lower” castes” (ibid: 2439). The higher education in India is biased against the poor and the lower castes who suffer from social disadvantages in society, because by its very nature higher education presupposes certain level of economic, social and cultural resources, which these groups lack. It is here that Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) provide a theoretical explanation of how students from privileged classes acquire higher levels of cultural capital by the virtue of belonging to that class, in the form of general awareness, verbal facility and competence in the society’s high status culture. This acquisition of cultural capital enables a student’s academic mastery via abstract and theoretical thinking. However, it is important to note that, cultural capital is possessed by everyone by the virtue of belonging to a particular social class, however it is the ‘highly-valued’ cultural capital that yields most benefits, and this is the cultural capital that the dominant classes possess (Bourdieu, 1974) which the lower castes/class lack. Education decides an individual’s social destination and choices reflect concerns about the social positions that will be available in the future.

Studies on experiences of Dalit students in institutions of higher education are very few. However Rao (2013) and Wankhede (2013) show that institutional discrimination persists even in these prestigious and exclusive institutions in different

spheres. Wankhede (2013) observes that studies on Scheduled Castes in higher education lack in-depth understanding and analysis of “social discrimination”, “casteism”, and “untouchability” and their impact on educational and social achievement (Wankhede, 2013: 185). These issues remain unexplored despite remaining strong traditional barriers in educational institutions. To enunciate this further, the Thorat Committee Report (2007) identified caste-based discrimination of Dalit students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels at one of the country’s prestigious medical institutions, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) located in the capital of India. Further, institutional discrimination by both fellow students and teachers by “labelling” a particular student based on his or her caste group in premier institutions is highlighted by Rao (2013) in his study of an IIT. He explains how “stigmatised groups” such as the Dalits and the Adivasis encounter discrimination through “labelling” and “stereotyping” as “not capable”, “not meritorious”, “bound to fail” (Ibid: 200). In this study, Rao looks at how the stigma associated with belonging to marginalised communities play out within institutional spaces and how it affects the academic achievement of the students belonging to these “stigmatised groups” (ibid).

Some scholars (Deshpande, 2006; Vaid, 2016; Kumar, Heath and Heath, 2002a, 2002b) have emphasised the role of higher education as a means of maintaining or gaining class mobility and status. In case of the middle class this implies continuity of class status and identity, however as Naudet (2008) notes participation in higher education for the lower castes/class would spell conflict with prior social identification, that is their group of origin (caste group). For instance, Naudet finds that in his study of Dalits who had achieved significant success in the professional fields of public service, academia, and in the private sector, there is a need to pay back to the society. This need for paying back arises from the moral obligation one feels towards his/her community, to make up for the ‘social distance’ created from moving up the social ladder. As Naudet emphasises, this is because, ‘paying back’ to society becomes a crucial part of being an upwardly mobile Dalit, who see it as a way to justify their upward mobility (Naudet, 2008: 431).

Many studies (Benei, 2010; Naudet, 2008; Rege, 2013; Ciotti, 2006; Still, 2014) emphasise the significance of education for Dalits is not only for economic mobility, but

for enabling broader social goals and aspirations, such as ‘recognition’, ‘dignity’, ‘respectability’, social transformation of the community and so on. Elaborating this, Bertaux and Thompson (1997) state that “moral” and “emotional” bonds play a crucial role in determining an individual’s actions and decisions. They are not just “rational choice” but are guided by the framework of “moral norms”, “emotional bonds” and the “reasons of the heart” (ibid: 20). This is an essential dimension of intergenerational relationships and transmission which has remained absent from the literature, which has viewed the individual, thus far as a “model of a man governed by self-interest” (ibid).

Social Mobility, Affirmative Action and Caste Identity

The policy of affirmative action via reservation in public education and public employment has had a considerable impact on the social and economic upliftment of the Dalit community (Despande, 2006; Borooah et al 2007; Chanana and Chanana, 2009; Vaid, 2016). Reservations in public sector at all levels enable Dalits to access these occupational positions which are seen to bring economic and social status. In addition to this, reservations in promotions also enable the Dalits to move through the ranks in public employment. It has been a significant factor in the rise of the Dalit Middle class, as mentioned earlier.

Nevertheless, one still sees the lingering effects of caste, gender, class of origin in gaining access to education and occupational positions (Desai and Kulkarni, 2008’ Kumar, Heath and Heath 2002a, 2002b). Deshpande (2009) in his study on fair access to higher education finds that Hindu Scheduled Castes form only 4 percent of all non-technical graduates, and 2 percent of engineering and medical graduates. However, the Hindu Upper Castes form 66 percent of all non-technical graduates and 67 and 65 percent of all engineering and medicine graduates respectively. These stark figures point out the existing caste divide and the dominance of the Upper Caste Hindus in higher education (ibid). There are also strong feelings of resentment among the caste groups towards affirmative action policies that has led to open expression of favouritism and nepotism among the middle-class upper castes who have turned inwards to protect their own interests (Still, 2013).

Educated unemployment among the Dalit youth is yet another cause for concern. As Vasavi states, “lack of attention to the quality of education and to the sacrifice of quality over assertions of quantity mean that the disadvantaged become doubly disadvantaged” (Vasavi, 2012: 11). She further points out that the reservation policy designed to address inherited disadvantages fails to develop skills for these aspiring Dalit youth. Lack of knowledge of English negates any possibility of gaining entry into the new global economy, rendering them unemployed (ibid: 11). Many of these unemployed youth, mostly those with poor quality education and lack of skills for the new economy are described as ‘unemployable’, due to such limitations. Craig Jeffery notes experiences by the educated unemployed to be,

“... a triple temporal hardship. First, they are unable to conform to dominant visions of how people should comport themselves with respect to linear, clock time—they ‘miss years’ or have ‘gaps’ on their resumes.... Second, they are unable to obtain the social goods, such as a secure white-collar job, which connote development... Third, they are incapable of moving into gendered, age-based categories, especially male adulthood, such that they come to be labelled or label themselves as ‘dropouts’, ‘failures’ or people on the shelf” (2010: 13).

Therefore, by being removed from a “life-world of knowledge and skills” that is drawn from the primary group (family and caste group), and further being denied the ability to realize one’s own interests, creates “multiple dislocations” and “feelings of humiliation” in the Dalit youth (Vasavi, 2012: 16).

Thus over the last 60 years the policy of affirmative action has enabled a small section of Dalit men and a smaller proportion of women to gain salaried employment in the government through reservations in these positions. Affirmative action policies (in education and employment) has led to a minority of educated Dalits to become upwardly mobile and form what is called the an influential "Dalit middle class" (Ram, 1988; Srinivas, 2014). The emergence of the new Dalit middle class is evidence to the fact that these affirmative action policies are being utilised and with the help of these policies, certain sections of the Dalit community are able to access these coveted occupational

positions that was previously unavailable to them, thereby enabling higher economic status through these occupational positions (ibid). However do those who are occupationally mobile achieve higher social status, dignity and respect in society? The mobility trajectories and experiences of mobile Dalit men and especially women are yet to be studied.

The Community and Mobility

In addition to the affirmative action policies, the larger (Dalit) community an individual is part of through extended family networks, peer groups and the neighbourhood also plays an important role in determining the upward or downward mobility of an individual or social group. This is because the role of the community is crucial in the social awakening and creating consciousness among its members through social and political activism. Many community led protest movements in different parts of the country had led to the process of developing a new identity, of discarding the notions of inferior status and incorporating the notion of equality in their self-image (Chandrashekar, 1989). For instance, the protest movements among the Mahars, the Mahad Satyagraha (Patwardhan, 1973), the Nadar breast-cloth controversy (Hardgrave, 1969) and the Ezhava's reinterpretation of Hinduism and reformulation of their place in it, led by Narayana Guru, who enunciated his philosophy of 'one religion, one caste and one god' (M. S. A. Rao, 1987). These movements enable the lower castes to adapt themselves to the new democratic framework. Leaders such as B. R. Ambedkar, C.N. Annadurai, and E. V. RamaswamyNaicker were crucial in improving the self-worth and self-esteem of the lower castes. It is however important to note that those groups, who did not go through this phase of protest, such as the Madigas of Karnataka has serious consequences for their social mobility (Chandrashekar, 1989; Still, 2014).

However, even Dalit communities aren't an exception to the existing patriarchal norms and structure, and significant others within and outside the family are often seen to hinder the progress of an individual. As discussed earlier, most lower class Dalit families do not prefer to educate their daughters due to their cultural norms that dictate the fear of the girl getting 'spoilt'. For instance, Janabai Girhe in her testimonio *Marankala*(1992) writes how her community members *gopals*, did not like her going to school, and asked

her father to stop her from going to school, or she would “blacken his face”, they even went to the extent of passing rude comments and singing “dirty songs”, when she was on her way to school. Though she says her father did not pay heed to comments of the community members, these comments seared at Janabai's soul and made her blood boil with rage, and her joy for going to school was destroyed. In such testimonios as Janabai's, it is often seen that the family and sometimes teachers acts as a huge support for fostering educational aspirations of the individuals, even if the community does not. For example, Kumud Pawade in her testimonio *Antsphot* (1981) writes about her upper caste, Brahmin Sanskrit teacher who played a significant role in her life by encouraging her to learn the language and study it further until post-graduation, after which she went on to become a lecturer in Sanskrit in a government college. But she also writes, how her own community people, the people from the Bahujan community discouraged her from studying Sanskrit after matriculation level, and some even taunted her, when she went for job interviews referring to her as a 'government sponsored Brahmin'.

Thus studies show that the community through its norms and practices both acts as a barrier and a facilitator for an individual, based on its established social norms and values. Some communities may not encourage education, while others may ardently campaign for it. However, the role played by the community in the lives of individuals, especially of those from the marginalised groups such as the Dalits is highly significant, because they allow for “collective problem solving” and “reciprocal aid and support”. It is in the community's agitation and support that Dalits pursuit of inclusion and integration in the larger structures of the society is achieved.

Rationale and Framework

Sociological studies have mainly viewed social mobility as an individual process rather than a “continual process of generalised social competition”, where individuals and social groups fight for their share of resources (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997: 4). The importance of understanding the social meanings and experiences that underlie the complex processes of social mobility along diverse pathways and bearing in mind the broad socio-historical and regional context in which they are embedded is highlighted by scholars. A number of studies have mapped the exclusion of Dalits from school and

higher education and a few have pointed to discrimination and exclusion that Dalits have faced within institutions. However there has been no research on mobility pathways and processes of Dalits and particularly Dalit women as they negotiate institutions and processes in their efforts to better their economic and, equally important, social status in society.

The study draws on Bertaux and Thompson conceptualisation of social mobility as a complex process ‘that is continuously shaped both positively and negatively by access to and restrictions on economic and cultural resources that is mediated by an individual’s social location and the prejudice and privilege associated with it’. Further “these processes are complex because they operate within unstable frameworks and because they are intrinsically reflexive” (ibid: 1). However given the focus on Dalit women the study framed by the understanding that “women” as a readymade subject does not exist, instead women are located within a grid of identities ranging from caste, class, religion among other possible identities (Nivedita Menon, 2004). Dalit women cannot be neatly fitted into the general categories of 'women' or 'Dalits' due to the manifestations of intersectionalities of oppression are ‘triply oppressed’ by the virtue of their gender, caste and class of origin (Chakravarthi, 2013). Majority of the mobility studies cited here do not address this distinction, and Dalits as a category are taken as whole thereby overlooking the gender dimension within the caste group. Using the lens of Dalit women administrators this study attempts to understand how social mobility pathways and processes are mediated by intersectionalities of caste and gender (Benei, 2010; Still, 2014). It draws on the experiences of SC women administrators’ experiences to do so.

This gap in literature then leads us to questions such as, what are the factors that influence the mobility of the Dalit women. What role does the family, educational institutions and the community play in helping them achieve this mobility? Looking at caste through the gender lens changes many previously made assumptions about a particular caste group and their social mobility processes because these very processes vary for women within the same caste group (Still, 2014).

Thus it becomes crucial to study the social processes underlying the strategies employed by Dalit families in becoming upwardly mobile. A focus on choices and strategies that influence decision making within Dalit families and by the women themselves will enable us to locate these strategies and choices beyond individual 'rational action' to the complex factors that influence aspirations among socially disadvantaged groups for dignity and respect. Further given the fact that the situation of Dalits' access to education and occupational changes among these communities varies across India, it is important to embed mobility pathways and processes within the specific regional context. In the present study the state of Tamil Nadu has been chosen and Dalit women administrators in Chennai form the participants who were included in the research.

Objectives and Research Questions

1. To map the changing context of caste, gender and education in Tamil Nadu.
 - To understand the social and educational context of Dalit communities in Tamil Nadu. To also look at state policies and provisions that focus on state policies and provisions that focus on scheduled castes in relation to education and government employment in the state.
 - What has been the educational and occupational participation of scheduled castes in Tamil Nadu
2. To explore from Dalit women administrators (the participants in the study) how educational decisions concerning them were negotiated within the family. To understand if class and gender concerns influenced these decisions.
 - How did the family mobilize economic and social resources to enable access to education and employment? Did caste influence the family's ability to access different networks and resources that helped/hindered them in gaining access to education and employment?
 - How did the socio-economic status (class) of the family and gender influence educational decision-making within the members of the family?

3. To understand the experiences of the SC women administrators as students within educational institutions (school, college, university). To also explore if and in what manner their gender and caste influenced these experiences.
 - What were the experiences of the women administrators in accessing education at different levels and their experiences with the academic domain?
 - Did caste and gender influence the experiences of the Dalit women administrators within educational institutions?
 - How did these experiences vary at different levels of education?

4. To know the role played by affirmative action policy in education and employment and other support systems in helping them gain access to administrative positions in government.
 - Did they make use of the provisions under the affirmative action policies?
 - How important was the affirmative action policies in gaining access to education and more specifically employment?
 - Did they face any discrimination within educational institutions in this regard?

5. Given their present position as administrators in government organisations, to understand from participants their reflections on their own journeys and on the situation of the Scheduled Castes.
 - Looking back how do they reflect upon their pathways and experiences in education?
 - How important is the policy of affirmative action for education and occupational mobility for the Dalits? What changes are necessary?
 - How do they look at their communities and their own role in this regard i.e. are they 'paying back'?

Research Methodology

Many studies (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997; Drury, 1993; Benei, 2010; Still, 2014; Heyer, 2014) have emphasised, the heart of social mobility research lies in the social-historical processes and social dynamics of social mobility. One method which is primarily concerned with the individual and her lived experiences to examine every day processes of life is the life-history research method. Life-history method refers to a “collection and interpretation of personal narratives, oral testimonies, collected during an interview process for the purpose of understanding the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future” (Roberts, 2002: 1) Life histories are seen to be relational (Ojermark, 2007) that is, they have the “potential to link the macro and micro processes and can be used to communicate how structure and agency intersect to produce the circumstances of a particular person’s life” (ibid: 3). Bertaux and Thompson point out, “the nature of the method is such that it is redolent with description of experience of relationships with members of the family, peers, significant others, with interpretations of turning-points, of influences and decisions that were rejected rather than followed” (1997: 7).

The study explores the social and educational pathways of Dalit women administrators in Chennai based on their lived experiences and their narratives of it. It first maps the broader context of caste, gender and education in Tamil Nadu in order to locate the study. It is felt that the life-history method will be suitable for this study. Six Dalit women who are working as Class-I officers in state and central government offices located in Chennai were chosen for the study. Snowball sampling was used to identify the administrators who are referred to as ‘participants’ in the study. An attempt was made to get participants from diverse social class and educational backgrounds. Using the life-history method, the participants of the study, were interviewed about their educational pathways and the constraints they faced and also the various contexts that shaped their lives. The effort was to facilitate the telling of their stories, keeping in mind the objectives of the study. These stories will be used as sources to reveal “what happened to them”, “how and why it happened”, “how she felt about it and how she reacted or

‘proacted’ to realise her goals” (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997: 13). Since an understanding of how caste and gender mediated by class in mobility processes in the entry of Dalit women into a high status occupation is critical to the study is critical to the study, the researcher will bear in mind the interface between macro context of the state of Tamil Nadu and micro sociological processes.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter two sets the context of caste, gender and education in Tamil Nadu. It looks at the role of the state in facilitating education and employment through various policies and provisions. It specifically focuses on the changing nature of caste relations and its impact on the scheduled castes with reference to education and changing occupations in the state. Chapter three deals with the exploratory study of the educational pathways of the scheduled caste women administrators. It traces the social background of the participants and their families and explores educational planning and decision-making mediated by social class within these families. It further explores the experiences of participants at different levels of education and place of work. It also looks at the changing contexts and perspectives of the participants after they have achieved their desired careers and their idea of ‘paying back’ to the community. Chapter four presents the conclusion of the study by engaging with the changes that have occurred in the larger context of Tamil Nadu and how it has impacted the scheduled castes’ access to education and government employment.

Chapter 2

Caste, Gender and Education in Tamil Nadu

Introduction

Tamil Nadu is one of the most literate states in India, with a literacy rate of 80.3 per cent according to the 2011 census (Government of India , 2011). It has relatively high human development indicators and also has some of the best public services among all the Indian states. With barely 11 per cent of its population living below poverty line and its per capita income steadily growing at 15 per cent since 2004, Tamil Nadu is better than most large states in the country (Sen and Drèze, 2013). Tamil Nadu's graph of progress is striking because, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the state's official poverty estimates were higher than the all-India figures for both urban and rural areas (ibid). In other words, about half of the state's population was below the Planning Commission's paltry poverty line. The *raison d'être* behind Tamil Nadu's rapid progress post 1980s is that basic facilities such as primary healthcare, school education, mid-day meals, ration cards, drinking water and public transport, has been made available on a "non-discriminatory" basis as far as possible and, in some cases essential services have not only been universalized but are free for all (Sen and Drèze, 2013; Harris and Jeyaranjan 2014). The state also has a comprehensive affirmative action policy with a total of 69 per cent reservation (30% for BC, 20% for MBC, 18% for SC and 1% for ST) in public education and employment, and other provisions such as free textbooks, uniforms, and scholarships for school children belonging to the marginalised sections. The foundation for the rapid progress of the state is seen to have been laid by well-planned state policies, public pressure, and effective functioning of public institutions (Sen and Drèze, 2013). In other words, it is an outcome of a combination of "democratic politics" and "organised public pressure" (ibid).

However, despite meritable state policies, that were also an outcome of social movements in the state, such as the Non-Brahmin movement and the Self Respect movement in early twentieth century, Tamil Nadu continues to witness oppressive caste

relations and caste atrocities. The Scheduled Castes (Dalits) in Tamil Nadu continue to face abominable treatment and some of the worst forms of humiliation and violence at the hands of the dominant non-brahmin castes even today (Pandian, 2013). They are deprived of basic social amenities and are the last to benefit from central and state schemes for the poor, such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), noon-meal programmes, etc. (Heyer 2010). There is substantial literature (Gorringe, 2005; Sen and Drèze, 2013; Vijayabaskar, 2014; Jeyaranjan and Harris, 2014) showing that despite the increasingly modernizing economy, affirmative action policies and state support, the SCs are still overwhelmingly a part of the lowest rungs of the socio-economic hierarchy (Thorat, and Negi, 2005). Harris and Jeyaranjan note, “the strong evidence from the village studies of the continuing exclusion of Dalits, and of women, from better-paying non-agricultural activities; Tamil Nadu still has a long way to go in the achievement of greater social justice” (2014: 22). Therefore, it is in this context, that the following sections in this chapter will look at the ubiquitous role played by caste and gender in accessing various resources, particularly education, and its overall effect on social mobility of the scheduled castes in Tamil Nadu.

Locating Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu

Many sociologists, indologists and social anthropologists have come up with different explanations for the caste system and its continued existence in India. For example, Dumont (1970) insists that the caste system is a pan-Indian phenomenon of a stratified, hierarchical organisation of castes which is founded on the purity-pollution principle. Commenting on the nature of the caste system as grounded in power relations, Harris (1971) notes, it is based on “inequalities arising from differential access to basic resources, uneven and lopsided workloads and consumption standards and asymmetrical redistribution of producer’s surplus” (ibid: 405-6). Viewing the caste system as exploitative rather than a “system of reciprocity”, Mencher (1974a) argues for “bottom-up” perspective to study caste (ibid: 470). She states, “From the vantage point of the people at the lowest end of the scale, caste continues to function as an effective system of economic exploitation” (ibid: 469). There has been considerable controversy and numerous interpretations about the status and position of the scheduled castes in erstwhile

Madras state (now Tamil Nadu) in early days. Mencher (1974) argues that, the status of the ex-untouchables was that of “agrestic” or “field slaves” at the end of eighteenth century, which is the beginning of the British rule in India (ibid: 472).

The caste system in Tamil Nadu is different from that in the northern India, as there are only three major social groups, that is, the Brahmins, the Shudras and the Panchamas (Dalits). Intermediate caste groups such as the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas do not exist within the caste structure of Tamil Nadu (Pandian, 2013)¹. The shudras comprise of sub-castes such as the Mudaliars, Naickers, Reddiars, Chettiars, Vanniyars, Thevars, and Nadars to name a few. They are considered to be ritually lower in status, but have considerable economic, political and numerical strength, and are referred to as the ‘dominant’ castes (Srinivas, 1987). The scheduled castes in Tamil Nadu have been at the mercy of these dominant castes for generation, labouring as *pannaiyals* (permanent labourers) or *padiyals* (hired labourers) in rural areas and daily wage labourers in urban areas (Heyer, 2014; Kapadia 2010). Speaking of the status of the scheduled castes in rural Tamil Nadu, Kumar writes,

“it is clear that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the *pannaiyals* in some Tamil areas were born into servitude. They were born into servitude and died in it. They could not leave their master’s land ... they were not in any way attached to the land but are the property of the individual and may by him be called away” (1965: 42-44).

Post independence, the Constitution of India, abolished the practice of untouchability and formulated the mechanism of affirmative action policy for the upliftment of scheduled castes and tribes, and also to protect them from exploitation by the upper and dominant castes.

The scheduled castes constitute 20 per cent of Tamil Nadu’s population, according to the 2011 census (Government of India , 2011). The Constitution of India, under Article 341, notifies a list of 76 scheduled caste groups in Tamil Nadu. In 2001, out

¹ Even though the Nadars of Tamil Nadu claim for Kshatriya status, on the basis of claiming to be descendents of the royal dynasties of the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas (Pandian, 2013)

of the 76 scheduled caste groups, five groups namely Adi Dravida, Pallan, Paraiyan, Chakkiliyan and Arunthathiyar together constitute 94 per cent of Tamil Nadu's scheduled caste population (Government of India, 2001). Numerically, the Adi-Dravidas are the largest scheduled caste group in the state with a population of 46 per cent, followed by the Pallan (19.2 per cent), Paraiyan (16 per cent), Chakkiliyan (6.6 per cent) and Arunthathiyar (6.5 per cent) (ibid). Arunthathiyar is an umbrella-term comprising the sub-caste groups of Arunthathiyar, Chakkiliyan, Madari, Madiga, Pagadai, Thoti and Adi Andhra (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2010). The term was designated after the state government passed an Act in 2009, stipulating a special reservation of 3 per cent, as part of the 18 per cent reservations for the scheduled castes, exclusively for the Arunthathiyars. This Act is called the 'Tamil Nadu Arunthathiyars (Special Reservation) Act of 2009, for the reservation of seats in educational institutions (including private educational institutions) and for the posts in the services under the state' (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2010). However, the Office of Registrar General of India, which administers the census, does not recognize all of those communities as one. Additionally, 35 scheduled caste groups have population below one thousand in the state. In terms of residence, 70 per cent of the scheduled castes live in rural areas, while 30 per cent live in urban areas. Pallans have the highest proportion of population in rural areas (76 per cent), among the five major scheduled caste groups, followed by the Paraiyans (73 per cent), Adi Dravida (69 per cent), Chakkiliyan (68 per cent) and Arunthathiyar (64 per cent).

The scheduled castes were traditionally considered polluting because they were engaged in occupations that were considered "impure" (Dumont, 1970). Traditionally the Paraiyans (also called Adi Dravida) were engaged in occupations such as "removing the carcasses of dead cattle", and "beating the drum at non-Brahmin funerals" (Mencher, 1974a: 474). The Pallans were largely agricultural labourers who did not possess land of their own and worked in the dominant caste lands (ibid). The Chakkiliyars² traditionally worked as *panayals*, i.e. permanent or tied labour (Heyer, 2010, 2014a). The Chakkiliyars and their families were attached to the dominant castes as labourers. Heyer (2010) also notes that Paraiyans (or Panadis in her study) worked as hired labour as well.

² Alternatively, Arunthathiyar, Sakkili, Madari, Madiga, *et al.* are the names used for Chakkiliyars (Heyer, 2010)

There has been a partial progress in some sections of the scheduled castes such as the Adi-Dravidas, the Paraiyans and the Pallans. In 2001, the rate of literacy among the SCs was 63.2 per cent. However, this is significantly lower than the state literacy rate of 73.5 per cent (Government of India, 2001). Among the SCs of Tamil Nadu, the Paraiyans have the highest rate of literacy (70 per cent), followed by the Adi-Dravida (65.3 per cent), the Pallan (65 per cent) Arunthathiyar (53.7 per cent) and and Chakkiliyar (51 per cent). The rate of literacy for females among the SCs was 53 per cent, which is much lower than the total female literacy rate in the state, which was 64.4 per cent in 2001 (ibid). Among the female literacy rates of the SCs the Adi Dravida record the highest (55.4 per cent) and the Chakkiliyars record the lowest (41 per cent). Nevertheless, the rate of literacy of the SC population in Tamil Nadu has improved significantly through the decades 1991-2011. The rate of literacy among the SCs has increased from 47 per cent in 1991, to 63.2 per cent in 2001 and 73.3 per cent in 2011. The rising rate of literacy indicates that some sections of the SCs are progressing having benefitted from state policies and provisions for education. This has also contributed to decreasing dependency on agriculture on the part of the scheduled castes, and subsequent loosening of control of the dominant castes over the SCs (Heyer, 2014a). The shifting contours of caste relations have led to the movement of SCs into non-traditional and non-rural occupations and also the emergence of Dalit assertion in the state.

Understanding the Changing Contours of Caste and Dalit Assertion in Tamil Nadu

Today any discussion on caste in Tamil Nadu, especially rural Tamil Nadu must begin with acknowledging two crucial aspects shaping the state currently. One “the shifting contours of dependency” of Dalits on the dominant castes and two, “the increasing frequency with which caste norms are confronted” by Dalits in rural areas (Gorringe, 2010: 250). Contrary to early scholars (Dumont, 1970; Moffat, 1979) Dalits no longer accept public humiliation and atrocities perpetrated on them by the dominant castes as their fate (Gorringe, 2010: 250). Several studies establish the determination of Tamil Dalits to escape their ‘traditional’ occupations which they consider to be degrading (Mencher, 1974; Mosse, 1994; Gorringe, 2005; Heyer, 2010, 2014). With the changing economic conditions of the Dalits, many Dalit groups in different parts of the state have

been engaging in 'everyday resistance' (Scott, 1985) by shunning their caste prescribed occupations such as burying the dead, removing carcass of dead cattle, carrying funeral messages, etc. Alternatively they have been borrowing money from moneylenders instead of their dominant caste employers, commuting long distance to urban centers to find work, utilizing government programmes and initiatives, joining social movements, and educating their children, etc. to break the stranglehold of caste (Gorringe, 2005, 2010; Heyer, 2010, 2014, 2014a). While it is true that certain changes were the direct results of state policies and initiatives (Beteille and Srinivas, 1969; Mahar, 1972; Mencher, 1974a), there have been other factors influencing the attitudes of the Dalits. For example, Heyer (2014) reported that the rising aspirations of scheduled caste parents have led to a change in attitudes and priorities particularly regarding education, (even among the most marginalized of the scheduled castes, such as the Chakkiliyars). This has led to a reduction of the preponderance of child labour within this community and has created an environment where education was valued (Heyer, 2010).

Moreover, with the spread of the modern political system, such as the village panchayats and the reservations for scheduled castes in these institutions, particularly women, has led to the increase of freedom and assertion among the scheduled castes in Tamil Nadu (Gorringe, 2005, 2010). The rise of Dalit political parties in Tamil Nadu is yet another source of Dalit assertion in the state. Though there are not many Dalit political parties in the state, the Viduthalai Ciruthaigal Katchi (VCK), which is largely seen as a political party of the Paraiyar and Puthiya Tamilagam, which is a Pallar political party, are the two Dalit political parties that are visibly active in Tamil Nadu. The VCK encourages Dalit assertion in a retaliatory fashion, because they believe, and Gorringe notes, "successive atrocities have fostered a disinclination to trust state intervention or negotiated settlements and cultivated a naive and often counterproductive belief in redemptive violence" (2010: 250). However, scholars also note that the retaliation by Dalits has proved to be inimical to their interests, and has led to invoking disproportionate violence (Deliege 1997; Manikumar 2001). However, the rising aspirations among them is creating a sea-change in varying degrees even among the most marginalised within the Dalit community of Tamil Nadu. For example, Heyer in her study on the Chakkiliyars in Tiruppur observed that as the result of rising educational and

political aspirations, “[Chakkiliyars] are wrenching themselves from their moorings for the first time,” (2000: 3). Therefore, as Gorringe notes, with rapid alternation in priorities, there is a visible shift from “primary focus on immediate income” towards “acquisition of transferable assets such as education” among the scheduled castes of Tamil Nadu (2010: 253).

Education in Tamil Nadu and the Status of the Scheduled Castes

According to the Constitution of India, ‘the state shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children under the age of 14 years, within 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution’.³ Furthermore, the first National Policy on Education (NPE) was passed in 1966, followed by the second, which was passed in 1986. The former emphasized on compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years, as dictated by the Constitution, while simultaneously focusing on equitable education to achieve national integration. Latter focused on a more aggressive pursuance of universal education by removing disparities in education, especially for women, scheduled castes and tribes. The Right to Education Act (RTE) was enacted by the Parliament of India, more than sixty years after the commencement of the Constitution, in 2009.

The early commitment and the responsibility of Tamil Nadu towards education are evident from its numerous state policies and initiatives on education. For example, Kajisa and Palanichamy (2010) note that, not only has Tamil Nadu government been striving for universalizing primary education in the state from as early as 1950s, it has also been providing free school education up to secondary level since 1964 and free higher secondary education since 1978. As seen in table 2.1, the literacy rate of Tamil Nadu has been significantly higher in comparison with All-India rates over the decades (1961-2011). In 2011 it was 80.33 per cent with 86.77 per cent for males and 73.44 per cent for females. In terms of gender-gap in literacy, Tamil Nadu continues to have a gap of more than 13 percentage points between male-female literacy rates in 2011, as compared to the All-India gender-gap of 16 percentage points. However, the rate of

³ This was enshrined in the Constitution of India (1950) in Article 45 as part of the Directive Principles of State Policy. In 2002 under the 86th Constitutional Amendment it was included under Article 21A and to provide free and compulsory education to children from six to fourteen years of age, and to give effect to the same the Right to Education Act was promulgated in 2009.

literacy among females in Tamil Nadu has recorded a sharp increase in 2001 (64.4 per cent), from the previous decade 1991 (51.3 per cent).

Table 2.1 Decadal Trends in Literacy Rate for All-India and Tamil Nadu (1961-2011)

Year	Persons (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)
All-India			
1961	28.3	40.4	15.3
1971	34.5	45.9	22.0
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3
2001	65.4	79.6	54.3
2011	73.0	80.9	64.6
Tamil Nadu			
1961	36.4	51.6	21.1
1971	45.4	59.5	30.9
1981	54.4	68.1	40.4
1991	62.7	73.1	51.3
2001	73.5	82.3	64.4
2011	80.3	86.8	73.4

Source: Directorate of Census Operation, Tamil Nadu

The gross enrolment ratio (GER), provides us with a nuanced picture of achievement at different levels of education. The following tables 2.2 and 2.3 shows the Gross Enrolment Ratio of different social groups in India and Tamil Nadu at various levels of education. As seen in table 2.2 in 2014, the All-India GER was 97 per cent for elementary education, 78 per cent for secondary education and 27 per cent for higher

education. In contrast, the total GER for Tamil Nadu in 2014 was 96 per cent for elementary education, 95 per cent for secondary education and 43 per cent for higher education (table 2.3). Tamil Nadu records significantly higher rates of GER at the secondary and higher levels of education.

For social groups the GER varies at different levels of education. For example, at the All-India level the OBCs have a GER of 97 per cent in elementary education, 76 per cent in secondary education and 26 per cent in higher education. On the contrary in Tamil Nadu, the GER of OBCs was 95 per cent in elementary education, 100.2 per cent in secondary education and, 47.2 per cent in higher education. Here again, Tamil Nadu shows considerably high rates of GER in secondary and higher education among OBCs, in comparison with the All-India figures.

In Tamil Nadu, the GER for SCs in elementary education was 97 percent. In secondary education it was 84 per cent, and in higher education in was 31 per cent. The GER in Tamil Nadu for SCs at different levels of education is much higher in comparison with the All-India GER for SCs (see Table 2.2). Nevertheless, among SCs a considerable decline can be observed in the rates of GER at higher levels of education, particularly in higher education. This indicates that there is high drop-outs at secondary and higher education. Interestingly, the GER for SC girls in secondary and higher education in Tamil Nadu is 96 per cent and 34 per cent, which is higher than the SCs boys in Tamil Nadu.

The All-India GER for Others at all levels of education is the highest among all the social groups with 99.5 per cent in elementary education, 88.5 per cent in secondary education and 37 per cent in higher education. In Tamil Nadu, the total GER of 'Others' in secondary education is 77 per cent, and is 48 per cent in higher education, the highest among all the social groups in the state. It must be the remembered that the 'Others' consist of the non-SC/ST/OBC categories, which accounts to less than 3 per cent of the state's population. It is significant that OBCs representation in higher education is 47.2 per cent, which is only marginally lower than that of 'Others' in the state.

Table 2.2 Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at Different levels of Education in India (2014)

Levels of Education	SC			ST			OBC			Others(Non SC/ST/OBC)			Total		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Elementary	97.9	93.4	95.8	97.1	94.9	96.1	98.0	95.6	96.9	99.9	98.9	99.5	98.4	95.9	97.2
Secondary	71.1	75.5	73.1	69.7	65.6	67.8	77.5	74.6	76.2	92.3	84.3	88.5	79.1	76.4	77.9
Higher	21.9	18.2	20.1	17.4	13.0	15.2	29.6	23.1	26.5	37.9	35.4	36.7	29.2	24.4	26.9

Source: NSSO, 71st Round, 2014.

Note: (Elementary= primary and middle level, Secondary= secondary and higher secondary level, Higher= graduate and above level)

Table 2.3 Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at Different levels of Education in Tamil Nadu (2014)

Levels of Education	SC			ST			OBC			Others (Non SC/ST/OBC)			Total		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Elementary	99.2	95.3	97.3	105.0	75.5	90.1	97.9	92.8	95.3	130.4	105.8	121.2	98.9	93.4	96.2
Secondary	75.7	96.1	84.4	95.6	90.1	91.4	93.5	108.8	100.2	67.9	104.4	77.6	87.3	104.4	94.8
Higher	28.5	33.7	31.1	54.6	4.0	34.3	48.1	46.2	47.2	52.4	43.9	47.7	42.8	42.4	42.6

Source: NSSO, 71st Round, 2014.

Note: (Elementary= primary and middle level, Secondary= secondary and higher secondary level, Higher= graduate and above level)

There are considerable variations within the SC groups in terms of educational attainment in Tamil Nadu. As seen earlier, five major SC sub-caste groups constitute 94 per cent of the total SC population in Tamil Nadu. What can be seen from table 2.4 is that 17.4 per cent of the SC population are matriculates, while 2.7 per cent are graduates and above. The percentage of population with higher levels of education falls sharply from primary to graduation. Table 2.4 shows the levels of educational attainment achieved by these five groups. Around 3 per cent each of Adi Dravida and Pallans, who constitute 45.6 per cent and 19.2 per cent respectively of the total SC population in the state have attained graduation and above.

The Chakkiliyan and the Arunthathiyars who constitute 6.6 per cent and 6.5 per cent respectively, of the total SC population in the state, have the lowest percentage (0.9 per cent and 0.7 per cent respectively) of their population who are graduates and above. They have the highest percentage of population at below primary level with 26 per cent and 24 per cent respectively and 34 per cent each at primary level among the five major groups. The decline in educational attainment of these groups suggests that drop-out rates increase sharply from primary level onwards and continues to rise with subsequent levels of education.

Studies suggest that one of the important reasons for higher educational attainment among the Paraiyars and Adi Dravida is their access to occupations outside agriculture (Harris and Jeyaranjan, 2014). Heyer however carried out longitudinal studies in villages near Tiruppur. She found that the Chakkiliyars who were agricultural labourers had low levels of education in 1981-82, when there was a preponderance of child labour among them (Heyer, 2010, 2014). Only one Chakkiliyar had passed SSLC in 1985 in her study-villages. However by 1996 majority of the Chakkiliyar children were in schools, including the girls. She notes one exceptional case of a Pannadi who was peon in the Forest Department in 1996 and hence prominent in the village. The studies reveal that a minuscule percentage of scheduled castes in the villages were accessing secondary and higher secondary education, and virtually none had accessed higher education between 1980s-90s.

Table 2.4 Educational Levels Attained by Major SC groups in Tamil Nadu (2011)

Name/ Level of Education	Population of Sub-caste	Literates	Below Primary	Primary	Middle	Matric/Secondary/Intermediate	Technical and Non-Technical Diploma	Graduate and above
All SCs	19.0	9.1	19.9	31.9	18.4	17.4	0.6	2.7
Adi Dravida	45.6	6.6	19.0	31.7	19.8	19.2	0.6	3.0
Pallan	19.2	10.7	19.3	31.9	17.7	16.5	0.7	3.0
Paraiyan	15.7	11.2	19.4	31.3	18.0	16.8	0.6	2.8
Chakkiliyan	6.6	12.7	25.7	34.1	15.5	10.8	0.3	0.9
Arunthat hiyar	6.5	10.5	23.6	34.0	16.1	13.5	0.5	0.7

Source: Census of India, 2001

As mentioned earlier, the state of Tamil Nadu has been proactive in its goal of enabling access to education for all social groups, particularly in rural areas. Nevertheless, in terms of availability and access, the spread of schools appears to be uneven in the state, especially for secondary and higher secondary education (Duraismy, 2001). According to the 6th All India Educational Survey (1998-1999), in Tamil Nadu 99.5 per cent of rural habitations have access to primary schools within 1 kilometer of their habitat. However, only 35 per cent of rural habitations have access to secondary schools and 32 percent have access to higher secondary schools up to 2 kilometers of their habitats (but not within it) respectively. Duraismy observed that, “girls tend to drop out beyond elementary level of education because higher levels of schooling are not located within accessible distances, and in general there is a resistance on the part of the parents to

sending girls over long distances to schools” (2001: 222). She also points out that the narrowing of gender difference from 1981 onwards indicates improved access to secondary schools.

Other studies also show that the location and the distance of the school from the habitat determine access to higher levels of schooling. Majumdar and Vaidyanathan (1994) studied the variations in educational performance in the villages of North Arcot and South Arcot, based on the availability of facilities. They noted that only a trifling proportion of villages in the two districts have middle or high schools (2.7 and 6.3 per cent respectively). Their study establishes a positive relationship between accessible educational facilities and literacy performance, i.e. villages having primary schools had better literacy achievements than the ones having none (ibid: 2296). Similarly, villages having secondary or higher secondary schools are more impressive literacy levels than those with only primary schools. Additionally, they find that gender disparity is higher in villages with no or inadequate educational facilities. Hence, they conclude that “accessible facilities make a difference in terms of educational performance, particularly for girls, put simply higher the access to facilities, better the literacy performance and lesser the sex disparity” (ibid: 2297). Duraisamy (2001) in her study on access to schooling in the districts of North Arcot and Dharmapuri also reported that “locational access, measured by distance to the school, emerges as significant determinant of the schooling of children, and particularly has a strong depressing effect on the education of girls” (ibid: 252).

Apart from school provisions, state policies on education are seen to play a major role in widening the access to education, particularly for the marginalised communities. Tamil Nadu has pioneered various schemes and programmes to enhance enrolment in elementary education. For example, the earliest Mid-day Meal Programme was introduced by late Chief Minister Dr. K. Kamaraj in 1956 for school children throughout Tamil Nadu, to increase the enrolment of children in primary schools and simultaneously reduce the drop-out rates (Rajan and Jayakumar, 1992). Later, in 1982 M. G. Ramachandran (MGR), late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu introduced the ‘Puratchi Thalaivar MGR Nutritious Noon-Meal Programme’, also known as the Chief Minister’s

Nutritious Noon Meal Programme (CMNNMP). It was initially introduced in rural areas for children between the age-group 2 to 10 years, and was later extended to include pre-primary and elementary schools in towns and cities all over Tamil Nadu (ibid). The primary objectives of this programme were to eradicate malnutrition in children and promote the goal of universal primary education in the state. Assessing the impact of the CMNNMP, The Indian Express (1985) conducted a survey, according which the districts of North and South Arcot and Dharmapuri recorded some improvements in enrolment and attendance rates, whereas the districts of Salem, Thanjavur and Madurai recorded a decrease in the number of recipients of the programme. Rajan and Jayakumar's study on the impact of CMNNMP on enrolment, attendance and drop-out rates in primary education in the 1990s in the district of Kanyakumari revealed that the CMNNMP has had a definite impact on the reducing the drop-out rates among girls and boys in primary education (1992: 2377). It is reported that in the late 1990s, there was a significant increase in the overall gross enrolment ratio of the state at both primary and middle levels (Akila, 2004).

Moreover, the state of Tamil Nadu has a slew of several initiatives and schemes to facilitate students in different levels of education in government and government-aided schools. The state has been providing one set of free uniform and textbooks for all students up to 8th standard from 1985-86 onwards, as part of the noon-meal programme. From 2005-06 onwards the state has also been providing free textbooks for all students studying in class 1-12th standard in government and government-aided schools. Free laptops are provided to 11th and 12th standard students from 2011. Free bicycles have been distributed to all students studying in higher secondary level in government and government-aided schools each year from 2011 onwards. From 2011-12 onwards, special cash incentives are given to students to reduce drop-out rates at secondary level of education. Under this scheme, Rs. 1500 for each student in 10th and 11th standard and Rs. 2000 for each student in 12th standard are deposited in Tamil Nadu Power Finance Corporation to be given to them after the completion of their education. Additionally, the Adi Dravida Tribal Welfare Trust provides special incentives for SC girl students, giving students in 1st to 5th standard Rs. 500 per annum and Rs. 1000 for students in classes six and above.

Access to and availability of facilities for education has been influenced by caste identity. For instance, Heyer (2014a) points out that primary education was not accessible to Dalits (the Chakkiliyars) even in the 1980s. Study on the ‘Slater’ villages of Tamil Nadu show that Dalits were prevented from accessing the main village school. Moreover the parents of Dalit children were primarily concerned about their safety in sending them to the village school (Harris, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj, 2010). Also it was not until 2003 that a panchayat union school was finally opened in the *cheri* (ibid). Therefore, the lack of availability and access to education largely tied the Dalits to land-based occupations and blocked opportunities of other non-agricultural and urban occupations

Higher education in Tamil Nadu as shown in table 2.2 (based on NSSO data) is by and large shared equally between males and females. Table 2.4 shows GER from educational institutions collected by All India Survey on Higher Education, which shows greater disparities in higher education. The GER in higher education in Tamil Nadu is 38.2 per cent, which is significantly higher than 20.4 per cent the All-India GER. The GER for SCs in Tamil Nadu is 27.1 per cent and the All-India GER for SCs is 14.5 per cent. Tamil Nadu records considerably a higher rate of GER in comparison with All-India rates. Going by gender, in Tamil Nadu the GER for SCs is almost equally shared between males (28.7 per cent) and females (25.6 per cent), which is not the case with All-India GER rates.

Table 2.5 Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education for All-India and Tamil Nadu
(2011-2012)

Category	All- India			Tamil Nadu		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
All Categories	21.6	18.9	20.4	41.1	35.2	38.2
Scheduled Castes	15.4	13.5	14.5	28.7	25.6	27.1
Scheduled Tribes	12.4	9.2	10.8	34.2	27.9	31.0

Source: AISHE 2011-12, MHRD

The state of Tamil Nadu has introduced several schemes and welfare measures to enable access to higher education, particularly for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The state government through the Adi Dravida Tribal Welfare Trust provides fee concessions such as exemption of special and examination fees for SC/ST girl students studying post-graduation. It also provides special fee concession like application fees and registration fees to SC/ST and SC converted to Christianity to graduate and post-graduate students studying in government and government-aided colleges. The Anna Institute of Management in Chennai provides job-oriented training for SC/ST students who are graduates and have been selected in examinations. They are also given free boarding and lodging during the training period in Chennai. Furthermore, SC girl students belonging to lower income households are encouraged to write the Civil Services examination, and those who clear the Civil Services (Preliminary) are given Rs. 25000 to prepare for Civil Services (Main). The state of Tamil Nadu has announced several schemes and incentives for enabling access to higher education, especially for the SC, ST and the backward communities. Nevertheless, as seen in table 2.3 and 2.5 the share of SCs continues to decline at higher levels of education, particularly in higher education. Especially the share of SC females in higher education is very low.

Despite state provisions and policies on education to ensure wide and easy access by all the sections of the population, some sections continue to remain backward and are not able to reap the benefits of these policies and provisions. The scheduled castes as discussed are disproportionately represented in higher education in the state. Studies have also explored the scheduled castes' experiences of discrimination in institutions of higher education (Wankhede 2013, Weisskopf 2004, Patel, 2014). For example, Weisskopf (2004) notes most SC students in professional and elite universities could not have made it into these institutions, in the absence of reservations. He states, "because they (SCs) barely have access to high quality secondary education or to privately funded workshops and tutorials, all of which contribute to the substantial edge enjoyed by students from relatively well-to-do families" (ibid: 4340). However, he also notes those SC students who make it to these elite institutions tend to increasingly come from "dominant Dalit castes" and "well-off dalit families living in urban areas which enable them to attend private secondary schools" (ibid).

Changing Occupations and Social Mobility

Tamil Nadu is a state that has been gaining prominence for its growing industrialization and urbanization, and as mentioned earlier it is at the forefront with respect to many human development indicators. According to the *Annual Survey of Industries* (ASI) for 2005-06, Tamil Nadu is one of the most industrialised states in the country with a highly diversified economy. It is also one of the urbanised states with numerous towns and cities, and with a high level of connectivity (Harris and Jeyaranjan, 2014). As a result of increasing levels of industrialization and urbanization, many studies on Tamil Nadu, suggest that the state is ‘post-agrarian’, particularly the rural areas (Harris, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj, 2010; 2012; Djurfeldt *et al* 2008). While these studies suggest that the state can no longer be analysed through the categories of peasant/village studies (Harris, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj, 2014: 2).

Table 2.6 Category of Workers in India and Tamil Nadu (2011)

Category	Tamil Nadu Worker Population (%)	
	All Categories	SC
Cultivators	12.9	6.97
Agricultural labourers	29.2	50.38
Household industries workers	4.2	1.90
Other workers	53.7	40.75
Total workers	100	100

Source: Census of India 2011

As seen in table 2.5 in 2011, the share of other workers comprises 54 per cent of total workers in Tamil Nadu, which is significantly higher than the share of all the other categories of workers. The share of agricultural labourers is still considerably high with 29 per cent of the total worker population, though it appears to be declining. In contrast, the percentage of SCs to total workers under the category of agricultural labourers is 50.3 per cent. This shows that SCs continue to be predominantly engaged in agriculture as labourers. The percentage of SCs to total workers under the category of other workers is

41 per cent. This shows that by 2011 there has been a shift from agriculture towards other sources of employment among the SCs of Tamil Nadu.

From 1970s onwards, Tamil Nadu began to evidence changes such as modernization in agriculture, and rapid industrialization in many districts which led to the rise in non-agricultural source of employment in 1990s and early 2000s. Many studies have tracked these changes in Tamil Nadu's rural agrarian societies, transforming them into a dynamic industrialising society. However, these changes were lopsided and did not benefit the scheduled castes as they did the dominant castes, because the SCs continued to be tied to agricultural occupations. (Harris, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj 2010; 2012; Djurfeldt *et al* 2008; Carswell 2013; Guerin *et al* 2014; Heyer 2000, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2014a). For example, districts of Coimbatore and Tiruppur in western Tamil Nadu were highly commercialized, with respect to agriculture, over the period of 1981-82 to 1996 (Heyer 2000a). Given this, the land-owning elite cultivators, "thottam farmers" (Gounder community) had a stronghold over agriculture and the labourers (who were mostly SCs). However, Heyer notes that there was a shift in priorities, on the part of the "thottam farmers" by 1996 when they had invested a majority of their capital into failing agriculture and were faced with an uncertain future with no resources for investing in alternative opportunities. As a result, they were now investing in their sons, particularly in their education, to make it feasible for them to find avenues outside agriculture. However, the SCs who were working as agricultural labourers were still tied to the land and could not access education or non-rural occupations.

Another study by Carswell and DeNeve (2013) also noted that due to the stagnation of agriculture and rise of textile factories in the villages of Tiruppur, there was a subsequent rise in the number of households engaged in non-agricultural activity, along with seasonal migration and pluriactivity. Nevertheless, the SCs of the villages who entered these non-agricultural activities, continued to be on the margins. Heyer who also studied villages in the same region, noted that, Tiruppur was industrialising at fast pace, and was compensating for the decline of agriculture in the region, by giving opportunities to people to shift to non-agricultural employment (Heyer 2010, 2014). For example, in two of Heyer's study-villages in Tiruppur, the households whose primary source of

income was agriculture declined from 77 per cent in 1981-82 to 64 per cent in 1996 and 54 per cent in 2008-09 (2014a: 143). One might have expected these opportunities to have benefited the SCs of the villages as well. However that was not to be and Heyer notes that, “a majority of the SCs were either completely excluded or included only at the margins of the industrial economy” (2010: 225).

Therefore, while ‘post agrarian’ Tamil Nadu was aplenty with non-agricultural opportunities – especially the districts of Coimbatore, Tiruppur and Villupuram which were booming with textile industries and power looms, they did not benefit the SCs, because a most of them continued to languish in agricultural work, and barely had access to non-agricultural jobs. However, Heyer (2010) finds that these opportunities were mainly restricted to people higher up the caste ladder, and did not include the SCs. As a result, a large number of dominant castes moved on to non-agricultural activities, while a substantial population of SCs continued to work as agricultural labourers (ibid: 225-227). For example, Heyer notes that in 1981-82, 98 per cent of SCs were employed as agricultural labourers, while only 2 per cent were employed in rural non-agricultural activities and literally none in urban non-agricultural activities (2010: 235). Even by 1996, Heyer observed that, the two main SC groups (Pannadis and Chakkiliyars)⁴ of the village were still overwhelmingly employed as agricultural labourers, constituting 61 and 77 per cent respectively and continued to be under-represented in non-agricultural activities. In 1996, only 34 per cent of SCs were employed in rural non-agricultural activities and 28 per cent in urban non-agricultural activities (ibid). Substantiating, Heyer’s observations, Carswell (2013) also finds that in the villages of Tiruppur, agricultural labour is heavily dominated by Dalits because they are excluded from better paying non-agricultural labouring jobs.

Even among the SC groups there were variations with respect to the nature of non-agricultural activities they were engaged in. Heyer notes that, a majority of the Chakkiliyars by the late 1990s had moved into non-rural agricultural activities had shifted to marginal activities such as “firewood cutting”, “coconut leaf plaiting”, “chappal repairing”, whereas the Pannadis who found rural non-agricultural employment moved

⁴ Pannadis are Parayars (Adi Dravida) and the Chakkiliyars are part of the Arunthathiya community in Tamil Nadu.

into services and trade (Heyer 2010: 234). Similarly, Carswell (2013) also notes that, the Matharis (Chakkliyors) depended more heavily on agricultural work, than the Adi-Dravidas, who have been more mobile and have been able to access education and urban employment. In other words, some sub-caste groups who were able to access education and urban occupations attained higher levels of education (as seen in table 2.4) and also entered lower levels in government services (Heyer 2010, Kapadia 2010).

With respect to women, their work participation in the labour force was largely restricted to agricultural work. Nevertheless, women from different castes were positioned differently. For example, Heyer's study mentioned earlier that in 1996 a significant number of Dalit women (74 per cent) still worked as agricultural labourers, whereas a fewer non Dalit women (13 per cent) worked as agricultural labourers (Heyer, 2014: 217-219). By 2008-09, both Dalit and non Dalit women were employed in manufacturing, however, the number of Dalit women working in manufacturing was much lower when compared to non Dalit women (ibid). Heyer notes the difference between Dalit and non-Dalit women in terms of their labour participation rates (56.2 per cent and 52.4 per cent respectively) is not very huge as one might have expected, because what counted as labour force participation for Dalit women was agricultural and other waged work. But for non-Dalit women, it was primarily work in the household production (ibid: 218). It is important to note that women belonging to the dominant caste were able to access non-agricultural jobs such as working in the textile factories, power looms and shoe factories easily, and was also considered more 'prestigious' than agricultural work. For example, Harris and his co-authors note that, the Vanniyar girls working at a shoe factory in Dusi (a Slater village), find prestige in doing 'company work' (Harris and Jeyaranjan, 2014: 11). 'Company work' was seen as a level above from backbreaking agriculture labour. Similarly, Carswell (2013) also notes that for the women even though the work in the power looms was grueling, it was considered to be 'sophisticated', and a step-up from agricultural work – giving it a cultural significance. In addition to the changing nature of work, Heyer also notes that there was a withdrawal of women from labour force participation in late 1990s and early 2000s (Heyer, 2010). Withdrawal from work was observed to be higher among the non-Dalit women, who

were now contributing to the household production. However, from late 1990s onwards, Dalit women also started withdrawing from work (ibid).

As seen before, with the emergence of industrialization in different districts of Tamil Nadu, the nature of occupations is shifting from largely rural agricultural based occupations towards non-agricultural, urban based occupations. This shift in the economy has largely benefitted the dominant castes, who were able to access these opportunities by the virtue of their economic status and political power in the state. The scheduled castes were largely excluded or remained mainly on the margins of the economy when accessing these occupations. The access to non-agricultural and urban-based occupations, were further complicated by caste-based segmentation within the labour market. For example, Carswell (2013) notes that caste-based labour market segmentation debilitates the Dalits from benefiting from new and emerging opportunities. Substantiating Carswell's observations, Kapadia (2010) also notes that the informal labour markets of Chennai that offer higher wages, such as the construction industry, embroidery units, are monopolised by the dominant castes. For example, construction work which is comparatively well paid, in comparison with other lowly paid jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy, is largely dominated by the Vanniyars, and there were hardly any Dalits in this line of work (ibid: 274).

Furthermore, caste has an even encumbering effect on women who are part of the informal labour economy, particularly scheduled caste women. Kapadia's (2010) study also reveals that there is high incidence of caste discrimination in the informal economy, making caste "a sophisticated economic and political weapon" (ibid: 272). For example, Kapadia notes, all the women workers in the embroidery export units (again is a relatively well paying source of employment) belonged to the dominant castes and Dalit women were nowhere to be seen. But domestic service, which is paid very low and is regarded to have a very low status, was seen to be largely a Dalit women preserve (ibid: 274). Documenting these observations Kapadia notes, that caste based stratification of occupations is evident in urban low-wage economy, signaling obstacles for Dalits, particularly women living in urban areas in Tamil Nadu.

While a predominant percentage of SCs continue to be engaged as agricultural labourers (see table 2.6), studies have shown that there is a small percentage that is shifting towards non-agricultural urban based occupations. This is evident in the share of SCs in other workers, which comprise a range of services including the public/government sector, where affirmative action is crucial for entering these services (see table 2.6). A majority of Tamil Nadu's state programmes, policies and incentives have been to alleviate poverty, promote education and provide employment to the poor. Moreover, specific policies have been tailored to enable marginalized sections such as the scheduled castes access education, particularly higher education and public employment. The reservations for SCs in public education and employment have been specifically devised to increase their representation in higher education and state government services, which are seen as crucial for economic and social mobility. Top positions in government service, such as Class I services in the state bureaucracy are associated with high social status and provides opportunities for upward social mobility. Nevertheless, despite state provisions and policies, only a miniscule percentage of SCs and more so women among them are able to enter these positions in government services.

Table 2.7 Representation of SCs in State Government Services in Tamil Nadu and Central Government Services (2015-2016)

Group Level	Percentage of Representation	
	State Government	Central Government
Group A	7.4	12.26
Group B	13.43	15.94
Group C	15.79	16.97
Group D	29.87	41.02

Source: National Commission for Scheduled Castes

Table 2.7 shows the percentage of representation of SCs in state government services in Tamil Nadu and in central government services. The representation of SCs in Group-A (Class-I) services in Tamil Nadu is conspicuously low at merely 7.4 per cent. Whereas their representation in central government services is 12.26 per cent which is significantly higher than their representation in state services. However, the percentage share of SCs in state services in Group-C and Group-D is 16 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. In central government services it is 17 per cent in Group-C and 40 percent in Group-D. In both state and central services there is a higher concentration of SCs in Group-D when compared to other levels of government services. Studies also point out to the stagnation of scheduled castes in lower and middle-level occupations (Deshpande and Palshikar, 2008). The scheduled castes register upward mobility mainly due to being at the lowest rung of the occupational hierarchy and even a small change from “very low” to “low” results in upward mobility (ibid). What complicates it further is the fact that, “the downward graph of proportion of Dalits engaged in very low occupations is marked by a corresponding rise in the numbers engages in lower and lower middle occupations, making evident the limitation of the upward mobility among the Dalits” (ibid: 68). The lack of gender-wise representation of SCs in state government service for Tamil Nadu impedes the researcher from further analyzing the influence of caste and gender on women in high status occupational positions such as Class I government service.

As mentioned before, reservations in public sector at all levels, enable Dalits to access these occupational positions which are seen to bring economic and social status. In addition to this, reservations in promotions also enable the Dalits to move through the ranks in public employment. However, despite such efforts, one still sees the persisting effects of caste, gender, class of origin in gaining access to education (Desai and Kulkarni 2008) and occupational positions (Kumar, Heath and Heath 2002a, 2002b). Patel (2014) observed that SCs at both higher and lower positions are subjected to “deriding” and “demeaning” comments and use of terms such as “reserved” and “quota” to refers to the persons who fall under the reserved category by their non-SC counterparts (ibid: 186)⁵. Furthermore, she also observed instances of highly prejudiced behaviour of upper and

⁵ This was evidenced during my fieldwork in government offices as will be seen in the next chapter.

middle castes towards their SC colleagues in government offices. She states, “jokes, instances of their inefficiency, their lack of class and culture specific tastes, their subordinates disregard for them are brought up every now and then by way of light entertainment at their cost” (ibid: 191). Corroborating Patel’s observations, Still (2013) also notes that, there are strong feelings of resentment among the caste shaped middle and upper classes towards the affirmative action policies, that bring new entrants (in this case SCs) into these classes, This has led the upper-caste/middle classes to turn inwards to protect their own interests.

Thus over the last 60 years the policy of affirmative action has enabled a small section of Dalit men and a smaller proportion of women to gain salaried employment in the government through reservations in these positions. It is at the behest of affirmative action policies in public education and employment that a minority of educated Dalits to become upwardly mobile and have formed what is called an influential “Dalit middle class” (Ram 1988, Srinivas 2014). The emergence of the Dalit middle class is evidence that these policies are being utilised (albeit by certain sections of the Dalit community) and are able to access these sought after occupational positions that was previously unavailable to them, thereby enabling higher economic status through these occupational positions (ibid). What are the pathways of those who are occupationally mobile and part of the middle class today? What are specific trajectories of scheduled caste women who have achieved high socio-economic status? Were their pathways marked by caste? Are certain spaces and avenues in higher education and occupation continued to be blocked for them because they belong to a particular caste. What are their perspectives on the changing social and educational context for Dalits, especially women and based on their experience of status, dignity and respect. The following chapter explores the social processes and educational pathways of six scheduled caste women who have successfully achieved many heights in their administrative careers.

Chapter 3

Scheduled Caste Women Administrators: Exploring Educational Pathways and Processes

Introduction

The previous chapter described the socio-historical milieu in Tamil Nadu, and the developments that took place in the state in terms of state policies and provisions on affirmative action, education and employment. It specifically discusses the effect of these policies on the scheduled castes in Tamil Nadu, and attempted to draw attention to the situation of scheduled caste (SC) women. This chapter discusses the educational pathways and social mobility processes of six SC women administrators referred to as participants working in Chennai. These are Sarika, Meera, Karuna, Sasi, Brinda and Akila.¹ It especially seeks to study the role played by their respective families, affirmative action and the participants' agency, in facilitating the participants to achieve high status occupations, such as top administrative positions in government services and institutions.

Table 3.1 Profile of the Participants*

Name	Sub-caste	Place of residence	Educational Qualification	Occupation	Educated generation
Brinda	Madiga	Hutti (urban)	MA	Commissioner IRS	First
Sarika	Adi-Dravida (Parayar)	Chennai (urban)	MA	Deputy Chief Personnel officer, Railways	Second
Sasi	Adi-Dravida (Parayar)	Chennai (urban)	BE	Addtl. General Manager (PSU)	Second
Meera	Adi-Dravida (Parayar)	Chennai (urban)	BA, MBA	IAS, TN	Third
Karuna	Valluvan	Thiruvanamalai (urban)	MSc	Deputy Commissioner IRS	Third
Akila	Pallar	Kondaimpettai (rural)	PhD	Associate Professor	First

*Scheduled Caste women administrators

¹ The names of the participants have been changed and the names of their organisations have not been mentioned to protect the identity of the participants and maintain confidentiality. As mentioned in the introduction to the study, snowball sampling has been used to identify the participants.

Social Background of the Women Administrators

All the six participants belong to the scheduled caste community. The term ‘scheduled caste’ has been used and not the term ‘Dalit’ to refer to the caste category of the participants’, because all of them preferred to be addressed by the constitutional term, and not as ‘Dalits’. Five out of the six women administrators, that is, Sarika, Meera, Karuna, Sasi, Brinda are gazetted Class I officers in state and central government services, and Akila is an associate professor at a reputed government college. They belong to sub-castes native to different parts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. For example, Sarika, Meera and Sasi belong to the Adi Dravida community and Karuna and Akila belong to the Valluvan and Pallar community, respectively. The sub-castes of Adi-Dravida, Valluvan and Pallar, as mentioned in the previous chapter are native to Tamil Nadu. Brinda who is originally from Karnataka belongs to the Madiga community. Families of five participants namely Sivagami, Meera, Karuna, Sasi and Brinda were residents of urban areas. Only Akila’s family belonged to a rural area.

It is significant that given the situation of Dalits in Tamil Nadu, the previous generations of all the participants, other than Brinda, had access to economic resources, such as land, property, cattle and government employment. For example, Meera reported that her paternal grandparents were milk vendors who owned cattle. The families of both her maternal grandparents owned land and property. Her maternal grandfather worked in the railways. Similarly, Sasi reported that her maternal grandfather was a government school teacher and Akila’s parents who were agriculturalists by profession also owned land and cattle. These similarities among the participants show that, a majority of the participants belonged to families that were relatively better off economically and were also able to access government employment (Meera and Sasi’s maternal grandfathers), in the earlier generation.

The generation of the grandparents who were largely well-placed economically, enabled the parents’ generation, especially the fathers’, to enter urban occupations. This is clearly seen in the participants’ parents’ educational qualifications and occupational positions (Table 3.2). Five out of the six participants’ fathers’ were employed in different government establishments. Meera’s father was an IAS officer. Karuna’s father was a

Treasury officer with the state government. Sarika's father, who has completed higher education in engineering, was employed as an inspector with the southern railways. Sasi's father was the head master at a government school. Only Akila's father was an agriculturalist, a 'rural' occupation. In most cases, the participants' mothers' were not as equally educated as their spouses. However, Karuna's and Sasi's, mothers' had completed teachers' training and were employed as head-mistress and as a teacher respectively at government schools. Brinda's mother, who is literate, worked as a labourer at a mining company. Akila's mother was the only non-literate. Table 3.2 shows the educational qualifications and occupational positions of the participants' parents.

Table 3.2 Profile of the Parents

Name	Father's education	Father's occupation	Mother's education	Mother's occupation
Brinda	-na-	Labourer/Union leader	Literate	Labourer
Sarika	Bachelors in Engineering (BE)	Inspector, Railways	Literate	Home-maker
Sasi	PUC+Teacher training	School Head Master	PUC+Teacher training	Teacher, government school
Meera	Bachelors in Arts (BA)	IAS, TN	Up to elementary level	Home-maker
Karuna	PUC	Treasury officer, TN govt.	PUC+Teacher training	Head Mistress, government school
Akila	Up to 5 th standard	Agriculturalist	Non-literate	Agriculturalist

Economic conditions and affirmative action alone could not have enabled the parents' generation to access higher education and government employment. Other factors such as migration to urban areas, access to facilities such as SC hostels and dormitories, and the presence of significant persons, have also facilitated their access to higher education and public employment, especially the fathers'. Four out of the six fathers' migrated from rural to urban areas for higher education or occupation. For example Sarika's father, who is originally from Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh, migrated to Thiruvanamalai in Tamil Nadu for higher education. Karuna's parents' left their village

in Krishnagiri and moved to Thiruvannamalai for accessing government employment. Brinda's father migrated from his village in Kerala to Hutti in Karnataka in search of work. Only Akila spent her childhood in the village and she recalled that there was spatial segregation of castes in her village. There were separate streets for the Iyers and Iyengars (Brahmins), the Muthurayars (dominant castes) and the Pallars and Parayars (Dalits). Recalling the festival, she explained that on the last day, the temple elephant was taken on a circumambulation ("oorvalam") of the village. However, it was not taken to the streets of the Pallars and the Parayars because they were considered to be polluted ("theet"). Describing the annual village festival, she said,

"On the last day of the festival, the temple elephant is decorated with jewels, flowers, turmeric, sandalwood paste and vermillion and is taken on a 'oorvalam'. It is first taken to the Brahmins' street, then to the Muthurayars', but it does not enter the Pallars and Parayars' streets because our streets were considered 'theet'."

Fathers' of Sarika and Sasi received timely help from significant persons who were not part of the family. Sarika's father's college education was funded by a MLA in Thiruvannamalai. Sasi's father was not allowed to study further by the upper-caste people in his village. He was aided by his teacher who took him to Coimbatore for further studies. In Coimbatore, his education was funded by a dominant caste person, who was also the founder of the hostel he stayed in. Sasi says,

"Though my father was good in studies, the upper caste people in his village did not let him study further. One of his teacher's from the village, took him to Coimbatore to pursue his education. My father then joined a school run by G.T. Naidu and lived in a hostel founded by Masilamani Mudhaliar, who also sponsored his higher education."

In both Sarika's and Sasi's fathers' cases, the presence of timely help from these significant persons, made all the difference in their accessing higher levels of education. It is important to note that, in the participants' fathers' generations, these significant

persons were located outside the family. In contrast, Meera's father's higher education was facilitated by his parents. Meera's father was able to access higher education relatively much easier when compared to others because his family had already migrated to Chennai and was able to access Adi-Dravida hostels during the period of his higher education. However, Sarika's father had to migrate to a different place, due to the lack of availability of higher education in his hometown. Whereas Sasi's father had to migrate to Coimbatore because his access to education was blocked by the upper-castes in his village. Only Akila's father lived in a rural area and was engaged in agriculture. As will be shown, the advantages secured by the fathers from receiving education early, is reflected in the participants' generation.

The siblings' of the participants have all completed school education and most of them have completed higher education as well. Out of the thirteen siblings, nine of them have accessed higher education, some even professional courses. For example, both of Sarika's sisters' have completed MBBS and are doctors at government medical colleges in Chennai. Karuna's sister is currently studying MBBS in Coimbatore. Some of them were employed in government services. Akila's sister was a gazetted officer in All India Radio and Brinda's eldest brother recently retired as the Deputy Superintendent of police and another is an advocate. Affirmative action played a crucial role in the siblings accessing higher education and employment. Sarika's sisters' accessed scholarships in higher education and also utilized reservations for accessing public employment. All of Brinda's siblings received scholarships in school and higher education and her brothers' also made use of reservations for securing public employment. Karuna's sister has also utilized reservations for accessing MBBS. Both Akila's siblings accessed scholarships in school, and only her sister accessed reservations for employment. On the contrary, none of Meera's siblings have accessed scholarships in schools, but two of them have used reservations to enter higher education. Among the thirteen siblings, it was noted that, only four elder siblings have not attained higher education.

The educational profile of the siblings' shows that most of them are as equally educated as the participants themselves and a few of them are also employed in government services. This reveals that education was given considerable importance in

all six families. It is interesting to note that, despite differential gender roles within the families, education was not gendered. For example, all the three participants, who had brothers, reported that there were gender role differentiation with regard to distribution of work within the household. The girls were given domestic tasks and the boys were asked to help out with tasks outside of home. However, despite such differentiations, each and every one of the participants reported that, all the siblings were given equal opportunities to access education, especially higher education. For instance, both Sasi and Akila reported that, in their respective families all the siblings were given equal opportunities to pursue higher education; however their respective brothers chose not to pursue it. The inclusive nature of educational decision-making within these six families, where gender is not an impediment in accessing higher levels of education, not only shows the high levels of educational aspirations, but also reveals the significant value for education in these families.

Table 3.3 Profile of the Siblings

Name	Number of Siblings	Educational Qualifications	Occupation
Brinda	2 brothers (both elder); 1 sister (elder)	1 – completed school education 2 – BA. LLB 3 – completed school education (sister)	1-Deputy Superintendent of Police (retired) 2 – Advocate 3 – Clerk
Sarika	2 sisters (elder and younger)	1 – MBBS 2 – MBBS	1 – Doctor 2 – Doctor
Sasi	1 sister* (younger); 1 brother (elder)	1 – M. Ed 2 – B. Sc	1 – Teacher 2 – Middle management, chemical factory
Meera	2 sisters (both elder); 1 brother (younger)	1 – completed school education 2 – MA Counselling 3 – M. Phil (brother)	1 – Home-maker 2 – Home-maker 3 – Business (hosiery)
Karuna	1 sister (younger)	1 – MBBS	– studying –
Akila	1 sister* (elder); 1 brother (elder)	1 – MA Economics 2 – completed school education	1 – Programme Exec. (gazetted), All India Radio 2 – Transport mechanic

* Passed away

Educational Pathways and Processes

As seen earlier, the role of education was exalted in these six families. It is seen as a crucial pathway for upward social mobility and high status by the participants, and elementary education is the first step towards achieving this.

Elementary education

For five out of the six participants early educational decisions such as choice of school, the medium of instruction, choice in second or third language in school, etc. were taken by the father. Only in Brinda's case, her mother being the primary decision-maker took most of Brinda's early educational decisions.

All the participants' had access to elementary education in their immediate locality. Other than Akila, who studied in village school, all the other participants' schools were located in urban areas. Four of them, namely Sarika, Karuna, Sasi and Akila, studied in government or government aided schools. Only Meera and Brinda completed a part of their elementary education in private and convent schools respectively. The medium of instruction was Tamil for the four participants who studied in government/government-aided schools. Meera moved to a private English medium school after completing her 6th standard at a government school, and studied there until she completed 10th standard. Whereas, Brinda moved to a government English medium school after completing her 7th standard at a convent school, and studied there until she completed 10th standard. It was noted that, only two participants, namely, Sasi, and Akila accessed affirmative action via scholarships in elementary education. The Table 3.4 shows the elementary education of the participants.

Table 3.4 Elementary Education* of the Participants

Name of Participant	Type of school	Medium of instruction	Area/ locality
Brinda	Convent(up til 7 th std)/ Government	English	Hutti (semi-urban)
Sarika	Government	Tamil	Chennai (urban)
Sasi	Government-aided	Tamil	Chennai (urban)
Meera	Government/Private	Tamil (until 5 th std)/ English	Chennai (urban)
Karuna	Government	Tamil	Thiruvanamalai (urban)
Akila	Government	Tamil	Thiruvaniaval (rural)

*Elementary education = classes I – VIII

Early educational decisions as mentioned were primarily taken by the parents of all the participants. However for Brinda and Akila, their older siblings were also involved in the decision-making process, along with the parents. As mentioned earlier for five participants the primary decision-maker was the father. Nevertheless the role of the mother was equally important. Mothers' of Karuna and Sasi who were teachers themselves were actively involved in their children's educational decision-making. They also helped the participants academically with home-work and other school tasks. However, some were tacit in their role performance. For example, Sarika's and Meera's mothers' while not being directly involved in the decision-making process, supervised their children's activities, which also included doing home-work and other school-related activities. Meera says, "*our mother stayed with us whenever our father went on transfers or was posted in a different district. She sat with us every day while we did our home-work.*" Here, Meera's mother engaged with her children's education by being with them and supervising their academic activities, such as home-work and other co-curricular activities. Meera's mother was tacitly involved in her children's educational planning.

In both Brinda and Akila's cases, the role played by the older siblings is crucial because, parents lacked secondary and higher education and hence may not have been equipped for making some decisions. For example, Brinda's mother was the primary decision-maker only until Brinda's primary education; subsequently her older brother

took the responsibility of educational decisions for her. Similarly, Akila's older sister was also involved in the decision-making process, especially for matters such as applying for scholarships. They also helped with home-work and other academic activities.

Performance of the all participants in elementary education has been excellent. Brinda, Sasi, and Karuna reported that they were first-rank holders and others were also good in studies. In addition to this, some participants also took part in extra-curricular activities. For example, Sasi reports that she was good in studies and also took part in creative competitions in school. She says, *"In fifth standard I wrote an on-the-spot essay on 'Kalaighnar's Kann Oli Thitam' (Kalaighnar's Vision Aid Programme) and was awarded the first prize, all my teachers and friends appreciated me."* Meera who was very good in Tamil reported that she often took part in speech and elocution competitions in school.

Despite being versatile students, some participants faced difficulties in school, regarding certain subjects and the medium of instruction. For Meera, who had changed to English as medium of instruction in 7th standard, the new language proved to be difficult to cope with initially. This made mathematics also challenging for her. She says, *"Initially I struggled in school because I couldn't understand English and this made studying other subjects difficult, especially mathematics, because it was difficult to comprehend the problems in English."* Meera overcame her difficulty with English with some help from the school principal. She admitted that the school's principal was pleasant woman, who encouraged students to perform well in school. She also helped Meera with learning English and told her she was a "hard-working and competent with great potential." For Meera, the principal's support and words of encouragement helped her overcome her difficulty with English.

In both Sasi and Meera's cases, the significance of 'appreciation' and 'words of encouragement' from teachers and peers is crucial to understanding, how such support bolstered the participants to perform better. For Sasi, winning the competition made her popular among her friends and also gained her appreciation from them. There is immense significance associated with being a 'good student' and being 'popular', because these qualities help create a secular pathway for the participants in school. It also helps them to

be recognized for their achievements and laurels. But most importantly, it helps them shed the stigma associated with being a scheduled caste student in school.

Two of the participants, namely Akila and Brinda specifically reported to having experienced unfair treatment in school, while others did not. For example, Akila reported that she was subjected to unfair treatment based on her caste, by her teacher in 8th standard. She says,

“In 8th standard, I was unfairly not given marks in Maths exam. When I took my paper along with the centum-holder’s paper to ask the teacher the, who was Brahmin by caste, where I had gone wrong, she refused to tell me and asked me to go back and sit quietly.”

Akila it will be recalled, the only participant who studied in a village school, also accessed scholarships. She is the only one who reports of unequal treatment based on caste identity in school. In contrast, Meera, the daughter of an IAS officer, who primarily spent her educational years in Chennai, said she did not experience any form of discrimination in school. She mentioned that her caste identity was not known in school, and was seen as the “collector’s daughter”. She says, *“I was always the collector’s daughter to my classmates and teachers in school.”*

Brinda reports that she was not made the class-monitor in school. She suggests it was gender that was the reason for it. She says, *“despite being the first-rank holder in her class (norm for being the class monitor), I was never made the class monitor, instead the second-rank holder, a boy was made the class monitor.”* Brinda studied in a convent school, which was located in an urban area. She also did not access scholarships in school which could have revealed her caste. Therefore, the unjust treatment experienced by Brinda may be attributed to gender-specific reasons. The nuances in the participants’ experiences must be understood differently, keeping in mind their social and as well as their spatial location.

Accessing affirmative action has been highlighted as a marker of caste by scholars (Wankhede, 2013; Rao, 2013) which often lead to instances of discrimination. For example, Akila reported that when her mother came to her school to collect the

scholarship forms, she was teased by her classmates because of her mother's appearance and her attire. She says, *"My mother was dressed in a yellow sari, covering her shaved head with its pallu, she also wore big earrings on her sagging earlobes."* In Akila's instance, her mother's caste and class identity was manifested through a combination of various factors, such as, physical markers – clothing and attire, and her mother's physical appearance – shaved head, sagging earlobes. Further, she also accessed scholarships. All these different factors are likely to have contributed to revealing her caste and class identity. On completion of elementary education with good academic records, all the participants moved to secondary level of education.

Secondary education

Only two participants', Sarika and Karuna, who resided in urban areas, completed their secondary education in the same school. Others changed schools to access secondary education. Meera who studied in Chennai had changed her school after 10th standard to access a particular subject stream that was not available in her previous school. For Meera, Brinda and Akila, the main reason for changing school was the lack of secondary education in their area of residence. Of those who moved to a different school, except Brinda, it was their fathers' who enrolled them into secondary schools. In Brinda's case, it was her older brother who decided where she went to secondary school. She also started accessing scholarships in secondary education. Table 3.5 shows the secondary education of the participants.

For the three participants who changed schools, namely, Meera, Brinda and Akila, the main reason was the lack of secondary schools in their area of residence. For example, the lack of secondary schools in Hutti made Brinda to move to Gulbarga for secondary education. She later moved to Davanagere to complete her higher secondary education. Brinda's eldest brother moved with her to Gulbarga and Davanagere and remained her guardian up until she completed her higher secondary education.

Table 3.5 Secondary Education of the Participants

Name	Type of school	Medium of instruction	Subject choice in 11 th *	Area/ locality
Brinda	Government/ Private	English	Arts (Economics)	Gulbarga/ Davanagere (urban)
Sarika	Government	Tamil	Science	Chennai (urban)
Sasi	Government- aided	Tamil	Science	Chennai (urban)
Meera	Private	English	Arts (Advanced English)	Chennai (urban)
Karuna	Government	Tamil	Science	Thiruvanamalai (urban)
Akila	Government	Tamil	Science	Thiruvaniaval (rural)

* PUC = Pre-university course

In terms of subject choice in 11th standard four of the participants chose science. Meera and Brinda chose arts. The selection of subjects in secondary education was facilitated by the fathers in some cases, and by older siblings in others. For example, Sarika and Karuna consulted their respective fathers' while choosing their subject stream in 11th standard. Whereas Brinda and Akila consulted their respective older siblings while selecting their subject streams in school. Akila especially sought her eldest sister's help. She said that her sister took active interest in her educational choices and decisions, and she also encouraged her to take science in 11th standard. She says, *“My sister took all my educational decisions in high school. She even bought many books and magazines to help with my studies.”* It is important to note that, the older siblings intervened where the parents of the participants were not able to help. In both Brinda and Akila's cases, their respective parents were not aware of the choices in secondary education.

Meera reported that it was also her decision to take arts, with advanced English as her core subject. She mentioned that she changed schools to study advanced English as the main subject in 11th standard. Her father (an IAS officer) also encouraged her take advanced English in school, to help her prepare for Civil Services examinations in the future. The role of the father is crucial in fostering the educational aspirations and career

ambitions of the participant. Meera's father's educational and occupational status provided her with counsel and guidance in making decisions with regard to higher education and future prospects, which other participants did not have. For Meera, choosing English as her core subject in secondary school was planned decision. She says,

“I chose advanced English because being able to speak and write English effortlessly is a job requirement in IAS, especially for someone from Tamil Nadu. My goal was to become an IAS officer and hence, I consciously planned all my choices accordingly.”

This shows that, Meera had already envisioned her goal of becoming an IAS officer. She also started planning and strategizing early to achieve her career goals. It was noted that the participants' who chose science in 11th standard, mentioned that they chose it because they thought it had better “scope” than arts in terms of future prospects.

Brinda who previously was not subjected to experiences based on caste, reported that in 9th standard when she accessed scholarships she was identified by her caste in school. She says, *“In 9th standard, our class teacher called out the names of all the students who were getting scholarships, to stand up and identify ourselves.”* Brinda admitted that this experience of being identified by her caste, and as someone who needed financial assistance embarrassed her. In contrast, other respondents who did not access scholarships through school, Sarika, Karuna and Meera, did not report experiences of being identified by caste in secondary education.

All the six participants continued to have a good academic record in secondary education as well. Sasi especially has an excellent academic record in school. She was the first-rank holder in the state in the 10th standard public examinations, for which she was felicitated with a cash award from the state. Participants also took part in extra-curricular activities. Karuna, Meera and Sasi report that they participated in many debates, poetry and essay writing competitions and have also won many prizes in school. On completion of secondary education, all the participants moved into higher education in different fields of science, engineering and arts.

Higher education

All the six participants entered different fields of education in college. Sarika and Karuna pursued their under-graduation in science while Meera, Brinda and Akila did so in arts. Sasi chose engineering and continued college education in Chennai. Karuna, Brinda, and Akila had to move to different cities to pursue under-graduation. For example, Karuna left her hometown in Thiruvannamalai to join a college in Thirunelveli, which is one of the southern most districts in the state. Brinda moved to Dharwad and Akila moved to Tiruchirapalli for pursuing higher education.

Table 3.6 Higher Education of the Participants

Name	Under-graduation	Post-graduation	Medium of instruction	Type of college/university	Area/locality
Brinda	BA Economics	MA Economics	English	Private	Dharwar (urban)
Sarika	BSc Botany	MA English (Correspondence)	English	Government	Chennai (urban)
Sasi	BE Electronics and Communication	-na-	English	Government	Chennai (urban)
Meera	BA English	MBA (completed in 2015)	English	Private	Chennai (urban)
Karuna	BSc Agricultural Science	MSc Agricultural Science	English	Government	Thirunelveli/Madurai (urban)
Akila	BA Tamil	MA Tamil, M. Phil Tamil, PhD	English	Private (BA)/Government	Tiruchirapalli (urban)

Enrolment in higher education was facilitated by the fathers' of Sarika, Meera, Karuna and Sasi. For Brinda and Akila it was their respective older siblings whom they turned for advice. Educational qualifications and occupational position of the father was

crucial in determining the participants' educational pathways. For example, Meera's father, an IAS officer, by the virtue of his occupational status, was most aware of the different avenues in higher education and also of different social networks to facilitate Meera's career choices. This is likely to have given Meera and her siblings an edge over the others. Other participants said that their fathers' offered them guidance on educational decisions such as, choice of college, choice of major subject and the medium of instruction in college. On the contrary, Akila's father who was an agriculturalist may not have known about the different options available in higher education. Therefore, Akila's sister who was already employed in central government service at that time, counseled Akila on her educational decisions. Brinda consulted with her older brother while making educational choices in higher education.

A significant change that was reported by four participants on entering higher education is the change of medium of instruction in college. Except Meera and Brinda who had been studying in English medium all through, all the other participants, namely Sarika, Karuna, Sasi and Akila, entered English medium of instruction for the first time in college. Consequently, all of them faced difficulties in coping with the new medium of instruction in college. For example, Sarika chose English as the medium of instruction in college at her father's insistence, because he counseled her that learning English will give her an edge in the job market. However, coping in English medium college was very difficult for her and she initially fared poorly. She says, "*I failed in all my subjects in the quarterly examination of my first year in college, it seemed impossible learn English then.*" Her performance in exam dampened her spirit, but her father continued to encourage her despite it. She gradually learned English by devising strategies to study. For example, she says, "*I studied everyday for a year by keeping both the English textbook and its Tamil translation side-by-side, and when I couldn't understand a word or sentence I byhearted it.*" She also admitted that her teachers in the college helped her by offering to tutor her after class. By the end of her under-graduation, Sarika conversed in English effortlessly. Sasi also faced difficulties in college because of the new medium of instruction. She reports that her father helped her every day after college to learn English and told her that the dictionary was her best friend. For Akila, her eldest sister helped her with learning English in college. Karuna, who also chose to study in English

medium in college, admitted that she wrote down everything the teacher said in class, and sometimes wrote down English words in Tamil when she did not know the spelling for the word, and later referred it in the dictionary.

Knowing English was significant because it was seen as an advantage, which would give the participants an edge over others, especially in securing employment. The role of the father and the siblings as mentors was also crucial in facilitating their efforts to learn English. Nevertheless, most important are the strategies and techniques devised by the participants themselves to learn English. Their efforts in learning English and simultaneously coping with a new medium of instruction in college, displays their struggles and the agency of the participants in overcoming them.

After the completion of under-graduation Karuna, Brinda and Akila moved to different places to continue their higher degrees. Karuna shifted to Madurai for post-graduation, while Brinda joined post-graduation in the same university. Akila moved to a government university and completed her Masters and M.Phil from there. She later enrolled for PhD in a university in Kodaikanal. Two participants, Meera and Sarika completed their post-graduation after marriage and Sasi did not pursue further education.

Affirmative action via reservations and scholarships played a crucial role for access to higher education, for all the participants. All the participants accessed affirmative action through reservations. Sasi, Akila and Brinda continued to access scholarships in college. Sarika began accessing scholarships in college. Scholarships were crucial form of financial support for the participants. For instance, Sarika's family was under immense financial pressure funding her sisters' medical education. Therefore, the scholarship was significant in helping her complete higher education. Brinda and Akila were entirely dependent on scholarships during their period of higher education. Accessing affirmative action made Karuna and Sasi soft-targets for taunts, derogatory remarks and discriminatory practices based on caste, in college. For example, Karuna reported that while doing her Masters, she was specifically targeted by her course director, who was a Vanniyar (OBC) by caste. She was subjected to "vile" and "derogatory" comments by him in college and pointed to his efforts to "set me back". Recalling a particular comment, she says,

“he said, ‘why do you people (SCs) who cannot even afford food, come to study MSc, why don’t you go work instead?’ in front of my classmates and other teachers. I felt extremely humiliated but couldn’t retaliate because he controlled our marks and final results. He tried to set me back academically as much as possible.”

Sasi enrolled into one of the most reputed government engineering colleges in Chennai. However, despite an excellent academic record, she was not given the specialization she chose electronics and communication engineering (ECE). She was instead given civil engineering by her college principal. In protest of what she felt was unjust treatment, Sasi refused to join civil engineering classes and stood outside ECE classroom every day, for a month. When her problem was not resolved even after a month, she approached the student union leader of her college. Chennai (Madras) at that time (1980s) was witnessing mass student mobilizations against the incumbent government led by the late Chief Minister Dr. M.G. Ramachandran, against his decision to shift many colleges from under the aegis of Madras University to Anna University. It was during this time that Sasi’s issue was also made a part of the larger student agenda and presented to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Following this, a student-teacher-parent meeting was called by the CM for the resolution of the issue, and Sasi was accompanied by her father to this meeting. Ultimately her problem was resolved and Sasi was given ECE. Later that Sasi found out that the principal was Mudhaliar (OBC) by caste and was *“dead against SC students.”*

Though there were only a few experiences of discrimination based on caste that were reported, they reveal certain things. Primarily, as also seen in the earlier chapter, due to the affirmative action policy in Tamil Nadu there is a pervasive presence of dominant caste persons in strategic positions of power in different institutions. In both Karuna’s and Sasi’s instances, their respective teacher/principal belonged to the dominant castes, and appeared to be exercising their caste power through their occupational positions to discrimination against scheduled castes, in this case women students. It also reveals the tendencies of the dominant castes to curb the socio-economic progress of scheduled castes. As Pandian (2000) points out, the minimal upward mobility gained by

scheduled castes through affirmative action in education and government posts has led to their decreasing dependency on land-based occupations. This has led to caste conflicts between the scheduled castes and dominant castes in the state, because the former no longer exercises “ideological hegemony” over the latter (ibid: 1).

All the participants completed their higher education with excellent academic records in both under-graduation and post-graduation. For example, Karuna was awarded a merit fellowship for consecutively securing the first-rank for all three years in under-graduation. Brinda was also awarded merit scholarships for her educational achievements in college. After the completion of higher education, the participants entered different occupations in state and central government services.

Accessing High Status Occupations

As seen in the beginning of this chapter, majority of the participants (5/6) in this study are Class-I officers in the state and central government services. The sixth participant, Akila is an associate professor at a reputed government-aided college. The pathways of most of the participants have been strewn with hardships and struggles and in specific cases experiences of discrimination have been reported. All the participants have managed to achieve high status occupational positions in different government organizations/institutions. Support from family and affirmative action via reservations has been two main support systems that enabled the participants to access these occupations. It was noted that various factors determined the access and entry of the participants into government service.

Due to economic hardships some participants had to postpone post-graduation or take up temporary employment to support their families and their siblings’ education. Though their families valued education, some could not continue to support their children’s higher education. Participants such as Sarika and Sasi had to postpone their post-graduation, because they had to find employment to support their families and their younger siblings’ education. Brinda took up temporary teaching jobs after completing post-graduation to support herself while she was preparing for competitive examinations. For a majority of the participants (4/5) entry into government service was through state

and central government competitive exams. Sarika accessed government employment through the state employment exchange. She reported that her father registered her name at the employment exchange, after she completed her under-graduation. Even though she wanted to pursue post-graduation, her family's financial status did not permit it, and hence, had to take up employment to support her family and her sisters' medical education. Sarika joined the southern railways as a clerk and rose through the ranks to the position of a gazetted Class-I officer. Like Sarika, Akila accessed employment by registering at the employment exchange after completing PhD. She reported that she worked in a private college before she received the offer letter for the post of assistant professor from her current college. Akila credits her sister for her success. Her sister encouraged Akila to pursue her PhD, while her family wanted her to get married after post-graduation.

Other participants who got through government service via competitive exams are Meera, Karuna, Sasi and Brinda. The fathers of Meera, Karuna and Sasi were instrumental in facilitating their access to state and central government employment. For example, Meera who successfully qualified both Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) examinations chose TNPSC on the counsel of her father. She also said that her father guided her through the different levels of the examinations. For Karuna UPSC examination happened by accident when she happened to notice a congratulatory poster on her college notice board about a college senior who had cleared the examination. She said that, after seeing the poster, she called a friend in Chennai, who was also preparing for UPSC to find out details for preparation for the examination. Following this, Karuna accompanied by her father moved to Chennai to prepare for the UPSC examination. She joined a government coaching institute, which also provided accommodation. She qualified the examination in her second attempt and was given Indian Revenue Service. She says,

“Even though UPSC happened by accident, I did not give up when she didn't qualify in the interview in my first attempt. I worked very hard and consistently for qualifying it the next year.”

Brinda also qualified Indian Economic Services (IES) and Karnataka state service examination, before qualifying the UPSC examination. To aid her career ambitions, Brinda took up temporary teaching jobs and also registered for PhD in her university to access hostel and library facilities to help prepare for the examinations. In contrast, Meera who is currently an IAS officer, and as mentioned had planned early to become a bureaucrat, said that her aspirations were fostered by her father who was also a bureaucrat. She attributes her success to her father entirely. Meera also reported that she did not take any kind of coaching for UPSC examination and prepared with the help of her father. These resources combined with her middle-class background gave Meera an edge over the other participants.

Sasi, who is an additional general manager at a PSU organization, reported that she took up a teaching job in Coimbatore at a polytechnic college after completing engineering. It was during this time that Sasi also prepared for UPSC and other government exams. Sasi reported that while she was waiting to write the UPSC Main examination, the offer letter for the PSU organization had arrived. Sasi's father advised her to take the job, as it was a reputed company. Conscious planning and strategizing on the part of the participants', as well as support from their families was crucial in achieving their desired goals.

At the work place also, a majority of the participants have reported to having experienced some form of discriminatory behavior by their colleagues or senior officials, especially for accessing reservations. For example, Sarika reported that behind her back, her colleagues often referred to her accessing "*quota*" as the reason for getting promotions. She strongly refutes it by saying that, "*promotions on quota are also given only to people who perform.*" Similarly, Brinda also recollects an incident, where a senior official issued a veiled insult during a conversation they were having. The senior official who was an upper-caste (Reddy) told Brinda in a backhanded way that she had to work to earn a living, whereas that was not the case for him. Participants were subjected to such instances of subtle and veiled taunts at their work place.

Sasi who is in top management position reported that in her organization discrimination against SCs was prevalent in the processes of recruitment and promotions.

She notes that promotions of SC employees are often delayed and many are not promoted after reaching middle management positions. She also shared that she hasn't been offered a promotion in the last six years citing different reasons by the organization's management. Akila, an associate professor by profession reported experiencing discrimination in her college. It was noted that despite her professional achievements – she has published books, articles in reputed journals and magazines; her promotion to the post of professor has been scuttled by the college management. As a result of this she has remained an associate professor for the last eleven years. More importantly, Akila said she was also subjected to taunts and derogatory remarks by her colleagues in the staff room. Akila says,

“I have been called names referring to my caste. They (her colleagues) have used my single status for character assassination, telling my students I have affairs with different men. Despite thirty years of service, I don't have any real friends in this place.

Akila mentioned that she was not included in staff-room conversations and department outings by her colleagues. She also said that she was subjected to “some worst forms of untouchability.”

The participants' experiences of discrimination in reputed government organizations and institutions, and when they occupy high status occupational positions, makes one question, if the pathways of education and government employment are really secular? Further, if it has helped them shed the stigma associated with caste? They have all achieved higher status positions and are socio-economically well placed, but appear to be marked by their caste. Caste appears to be pervasive and marks the processes of mobility. All the women administrators understand the importance of affirmative action in facilitating them to reach their current occupational positions. They reported that reservations have been crucial in helping them access these positions. As seen earlier, affirmative action has played a significant role for all the participants throughout their educational pathways. It is only through the mechanism of affirmative action, were these six participants able to access their respective occupational positions. As also evidenced

in the earlier chapter, reservations are central for scheduled caste persons to access public employment, which otherwise remains unavailable to them.

Changing Contexts and Perspectives

The women administrators who formed a part of this study are today heading families that are in many ways different from those they grew up in. They are themselves highly educated and in important occupational positions. The spouses of the five married participants were also equally well-educated and were employed in government and private services. Akila is only unmarried participant. It is significant that four among the five participants married relatively late in their lives. Only Meera married at the age of 21, but after joining the IAS. It was seen that late marriage was the norm in all the four participants families, as it was reported that siblings of Sarika, Sasi and Brinda also married late. For instance, Sarika says, *“My father postponed my marriage because, I was the only earning member in my family, and I was also supporting my sisters’ medical education.”* It is striking that all four participants reported that their pursuit of higher education was the reason for their late marriages. All the participants married only after completing higher education and were gainfully employed. It is significant to underscore the role played by the family in negotiating participants’ higher education, employment and marriage, as all of them reported that their respective families did not force them to get married, rather insisted that they complete higher education and find employment before getting married. Karuna says, *“My father insisted that I get married only after I was employed. He believed financial independence was crucial for women.”* This shows that education is a valued resource for these families. The value for education embedded in the participants by their families, manifested in their aspirations for their children after marriage. All children except one studied in private English medium schools. Karuna’s four-year old daughter studies in a Tamil medium government school. As seen in Table 3.6 majority of the children have completed higher education in professional courses such as engineering and MBA from private colleges and universities in Chennai. While all the children accessed reservations, none accessed affirmative action for financial support such as, scholarships. It was noted that three participants’ children were employed in the private sector and none in government services. Only Brinda’s daughter is currently

preparing for the UPSC examination. Brinda reported that it was her husband’s “life-long dream” that their daughter become a civil servant like Brinda and himself.

Table 3.7 Profile of the Spouses and Children

Name	Educational qualifications of the spouse	Occupation of the spouse	Number of children	Educational qualifications of the children	Occupation of the children
Brinda	MA	IPS	1 (daughter)	BE	-na-
Sarika	MA	Self-employed	2 (a daughter and a son)	BE, MS (both)	Consultant, IT sector (both)
Sasi	MSc	Joint Secretary (retired)	2 (a daughter and a son)	1 – BE, MS 2 – BE	1 – consultant, IT sector 2 – yet to be employed
Meera	MA	General Manager, PSU	1 (son)	MBA	Financial Analyst in a bank
Karuna	MSc	Banker	1 (daughter)	Lower kindergarten	-na-
Akila	-na-	-na-	-na-	-na-	-na-

Regarding children’s education were taken jointly by the participants and their respective spouses. The participants as mothers have been actively involved in shaping their children’s futures by facilitating their children’s entry into occupations that is largely associated with the ‘new middle-classes’ (Fernandes, 2006). The role played by the participants in their children’s lives is very different from the role played by their mothers. They were now the facilitators of their children’s educational trajectories. They were able to access loans to facilitate their children’s education abroad. A visible shift in terms of socio-economic status is evident from the children’s generation, which is an outcome of the participants’ higher education and occupational positions which directly resulted in the upward social mobility of their families.

While the participants were explicitly involved within their families, they were equally concerned about ‘paying back’ to the community (Naudet, 2008). All the participants were aware of their role as members of the SC community in ‘paying back’. Some of them were already involved in programmes and initiatives targeting social and economic upliftment of SCs, while others expressed their willingness to do something for the community.

Sasi, who has been the President of Women in Public Sector (WIPS) twice, reported that many WIPS Cells have been established in different PSUs under her leadership. She also mentioned that during her tenure as the WIPS President, she addressed the issue of gender inequality in public sectors United Nations Organisations forum. She says,

“Women represent a miniscule percentage in top management and in decision-making roles in PSUs; the share of SC women is negligible. Initiatives need to be taken to bring more women into top management positions.”

She also mentioned that many PSUs lack basic facilities such as clean restrooms and crèches for women, and this affects their productivity at work.

Participants also reported that they were part of the SC/ST associations in their organization. Sarika, as part of the association released a manual on the history of reservation policies for SC/ST in her organization. She says, *“It is important for people to know the history behind reservations and why we require it. We have to educate them from their ignorance.”* She also mentioned that she wanted to build a school for the Adi-Dravida children after her retirement. Sasi set up the SC/ST association in her organization. She said that currently 195 members were part of the organization, even though many choose not to be a part of the association for the fear of being identified as SC. She says, *“SCs are the most affected where promotions and recruitment are concerned. There is a severe backlog on both counts in my organization.”* Meera however did not prefer to be recognised as someone who helps only SCs. She says, *“My father did a lot for the SC employees and because of this he was seen as a ‘pro-Dalit’ officer. I do not*

wish to be tagged like that.” Brinda reported that even though she is “conscious” and “sensitive” towards community issues, she is not proactive enough. She mentioned that she wanted to build a public library in her hometown Hutti, after her retirement.

Participants viewed affirmative action as crucial mechanism for socially uplifting the SC community. Meera says, *“Affirmative action is not for a person alone, it is for the entire community. You scale a particular height and lean in to help those below you to reach the same height as you.”* The participants were acutely aware of the importance of education as the main pathway for achieving high status occupations. Akila, who is also a Tamil feminist writer, said that education made her the person she is today. She has spoken at several public forums about the struggles of scheduled caste women, particularly in higher education. She has also written articles and published books in Tamil on plight of scheduled caste women in the state. She says, *“It is like needles in the eyes of the upper-castes to see the scheduled castes rise, especially the women. They will always try to pull you down, but we shouldn’t give up. It is only my education that has brought me this far.”* By being actively involved in different forums and SC/ST associations in their organizations, the participants have found different ways to ‘pay back’ to the community.

Besides affirmative action, support of the family was extremely vital for enabling the participants’ educational and occupational trajectory. Support from the family has been extremely vital in enabling the participants’ educational and occupational trajectories. The advantages secured from the education of the earlier generations, significantly contributed towards the participants’ unbroken trajectory and helped them reach their desired careers. The individual roles played by the participants’ fathers and older siblings in educational decision-making and planning of their careers are equally important. It is critical to understand that all the participants who are largely a part of the middle-class, consciously planned and strategized their educational pathways to ultimately reach high status occupations, which contributed towards upward social mobility of their respective families.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The study of social mobility is crucial to understand change and continuity in society. Some studies have conceptualised social mobility as upward or downward movement of individuals based on socio-economic status attainment via occupational positions (Giddens, 1991; Kumar, Heath and Heath 2002a, 2002b; Vaid and Heath, 2010). These studies largely view social mobility through the lens of intergenerational mobility, where the 'origin' and 'destination' of individuals are understood in terms of their class positions across generations (Savage, 1997).

One of the main concerns with studying social mobility in this way is that it excludes the social processes and pathways to mobility, and does not take into account the lived reality of the individuals, their planning, and strategies that they devise to become upwardly mobile. The experiential dimension is essential to understanding the operationalisation of social mobility. This is more so in case of Dalits and other marginalised groups. Dalits are one of the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups in India. The low ritual status accorded to them traditionally, has subjected them to different forms of oppression and humiliation for generations. Social mobility, particularly upward social mobility is significant for Dalits, given the possibilities it opens for them to discard the stigma associated with caste identity.

Majority of the mobility studies treat Dalits as a homogeneous category, not taking into account differences mediated by class and gender within this group. Understanding the variations among different Dalit groups will help us comprehend why some groups have managed to become upwardly mobile by accessing state policies and mechanisms, while others were left behind. Apart from class variations, gender is another factor that complicates our perception of this group. Social mobility studies on women are negligible. This is because mobility studies largely focus on intergenerational mobility, and look at it from the perspective of father-son mobility, thereby effectively

sidelining women from these studies. Studies focusing on the social mobility of Dalit women are rare.

Given this context, the present study has focused on exploring the social processes and mobility pathways of six Dalit women administrators in Class-I positions in state and government services located in Chennai. The state of Tamil Nadu was specifically chosen to situate the study because it is one of the large states in India that has performed well in terms of socio-economic development and also has high human development indicators. Moreover, Tamil Nadu is well known for its history of social movements that have addressed issues of social justice and inclusion. Comprehensive policies and provisions available on a non-discrimination basis make it one of the best in terms of public services (Sen and Drèze, 2013). Of these policies and provisions, it is Tamil Nadu's affirmative action policies and state provisions on education are the key factors that set it apart from other states.

The affirmative action policy of Tamil Nadu was designed in view of the large representation of backward (dominant) castes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the state. The state provides reservations in public education and employment for all socially backward and marginalised groups. The backward castes constitute more than 60 per cent of the population are given 50 per cent reservations and the scheduled castes who constitute 20 per cent of the state population are given 18 per cent reservations in state educational institutions and government services. There has also been an extraordinary diversification of employment post the implementation of state welfare schemes and initiatives. Tamil Nadu is a model-state in terms of provision of basic facilities, access to resources and social inclusion, but only on paper.

A closer look at the state of Tamil Nadu focusing on the situation of Dalits in relation to educational and occupational participation reveals a far more complex picture, and questions the positive image of the state. Where education is concerned Tamil Nadu does well in relation to the GER at all levels in relation to India as a whole. However within the state the SC lag behind in relation to the OBC's and the 'Other social groups' (non SC/ST). This is particularly striking in higher education. What is interesting is that gender differences within SC are not so sharp in relation to GER (from table 2.3). Figures

from the All India Higher Education Survey, however suggests that enrolments of SC in relation to the Tamil Nadu state are relatively lower than enrolments of scheduled tribes in the state (from table 2.5). Inter-district disparities are also seen in the state in terms of literacy levels and availability of middle and secondary schools.

Disparities in educational attainment within Dalits were also evidenced. Dalit sub-castes such as Adi-Dravida, Pallan and Paraiyan, who are also groups in numerical, have higher educational attainment levels than the sub-castes of Chakkilyars and Arunthathiyars. Research studies carried out in Tamil Nadu in a number of villages (Heyer, 2014; Carswell, 2013; Harris, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj, 2010) point that caste as a factor has played a key role in constraining access of Dalits to education. Their rural location and occupation as agricultural labourers has also been a major obstacle in accessing education. Moreover, some of Dalit sub-castes who lag behind in schooling and higher education are those who are 'tied' to land as agricultural labour. Studies also show that the dominant castes – the OBCs are the powerful land owning castes in the village and Dalits (such as the Chakkilyars) who are largely attached to them are heavily dependent on the dominant castes, making them economically and socially vulnerable.

Though there has been a shift in occupation away from agriculture in Tamil Nadu, scheduled castes continue to constitute the largest percentage of agricultural labourers, thereby also the poorest (Heyer and Gopal Jayal, 2009). Their predominance in rural and agricultural occupations makes them the last ones to migrate to urban locations thereby by constraining their access to better opportunities. A small percentage is shifting from agricultural occupations to urban occupations, which includes services (as seen in table 2.6). However, what is significant is the relatively poor representation of Dalits in government services. Their proportion in Class-I state services was barely 7 per cent. However their proportion increases at lower levels of service. It will be remembered that the proportion of the SC population is 20 percent and their share in reservations is 18 per cent. The National Commission for SC has pointed to Tamil Nadu as one of the states where the representation of SC in government services is abysmally low, when compared to the dominant backward castes in the state.

Bearing in mind these paradoxes, it was decided to study the educational pathways and social mobility processes of Dalit women who had entered government service. The six Dalit women were from different Dalit sub castes. They were in class-I positions in state and central government services and were working in Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu.

Tracing the social background the participants' families it was seen that the earlier generations of the participants were not engaged in traditional sub-caste occupations or even in agricultural labour. This movement away from their traditional occupations can be attributed to the fact that many of them had access to education and economic resources such as land, property and government employment, in the earlier generations itself, setting them apart from majority of the scheduled caste population in the state. This is particularly important in the context of Tamil Nadu, because even until the 1980s, a large percentage of the scheduled caste population were tied to the land working as bonded labourers for the dominant castes (Heyer, 2014a). Scholars have highlighted that the scheduled castes are among the India's poorest and are continue to be largely engaged in rural and agricultural occupations (Jha, 2007; Heyer and Gopal Jayal, 2009; Harris and Jeyaranjan, 2014). In contrast, the earlier generations of the participants' families had already accessed education and government employment and even had economic resources such as land and property. These advantages secured by the earlier generations put the participants in advantageous positions, thereby facilitating their educational pathways.

The role of significant persons is crucial in the lives of mobile Dalits. The timely presence of significant persons outside the family, in the fathers' generations enabled them to access higher education. The advantages secured in the fathers' generation were carried forward into the next generation. In the participants' generations the fathers' became the facilitators capitalising on the social capital and networks that were an outcome of their education and occupational positions. The locus of the significant persons shifted from outside the family to inside the family in the participants' generation. Scholarly work also points out the role of significant persons. Nambissan (1996) notes the enabling effect significant persons have on facilitating the educational

trajectories of Dalits. These key persons in some way or the other, made possible access to and use of education as a pathway (in fact the only one) to secure occupational and social mobility.

Access to education and economic resources facilitated migration to urban location in earlier generations. It is also significant that none of them were located in districts that were educationally backward; their urban locations enabled their access to middle and secondary levels of education. However, one of the participants resided in a village (and belonged to a minority of Dalit families that owned land and other resources) during her childhood. She provides a glimpse of a partly different trajectory through the village, but she also moved to the town/city for higher levels of education. Thus we can conclude that urban location was a key factor that eased access to secondary education and higher education for the women administrators suggesting that relatively distinct pathways when compared to the general SC community in the state. This points to variations in educational pathways that is influenced by rural residence.

The role of the family was significant in educational planning of the participants. Just as scholars like Drury (1995) and Chopra (2005) have shown, considerable educational planning and strategising happens mainly within the domain of the family among the middle classes. It is significant that in families of all six participants educational decisions were planned at every level by their parents' particularly their fathers as well as older siblings when necessary indicating that families mobilised all the resources at their command to ensure that educational trajectories were 'unbroken'. Gender differences in access to educational opportunities was not characteristic of these families. All the girl children were given equal opportunities to pursue higher education. In that sense the families of the women administrators distinctly shaped their educational and occupational pathways. This again appears relatively unusual in the larger context of the situation of Dalits in Tamil Nadu. As seen earlier, scheduled castes, particularly women lag behind other social groups in terms of their representation in higher education, even in Tamil Nadu.

As mentioned Dalits are not a monolith and there are many intra-community differences in relation to social class and sub-caste. Some of these variations can be seen

even in the trajectories of the six participants. For instance, variations in terms of social class among the fathers of participants led to differential access of the latter to the required economic and cultural resources as well as social capital. For example, the participant whose father was an IAS officer benefitted from the comfortable economic position of the family (she never had to avail of scholarships). Moreover, her father actively planned and strategized her educational choices in order to enable her entry into the IAS. This was not the case for the other participants who had to face many challenges and struggles as they availed education and sought entry into government services.

As seen in the study, all the six participants have had a good academic record throughout school and college. Nambissan (2001) notes in her study that being a ‘good’ student makes one ‘popular’ among their peers, creating an environment of acceptance, thereby helping one shed the stigma associated with caste identity. Education then becomes a symbolic and a secular pathway to success. The participants of the study have also reported similar experiences of garnering popularity in school and college as an outcome of their academic achievements. Moreover, agency displayed by the participants in making educational choices bearing in mind their future career plans was significant. For example, decisions such as choice of subject in 11th standard, subject specialisation in college, working temporary jobs for financial support, were all active strategising on the part of the participants to achieve their desired goals.

The importance of English as a cultural capital was highlighted by all the participants. Learning English was a fundamental part of their educational strategies. They were all aware of the significance of English and its prospects for their future, and therefore invested maximum efforts to learn it. As the participants pointed out they believed that knowing English opened up different avenues and also gave them an edge over others. English was the medium of instruction for all participants in college. Despite their struggles with the language, all of them acknowledged the importance of it, as did their families. Study conducted by Deshpande and Newman (2007) on Dalits and Non-Dalit students studying in different higher education institutions in the country, showed that fluency in English was considered to be significant for qualifying job interviews. It also highlights that Dalit students may have weaker cultural capital in the way of ‘social

skills' and being a good 'fit for the firm' (ibid). The importance of English cannot be overstated and has to be seen as an indispensable resource for the participants in accessing government service, especially central government services.

Affirmative action has been one of the major factors in facilitating access to higher education and government employment. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that it only provides entry into institutions. However upon entering the institutions students from the marginalised communities continue to face economic hardships in paying of fees, buying reading material, etc (Despande, 2011). The participants in the study reported facing economic hardships as well. In the context to Tamil Nadu the role of affirmative action policies in enabling access to government services becomes central as these policies have been specifically crafted bearing in mind the marginalised sections. However, as seen earlier only a minuscule percentage of SC (7.4 per cent) are in Class-I positions in state government services. However, the dominant backward castes (OBC) appeared to be in better positions and have a large representation in higher education in Tamil Nadu (from table 2.3). Equally significant are experiences of conflict and discrimination that were highlighted by some of the participants with dominant caste persons located in strategic positions of power in institutions of higher education and their workplaces.

While the significance of affirmative action cannot be underplayed, other factors such as urban location, social networks and most importantly the agency of the participants is crucial in shaping their educational trajectories. Conscious planning and strategising on the part of the participants has been critical to their achievements. Especially decisions regarding subject choice in school and college were chosen accordingly to help them shape their career paths. While it is important to acknowledge the structural factors, agency of the individual is equally significant.

Participants as individuals played a vital role in shaping their own educational trajectories and maintained class stability by remaining in the middle class. However, the participants as mothers', much different from their own, were actively shaping their children's futures by strategising their educational decisions to help them enter the 'new middle classes' (Fernandes, 2006). By becoming directly involved in helping their children enter into the

new middle class, the participants had become facilitators themselves. However, this movement within class-fractions also raises critical questions such as if the participants are continued to be marked by their caste identity despite becoming a part of the middle class? Have their occupational positions helped them transcend the barrier of caste? Having reached occupations of high status, were they now able to use their positions to acquire respect, dignity and prestige?

What is striking is that along with shaping the pathways for their families and particularly their children's, the participants displayed a strong sense of belonging to their community. Hence the critique that Dalit's who themselves are in privileged positions in the middle classes distance from the members of their own communities does not hold true in the case of the women administrators in this study. The sense of belonging that the SC administrators shared primarily emerges from their understanding that the utilisation of affirmative action is not for an individual alone, but for the overall development of the community. This was exemplified in the participants, who were conscious of 'paying back' to the community. While some were already involved in community programmes and other organisational initiatives for the upliftment of the scheduled castes, others displayed willingness to give something back to the community, when they can.

While carrying out such studies the question did arise of the ability of researchers to be allowed to share the lived experiences of participants especially when they relate to the most marginal groups in Indian society who have suffered from the worst forms of social discrimination and disadvantage because of their caste identity as ex-untouchables. There are epistemological and methodological issues that have been raised for instance by Guru (1995) that the lives of Dalit women cannot be understood by the 'outsider' as the former 'talk differently'. Guru insists that one cannot acquire a Dalit feminist episteme, in the absence of 'lived experiences' as a Dalit woman (ibid). In response to this, Rege has argued for a Dalit feminist standpoint which creates a space for dialectics in the vocalisation of Dalit women's experiences (Rege, 2013). The Dalit feminist standpoint provides an 'incorporative epistemology' and allows for broader engagement with Dalit women's experiences. The 'insider-outsider' debate has been pertinent for this study as well. During the course of the study it was evidenced that the insider status of

the researcher helped her in identifying the participants, and as well as acquiring information and building a rapport with them which was crucial in obtaining the insights that have been discussed. Would this have been possible for the ‘outsider’? In the researcher’s opinion, her own caste location privileged her in gaining access to very personal and often disturbing stories and lived experiences that were being shared for the first time. However regardless of being an insider or an outsider, what is crucial is acquiring a Dalit feminist standpoint that equips one with a theoretical perspective and sensitivity towards understanding and writing about Dalit women’s experiences, which are characterised by multiple systems of oppression.

Exploring the life-stories of Dalit administrators in order to understand the mobility pathways and processes as women belonging to traditionally socially discriminated and educationally disadvantaged Scheduled Castes is at the heart of this study. That they are in high status middle class occupations is what makes the women administrators distinct given the larger relatively abysmal educational and occupational situation of the Dalits in India in general and in this case the state of Tamil Nadu. However while the participants are today in the middle class and in powerful positions, being Dalits or SC has informed their mobility experiences in different ways often impeding but also facilitating their journeys. All of them (except one) were in middle class fractions in the previous generation, but they all have had to access affirmative action in their journeys – some earlier others much later. In other words their caste location (on account of their fathers) has not seamlessly enabled them to transit into the middle class or achieve upward mobility within it. Further caste continues to mark them in their professional lives (the study did not focus on their lived experiences as members of the middle classes today). Significantly while gender did not affect intra familial access to resources and opportunities, it appears to have influenced the experiences of some and the caste-gender intersection has been pointed to in the mobility pathways of some participants. The interplay of structure and agency where Dalit women are concerned also emerges from the research. The structure of caste and in most cases class presented many challenges. But their experiences also reveal the agency of the Dalit women who strove to reach where they presently are. It will also be important to place their journeys alongside the pathways of middle class women from other communities,

for instance the OBCs in Tamil Nadu, and equally important upper caste women in such positions. It will be important to explore these concerns more deeply and with far more time than the present research offered. This is necessary if we are to gain further insights into what appears to be distinctly unique journeys of Dalit women administrators.

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Appendix I

Interview Schedule

Educational Pathways of Scheduled Caste Women Administrators in Chennai: Exploring Caste, Gender and Social Mobility Processes

Social Background

1. What is your native place?
 - 1.1. When and why did you move to Chennai/another city/town?
2. Did this move affect you in any way – or would you say the move was for the better?
3. How were the social relations and environment like in your native place? Would you say caste played a dominant role in these relations?
4. What is your sub caste?
5. How do you view your caste status when compared with other Dalit sub-castes? If you think your caste is better off, why do you think so? If not, why?
6. How would you describe your family's socio-economic status (Occupation) during your childhood? Would you say it has changed since then? If yes, what caused it?
 - 6.1. Would you consider yourself a part or the sole reason for this change?
7. How much do you think social class matters in being able to access resources?
8. Despite being a Dalit, would you say your social class helped or hindered your journey?
 - 8.1. Would you say your social class has changed from that of your father's class?

Family and Community

2. How many members are there in your natal family?
3. Are you the first generation of educated persons from your family? If not what are your parents' educational qualifications?
4. If yes, how did the fact that you were the first-generation learner play out in your family/school/ college/university? If you faced difficulties due to this what were they?
5. Who would you say was the primary decision-maker in the household?

5.1 (If it is the father) what was the role of the mother?

5.2 (if there are siblings) How were decisions regarding distribution of resources within the family negotiated? Did being a girl affect this process of distribution of resources?

5.3 Were there differences in how resources within the family were distributed among male and female siblings?

6. What is the family ethos regarding education? How does your family view education and its role in socio-economic mobility?

Did familial aspirations for education and career paths differ from the individual's aspirations?

Was getting a government employment your decision or the family's? Why government employment?

Would you have chosen a different career path for yourself if given a choice?

7. What were the supports and constraints from the family and wider kin and community? Was there a significant person in your life who helped you in your journey?

Marriage

8. At what age did you get married?
9. Was getting married your decision or your family's?
 - 9.1. If it wasn't for your family, would you have chosen to get married? If not, why?
10. Is your husband from the same caste as yours or was it an inter-caste marriage?

10.1. Are there any cultural differences between you and your husband?

10.2. Do you discuss caste related issues and experiences with your husband?

11. Are you the primary decision maker in your family?

11.1. How much can you take decisions on your own, i.e. would you say your decision making is influenced by your husband (and children) now?

Education – School and Higher Education

1. What school did you go to (English/regional medium, government/private)?

(If regional) Do you think studying in English medium would have made a difference to your education?

Did you (were you able to) access any scholarships in school?

2. Did you reveal your caste identity in school/college?

(if yes) Did your caste status shape your interactions in school/college?

3. Did you experience any discrimination due to your caste identity in these institutions?

Along with your caste, did your gender also shape your interactions in these interactions?

4. Were your friends/peers from the same caste as you or did you have friends outside of your caste?

5. Do you see yourself different from that of your peers? If so, in what way?

Affirmative Action and Community

1. How and when did you know about the affirmative action policies (such as reservations, scholarships, remedial/coaching classes, etc.)?

2. Did you make use of provisions under the affirmative action in educational institutions and entry into employment?

2.1 Did you face any discrimination in this regard?

3. Did the affirmative action policies help you in gaining access to education and employment?

What other changes do you think can be brought to these policies for making them

more accessible?

4. How important were the policies of affirmative action to you in gaining access to education and employment?

4.1 Do you think you could have accessed education and employment without the help of the affirmative action policies?

Agency and Reflections

1. When did you realise the role of caste in your life? Did it have a stigmatising effect on your life/relations? Did it cause any disadvantages for you or create obstacles in your journey?
2. If not what does being a Dalit woman mean to you? Would you consider yourself different from other (upper) caste women?
3. How do you view yourself in comparison to your peers (colleagues, classmates, friends) both Dalits and non-Dalits
4. Do you think being a Dalit from a higher or middle economic class would have made a difference in your journey?
5. Would you refer to your journey from where you were to where you are now as unusual or extraordinary? If so, why do you think so?
6. To which factor/institution/person do you accord utmost significance to in making this journey possible?
7. Higher education is a crucial pathway in achieving high status occupations, such as yours, what do you think about this based on your experiences in school/college/university?
8. Do you think there is something wrong with the educational system as it exists today, in terms of Dalit women's education and their access to it?
9. If you had the power to do so, what are the changes you would bring about based on your experiences in these educational institutions?
10. This journey is a lonely path, a few extraordinary women have beat the odds to get where you are, how do you reflect on this journey? What/who would you say was a major support system, which helped you follow this course?
