

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Higher education is a key tool for India's growth and development, competitiveness and social stability. It plays an important role in economic growth and development of a nation. Education is fundamental to every constituent of the society irrespective of gender, physical, racial, economic, geographical, cultural, or linguistic differences. Higher education system in India experienced a phenomenal change and is recognized as a powerful instrument of socioeconomic advancement of the society and a vehicle for upward social mobility. Higher education in India has witnessed a steep growth trajectory, with India positioning itself as the world's largest higher education system in terms of the number of institutions and second largest in terms of the number of students. In the context of current demographic structure of India where a significant proportion of the population is below 25 years of age, the role of higher education is significant.

The government is targeting to achieve a Gross enrolment rate (GER) of 30 per cent by 2020 which will require an additional enrolment capacity and the 12th five year plan envisages a capacity of 10 million, which is expected to raise the GER from present level of 17.4 per cent to 25.2 per cent in 2017-18 (Annual Status of Higher education of states and UTs in India, 2013, ASHE). Despite efforts, inadequacy in access, inequitable opportunities across different categories, and low quality of education imparted in institutions of higher education and low employability are major hindrances in the progress of country's educational attainment (Deloitte Report, 2013). The overarching goal of a progressive higher education system is to ensure that the education is available uniformly to all concerned and hence imperative to understand higher education system across various social parameters. Distinct disparities exist in GERs in terms of caste, religion, gender, rural-urban status etc. This needs to be addressed to achieve the objective of inclusive growth, to make the society more egalitarian, and harness the potentials for the development of the nation. The representation of Scheduled Caste (SCs) in enrolments in the Indian higher education has remained low over the years and the GER of SCs in higher education is 12.2 per cent (2009-10), which is below the national average and underscores the need to initiate special efforts. Inequality in education or unequal access to education is costly as it results in loss of individual attainment and social welfare. The reservation

policies have played a major role to continue education at the college and university level but however, they have done in large part by significantly lowering the minimum exam scores of SC and ST students to enter universities as compared to scores required by general entry applicants. The lower scores and the less adequate academic preparation are highly correlated with socio-economic status, which increases the challenge faced by the SC or ST students embarking on a higher educational (Weisskopf, 2004) experience.

Even if the higher educational delivery systems were to be expanded, their effectiveness remains challenged without greater gender inclusiveness and the gender gap rankings of educational attainment reflect the scenario (Zahidi, 2005). Voices of concern on girls education in India have periodically figured in both public policy statements (Government of India 1959, 1975, 1988, 2008) as well as in the academic discourses (Mazumdar 1975; Kamat 1976; Ahmad 1979; Chanana 1993, 2000, 2007). The gender bias prevalent in Indian education is deeply entrenched in the socioeconomic and cultural conditions. Poverty, lack of economic resources and traditional roles of girls have restricted the meaningful participation of girls in education. Khan (1993) identifies domestic work, marriage, and parental indifference as reason for repeating of classes and girls dropping out at the upper primary level, reiterating the need to overcome the attitudinal stereotyping. In addition the systemic or structural constraints are larger issues for the girls of the scheduled community especially at the higher level of education.

Higher education is not confined only within the academic institutions but a strong and dynamic influence exists between individuals and their families and, in turn, between families and institutions of higher education. Cultural background arising out of the position in social context along with the social class has a key influence on the educational chances and outcomes. In addition parental characteristics such as parental education, income, and wealth (Conley, 2001) are associated with a higher probability of children attending college, and parental income is associated with greater parental willingness to pay for college (Steelman and Powell, 1991). Parental involvement promotes the college enrolment of underrepresented groups of students and parental involvement is associated with a greater likelihood of aspiration to attend college and actual enrolment (Carbera and

La Nasa, 2000; Horn, 1998; Perna, 2000). Involvement generally refers to parents' management of their adolescents' careers (e.g., helping to select courses for future employability), active assistance such as helping with homework, encouragement of educational goals, and attendance at school events (Muller 1995). The indicators of parental involvement, patterns of parental involvement and factors influencing parental involvement provide a huge body of literature, especially in the Western context. However in the Indian context, it is less addressed and the concept as research interest is gaining importance with changing social situation.

In addition, affordability has now become a key word for policies to help families to afford for education and sustain till the completion of the course. Aspirations also motivate them for better achievements (Sherwood, 1998), as they are based on what they have aspired. Educational aspirations are influenced by family backgrounds, socioeconomic status, living areas and neighborhoods (Stewart et al., 2007). Bourdieu (1973) emphasizes that it is important to understand how individual networks operate and how one can maintain and utilize these relationships overtime. He also highlights that social networks must be constructed and skillfully maintained in order to utilize the resources. Each individual has his/her own network of social ties which expands or contracts with his /her passage through life (Bidart, 2005). Social network of girls accessing higher education and their parents are likely to have profound impact on their educational path.

Over the last few decades, advances in increased access to higher education for many historically underrepresented groups coupled with increased college participation rates among high school graduates has generated an influx of new college students, many of whom are first in their family to attend college. It brings a series of inevitable changes to higher education systems with specific impacts and conditions that vary by location. Student populations not only expand but also become more diverse with access. The society also faces a complete shift in the size and type of family, along with it there is desperate pressure to utilize the educational opportunities for which certain families, caste groups and communities are yet to be prepared. In addition there is a shift from traditional occupations but still it is unclear about the many opportunities available through education.

Hence families have difficulty in understanding, motivating and involving in children's education but it is also an unavoidable phase that they have to encounter. The applicability of 'parental involvement' is a question, especially among the Dalit communities yet it is an important component and facilitator for educational attainment. The policy perspective addresses the macro issues such as enrolment, budgeting, infrastructure etc. while micro issues such as parental involvement, family affordability and awareness about the educational schemes are equally important to engage in the educational discourse.

Higher education is a field where equal access is hard to define, and policies for equalizing access are always controversial (Deshpande and Zacharia, 2013). Reservation quotas were instituted as constitutional safeguards for increasing the representation of socially-excluded communities. However, unfavorable institutional and familial structures continue to make it difficult for students from historically marginalized groups to meaningfully avail legal provisions. The educational access is an important outcome variable at the individual level which reflects the short term achievement but an important step for future mobility. Thus an understanding of the micro level processes of parental involvement, family affordability, awareness about the government educational schemes, social networks of adults, aspiration and access to higher education and the patterns associated with access to higher education seems fit. A few studies have integrated the components in qualitative research though limited research exists in quantitative compilation. Other issues incorporating gender, social networks, and parental engagement etc. are less noticed in Indian literature. Gaining direct insights into the experiences of being Dalit female students accessing higher education is a valuable starting point.

The research problem in a gist is the examination, description and explanation of girls accessing higher education from the Dalit community. The specific objectives of the study are to (a) understand the relationship between personal, familial and schooling factors and access to higher education, (b) know the family affordability and awareness regarding special schemes facilitating higher education towards access to higher education and (c) identify the parental involvement and support networks and its relationship with access to higher education. The research design is largely descriptive in nature while quantification and explanation is attempted to address the issue of access to higher

education. As the research topic is less explained through caste and gender dynamics, it demands both qualitative and quantitative approach to explain the process and mechanism. Indicators were identified to understand the key concepts and a few important indicators which are feasible and appropriate in the cultural context were identified and operationalized for the study. Interview schedule was considered appropriate due to the in-depth nature of questions to examine the underlying causes for enrolment as well as those not accessing higher education (drop outs after school education). The respondents for the study were Dalit women pursuing higher education and women dropped after school education in the age group of 18 to 25 years. A description of secondary data Selected Educational Statistics (SES), Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and University Grants Commission (UGC) Report was carried out to understand the enrolment pattern in higher education at national and state level (Tamil Nadu).

The primary data present study relates to urban and rural regions of Thanjavur district, the western part of Tamil Nadu, India. Thanjavur district is emerging as a higher education centre with several new arts and science colleges, professional colleges and deemed universities providing opportunities for enrolment in higher education and social transaction. The research setting provides a typical context to understand how the Dalit women in transitional societies utilize the facilities. The sample for the study is non-probability in nature and the purposive sampling technique is adopted to draw the sample comprising of 108 respondents who accessed higher education and 52 respondents who dropped after school education. The primary data was collected between August 2014 and January 2015. The data collected were edited, coded and analyzed through SPSS software. Basic descriptive techniques are used to describe associations and correlation and regression were used to explain and interpret the relationship.

India is systematically progressing on the educational front but more emphasis is attributed to schooling rather than higher education. With a huge younger population base, mass enrolment of students in schools and greater proportion of students completing schooling, the demands for higher education in terms of quantity and quality are on the rise. The role of government is noticeably less and private players have taken lead thereby commercializing the education. Under such situations, the economically and socially

deprived communities become the core victims and their chances to enhance the individual and group positions become difficult. The higher education in national and state level is vital to understand the macro social context and its link with micro phenomena. The trends are examined with regard to key indicators like gross enrolment ratio, average enrolment per college/ institution, literacy rates of Scheduled caste by Sex, Urban-Rural distribution etc. The national level data depicts that there is an increase in enrolment of dalits but are still underrepresented in higher education. Despite positive changes, the changes are not consistent and stable.

The availability of higher education institutions and students enrolment has increased in terms of absolute numbers but proportionate increase in accordance with the population is not noticed especially among the Scheduled Castes. The national level public expenditure for higher education is only at 3.6 percent of GDP. The gross enrolment ratio is a measure of access to higher education. Union Territories such as New Delhi, Chandigarh and Puducherry records higher GER due to the migration of students to centrally funded institutions in comparison to backward states like Bihar, Jharkhand etc. Most populous state also has high enrolment. Central government expenditure towards higher education has declined sharply from 1980 onwards. Deceleration of public expenditure is noticed across all states and highest deceleration is noticed in states of Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu due to greater degree of privatization though Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Kerala etc also show deceleration but to a lesser extent. Efforts are required to address the facts that the burden of cost falls on poor and hence it becomes important to know the enrolment of SC students in higher education. Tamil Nadu has higher GER in comparison to national GER and has more number of universities and colleges but dominated by private unaided institutions and two-third of the enrolment is in private institutions. In terms of enrolment the GER of SC is lower than the state's overall GER in higher education while males outnumber females. The share of 18-23 years of age population is about one-tenth of the total population and the average enrolment per college in Tamil Nadu is quite low (Vision, 2023, Government of Tamil Nadu). The share of government colleges and private aided colleges at the national level is quiet high and correspondingly higher enrolment is noticed in government institutions but on the contrary in Tamil Nadu, a greater number of unaided colleges exist. Nearly two-third of the

enrolment occurs in these colleges which make the situation difficult for students of deprived communities to access higher education. The specific gross enrolment ratio in 18-23 years age group shows in comparison to the national level, Tamil Nadu shows a picture of better enrolment for SC females. Lesser female enrolment is noticed beyond graduation and rural females are relatively less enrolled in comparison to the urban counterparts. More males are enrolled in engineering courses and more females are enrolled in medicine but with increasing age women decline in enrolment.

The caste ridden social structure constrains the social and economic progress and the development indicators of SC are not on par with the general category and their position is not different from other states in India. Dalits in Tamil Nadu are largely categorized into Pallars, Pariyars and Chakkiliars while Pallars occupy a superior position among the sub-castes. Dalits have a poor socio-economic background of being wage laborers and land ownership at a minimum. They largely utilize the government welfare measures such as housing, public distribution system, etc. and do not have the economic capacity to seek other channels for additional support. They have distinct cultural traditions and have modernized in limited ways. Respondents who accessed higher education are largely first generation graduates and pursue graduation in Arts and Humanities. A majority are enrolled in government colleges for Arts and Humanities courses and in private colleges for Engineering courses. The profile of the sample depicts that the respondents are in the age group of 18-24 years and the mean age of women who accessed higher education is 20.34 years, while that of drop-outs is 22.63 years. The drop outs are slightly older as immediate drop outs are difficult to be identified. Respondents' accessing higher education largely belong to the second and third birth order while a majority of the drop outs are in the first order of birth. A majority of respondents who accessed higher education belong to the sub caste Parayan while a greater number of drop outs also belong to the same sub caste Parayan and only a small proportion of respondents who accessed higher education are from the Pallan sub caste. There is a numerical dominance of the sub caste Parayan whereas the Pallan sub caste is considered to be socially superior among scheduled castes and Pallars continue to maintain distinct social distance from other scheduled castes.

It is found that a majority of the respondents are in nuclear families but a noticeable proportion among those accessing higher education also live in joint families. The family size appears to be relatively smaller for those accessing higher education compared to the drop outs. Birth order is strongly linked to accessing higher education. First and second born respondents of smaller families have more chance of accessing higher education while later born in larger families have greater access to higher education and the finding supports Hauser and Sewell (1985) finding that the first born daughters get less or no more schooling than later born. A greater proportion of the respondents accessing higher education have relatively higher family income of above Rs. 10,000 per month, while families of drop outs have lesser family income. Parents in higher income brackets more freely endorse and take responsibility for college expenditure than their less financially secure counterparts. Parents especially fathers with better educational qualification place a higher emphasis on parental involvement than their less educated peers. Most of the families live in segregated settlements either through inheritance, purchase or allotment of houses by government. In Indian context, higher education is looked at as a means to earn and improve their livelihood hence many respondents, who are first generation graduates accessing higher education primarily intend to take up a job on completion of a degree.

More than half of the respondents are pursuing Under Graduation in the Arts courses while relatively smaller proportion are enrolled in Science courses and about one tenth of the respondents are pursuing Professional courses. Respondents of Pallan sub caste choose subjects from which they get immediate job opportunities whereas the respondents from Parayan sub caste have chosen subjects which are ranked less in the job market. The choice of the course and college are by and large influenced by the reputation of the course and college in terms of job opportunities, nearness to their place and economic considerations. Family income and availability of parents are also important in choosing the course as it is noted that children of single parent families opt for non-professional courses. Parents with better educational attainment and occupational status tend to enroll their daughters in professional and science courses. Despite having a male sibling, respondents have entered professional and science courses but lesser women with availability of female sibling have enrolled in professional and science courses.

Affordability is a key determinant of access to higher education. Despite governmental support, parents have to spend considerably for higher education through direct and indirect expenses. Better financial positions and interest to afford for the children places the SC children at a higher self-esteem and frees them from the constant pressure of guilt that parents are struggling to pay for their educational expenses. On the other hand, those in lower financial position's express that their education is a burden for their parent's and the feeling is also intensified when the individuals are not in a position to academically perform well as per the expectation of the parents or the requirements of the institution. They constantly negotiate to quit and pressurize themselves to stay on due to the investment. They feel that they are passing through an 'acid test' and a complete learning also do not occur nor have they acquired the necessary employability skills. Hence to understand the familial affordability an index was created through a set of indicators such as financial capacity to spend towards higher education, specifically to get an application, expenditure towards daily commutation, college fees, purchase of books, college wear and food expenses. In addition the availability of sufficient time and physical space are also considered as indicators. A majority of the respondents indicated that their families were in a capacity to afford 'somehow' but also had issues regarding payment of college fees on time, purchase of books and expenses towards food expenses at college. They have direct unmet needs and as a result had poor self-esteem and peer group socialization. About one tenth reported low affordability levels indicating high vulnerability for dropping out during the course of higher education. The quantitative analysis of variables indicates that a majority of the respondents who are in lower age group, those belonging to second and third birth order, those from Parayan subcaste and those from nuclear families reported better familial affordability. Respondents with higher family income, having parents of relatively younger age, higher educational and occupational status also had chances of higher familial affordability. In addition, respondents who studied in urban schools and those who had availed paid tuition during school also reported higher level of family affordability. Children who are first borns, those with lower familial income, having parents with lower educational qualification and occupational position did have a similar advantage and reported low affordability of family. Regression results indicate that family income, parent's education, mother's occupational status, type of school, location of the

school and past effort such as paid tuition and respondent's aspiration are found to have a significant effect on financial input of family towards higher education whether they have high real income or not. Concerns about affordability and access towards higher education have grown among policy makers and have increased our attention to address the issue in higher education institutions (Hellar, 2001). Hence higher income and family affordability are strongly connected to facilitating children to enroll in higher education. Dalit communities with history of oppression are associated with lower socio-economic conditions. Therefore affordability is a significant factor to be understood among the dalit families and their chances to spend on higher education. Jeynes (2002) and others (McNeal, 2001; Hochschild, 2003) report that socio economic status effect enrolment outcomes and the current research findings also support the fact. The educational initiatives are likely to be only partially successful in raising the social standing and economic position of Dalit without a substantial redistribution in material assets or economic growth. It is found that, relatively older respondents (21 years and above), those of later birth order and respondents from Parayan sub caste are more aware of government educational schemes since they have caste association which involves in welfare activities including informational assistance. The study reveals that the socio-economic condition of the family and parental resources has a significant role in Dalit women's access to higher education. First generation respondents reflect concerns with financial security, choice of college and indicate different expectations for their college experience and beyond, and have distinct experiences that serve as obstacles in their path to degree attainment and academic success. However it is found that the respondent first in the family to attend college receive relatively higher level of support from their networks.

Gender also has a significant role in dalit women accessing higher education. Parents consider sons to be more important than daughters because it is easier for them to get a job and support them at a later age. For daughters, in addition to the expenses of their education, parents are more concerned about their safety. Parents feel even if their daughters are not educated they are considered to be settled if they have good married life. Though parents may recognize the responsibility of giving education to their daughters, simultaneously they visualize it as something beyond their means or they set limits on economic sacrifices they are willing to make for female children. Research (Grodsky and

Jones, 2004; Luna De La Rosa, 2006; Tierney and Venegas, 2007) indicate that lower income families perceive higher education to be expensive and unaffordable. Hence financial support from formal sources such as educational scholarship and grants are most expected by the families. In Indian context despite government aid, many are not aware of the schemes and procedures associated with it. The complexity in college admission process, financial aid systems and lack of information about higher education costs are major impediments to access higher education. Limitation in policy remains as they do not reach the neediest among the marginalized group. The central and state governments offer financial support for higher education through many programmes such as free education scheme, scholarship for first generation graduates, post-matric scholarships for SC/ST, PG Indira Gandhi scholarship for single girl children, specific reservation for SC/ST in higher education etc. Respondents awareness towards the schemes indicate that there is a greater awareness regarding schemes for general population of economically weaker sections and first generation learners but are less aware about the special reservation schemes for SC/ST in higher education as well as fellowships for single girl child. Regarding the general schemes, friends and media play an important role in providing information but with regard to SC related fellowship parents, siblings and kin are important source of information. One half reported higher levels of awareness and one fourth reported very low level of awareness regarding the schemes. The respondents were just aware about the various schemes and their eligibility to it but were not clear about the importance and outcome of the schemes. Respondents later in birth order, those from larger families, having parents of relatively younger age, higher educational and occupational status reported having more awareness regarding government educational schemes and programmes facilitating higher education. In addition, those who studied in government schools, those had paid tuition and those who have not shifted their school tend to have more awareness regarding government educational schemes and programmes. It reflects that those keen on having better education and specific aspiration and in affordable positions are aware of more education related schemes and also utilize it. The major source of information for the respondents regarding the government schemes are from friends, father and media while personal social networking plays an important role. Discussions with friends or observing them, parents especially fathers making enquiries regarding the schemes from person's who had availed

it or knowledgeable persons within the community and sufficient publicity through media has facilitated the awareness building measures.

Parental involvement is the degree to which parents dedicate time and energy to the child in a given developmental or educational domain. Parental relationship, parental skills, knowledge and involvement provide the academic leverage that helps students succeed in school and which also facilitates the access to higher education. Parental involvement index is created through a set of indicators related to children's school education such as parent's involvement in school related activities, interaction with class teacher, efforts to understand the scope of the subjects for future educational and occupational opportunities, assist during exams, provide encouragement to perform well, having specific aspirations for children and facilitating overall academic performance. Both respondents who have accessed higher education as well as dropped out (not accessed higher education) retrospectively responded to the parental involvement indicators. Further summative scores are considered for categorizing level of parental involvement. Respondents reveal that parents are more concerned about marks in exams and involve only in the context of exam rather than interaction with school teachers, peer group or respondents interests. The parents do not expand their relationships at school. There is a hesitation to interact and miss out on nuances required to help children utilize the resources. As the parental skills and knowledge regarding the educational requirement are limited among the sample studied, they are unable to provide the academic leverage required. Though it is important as Coleman (1988) and Lopez (1991) have explained, the quality of input from parents towards education is lower in the study. Distinct difference in parental involvement exists between respondents who have accessed higher education and those who have dropped out (not accessed higher education). Respondents who accessed higher education reported receiving higher parental involvement at school level indicating high and medium level for total scores. Among those accessed higher education, relatively younger respondents, later born and those with higher family income depict having greater advantage in parental involvement. Similarly those having studied in urban locales, those availed paid tuition, having greater teacher influence and having specific aspiration also reported higher parental involvement. The findings indicate that the respondent's accessing higher education had relatively higher parental involvement in comparison to those who

have not accessed higher education and fathers are more actively involved. Among the drop outs, parental involvement is relatively less, those with better educated mother's and those with more number of male siblings are reported to have some parental involvement before they dropped out through these involvement did not get translated towards children's sustenance in education as other factors became decisive to drop out. Regression techniques indicate that family income, father's age, status of availed paid tuition and respondents' specific aspiration has a significant effect on parental involvement for those who accessed higher education. Fathers play a significant role in parental involvement while father's income and age facilitates the involvement and thereby has positive association with girl's receiving higher education. Regarding parental involvement, respondents who are later born (order of parity) receive relatively greater level of parental involvement, while among the drop outs the first born reported higher parental involvement especially if there were fewer male siblings in the family. As the sibship size increases, the parents who are in low economic status are unable to provide required attention to all children and hence the performance in school declines and gradually the parental involvement also declines. Research suggests that involving families in orientation programs at schools to emphasize on higher education can facilitate parental support for underrepresented students (Dennis et al., 2005; Lombardi, Murray and Gerdes, 2012). Frequent ways to engage parents such as inviting newsletters, parental websites etc. can facilitate change (Kristic, 2013) but such aspects are not incorporated either at final stages of schooling or at higher education level in the Indian context. The role of parents is highlighted through many studies emphasizing on the positive role of parental involvement in school education and post secondary careers (Redding et al., 2011) and it facilitates the smoother transition to higher education.

Social networks are identified to be the micro social structures of individuals and act as channels to share material resources, information as attributes. Historically Dalit families were residentially segregated and had only homogeneous ties. In a traditional transitional situation when the Dalits are in the process of accessing higher education support networks are required to provide the necessary support which is not otherwise found in the traditional setting. Teachers and peer group are currently providing some respite by giving some information and support but is not adequate. In case of financial

assistance they require more support from the government. Service needs in the form of guidance for choices of courses, academic support etc. are still an unmet need. Based on the needs a set of indicators were consolidated to form the support index. The indicators are encouragement to complete schooling, assistance in choosing course or joining college, financial assistance in joining a college, financial advice or suggestion regarding studies and participation for leisure activities. The social networks ties are relatively small in number and lesser for dropouts regarding support related to school level involvement. Respondents accessing higher education have more of younger ties, other caste ties and better educated ties which are considered to be more heterogeneous. More support is received in form of encouragement but lower in terms of specific advice and financial assistance while the support questions are restricted to only those who accessed higher education. Younger respondents, those in rural regions, those who had schooling in urban locales drafted greater level of support indicating both the need as well as the capacity to draft. Regression findings indicate that the family size and fathers education has significant impact on the number of ties and level of support received. Respondents with smaller families are found to have received more support, which indicates child centeredness and keenness to educate the children which is change noticed among families across categories. Respondents having fathers with better education draft more support. Fathers are the main channels to expand the networks in support of access to higher education for the girl children. Despite some resource in support networks, no major prevalence of resourceful ties exists. Transactions takes place within the existing network which is not adequate in terms of quantity and quality. The individual and familial social capital is limited and demands embedding social setting with potential ties. Educational institutions can act as support centres for various immediate needs of the schedule caste students. In a transitional stage where Dalits are in the process of accessing higher education, support networks provide the buffer support. They are in need of informational, service and financial support and report unmet need in all domains. The networks are smaller in number, have more of younger and kin based ties, but compose of significant proportion of other caste and better educated ties.

Sub-conscious disposition predispose children to value education differently and this impacts educational ambitions and aspirations they have for themselves in terms of

higher education (Fuller, 2011). The study findings also supports Danziger (1983) finding that the adolescents girls are influenced by parental expectation of getting a job. The study to understand aspiration distinguished it as general and specific. General aspiration relates to respondents aspiration of getting a job whereas specific aspiration relates to specific interest jobs like teacher, engineer, Bank manager etc. Family and social environment are also important in shaping attitudes towards education. With increasing age many respondents had specific aspiration. Later born respondent's, those in larger families, those with older parents, father's with better education and those who received extra attention in the form of paid tuition and having the influence of teachers largely report having specific aspiration. Regression techniques identify urban location of schools, history of spending for education on children such as paid tuition and children who are self motivated tend to have specific aspiration. The study findings confirm Bourdieu's (1967), findings that they have internalized and reconciled themselves to the limited opportunities that exist for those without much social capital (Swartz, 1997). Aspirations are formed early in adolescence and for girls it is heavily influenced by gender role socialization, one of the earliest and thus most powerful forms of socialization. The strength of this socialization often creates a narrow, gender-based range of career options (McMahon and Patton, 1997). Aspirations for adolescent girls are influenced by the class background and parental expectations (Poole and Low, 1985). The study finds that the gender role socialization, achievement level at school, familial resources and school environment especially good and constant interaction with children are all factors that influence career choice. The respondents in the age group of 18 to 20 years indicate general aspiration of getting a job but with increasing age a majority report specific aspiration reflecting self realization and career interest. At higher education they have chances to look into a wider world focusing on specific interest. In addition individuals reevaluate their interests and capacities in accordance with the societal opportunities, thus reshaping aspirations in realistic terms. It is also noted that respondents in the third or above birth order of parity have specific aspirations while the first born are driven by general aspiration limiting to getting any good job with decent payment. Girls are faced with a conflict between their future careers and a commitment to marriage and family which supports the findings of Archer (1985) and Card et al. (1980). As stated by Corder and Stephan (1984) girls make decisions about how they will combine family and work

before choosing a career. Due to these conflicts, adolescent girls are convinced with lower prestige careers (and usually more stereotypically feminine) as stated in the studies of Danziger, (1983), Eccles (1985) and Shapiro and Crowley (1982).

Higher education presupposes prior qualification and operates on filtering process and relatively few aspirants reach it (Deshpande, 2013). It is looked up as a legitimate means for sustaining or challenging social order. One half of the respondents who accessed higher education are first generation graduates and hence demands a detail study. A majority are enrolled in Arts and Humanities courses. First generation graduates, those pursuing under graduation and those in Arts and Humanities and those in government colleges also report low level of family affordability, awareness regarding government schemes and low level of parental involvement while they have more of homogenous ties in their network. Student of such background and current educational position are in greater need and support in comparison to others enrolled in higher education. Respondents pursuing Post graduation , those other than first generation graduates, those enrolled for Master of Philosophy and Science courses and those in private colleges report that they are in a relatively better position in comparison but also report receiving low level of support despite their greater need for support as the expenditure is correspondingly high. Regression results indicate younger respondents, those later in birth order, those in joint families, those with better educated mother and those with high parental involvement and those who have shifted school and those who had the influence of teacher report greater advantage in accessing higher education. An analysis by specific enrolment for Arts and Humanities and Science courses indicate that respondents other than first generation learners, those in private colleges, those with better awareness of government schemes and those who have availed paid tuition are largely enrolled in Science courses at a higher education level which demands greater preparation and performance before, during and after joining the course.

The Dalits in villages continue to live in segregated settlements, having their own caste and kin group in the ‘colony’ but many have moved away from traditional occupations and engage in new forms of labor such as painter’s, driver’s and contract laborer’s for agrarian based work while women continue agrarian labor. Many of the

families have older members and the neighborhood does not have greater access to members in higher education or occupation, though distant kin are available who visit villages rarely. Even among other caste members living outside colony, they cannot provide much information as they also have limited members in higher education and they also move out of village for access. In case of girls accessing higher education across all communities they get married quickly on completion of course and move out of the place. Hence networking among those who accessed also becomes difficult. Economically better off families in higher castes send the girls to hostels for higher education. There is a common expression in villages that it is difficult to get alliances for highly educated girls as many of the rural boys do not match the education. Apart from these, the parents feel that the girl's gain greater freedom after education and will not listen to parent's and are likely to get married on their own which may bring dishonor to the family. In addition the investment on the girl's higher education has no returns and after the education also parent's may have earn and spend for the girl's marriage, if it is an arranged marriage. They also indicate that there is no guarantee that they may get a job after education or the earnings are not greatly different from the wage labor, the only difference is that they can work in shade, can be well dressed, there may be no major physical strain. Even if the parents are interested in providing education the children and parents are not highly motivated for they feel studying is difficult, teaching is not good in schools and hence cannot understand when they move on to higher education, they have to move to new places for higher education for which they are reluctant to move as they have few known persons to support and few peers from the school and village come along with them to study, commutation is difficult, frequent buses are not available from villages, the associated transportation cost, have to complete minimum household tasks, have to forgo comfort of sufficient sleep, food, and have to take care of their requirements by self such as washing and ironing their clothes, competition among siblings for scarce resources, parents have to compromise on some of the working days, diversions related to the age, parental problems at home in terms domestic fights, prevalence of more alcoholism, financial deficit, poor housing conditions, neighborhood de motivation, non availability of supportive or knowledgeable networks, lack of formal source of support, lack of access to information through print media or internet etc compound the problem and hence

extricating themselves from such situation which is highly unequal for Dalit, especially women and accessing higher education is difficult. Further the institutional issues such as inequality of treatment, indifference, inadequate academic resource, poor self esteem, need for better academic preparation etc make it difficult for girls to access and continue education in higher education. Only if the prerequisites are met one can discuss about the quality of educational outcome which would fetch them a job worth the effort and their primary intention to take up higher education.

In urban setting the Dalits live in residential areas which are composed of multiple castes but belong to lower class. The housing conditions are poor and the neighborhood is not felt secure. A mixed job profile is noticed among the families and is chaotic most of the time due to varied cultural interactions. The families are interdependent but do not provide the trust required. Familial and neighborhood pressures are quite high but the places are accessible to colleges and peer groups accessing higher education are available. Age related diversions are high but they are more adaptable to manage situations on their own. They report a better self esteem and peer networks are stronger to provide information and support when required. They also have access to caste associations as members are available within the residential community and in case of need they support them. The Parayan caste group has their own association which involves in welfare activities such as providing assistance to students at school as well as at the college level and provides guidelines for applying to jobs. The Parayans of Thanjavur district have become assertive of their identity while the relative numerical strength, proximity to city culture and its dynamics plays an important role. Caste associations are potential group which young Dalits can depend on for information or any emergency support. But such associations are a highly sensitized political group but care should be taken to ensure that students will be benefitted by utilizing welfare activities of the association. The social context described emphasizes the need to have active supportive network which is required for the Dalit students in various aspects from counseling at familial level to the institutional level.

Considering the social structure, personal resources, familial constraints, neighborhood, infrastructural facilities at school, social networks, and higher education facilities, the Dalits especially the Dalit women do not have a favorable environment to

pursue education in general and higher education in particular. Despite these, the general interest among the younger population to study, facilitating factors at the formal level and familial motivation to invest in education of children are positive factors that operate at ground level. Meeting the unmet needs at places of requirement either at schools or higher educational centers including the parents, teacher's peer groups and providing support through trained individuals, teams and programs will provide the required capacity building for the stake holders. Regarding research, further scope remains to understand the institutional environment to remove the psychological and social barriers. Research in Indian context focuses on general aspects of access but further research pertaining to persistence of maximally maintained inequality in term of choice and availability of certain courses and occupationally and socioeconomic mobility that follows remains to be probed. At policy level, refinements in existing policy are required to enhance utilization, such as provide special facilitating centres and ease the formalities.