

CASTE IN CITY: A STUDY OF A RESIDENTIAL SETTLEMENT IN DELHI

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**Caste in City: A Study of a Residential Settlement in Delhi**” is the result of investigation carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Dr. Sawmya Ray. The work has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university/institution for a research degree.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Ms. Rama Devi has prepared the thesis entitled “**Caste in City: A Study of a Residential Settlement in Delhi**” for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The work was carried out under my supervision and in strict conformity with the rules laid down either in whole or in part to any other university/institution for the purpose. It is the result of her investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university/institution for a research degree.

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Sawmya Ray
Supervisor

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I thought writing acknowledgement would be the easiest part of writing a thesis. But as I sit to write this page, realisation dawns upon me that it requires a special craft to express concisely and meaningfully the ways in which people influence an individual and her work. Despite my literary constraints, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the people who in different roles and in their unique ways have contributed in the making of this thesis.

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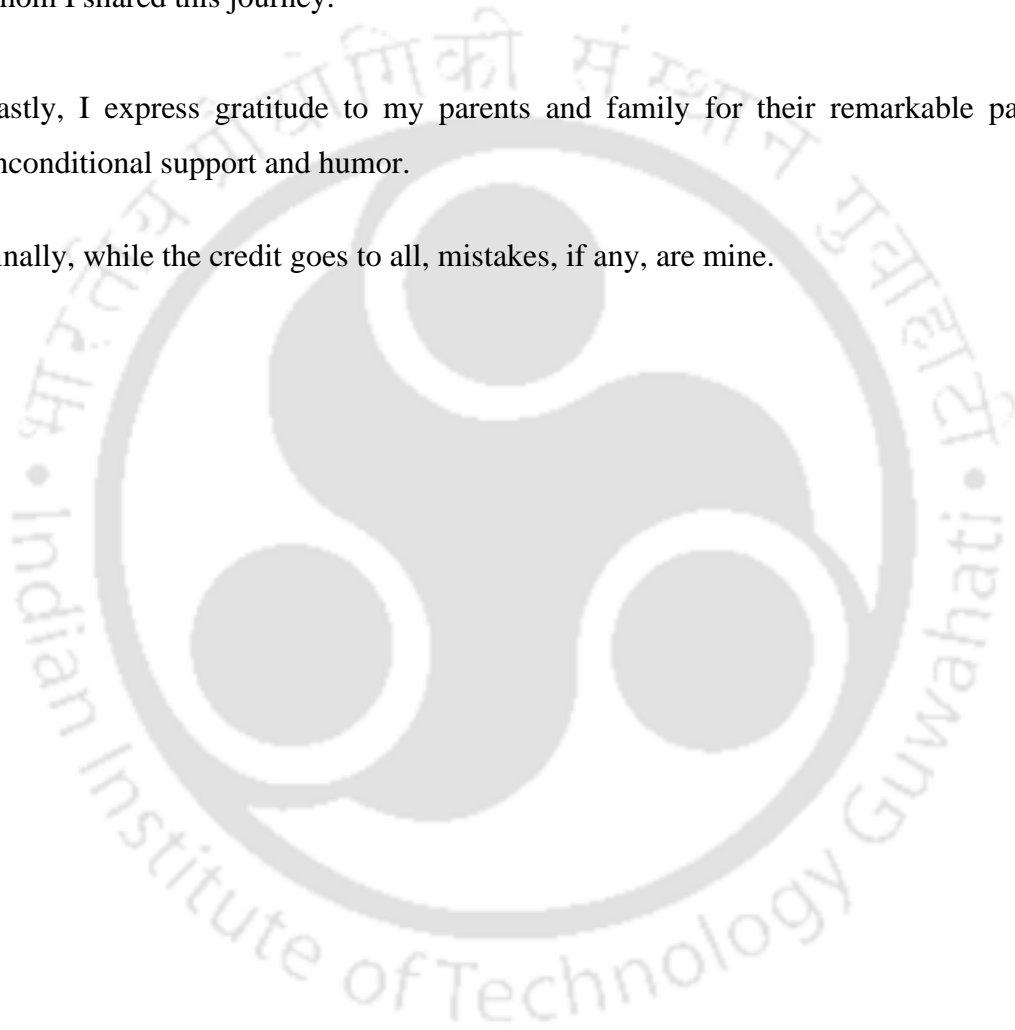
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Abstract

This research attempts to understand the manifestations of caste in an urban context, through a qualitative field study of a residential locality in the city of Delhi. It primarily focuses on Dalits, the members of marginalised castes, who have been residing in Ashanagar for over four decades. It explores various aspects of their lives and seeks to understand the manner in which caste exerts influence on their everyday interactions, experiences, opportunities and economic mobility in the city.

Scholars continue to debate the nature, presence and persistence of caste in contemporary times. Some argue that caste has been de-ritualised and domesticated under the modern conditions, and, as a result it ceases to exert influence on socio-political and economic life. Others, in contrast, underline caste based socio-economic disparities and discriminations and insist that modern structures conceal its role even as it reinforces inequalities. In the light of these broader debates, this study examines the modes of operation of caste and the ways it appears in urban landscape. More specifically, this study provides a descriptive account of the nature of quotidian inter-caste interactions in Ashanagar; it explores aspirations of members of various castes, especially the youth, and the realities of socio-economic mobility; and, it analyses local politics including electoral representation and Dalit politics. The study underscores that rather than being domesticated, caste occupies public spheres, and influences inter-caste relations and interactions. It also fuses with different forms of modern hierarchies and plays a significant role in shaping urban inequalities.

This study is based on data collected through qualitative research methods, including observation of various activities, interviews of individuals and groups, and case studies. This fieldwork for gathering information extended over a period of one year to understand the interactions and dynamics in the locality and individual/family life courses. It covered members from across caste/community, age and gender groups.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Aam Aadmi Party
AISHE	All India Survey of Higher Education
ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
B.Ed	Bachelor of Education
BA	Bachelor of Arts
B.Sc	Bachelor of Science
BJP	Bharatiya Janta Party
BSNL	Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CDS	Combined Defence Services
CM	Chief Minister
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
CTET	Central Teacher Eligibility Test
DCB	Delhi Cantonment Board
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
DDE	Delhi Department of Education
DESU	Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking
DJB	Delhi Jal Board
DMRC	Delhi Metro Railway Corporation
DP	Delhi Police
DU	Delhi University
DUSIB	Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board
EWS	Economic weaker section
IBPS	Institute for Banking Personnel Selection
IGNOU	Indira Gandhi National Open University
IIMC	Indian Institute for Mass and Communication
IIT	Institute of Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INC	Indian National Congress
ITI	Industrial Training Institute
JD	Janta Dal

JEE	Joint Entrance Examination
JMI	Jamia Milia Islamia
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
KVS	Kendriya Vidyalaya School
M.phil	Master of Philosophy
MA	Master of Arts
MBCs	Most Backward Castes
MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MLM	Multilevel Marketing
MP	Member of Parliament
NCWEB	Non-collegiate Women's Education Board
NDMC	New Delhi Municipal Council
NET	National Eligibility Test
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSDC	National Skill Development Corporation
NSDM	National Skill Development Mission
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
OBC	Other Backward Class
PAN	Permanent Account Number
Ph.d	Doctor of Philosophy
PM	Prime Minister
PSU	Public Sector Undertaking
RTE	Right to Education
RWA	Resident Welfare Association
SAU	South Asian university
SC	Scheduled Caste
SOL	School of Open Learning
SPA	School for Planning and Architecture
SSB	Service Selection Board
STET	State Teacher Eligibility Test
TERI	The Energy and Resources Institute
U.P	Uttar Pradesh

UPSC

Union Public Service Commission

YWCA

Young Women's Christian Association



Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study: Context and the Debate

This study attempts to understand the manifestation and operation of caste in urban space, represented by city, which varies on many counts from village where the study and descriptions of caste originated. It explores the significance of caste in urban space by focusing mostly on Dalits¹ in the metropolitan city of Delhi. It documents and analyse the experiences and negotiations of marginalised castes with a focus on a particular residential locality called Ashanagar². Exploring different aspects of people's life residing in Ashanagar, it unravels the ways in which caste survives in the city. Aim here is to analyse the influence of urban location and economy on persistence, transformation, and modes of reproduction of caste.

Cities are considered as spaces of advancement with emancipatory potential (Ambedkar 1948). This study examines the urban conditions and contexts facilitating and constraining socioeconomic advancement of the depressed classes in a metropolitan city of India – Delhi, which has experienced drastic economic changes under the liberalised economy. It elaborates on strategies adopted by the members of the depressed classes to attain mobility and navigate the city. The study also demonstrates that in urban areas convergence of caste identity, class and residential location are the crucial forces to comprehend production and accumulation of privileges and disadvantages. The study is situated in a broader background and debates where caste was paid scant attention in urban context despite the persistence of caste-based disparities.

Understanding of caste manifests spatial bias, as immense scholarship produced on the subject remained disproportionately attentive and largely restricted to villages/rural India. It, thus, nearly established a 'natural' link between space (village) and social system of caste. Excessive focus on rural India does not seem unreasonable

¹ Dalit is a Marathi word which connotes the broken people. The term Dalit which now represents the Dalit movement and political identity was first used by Jyotirao Phule. Later, it was widely popularised in the early seventies and eighties when Dalits began to delink themselves from the structures of caste and political patronages by building autonomous political identity like through Dalit Panther movement or formation of the Bahujan Samaj Party (Jodhka, 2002). Here the term is used to refer members of formerly 'untouchable' caste groups which are administratively categorised as Scheduled Castes (SCs).

² Ashanagar is a pseudoname given to the settlement where the fieldwork for the study was carried out.

if viewed through the lens of modernisation theory which advances laws of social change. It supposes that modernisation would initiate a progressive transition of society from traditional to modern where primordial structures/institutions, like caste system, would become impertinent and ineffective. This postulation creates a spatial binary of 'traditional' and 'modern'. Rural India, identified by primitive structure of caste system, represents the former; whereas urban spaces governed by egalitarianism and meritocracy denotes the latter. Thus, it leads to belief that in traditional societies ascriptive identities and primitive structures are of primary importance that in turn forms social relations and fates. In contrast, modern society untouched by primitive institutions and devoid of primordial identities is conceived as democratic space where meritocracy determines 'status attainment' (Wacquant 2018:16). "As cities came to be gazed and comprehended through the lens of a pre-defined urban Northern sensibility, cities of the South also replicated this gaze" (Patel 2018:3). As a result, the scholars investigating cities largely focused on analysing the facets of class, migration, labour, industrial relations, morphology of city, infrastructure (housing, sanitation system), and the evaluation of city centric policies. Therefore class, rather than qualitative category of caste, turns out an important analytical category to study and understand prevailing inequalities in cities. Separation of primordial social institutions/identity from urban space obscure the influence of social system like caste in producing marginality and perpetuating inequalities in 'modern' urban space. It leads to popular belief of 'castelessness' in cities (Deshpande 2013).

In contrast to villages, caste did not become an inevitable analytical category to understand and analyse urban realities. However, it would be flawed to assume that caste remained completely unexamined and ignored in urban milieu. In cities, caste appears in the study of urban stratification, urban workforce – engaged in both formal and informal sectors – and operation of caste networks in the labour market determining life chances of a group/community within the urban boundaries. Satish Saberwal (1973) argues, in order to cope with the complexity of urban demography and life, scholars tend to focus on a single caste group and its realities in urban space. Concerns regarding the effect of the modernising forces on various aspects of city life were remarked upon by scholars, but systematic study of caste in cities did not gain significance. Delayed attention and debate on caste in urban space is also assigned to the domination and control of upper-castes over most spheres of urban life (Deshpande 2004). Caste-based discrimination and exclusion remained imperceptible as the caste

system benefitted upper caste the most (ibid). Further, it is argued that under modern conditions and institutions caste has been de-ritualised and domesticated as a result it ceases to exert influence on socio-economic life (Sheth 1999; Beteille 1991, 2012; Srinivas 2003). In the early 1990s caste resurfaced in cities in form of upper-caste's protest against implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations³ ensuing a discourse on 'merit', 'efficiency' and 'reverse discrimination' (ibid). Caste became blatantly visible in cities by its vehement denial emanating from the forward caste and middle class. They fiercely resisted and opposed the implementation of the commission's recommendation implying caste-based inequalities are non-existent. It is soon after, in the early 1990s caste began to gain importance in understanding inequality and exclusion in various spheres of urban life, labour market, housing, residential segregation, educational opportunities. Also, statistical surveys like NSSO and census show persistence of caste-based disparities both in rural and urban India. Renewed discussion and empirical studies on caste in urban space from the nineties also coincide with liberalisation of Indian economy and expansion of private sector. Economic changes drastically altered the nature and character of labour-market as many jobs were created in the private sector simultaneously public employment condensed sharply. While economic changes were applauded by the new middle class, Dalit activist and intellectuals expressed concerns over its implications as the private sector were not bound to implement reservation policy in hiring (Jodhka 2015). Private players declined the proposal of extending reservation into private sector. They advanced the popular argument that reservation contradicts the 'merit' and 'efficiency' (Jodhka 2015:119). Entrepreneurs and employers in private sector emphasised that identity-based discrimination in the sector is non-existent and it is 'merit' which counts. For the rapidly privatising economy social identities seem impertinent and even against the economic growth. Against this argument, empirical studies and surveys show continued operation of caste and caste inequalities in different spheres of urban life. By underlining caste-based inequalities, discrimination and exclusion scholars argue

³ The commission, also referred as Second Backward Classes Commission, was established in 1979. The commission was headed by BP Mandal "to identify socially or educationally backward classes" of India (Mandal 1980). Total 3,743 communities were identified as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) constituting 52% of India's population. The commission submitted its report in 1982 which recommended 27% reservation in for OBCs in higher education and government services. The recommendations of the commission were implemented between 1991 and 2006.

modern institutions conceal the role of caste in uneven distribution of privileges and disadvantages (Guru 2009, 2011; Deshpande 2013, Jodhka 2010, 2015; Deshpande and Newman, 2007; Deshpande 2014).

Power, privilege, and material resources are distributed unevenly within the caste system. Importantly, ritual and material power are concentrated among caste Hindus whereas Dalits have been disenfranchised of dignity and control over means of production. Asymmetry of relations and material distribution depicts that caste system has played a crucial role institutionalising inequality based on ascriptive identity. It was expected that democratic republic ruled by the constitution based on the principles of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice would succeed in eliminating the system. In democratic-republic attempts were made to eliminate historical caste-based inequalities through legislations, targeted policies and affirmative actions. However, media reporting of caste atrocities, socio-economic inequalities based on caste, and political mobilisation on caste identity shows the persistence and significance of caste in shaping political-economy of India (Chalam 2010). Further, studies show that Dalits experience discrimination in cities in sphere of housing, labour-market, accessing basic services and also spatial segregation. It has produced a paradoxical condition where presence of caste is denied despite the evidence of inequalities based on it. Persistence of caste inequalities in urban life suggests that without incorporating social identities, like caste, understanding of organisation and functioning of urban life is only partially comprehensible (Fuller 1996; Thorat and Atwell 2007; Bairy 2010; Vaid & Heath 2010; Deshpande 2014; Jodhka 2015). It is between these broader debates and concerns the present study strives to understand the manner in which caste manifest and operates in urban space. Different perspectives on caste and debates on it are discussed in detail in chapter II.

Enormous demographic diversity, physical mobility and complex spatial organisation introduce an element of anonymity among city dwellers and make identities like caste imperceptible or transitory. Therefore, the fieldwork for the present study was carried out in a multi-caste residential locality in Delhi where inter-caste/community relations are somewhat crystalised and durable. Organisation of socio-political relations in the neighbourhood are explored to understand manifestation and transformation of caste. Rather than focusing on single caste group, here inter-caste relations among different Dalit castes, and between Dalits and touchable Hindus have been examined. Further, the dissertation traces educational and occupational trajectory

of youths, emphatically Dalit youth, to explore intergenerational mobility and integration of Dalits in the liberalised economy.

1.2 Methodology

Broadly the objective of this study is to understand the nature and manifestation of caste in contemporary urban life. This includes examining the role and significance of caste in quotidian interactions, its influence in socio-economic mobility of urban citizens and social reproduction, and exclusion. To locate the manifestation of caste in a non-village setting, the present study examines its significance in three different but interrelated domains namely quotidian social life, local politics and in economic/intergenerational mobility. This necessitates tracing of caste practices in everyday aspects of life like in spatial preferences, quotidian interactions, relations and experiences of people residing in intercaste neighbourhoods. To illustrate the relevance of caste in urban politics, attention is given to the basis of political consolidation, local political institutions and actors who determine the direction of the politics at microlevel. Lastly, to develop an understanding of intergenerational shift in terms of socio-economic mobility, the study focuses on gaining an in-depth account of educational and occupational aspirations of youth, available opportunities to attain them and actual accomplishments. Through a qualitative focus, this study seeks to map historicity of the locality and socio-political dynamics of a locale amid a larger context of urbanisation and urban cultures.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are:

- a) To understand spatial patterns of caste in urban/city context with a focus on residential spatial organisation multi-caste locality
- b) To analyse inter-caste relations in a residential settlement
- c) To document the dynamics of economic and occupational mobility; and how caste impinges on socio-economic aspirations and their achievement with a focus on youth
- d) To understand the significance of caste in urban local politics, especially in elections and in shaping Dalit politics

Research Questions

- a) How does caste influence or play a role in everyday urban lives and social interactions?
- b) What spheres of urban life does caste manifest and how?
- c) How do various social groups in the locality conceive and aspire social mobility? What role caste location and urban cultures play in the construction of mobility/aspirational models and what are the means adopted for social mobility?
- d) What role does caste play in urban local and electoral politics? And, in what ways it mediates participation and organisation of Dalits in such politics?

Field Site

The field work was conducted in a settlement located in the metropolitan city of Delhi. Delhi is also the national capital of the country. The city is categorised into eight settlement types---*Jhuggi Jhopri* Clusters (JJC), slum designated areas (SDA), unauthorised colonies (UC), *Jhuggi Jhopri* resettlement colonies (RC), regularised unauthorised colonies (RUC), rural villages (RV), urban villages (UV) and planned colonies (PC) (CPR:2015)⁴. These ‘settlement types are defined by diverse degrees of formality, legality and tenure’ (ibid). The field of the study is a resettlement colony established in 1976 during the emergency. The city has total fifty-five resettlement colonies. These colonies were established in three resettlement waves beginning in early 1960’s. Subsequently in 1970’s during the declared national emergency new resettlement colonies were created. Again, in early 2000 to prepare the city for the successful hosting of commonwealth games, held in 2010, newer colonies were established. In 2000, estimated population residing in all the resettlement colonies was 17.76 lakhs, constituting total 12.7% of the total estimated population of the city (DUEIIP, 2001).

⁴ According to classification of settlements into eight categories in GNCTD, a) *Jhuggi Jhopri* Clusters (JJC) are non-notified slums defined as “squatter settlements” on “public land”. b) slum designated areas (SDA) ‘only settlements in Delhi that are technically “slums” notified under 1956 slum areas (improvement and clearance) act’. c) Resettlement colonies (RC) where those evicted from the JJC are resettled and have legal status. d) regularised-unauthorised colonies (RUC) represent the unauthorised colonies that were regularised in 60s and 70s. e) rural villages (RV) ‘are located mostly on Delhi’s periphery in areas that continue to be classified as “rural” by the Master Plan of Delhi’. f) urban villages (UV): are rural villages notified under section 507 of Municipal Corporation Act 1957 of Delhi thereby bringing them in urban ambit. g) planned colonies (PC) are ‘approved colonies on land demarcated as land development area in the Master Plan of Delhi (and/or concerned sonal plan) (CPR, May 2015)

Ashanagar, where fieldwork for the study was carried out is situated in trans-Yamuna, in East Delhi district. Established in 1976, it is a multi-caste and multi-religious settlement of recent origin.

Methods of Data Collection

The field work was carried out between July 2016 to December 2017 in different phases of varying durations. Finally, field was revisited for a month in November, 2018. Duration of the fieldwork alternated between the empirical phase and the interpretive phase (Srivastava 2005). During the fieldwork I resided in a gated society which is at a walkable distance from the settlement. I was introduced to field and its people by a local resident of Ashanagar. He introduced me to the people residing in different blocks of the settlement and walked me to different key locations like caste specific temples, parks to be avoided, or an abandoned film theatre, and local markets etc. He accompanied me in the field for ten days. Subsequently I began to revisit people introduced by him and build new social networks through them. In the entire duration of the fieldwork I met and interacted with over 450 residents belonging different castes, tribe, religion and demography, and reside in different blocks of the settlement. I met my participants in different spaces like home, NGOs, temple, parks, lanes, markets, coaching institutes, and in party offices of different political parties.

Data for the present study was gathered primarily by deploying qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, group discussions, case studies and observations were used to collect data. Also, understanding of various dimensions of the field is arrived by adopting go along ethnography⁵ (Kusenbach 2003). The method enabled me to identify different lanes where members of different castes reside as neighbours, and understand various activities unfolding in the field. The adopted 'research design' was relatively open-ended (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Depending on the context and issue at hand different methods were used. Like group discussion was generally used when many people were present at the same place and time, for example in coaching centers or in offices of political parties. When a meeting with a person was prefixed generally method of semi-structured interview was adopted, like with locally prominent individuals or leaders. Whereas people with whom I was

⁵ Margaret Kusenbach (2003:463) describes go along ethnography as a research tool in which 'fieldworkers accompany individual informants on their "natural" outings, and---through asking questions, listening, and observing---actively explore their subjects' stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment'.

meeting on a regular basis data was largely gathered through mode of informal conversations and observations. The process of data gathering was multi-sited, as it was collected from different formal and informal locations ranging from homes, alleys, NGOs, coaching centres, party offices, near parks and temples. Apart from gathering data through observations, discussions and interviews, attempt was also made to sketch some case studies to gather description of the neighbourhood and its residents. It requires sustained engagement with the participants for long term, therefore close relations are maintained with few of the families and individuals of the neighbourhood. Further, the boundary of the fieldwork was not restricted to Ashanagar. Life of the people extends and is interlinked with the city lying beyond the bounds of Ashanagar. I meandered through these different spaces like administrative offices, educational institutions, and workplace which shape and order the internal life of Ashanagar.

As each chapter focuses on specific dimension, therefore demography, and location of the source of data kept shifting. The third chapter tries to describe inter-caste relationship. So apart from examining nature of relationship in different settings, a few lanes were identified where members of different castes shared neighbourhood, importantly those lanes where upper-castes resided next to members of Dalit community. It is through observation and informal discussions, neighbourhood relations in modern space is understood. The fourth and fifth chapter focuses on intergenerational mobility for which educational and occupational aspirations were mapped. Youths are the key demography to gain detailed description of mobility. To understand the intergenerational shift in aspirations and opportunities many youngsters, who are pursuing higher studies, working or searching for a job, are interviewed. These interviews are semi-structured in nature, and on most occasions, these were held in their houses. When more than one participant was willing to participate then instead of interviews, group discussions followed. Group discussions occurred by the roadside/alleys with boys. With girls interactions happened in NGOs where they go for learning vocational skills. To maximise interaction with students (youth), group discussions were also conducted at various coaching centers located within Ashanagar. I went with some students to their colleges to interact with their friends and other students present in the university campus. For gaining in-depth details of their everyday life and progress on various fronts, close ties are maintained with few of these participants through regular interaction and informal posturing. Interactions with these young participants focus on general information about the family, about the education

of the participants, their aspirations, status of employment, local issues, communal tension of 2014, inter-caste and communal relations in the area, and about their indulgence in leisure. In addition to these questions, female participants were asked about their sense of security and its relation with their mobility within and outside the locality. The sixth chapter discusses local political dynamics. For this, locally prominent leaders from political parties, different caste, organisations, like Ambedkar organisation or other caste associations were key source of data. Further, observations were conducted of religious and community-based celebrations and opinions of young people were collected through individual interviews and group discussions to document nature, dynamics and evolution/changes in local politics. To understand the local surroundings more closely I relied on 'key informants.' Also, to observe and understand the field in strategic spaces I use to 'bide' time and loiter when I had no scheduled meetings/interviews. Overall, during the fieldwork I conversed with over 400 people, of different caste, gender, religion and region. However quality of relation and interaction was not even with all. While interactions with some were short and fleeting in nature, whereas with some others it was durable and proximate.

Further while in the field I always carried voice recorder but did not use it uniformly. Before turning on the recorder, participants were informed and without their consensus it was never used. Also, during big scale rallies and socio-religious celebrations recorder was hardly of any use. On such occasions digital camera was used to capture the moment and its details to develop a cue while writing the field notes. I refrained from using recorder during regular 'informal' conversations which I used to write after returning from the field.

Field Experiences: Entering the Field

Dependence on qualitative methods require a long-term presence in the field and establishing a *credible self* which is an important aspect of rapport building. A credible self is important to gain wider access, build networks and to navigate swiftly in the field.

Before beginning the field-work it is important to gather a sense of place and of the people residing/positioned in field-site. The prior and broad information about the field help in understanding the practicality of selecting a place/site as a field site and feasibility of conducting fieldwork. Through my research I wanted to understand manifestation and operation of caste in urban spaces. One of the important focus of the

study was to understand how intercaste interactions, especially between Dalits-upper castes, take place within a settlement/locality in a city. Therefore, the precondition for a field-site was to be a multi-caste settlement where both co-exist. A locality inhabiting single caste/identity would not have provided insights on intercaste interactions. Further, prior information not only prepares to enter the field, it even supplies fresh questions and points to initiate the fieldwork. I conducted field-work in a place which is administratively categorised as resettlement colony in Delhi. The settlement is historically and politically significant. Established during the national emergency in 1976 it has secured a notorious public reputation beyond the settlement, in the city, among officials and in the neighbouring settlements for being one of the worst affected areas during anti-Sikh riots of 1984. Also, the settlement is a part of reserved assembly constituency. Before entering in the field, I had information about its establishment, communal past, political status and identity of those inhabiting the settlement. This beforehand insight allowed me to reflect on and frame questions to capture its exceptional history/past and its link with the present local life. To delineate its past, the information prompted me to approach mainly a specific demography, older people, to inquire about their arrival, experience and transformation in the settlement. Prior gathering of information about the prospective field-site allows its assessment, in terms of access and feasibility, and design methods to approach it.

Meandering through different administrative offices and localities I entered into the field. This meandering partly was a conscious act directed to postpone the entry into the field in a belief, though self-deluding, of adequate preparation that a researcher requires before stepping in to the field. This was an apology to delay the entry in the field and an alibi for the fieldwork. However, while doing field-work, I realised that preparations and boundaries of the field are fluid, not absolute. After venturing into sub-fields, I made few individual attempts to make an entry and engage with the field. These attempts, if not unsuccessful, were discouraging as initial entry (the very first day) drew unrequested comments, evoked poetry among male participants and sometimes gaze stalking while passing the streets/lanes. This of course was for a brief period of less than a week. On subsequent visits these uncalled acts discontinued and became more rare than regular in the remaining period spent in the field. Discouraged, I instead withdrew from the field. After few days, I re-entered with a '*gatekeeper*' who also resides in the settlement. He introduced me to the field and its residents related to him as kin members, neighbours, friends, and acquaintances. Anthropologically

gatekeepers are strategically positioned thereby wield power to limit access to respondents/participants and can inhibit free flow of information. Commonly, a higher official in a workplace, village head, or in cases of surveys head of a household commonly men feature as gatekeepers who based on self-defined legitimacy determine whom to include/exclude from the gaze and records of a researcher. But my gatekeeper is an ordinary married man with little influence locally. More than ordinary status, it is the local reputation of a person introducing to the field is of crucial importance to establish credibility of a researcher, crucially of a female researcher, and acceptance. The man through whom I began to build local network of participants is a graduate who has worked in several private jobs and thus has an inconsistent source of income. However, earning honestly, abstinence from locally considered bad habits and emphasis on education he is regarded as a sensible man in the neighbourhood and among his social network. The notion of respectable person is also constructed locally based on the prevailing moral order. Therefore, while a man like my gatekeeper is regarded as a respectable person, but women active in local public life, single as a result of separation/divorced, or known to be in extramarital relations, have a vilified reputation. Eventually I met these locally active women and spent time in their company. By the time I met them, I already had established my image and purpose among locales who knew that my work is to meet different people in the locality. Since then I have speculated about the direction of my fieldwork had I urged these locally '*hypervisible*' women to introduce me to the field.

In a predominantly Dalit settlement, I not only entered as a researcher curious to know the social-political life and world views of people but also as a Hindu upper caste, middle class, educated, even for some, 'modern' unmarried woman. I was distinct from my participants in terms of caste, class and for many even in gender. Even among women, I was different because of liberty and independence to pursue whatever I want to without resistance from my family, importantly, despite being unmarried. Women and young girls uninhibitedly asked about my lifestyle beyond the field, in the city and the campus. They commonly inquired about my family background, if I have a 'boyfriend', how would I prefer to marry, 'love' or 'arrange', do I drink or smoke, or do I wear 'modern' cloths? Further, while several who knew my caste/class position commended me for my work, there were many from whom I drew suspicion and criticism about my legitimacy to write about their life. To gain trust and allay hostilities it is important to present a credible self through overt and covert means. It is a pre-

condition to gain access and navigate smoothly into the field for a researcher, more so for a female researcher. The process of building trust and gaining acceptance is a quotidian process. Adjusting to local norms, I deployed few conscious strategies to present a credible self through clothing, footwear, appearance, manners and speech. ‘Clothing matters’ (Tarlo 1996), so in the field I only wore *salwar-kamees and dupatta*⁶. Apart from the ease, sporting the attire projected me as a modest/unassuming woman. Further, for me it was important to display my disbelief in caste and communal ideologies. Therefore, ignoring the formalities, I readily accepted hospitalities and invitations to socio-political occasions (of course invitations are desired by the researchers to enrich their understanding of social life). To forge proximity, I responded to questions posed about my personal life. However, being a female researcher I selectively shared information and framed them sometimes according to acceptable local norms.

Navigating field as a female researcher

Focusing on quotidian socio-political life, my research was not restricted to any specific demography, gender or community. I wanted to maximise the access therefore build rapport with diverse social groups inhabiting the field. As a female researcher it was crucial for me to establish my reputation as a ‘respectful’ woman (Choudhury 2017). While demeanour is crucial in crafting the image of a ‘respectful’ woman but it alone is not sufficient for female researchers when their research involves interaction with male participants. It is likely for female researchers to encounter embarrassing/uncomfortable moments with male participants. They have to devise strategies to escape such situations without jeopardising field-work. I was attempting to map intergenerational mobility, in terms of aspiration, education and occupation, which led me to interact with the youth, both female and male, in the settlement. Also, I was trying to understand the local politics and events, which is mostly a male dominated sphere. Given the research focus, it was essential to build rapport and interact with the men active in these spheres. But nature of these interactions was more restrained and alert. In group discussions and interviews, apart from asking questions the concern remained at appropriateness of my expressions and gestures. Like in group discussions with young men it was common for them to mock and laugh at each other. Unlike

⁶ The dress is worn by many Indian women and also in South Asian countries. It consists of loose trouser, tunic till knees and a long scarf.

women, where I could enjoy such candid moments, in overjoyed mood of male participants I would just pass a smile and sometimes even ignore their internal bantering. Among women, internal bantering not only displayed an aspect of their inter-relation, brought closeness but also offered an opportunity to raise questions informally. Locally an interaction between an unmarried men and women draws disapproval, lest they are related as kin or close family friends. Occasionally I was urged by female members to interact inside the house fearing neighbours will misconstrue the relation between 'us'. Despite the locally prevailing moral order it was not possible for me to visit the houses of male participants frequently and interact inside. In the settlement, most male participant (employed and unemployed) spend time outside the house in public spaces of the settlement. It was common to meet and interact with them in public spaces. Contrary to local norm, several conversations took place under the gaze and scrutiny of other residents. Under the public scrutiny it becomes crucial for female researchers to behave 'appropriately' in public spaces which in my field implied formal, restrained and to the point conversations. Aimless mobility of women in public spaces is deplored so it was important to underline the purpose of visit to the locales. A strategic distance and serious posturing with male participants were adopted by me. Most of the male participants made me feel at ease during meetings, treated with respect and were co-operative whenever I sought help from them. But there were few moments and meetings with male participants which were unsettling for me. Like, in the initial days I was in the field with my gatekeeper to meet a man in early sixties who is influential in local politics. The meeting took place in the afternoon outside the house of one of his political protégé. During the conversation the man was not only rude but was touching inappropriately which made me feel very uncomfortable. The discomfiture caused by him as not only in public space but also in presence of two men who were in their late twenties. The unexpected behaviour led me to conclude the conversation abruptly and never return back to the man. The incident in the initial days compelled me to prepare for similar moments that might be awaiting and develop a strategy to deal with them. As a response to uncomfortable people I neither returned nor relied on them for any further inquiries. On unexpected encounters I gave a terse response. Further, on 'loosing' a participant I had to seek alternate / help of other proficient people to gather required information. It is important for a female researcher to assert, implicitly and explicitly, the dispensability of the people subjecting her to embarrassing/ incomprehensible situations. Such

encounters in the field could be very disconcerting for a female researcher and it is not always easy for her to resume fieldwork on subsequent days. Further, it also requires her to expend more time in order to find alternate and right participant to resume her data collection. Even though far and fewer, and despite their appropriate conduct, female researchers are vulnerable to encounter instances of inappropriate, tacit and overt, behaviour from male participant. Beside the formal posturing, place, time and context are important to reduce the instances of vulnerable encounters.

Also, a female researcher tends to frequently receive advise and warnings from the locales which I believe is more because of the gender than the status of being a new entrant in the field. Quite regularly I received advise from the residents about when to leave the field. The duration of my stay in field was not definite, it was contingent on people I met and duration of conversations. There were days when I left the field past noon, in contrast some days past sunset. But people generally advised me to leave in daylight as it was 'unsafe' for me to stay till sunset. I was also warned against venturing specific locations within the settlement and meeting certain people or personalities. This was a way of people to guard me from unpleasant experiences, but passive submission to advises might obstruct the fieldwork. Generally, advises were directed at me because of my gender. To overcome such seemingly difficult situations of acting against the advises/warnings it is important to make people understand the nature of the work which involves meeting and interacting with different people. It is true that gender does curtail access to some part of the social life of the people. Like, I could rarely explore the local life past seven in the evening, or to enter into the network of drug addicted youth in the settlement or political rallies scheduled in night hours. Without drawing local censure, for a male researcher access to this life would have been imaginable and far easier.

1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

The chapter II, *Understanding Caste: A Review of Literature*, provides a detailed literature review of different perspective from which caste has been understood and also different forms in which it manifests in urban settings.

The chapter III, *Negotiating Relations in Inter-caste Neighbourhood: Spatial Organisation, Inter-caste relations, and Perceptions*, describes spatial arrangement of the settlement to understand mediation of caste in everyday interactions. It examines

how intercaste relations are forged under spatial proximity, nature of these relations and how various caste groups perceive the 'other'. It also looks into the conventional sites of caste i.e commensal relations and matrimonial alliances. Further, the chapter also describes how Dalits experience caste in the city.

Chapters IV, *Intergenerational Mobility: Aspiration and Education*, and IV, *Intergenerational Mobility: Occupational Aspirations, Struggles and Realities* map locational (dis)advantages in attaining socio-economic intergenerational mobility among Dalits. Attempting to understand the emancipatory potential of the city, these chapters document trends of economic/occupational mobility under the new economic order and its role in transcending or retaining the caste identities. To understand the nature of occupational/economic mobility the trajectory of aspirations and educational attainment is examined in chapter IV. It elaborates educational and occupational aspirations of youth, and the local conditions within which they are conceived. Also, avenues available to actualise these aspirations. Here only educational choices of the youth for higher education are examined that includes the selection of discipline after class 10th, type of schools, medium of education, and institutes of higher education accessed by the youth. Role of the space and prevailing gender norms in shaping aspirations of the youth is explored. By looking at educational economy of the neighbourhood and of the city, this chapter traces reasons behind disjunction between aspiration and actualisation. Chapter V discusses the translation of educational attainment in occupation/income. This chapter focuses on occupational aspirations and strategies deployed by the youth to attain it. The chapter depicts the nature of employment available to Dalit youth in liberalised economy in which they are concentrated. It also shows how they negotiate with their unrealised occupational aspirations.

Chapter VI, *Local Politics: Caste, Co-option and Dalit Politics*, focuses on local political life and organisation of neighbourhood. Attempt here is to understand scope of Dalit politics and unity in urban locale preponderantly inhabited by Dalits. The chapter briefly discusses the success of different political parties since 1991 to 2015 in assembly elections, and the background in which they swept into the power. It also describes political allegiance of different caste groups. It further discusses role of caste association, the Ambedkar organisations, changing aspirations of younger generation, communal events and influence of popular communal rhetoric in shaping local electoral politics and its outcome. Attention is drawn to intra-Dalit political factions and rivalry

by providing details of micro level political processes involved in municipal elections of 2017. Local political unfolding is compared and contrasted with the national political context.

Chapter VII, *Conclusion*, summarises the preceding chapters. It brings out important observations and findings of each of the chapters. Towards the conclusion it discusses the significance of caste in influencing urban inequality.

The next chapter, II, discusses broader context and debates to situate the present study. The chapter will discuss the sources of our understanding and multiple dimensions of caste.



Chapter II

Understanding Caste: A Review of Literature

This chapter discusses the relevant literature which throws light on source of our understanding and multiple facets of caste.

2.1.1 Indological Approach to Understand Caste: The Text View of Caste

The knowledge of caste has been developing mainly from two approaches adopted to understand Indian society: namely, text or indological view and the field view. It is under colonial rule, indologist, orientalist, missionaries and colonial administrators deployed the text view to make sense of the Indian society.

Varna model or Indological approach represents caste as a social system based on consensus. It depicts benign and harmonious understanding of caste system. It conceals coercive and exploitative nature of inter-caste relation ignoring the dynamic nature of caste and flexibility in the system. This approach relies heavily on the Hindu religious scriptures—*Rig Veda* and *Manusmriti*—and *Brahminical* interpretations. It received severe criticism for representing Brahminical views on the caste system which provides an incorrect and only partial understanding of caste. Field view approach is considered to be superior and complementary to text view. It is based on the participant observation in/on the ground and provides a ‘holistic’ understanding of Indian society (Jodhka 1998). British administrators initiated the earlier understanding of caste to make sense of social diversity in India under its rule, and organise this diversity in order to facilitate smooth administration. Efforts to understand and categorise the ruled gained impetus in the events of 1857’s mutiny⁷ and exercise of caste enumeration in 1871. Before this, the focus was on the village as the unit of administration. This quest, of indexing the ruled population, resorted to religious texts and experts mainly Brahmins to whom these texts were ‘intelligible’ (Ghurye 1969; Upadhyay 2002). Textual emphasis, Brahminical interpretations and exercise of caste enumeration made caste inflexible and unchangeable (Sharma 2002; Dirks 2003). In developing the western view of caste, orientalist, missionaries, and administrators were the crucial actors and contributed in the presentation of caste as a universal category to describe

⁷ On May 10, 1857 Indian sepoys in the service of East India Company of Britain revolted against the company and its troops (Yadav 1994). Subsequently the rebellion found allies and support from key leaders of different regions of the country.

Indian society (Dirks 2003). Colonial understanding overwhelmingly relied on religious textual descriptions and Brahminical explanations and was ignorant of the empirical reality of caste (Jodhka 2014).

G.S Ghurye, regarded as father of Indian sociology, has contributed immensely to indological approach. His “sociology carried the imprint of his training in Sanskrit and Indology, on the one hand, and a pronounced anti-colonial and pro Hindu nationalist ideology, on the other” (Jayaram 2013: 197). Drawing immensely from religious texts, his writings like *Caste and Race in India* (1932), remained uncritical of the caste system. He held a depoliticised view of caste system which overlooks religious legitimisation of inequality, domination, power, violence and exploitation. Ardently against the reservation he argued that such policies damage the harmony, interdependence and peace established by the caste system. He writes (Ghurye 1932:27, cf. Dirks 2013)

Common service to the civic life, prescriptive rights of monopolist service, and specific occasions for enjoying superiority for some of the castes, considered very low, made the village community more or less a harmonious civic unit. Complete acceptance of the system in its broad outlines by the groups making up that system and their social and economic interdependence in the village not only prevented the autonomous organisation of the groups from splitting up the system into independent units, it created a harmony in civic life. Of course, this harmony was not the harmony of parts that are equally valued, but of units which are rigorously subordinated to one another.

Dirks writes such harmonious understanding of caste system derives from Ghurye’s reading of religious texts.

Similarly, Iravati Karve, a protégé of Ghurye, combines her knowledge of Sanskrit literature and anthropology to understand, caste, kinship and Hindu society. Despite conducting extensive field work, rather than intensive, in different parts of the country, Karve relied on indological texts for interpretation while rarely referring scholars of her time working in the same area (Sundar 2007). Karve’s interest in caste centres on the question of its origin. Unlike Ghurye who locates origin of caste with Aryans, she argues pre-Aryan existence of caste as *jati* system (ibid). Accordingly, Varna system brought by Aryans superimposed on different jatis and produced the present form of the caste system. Karve (1959:161) provides a detailed account of different aspects of caste system and locates “peaceful co-existence of many religion and many gods” as the norm of social existence in Vedantic thought and philosophy of

Karma and rebirth. Noting inequalities and duties of each caste she concludes, "...the theory of Karma and rebirth while justifying social inequality, held out a future hope for betterment and promised ultimate equality in the goal of Brahma realisation" (ibid). Reliance on Indological texts for interpretation provides benign explanations of harmonious co-existence between culturally distinct groups. As a result, as Sundar (2007) notes, in her writings class question, material basis of caste, mode of production and questions of political economy never appeared to examine caste based socio-economic inequalities.

Louis Dumont (1988 [1970]) in his classical book *Homo Hierarchicus* constructs an ideal model of caste system and contrast it with western societies organised by the ideology of equality. He relies on text approach arguing that social organisation and reality of Indian society can be explained by the model which was constructed from the *Brahminical* texts. According to Dumont, hierarchy is the "keystone" ideology which governs Indian society and characterises its social relations. Thus, the hierarchy in traditional caste system is religiously sanctioned and ranked. It is the principle of hierarchy which separates 'superior pure' from the 'inferior impure'. While maintaining separation, hierarchy simultaneously ensures coexistence of pure and impure within the system. According to Dumont organisation of relations within the system are interdependent, not contradictory or conflictual. So as per Dumont, rather than political or economic basis, interdependent relations possess religious legitimacy. Remarking on the Brahmin centric understanding and neglecting the political-economic basis of the caste system Gloria G. Raheja (1989:79) writes, "in this narrow view, caste is seen as focused on the Brahman value of purity".

2.1.2 Field View of Caste

Field studies provide evidence of embedded materiality, conflict, resistance and mutability of the caste system pointing to the severe limitation of 'textbook view' in capturing the variation observed across the regions (Jodhka 2014). It also explicates that perspective on caste is not universal; indeed, it is relative and depends on the location of a caste group within the caste system (Mencher 1996; Gupta 2000). Perspectives of the 'upper' caste groups do not concur with that of 'lower' caste and is contested by those positioned at the lower ends of the caste hierarchy. Field studies of the villages found that jati is the operational unit and empirical existence of caste, not varna. Hence, the field view added jati to the understanding of caste and made it more

grounded in reality. The term caste implies two meanings: caste as varna and caste as jati (Beteille 1964; Srinivas 1987; Jodhka 2014; Vaid 2014). Unlike varna, jati model of caste demonstrates the scope for mobility and change (Srinivas 1995, 2012). Sankritisation, westernisation, secularisation, reference groups explain the dynamism and mobility within the caste system (Damle 1968; Srinivas 1995; Jodhka 1998). Inherent contradictions within the system and biases in the textual understanding of caste come to the fore with the empirical study of Indian villages. Intensive village studies demystify understanding of caste system by bringing it out from the narrow bounds of Sanskritic texts. Field view on caste points out that empirical reality of caste is at variance with the textual description of the system and argues the system is flexible. Caste is an adaptive structure and mobility observed within the structure support this claim of flexibility which is theoretically unacceptable (Srinivas 1956).

M.N Srinivas (1962) points at some of the distortions and ambiguities caused by text view on caste which he noted during his fieldwork in villages of southern India. He draws distinction between Varna and caste. According to Varna scheme of the Vedas, society is classified into four order—*Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya* and *Sudra*—whereas untouchables are not included within varna order. Such classification of social order was found at great variance from the existing realities of rural India. Field realities show existence of various caste and sub-caste that cannot be neatly arranged within the Varna scheme. He writes, “the position each caste occupies in the local hierarchy is frequently not clear” (ibid:31). Contesting universal hierarchy represented by the Varna scheme, Srinivas argues that caste hierarchies are local as they not only show regional variation but also differ from village to village. Further, the concept of sanskritisation⁸ shows the position allocated to each caste group within the local hierarchy is not fixed and incontestable (Srinivas1995[1966]; Gupta 2000). People, mainly lower caste groups contest their caste location and claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy (ibid: 6). While for Srinivas, sanskritisation represents attempt at ritually upward corporate mobility and does not account for individual mobility. According to Karanth (1996:94 cf. Vaid, 2014:396) sanskritisation is “not only an attempt to claim higher status but also a demonstration of the new economic position of a lower caste

⁸ According to Srinivas (1995[1966]:6), “Sanskritisation is the process by which a ‘low’ Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, ‘twice-born’ caste.” Generally, such claims are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community’. He used the term in his study of Coorgs in India.

household”. Nicholas Jaoul (2011:274) through his study in Kanpur points that “sanskritisation has been politically engineered among Dalits”. He argues for examination of political function of Sanskritisation in creating meta-identity and incorporation of Dalits by Hindu religion, rather than viewing it as merely cultural/ritual phenomenon. Sanskritisation is not merely an attempt initiated from below by hitherto excluded communities, but also encouraged from the above by caste Hindus to meet their political ends. Therefore, mobility and flexibility within the caste structure is produced by different reasons of which politics is an important one. Different frames of reference are used to understand mobility as single conceptual tool like Sanskritisation is inadequate to explain the different forms of mobility in different contexts. According to K.L Sharma (1997), mobility takes place at individual, family and group level within the caste structure. Mobility is not defining feature only of those located in the middle and lower rungs of caste hierarchy but is also possible for upper caste at the apex of caste hierarchy. There is a qualitative difference in this form of movement, it is characterised by accommodating the secular character. According to Srinivas (1995) concept of westernisation refers the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, and the term subsumes changes occurring at different levels—technology, institutions, ideology, values. According to him, Brahmins were the primary beneficiaries of westernisation. Brahmins looked up to the British masters for attaining power and respect in the society. It provided an avenue for the mobility of Brahmins as they were the one who took to modern education and administrative jobs. Hence, sanskritisation was resorted to by the lower castes to improve their position within the traditional structure of caste, whereas westernisation was the response of Brahmins/upper caste to gain new status and prestige embodied in modern socio-political systems. Avenues of mobility demonstrate the deviance of existing system of caste from the textual descriptions. Ascribed identity can change in a generation or two with the positional changes in caste structure. Caste structure is alterable to external changes and opportunities.

In contrast to Varna scheme which accord a fix and unchangeable position, field views show that to some extent there exists scope of upward mobility in local caste hierarchy⁹. Dominant caste is another concept introduced by Srinivas (1959:1):

⁹ The concept was criticised. One of the criticisms posed to the concept is that ‘can lower-castes really achieve secular or ritual mobility without changing their occupation?’ (Bopegamage and Kulahalli 1971:130). While Srinivas remarked upon the economic/material aspect, he did not address the influence

A caste may be said to be "dominant" when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power. A large and powerful caste group can be more easily dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low.

In the defining features of dominant caste Srinivas further adds the dimension of education and occupation. Dominant caste also serves as the model for sanskritisation, it is not always essential the claimant of higher ritual status emulate Brahminic ways of life to move up in the hierarchy of caste system. The concept points that mere ritual status allocated by the religious hierarchy alone does not give power and control. Ritual status accompanied by capital acquired in secular domains like material prosperity, access to modern education and employment, considerably consolidate the power and control in local caste hierarchy. Contrary to textual descriptions of caste which assigns each varna a strict location and status in the caste hierarchy, Srinivas suggests caste groups above the pollution line meeting specific criterion can exercise status and power at local/regional levels. The concept of dominant caste suggests high ritual ranking does not essentially concur with political and economic power. Ritually low but politically and economically strong caste groups do exercise immense influence in local affairs. These analytical categories evolved from field approach demonstrate that caste system is not monolithic and unchangeable.

F.G Bailey (1957) argues that villages are not isolated small republics untouched by the larger administrative and economic changes. His study of Bisipara village in Odisha shows economic and non-economic factors are interlinked and influence changes in the social and political organisation of the village. He uses the concept of economic frontier to analyse socio-economic and political changes in the village. He traces the influence of commoditisation of land on the socio-economic structure of village. As land became saleable due to various factors such as to fulfil ritual obligations, land fragmentation etc, whereby traditional landowners were forced to sell land its ownership changed from the former to those who were ritually denied its ownership. Saleability initiates redistribution of land as it allowed certain economically prosperous lower caste groups to buy and own land from tribals. Further, ownership of land also brought power and dominance of lower caste groups. Possession of land also

of this aspect on Sanskritisation. Jodhka (1997) points that Sanskritisation is not a simple process as mere emulation of rituals and lifestyle of higher caste may not legitimise claims of superior ritual status of the claimant. The process of Sankritisation and claims of superior ritual status can fuel hostility between the claimant and higher caste groups.

led to the rise in caste position of new owners in caste scale conforming to purity rules. This highlights the influence of economic strength in improving caste position in seemingly unalterable caste system.

Using Marxian and Weberian model of stratification André Beteille (1965) in his book *Caste, Class and Power* demonstrates changes in the rural stratification effected by new democratic polity and economic changes after independence. His work in Sripuram village of Tanjore district explores influence of secular factors on interrelationship between caste, class, and power. Based on caste, he broadly classifies the village population as Brahmins, non-Brahmins and adi-Dravidas to explain the correspondence between caste, class and power. Traditionally, Brahmins were the owners of the land on which non-Brahmins worked as tenant cultivators, whereas adi-Dravidas worked as agricultural laborers. Migration of landowners, Brahmins, to cities induced changes in the ownership pattern of land and exercise of power. Both largely came under the control of non-Brahmins. Apart from being rooted in the ritual base, caste also has the material basis to it, largely manifested in the high degree of overlap between class, caste and power. It is observed that upper caste often corresponds to better economic position and power (Beteille 1965; Harriss 1982; Sharma 1997). However, Beteille points out that correspondence between caste, class and power, as obvious and seamless, are problematic given the external changes exerted from political and economic spheres, which dilute the distinct inter-relationship between them. Conclusively he writes:

Traditionally, most important cleavages and alignments have been embedded in the matrix of caste. With the change from a static, traditional social order to a more dynamic one, the economic and political systems gradually detach themselves from caste and acquire a more autonomous character (1965:225).

Kathleen Gough (1996[1981]) compares changes in socio-economic life and relations in two villages, Kumbapettai and Kirippur in Tanjore district, Tamil Nadu. Gough studied these villages in early 1950s and revisited them in 1970s. She uses Marxian framework to understand social and economic structures of these villages. She classifies people of the villages on basis of work, income and class relation and compares with their class location. She finds significant overlap between caste location and class position. On revisiting the villages in 1970s she observed some weakening of class-caste interlinkage. However largely caste-class nexus continued to be strong and significant despite the Green Revolution, land reforms and increased commoditisation

(ibid:287). A significant proportion of supervised labourers belong to Dalit castes, whereas loosening of caste-class has been noted in middle ranking castes.

John Harriss (1982) in his study of Randam village in North Arcot district of Tamil Nadu, aims to understand the impact of newly introduced technologies in the agriculture on the development of capitalism and on the political economy of the village. He lays down an elaborate description of forces and relations of production that shows an overlap between the caste, ownership of forces of production and benefits of new technology. His work suggests patron-client relationship has not been eroded with the introduction of technology.

Economic prosperity emerges as an important criteria to achieve upward social mobility in caste hierarchy. Caste is not merely religiously ordained unchangeable ritual ranking. Ranking order shows unequal distribution and access to material resources/capital among different caste groups. Social and ritual distance fixed by caste appear bridgeable upon acquisition of economic resources which is one of the preconditions of upward social mobility. However, it is important to note that even by fulfilling the preconditions of economic superiority and sanskritisation, attainment of upward social mobility is not easy to attain. Attempts of securing upward mobility in the caste hierarchy may face strong opposition or even violent response from the upper castes (Jodhka 1997:35). Difficulties and resistance faced by caste groups below the purity line in their quest of attaining upward reflects inflexibility of the system at the extreme bottom. Also, class and caste are intertwined, and caste based inequalities are ritually legitimised.

Further, over the years scholars have observed transformation/weakening of caste system in rural India. Recent studies indicate the loosening of caste system especially weakening of *jajmani* relations in villages. Industrialisation, social-political movements and agrarian changes in rural economy are observed to have weakened the dependency relations. Changes brought within the hierarchical order of village have weakened the dependence of Dalits on upper-castes. Jodhka (2014:37) observes that weakening of hierarchical social order has freed Dalits from the oppressive structure, for upper-castes it means erosion of their privileges and power in rural economy.

G.K. Karanth (1996) has observed the gradual dissociation of caste and hereditary occupation in contemporary rural India. He observes the cause of this delinking between caste and occupation is the delegitimation of caste panchayats/councils and fast disintegration of the *jajmani* system. *Jajmani* system

sustained the patron-client relation, hence declining interdependence between castes has induced people to look for alternative means of livelihood (ibid: 89-90).

Changes in local economy influence the quality of inter-caste relations between upper-castes and Dalits, as pointed by S. Anandhi, J. Jeyaranjan and Rajan Krishnan (2002) in their study in Chengleput district, Tamil Nadu. While earlier generation of Dalits were dependent and forced to work for landowning upper-caste, Mudaliars. Urban and industrial expansion in and around the district have reconfigured the land use pattern which is mainly used for non-farm activities (like building industrial units, farmhouses). Growth of industrial units in the vicinity provides employment to younger generation of Dalits. Unlike their parents, young Dalit men refuse to work for upper-castes. Rather, they work on agricultural land either as sharecroppers or as owners. This has reduced dependence of Dalits on Upper-castes and also, these changes have altered and redefined masculinity of young Dalit men.

Surinder S Jodhka (2014, 2015) observes a similar trend of the rapid disintegration of jajmani system in contemporary rural Punjab and Haryana. He notes that the traditional relation between caste and occupation are very rare to find in rural Punjab as they are disappearing fast. Agrarian transformations in the state and socio-political mobilisation of Dalits have drastically weakened the traditional relations of dependency. Also, practice of untouchability has declined sharply. Dalits do not accept *Karmic* explanation for their oppression and lower socio-economic status. Younger generation of Dalits aspire to move out to the city for better employment and social mobility.

James Manor (2012) concedes that older caste hierarchies are waning but unevenly. In his study of villages in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka he notes that nature of inter-caste relations between upper-castes/dominant caste and Dalits are changing. He notes earlier dominance of upper-caste is now displaced by accommodation and negotiations to manage local affairs.

A study of four villages in Bihar by Sahay (2004) also concludes the erosion of jajmani system in village and weakening of control exercised by the community in determining individual's choice of occupation. He concludes that logic of economics, not caste, guides the jajmani system in the villages. Dipankar Gupta (2005) also points that caste hierarchies in rural India are becoming loose. He argues that the change in the caste system is due to inertia in Indian agriculture, changing demography, sub-division of landholdings, nature of social relations and lack of economic opportunities within

the confines of the village. Inability of village economy to sustain itself has pushed landless labourers out into the towns and cities contributing to decline of caste as a system in villages.

2.1.3 Bottom up View: Caste as Domination, Class and Violence

In pre-independent India, every day forms of oppression, resistance, exclusion, untouchability and inequality based on caste became concern of very few leaders and thinkers. Jyotirao Phule, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, M.K Gandhi and B. R Ambedkar are few of the pioneers who raised the question of caste and responded to it differently through social reforms and forming a politics striving for 'radical equality' (Kumar 2019).

Ambedkar was one of the foremost scholars to provide a forceful critique of caste. He holds that social and religious institution has bearing upon political institutions (2014[1936]). For him independence and political power are meaningless without radical transformation of socio-religious institutions and belief systems which legitimises inequality. Caste system governed by religious texts has no place for rationality. As a result, it prohibits equality and progress of civilisation. According to him without eradicating untouchability, essence of caste, equality and emancipation cannot be achieved (Guru 2009). Thus, he argues against the socialist claim that economic redistribution can bring about equal society. As, he argues, economy is not the only source from which power is derived, social and religious institutions are equally important sources of power. Noting dogmas, evils and violence sanctioned by Hindu religion in the form of caste system Ambedkar urges those leading anti-colonial struggles for political independence to wage a battle against it. According to him, without confronting the question of caste and its annihilation, emancipation and independence from colonial rule would be rendered empty and artificial. As he writes, "turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster" (ibid:233). He rejects justification provided by Gandhi, his contemporary, who views division of labour mandated by caste system allows for harmonious co-existence of Hindu society. Ambedkar (2014[1936]:233) famously wrote, "the caste system is not merely division of labour. *It is also a division of labourers*". Distinguishing division of labour as a need of civilised society he describes division of labourers as unnatural. Rather than based on aptitude and interest, occupational mobility is restricted within the

system as it divides labourers based on birth therefore it is an inefficient form of economic organisation. Underlining religious texts as the source of caste system he argues that only by reimagining and creating a new religion based on aptitude and equality structural inequality perpetuated by the system can be eliminated. Sharmila Rege (2006) points that scholarship on caste has largely neglected non-brahminical perspectives on the subject. Thus, despite Ambedkar's incisive critique, scholarly attention and approach to understand Indian society ignored the exploitation and inequality perpetuated by the caste system.

By drawing attention to the changes exerted upon the caste system by secular forces of economy, politics, education, etc. field-view suggests that the system is subject to change, it is flexible. Ethnographic accounts largely remain engaged on caste, kinship, family, religion to understand the organisation of rural life. This excessive preoccupation with caste and other aspects are noted and criticised by Beteille (Fuller 2012:2). He instead urges scholars to engage with agrarian system and class relations. Perhaps shift to the class question would have led scholars to address the nature of inter-caste relations, mainly between touchable and non-touchable castes. Coercive, exploitative and conflictual nature of inter-caste relation and Dalit perspective on the system conspicuously remained unremarked in the first two decades of independence during which a large rural territory was covered by social anthropologists and sociologist. The sources of ethnographic accounts largely remained of upper-caste touchable Hindus and their residential locations. Oversight of exploitative and coercive nature, and non-representation of Dalit experiences of caste also spring from the legacy of theoretical frameworks deployed by the scholars. Structural-functional and culturological approaches adopted by scholars understand Indian villages vis-à-vis caste as a system of interdependence, harmony and reciprocity. For scholars like M.N Srinivas adopting this approach "instances of violence deployed to enforce compliance of caste rules, of sheer exploitation and meanness, such violence and force did not become part of his analysis" (Tharmanglam and Chathukulam, 2018). Elements of coercion, domination and servility were viewed as external factors of secular life and not inherent reality of the caste system.

Joan P. Mencher (1974) notes this striking absence in village studies. She writes "for a long time, studies of India have focused on caste as a system of interdependence and reciprocity rather than one of exploitation" (ibid:470). In her study of Chingleput district (Tamil Nadu), she privileges the views of people at the lowest end of caste scale

to understand the functioning of caste structure. She argues that from this vantage point exploitation embedded in the 'interdependent' relation can be revealed. From this shift in vantage point, she records that people have a materialistic view of their position and understand unequal economic relation. She notes that those at the bottom do not view caste as a system based on interdependence. They have materialistic view of their condition, for caste-based inequities are not rationalised by notions of *Karma* and *Dharma*. While lowest caste, Paraiyans, work for upper castes, but it does not imply they are content with their position. She argues that caste functions as an exploitative system and it prevents formation of class unity. Likewise, Berreman (1991) argues that caste does not exist at a theoretical level, but it is a lived experience determining the distribution of "...power and vulnerability, privilege and oppression, honour and denigration, plenty and want, reward and deprivation, security and anxiety" (ibid:87-88). Conceding with Mencher, Berreman notes that Dalits do not voluntarily accept their subordinate position and negligence of Dalit vantage point perpetuates upper-caste view of the system as harmonious and reciprocal. Brahmanical dominance in socio-political and cultural spheres, and attempts to categorise Dalit-bahujans as Hindu have been challenged on the grounds that it misconstrues realities and experiences of Dalit-bahujans. Kancha Ilaiah (2012) argues that Dalit-bahujans have distinct lifeworld from caste Hindus and categorising former as Hindu is incorrect. Living in extreme forms of economic deprivation lifeworld of Dalit-bahujans is more egalitarian, democratic, close to nature, and rational (ibid). Whereas, caste Hindus seeks control over nature and labour through oppression. Lifeworld of caste Hindus is characteristically undemocratic as propensity to control and subordination requires irrational justification and use of power. Caste ideology not only controls Dalit bodies but it also establishes control over women cutting across the castes in order to extract unremunerative labour. Control over female labour and sexuality, which is attained through disciplining women by inculcating servility and obedience, enables the reproduction of caste and 'perpetuate caste hierarchies' (Sonalkar 1999:27). Emphasising on intimate link between patriarchy, caste, and centrality of women in perpetuating caste inequalities Ambedkar underlines the necessity of patriarchal control over women's sexuality for the reproduction of caste (Kapadia 2020). Sonalkar (1999: 25) writes according to Ambedkar, "women are central to the fight against the caste system, that the subjugation of women is central to the functioning of the caste system, that women are, in his words, the gateway to the caste system". Ambedkar proposes that without

transforming caste centric rules which govern the private sphere and gender relations annihilation of caste cannot be achieved. Towards elimination of caste he proposes inter-caste marriages, and subsequently as the law minister, emancipatory laws for women in marriage, divorce and inheritance through the Hindu Code Bill to bring equality in gender relations. For him annihilation of caste meant not only liberation for Dalits but also for women. Ilaiah (2012) describes gender relations among Dalit-bahujans as more egalitarian and democratic. Ambedkar recognises pervasiveness of patriarchal caste ideology till the bottom of caste scale and Dalits are not immune from its influence (Kapadia 2020). Also, feminist scholars have illuminated on subjugation, lack of autonomy, and agency among Dalit women (Dattar 1999; Rege 2004; Kapadia 2007). Unsettling monolithic understanding of women subjugation, Dalit feminist and Dalit women's organisation have foregrounded that incorporation of caste is inevitable to understand gender relations and nature of patriarchy (Guru 1995). Anupama Rao (2003:5) writes that Dalit feminism seeks, "re-examination of gender relations as fundamental to broader ideologies of caste". Underlining the significance of caste in gender relations Dalit feminists make case for 'politics of difference' on the grounds that Dalit women are doubly vulnerable as they are subjected to physical and sexual violence from both upper-caste and Dalit men (Guru1995). Sexual violence against Dalit women from upper caste men also manifests structural violence of caste. Rao (2010:222) writes, "sexual violence is particularly indecipherable as caste violence because it is normalised as upper-caste privilege and experienced as an unspeakable form of intimate humiliation".

Subordination is one of the preconditions to sustain asymmetrical and exploitative relation upon which the caste system is arranged. These asymmetries justified and sustained by caste system are not natural, rather they are imposed artificially. Dipankar Gupta (2000) argues caste as a closed stratification system. He points that in closed stratification system, hierarchy is maintained by imagining, imposing and emphasising on difference between equal and separate groups. Since differences are not natural or apparent, it is forced on to hierarchy to rank otherwise logically unrankable groups to maintain power and subordination. Accordingly, graded hierarchy of caste system based on the idea of purity and pollution is an instrument of retaining power and justify socio-economic inequalities. Further, practice of untouchability embedded in the system has been instrumental in subordination, stigmatisation and humiliation of Dalits. Stigma and humiliation attached to Dalit

bodies are intimately linked to untouchability. Deriving from untouchability, caste-based humiliation is integral to Dalit life and experiences. Gopal Guru (2009) argues untouchability serves the human need of 'surplus recognition' acquired by reduction and rejection of others. Distinguishing between reduction and rejection Guru argues untouchability is founded on the basis of rejection: "rejection especially achieved by assigning a repulsive meaning to the human body assumes a much pernicious dimension" (ibid:210). Caste hierarchy is created artificially by giving repulsive meanings to otherwise natural elements which denies equality and inclusion. The caste ideology rationalises subordination, exploitation and alienation of Dalits from the means of production. Subordination is crucial for the appropriation of surplus as Claude Meeillassoux (1973:107) writes, "the repressive effect of the caste system is coherently related to the ideological and religious notions with [it]...the notion of 'purity'...reinforced the pre-existing relation of subordination and alienation...since one must be alienated if one is to accept being impure". Although, for several field-studies class was not an analytical category, but significance of class manifested in economic power and its role in upholding local hierarchical caste order. Marxist and Political-economic approaches incorporate class as an analytical category to understand agrarian relations and pattern material distribution to understand inherent inequities of the caste system. Departing from earlier understanding of village as mutually interdependent society, these studies emphasize on contradictions and conflict inherent in the system. Rather than selecting either caste or class to comprehend caste these scholars argue that both be studied in tandem as caste and control over economic resources are deeply connected. Harriss (1982:9) points that, "the process of 'differentiation' of the peasantry is thus 'blocked' both because of the character of the economy and by the ideological structures of caste and kinship which reinforce the existing relations of production and power structure". Anand Chakrabarti (2001) rejects caste and class dichotomy as false creation and misleading. Unequal distribution of economic resources/capital sustains the relationship of domination-subordination. Subordination of labour, mainly landless Dalits, is maintained through extreme forms of labour exploitation and violence. Combined focus on caste and class enables disentanglement of various forms of caste atrocities perpetrated against Dalits rather than rejecting it as 'aberration'. Agrarian policies (land reform policies) and technological intervention in it benefitted the landowning classes and consolidated their dominance (Prasad 1987; Byres 1977, 1981; Harriss 1982; Lerche 1999, Chakrabarti

2001). As the pattern of land ownership hardly changed by the abolition of samindari and redistribution of land, these legislations failed to undermine the traditional upper-caste dominance and their control over land. Increasing political and economic dominance of upper-caste has further worsened the material conditions of Dalits. Further marginalisation in rural economy and political consciousness of Dalits have also resulted in escalation of intercaste tension and violent atrocities on Dalits (Balagopal 2011; Guru 1994; Prasad 1987). Often political assertions, demand for higher wages or dignity have resulted in systematic unleashing of upper caste violence on Dalits. Dalit massacre in Kilvenmani, Tamil Nadu (1968), Karamchedu Killings in Andhra Pradesh (1985), or surge in agrarian violence in rural Bihar between 1970s to 1980s show that challenges to upper-caste dominance are mostly met with violent repression. The acts of violence against Dalits exposes the upper-caste mythical notion of the system as based on consensus and interdependence. Stark contrast in economic conditions of Dalits and upper castes suggest indeed caste-class are inseparable (Chakrabarti 2001). Dalit assertion and demands threatens to undermine the upper-caste dominance which is sustained by exploitative socio-economic relations which is legitimised by caste system. Violence is used as a tool to restore relational order of dominance and subordination (Teltumbde 2016; Nagaraj 2015).

2.2 Debating Survival of Caste in the City

Unlike villages, cities are characterised by vast boundary and heterogeneous population from diverse regions and different ethnoreligious identities makes study of caste a strenuous exercise. Due to its morphological structuring, demographic heterogeneity, and intersection of opposing value systems—traditional and modern—ascertaining overt presence of caste in cities becomes an intricate exercise. Guru (2009:55) observes, “the growing dilution of interactive sphere leading to growing anonymity makes the domestic space within the urban context only sphere for the protection of ‘pure untouchable’.” Conflict of opposing values in cities is negotiated by domesticating ‘traditional’ and publicising ‘modern’ (ibid). As a result, caste gains an ambivalent character in cities. Further, the presence of modern social, political and economic institutions in the cities and its proximity and accessibility to its citizenry give an impression of cities as a casteless boundary. However, studies suggest that this appearance is far from the reality. Macro-level manifestation of caste-based discriminations and inequalities in the urban labour-market, rental housing and spatial

segregations suggest that boundaries of 'private' sphere where domestication of caste occurs are porous and escape into public 'secular' spaces. Demarcating operation of caste only in 'private' sphere conceals its subtle reproduction and role in generating urban inequalities when it leaves domestic boundaries. Caste appears in urban landscape through debates around the reservation, discrimination in the urban labour market, residential segregation and operation of caste associations. Notwithstanding these manifestations, caste seems to be absent in the cities because of its subtle, secular and sporadic nature of appearance. Such unobvious and seemingly momentary expressions of caste in cities that make it unidentifiable in everyday life.

Influence of different forces like urbanisation, monetised economy, centralised polity, migration, technological advancement, legislations prompted debate on future of caste. Central to the debate is question can caste survive without hierarchy? Continued presence and persistence of caste has been noted, but debate on its survival remains divided. Scholars remain divided on the final fate of caste under modern republic experiencing rapid political and economic changes. While some maintain caste adapt to changes by acquiring newer forms and meanings (Desai 1988; Rudolph and Rudolph 1965). Whereas, other are of the view that political and economic changes has led to de-ritualisation and domestication of caste which has reduced significance of caste assigned ritual status to private/domestic sphere (Gupta 2004; Sheth 1999; Beteille 1991, 2012). Therefore, it ceases to exert its traditional influence on socio-economic spheres. On the contemporary nature of caste D.L Sheth (1999:2505) writes, "while caste survive as micro-communities based on kinship sentiments and relationships, they no longer relate to each other as 'units' of a ritual hierarchy". It is argued that in contemporary times in education and occupation have become salient status markers. Andre Beteille (2012:43) writes, "The old ritual criteria have not disappeared, but they have to compete increasingly with new secular criteria...salient among them are education and occupation". Beteille (1991) urges that study of family rather than caste is crucial to understand reproduction of inequalities in India. M.N Srinivas (2003) argues that traditional mode of production which is linked with ritual status is crucial in sustaining hierarchy and inequality. Combination of different political, economic and ideological forces have altered the traditional mode of production and initiated disintegration of hierarchy. He underlines that, "caste as a system is dead, individual castes are flourishing" which characterises move towards equality as individual castes express difference not hierarchy (ibid:459). Autonomous existence of caste,

independent of hierarchy, is noted and referred variously as ‘horizontal stretch of caste’, ‘substantialisation/ethnicisation’ or ‘secularisation of caste’ (Srinivas 2003; Dumont 1988; Jaffrelot 2000; Gupta 2000, 2005; Sheth 1999). Crucially, substantialisation/secularisation represents non-hierarchical, independent, and horizontal existence of caste possessing community consciousness. Rather than bound by vertical relationship of ‘interdependence’, it is argued that independent caste entities compete with each other for political and economic resources (Sheth 1999). Horizontal existence of caste delegitimises the principle of hierarchy as it represents identity/cultural difference (Srinivas 2003; Gupta 2005; Fuller 1996). Rather than ritual status, for horizontally related discrete castes education, occupation, income and class constitute crucial identity markers.

Further, it is advanced that detached from the hierarchy, caste denotes cultural/ethnic identity. However, proponents of de-ritualisation/secularisation of caste and its domestication overlook saliency of caste ideology in reproduction of caste as ethnic/cultural identity. On acknowledging caste as cultural identity Balmurali Natrajan (2012:5) writes, “castes have *claimed* ‘culture’ as their key mode of reproduction and stability, thereby enabling caste and casteism to adapt to new demands of capitalism and democratic politics”. Gopal Guru (2009:50) argues conditions of modernity has not displaced but represses the untouchability “at the bottom of ‘brahminical mind’.” Ideology of caste becomes unrecognisable because it masks behind the modern idioms and identities which reappears in subtle forms. While it is argued that under modern conditions new stratificatory system has emerged in which upward mobility is sought by accessing secular means, education or occupation. Since, access to secular means is not dependent on ritual status, upward mobility is achievable for all. However, reproduction of caste as cultural identity and subtle operation of caste hides the ways in which caste-based discrimination, and exclusion restricts attainment of upward mobility (Deshpande 2013).

This section reviews various modes through which caste enters, manifests and gets discussed in urban context. The review shows resilience of caste and its significance in urban space This section reviews various modes through which caste enters, manifests and gets discussed in urban context. The review shows resilience of caste and its significance in urban space.

2.2.1 Urban Focus

Rao (1979) points that urban sociology was neglected till 1970s under a false belief that India is a land of villages. With the rural-urban migration, slums, and urban development cities gained the attention of sociologists and anthropologists. Among other spheres of urban life like stratification, neighbourhood, slums, etc. a dominant focus of urban studies remained on industrial sociology (trade unions and industrial relations). Changes ushered in the character of urban industrial stratification due to changed agrarian relations, migration from rural to urban areas, and the increase in urban industrial towns constituted the main areas of inquiry for scholars (Sharma 1997). These studies insisted on moving beyond the villages and to focus on understanding the composition of urban-industrial society, organisation of work and labour in the urban economy (ibid). Investigation of the workforce in organised sector of urban economy uncovered the role of ascriptive identities like caste, religion and other ethnic origins in the process of recruitment (Breman 1999; Devnathan 1987).

Navlakha (1971) reports the pattern of bias in the recruitment process in favour of upper caste, urban dwelling, and the metropolitan population. Studies on labour and workforce find the role of caste networks in facilitating migration to cities and in determining the chances of employability of migrants in the city (Rao 1961; Gould 1963). Caste and caste networks seem to play an active, but an informal role in determining the nature of job, job opportunities and position within the organisation. Papola and Subramaniam (1973) point that Indian labour market is characterised by the predominance of informal channels whereas formalised channels are of little significance. In their study of four cities Bombay, Coimbatore, Poona and Ahmedabad, Papola and Rodgers (1992) find that formal channels like employment exchange and newspaper advertisements are the source of information to a very small section not exceeding 20 to 25 per cent. However, in over two third of cases, workers receive information about the availability of job from the informal channels like relatives, friends, and neighbours. Holmstrom (1976) makes similar observations, he notes that due to the disparity between the demand and supply of workers, wherein supply exceeds the demand, therefore, an applicant lacking contacts (neighbours, friends, relatives) stands no chance. Bargaining power and informal role of trade unions in the organised sectors have been documented in maintaining the pool of workers on the basis of identity ties which includes mainly caste, religion, region, language and so on (Holmstrom 1984). Trade unions as informal networks facilitate the caste clustering in

the industries by ensuring denial of opportunities to casual and contract labourers to gain any permanent job in the organisation (Breman 1999). It is observed that in occupational world of industries/factories identities of caste, religion or residence play important role in organising and governing relations informally (Panjwani 1984; Parry 1999). Study of Coimbatore labour market by Harriss (1982) found that informal channels of caste networks restricted the movement of labour from unorganised to organised sector despite their having required skills, experience, and qualification. Upper castes are preponderant in the permanent jobs of organised sector and through their or influence of trade unions, it maintained control over these positions. Although it has been observed that schedule castes, schedule tribes, and backward caste are preponderant in class III and IV, they together account for less than 50 per cent jobs, upper castes retain nearly 50 per cent of jobs in this grade apart from their hegemony over grade I and II jobs (Panini 2014). In the labour market mainly Dalits, adivasis, women and lower caste predominate in low-wage sections of the market (Devnathan 1987). Although cities appear to be stratified on the principle of class, but drawing such simple conclusions could be misleading.

Aforementioned studies reveal clearly the continuity of traditional ties/kinship networks in the modern urban labour market. The operation of caste and other identities in the urban labour market indicate the saliency of pre-market relations in determining opportunities and life chances in cities.

2.2.2 Caste Associations

Caste associations are born in urban boundaries and is an urban centric phenomenon peculiar to cities. They represent modern incarnation and associational life of caste in cities which is assumingly premised on the principle of competition, not hierarchy (Ghurye 1932). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century formation and assertion of caste association was noted in cities and towns in response to caste enumeration in census returns which commenced in 1871 under the colonial rule (Sundar 2000; Dirks 2003). Various caste groups used the census as an instrument to claim superior position than accorded to them within the caste hierarchy, in census returns to raise their group ranking within the caste system. The introduction of affirmative policies, both in pre-independence and independence period, for deprived communities mainly for backward castes, and anti-caste movements initiated and sustained the formation of the caste associations (Jaffrelot 2000). “Corporate caste

associations are an assertion in the sphere of modern civil society demanding that the state recognise their legitimacy and, in the process, respond to their need for material and symbolic resources” (Baird 2009:90). Caste associations became a medium for depressed castes to articulate caste inequalities, and demand equal distribution of modern resources and opportunities from the state in modern urban spaces. However, caste associations were not restricted only to depressed castes. Crucially, for upper castes in cities, caste associations served as tool of caste reproduction in form of arranging marriages or ritual performance, enlargement of caste networks and distribution of social-cultural capital within endogamous group (ibid). Thereby, caste acquired a different form in different settings; in the village as caste system, whereas in towns and cities it appeared in the form of caste association. Contrary to ‘book view’, which explained caste system as the uniform and unchanging reality of Indian society, materialisation of caste associations in cities indicated potential of caste to readjust itself to the new changes and opportunities (Rudolph 1965; Dirks 2003).

Caste association refers to the horizontal consolidation of endogamous jatis/varna i.e. members recruited within it share similar ascriptive identity of caste. Caste associations tend to subsume different sub-castes to create an exclusive and homogeneous identity. Balmurli Natrajan (2012) observes while through the process of culturalisation these associations seek to standardise caste identity, but representation of caste as a unified homogenous block conceals internal contradictions and inequalities of class and gender. Standardisation of identity is important to claim its higher or lower caste position and articulate its demand to the state. Unlike caste system, based on the principle of hierarchy and interdependence, it is equality and competition among caste groups that defines the caste association (Dumont 1988). Dumont describes the dissociation of castes from the caste system as substantialisation of caste. This modern incarnation of caste becomes the cause of concern and debate for those who are optimistic of its disappearance under the influence of industrialisation and urbanisation. Ghurye (1932) expresses concern over emerging horizontal caste solidarities. He points out at the bearing of non-Brahmin movement upon the caste system mainly in towns and cities of Maharashtra (cf. Dumont 1988:220-23). For him, caste associations represent visible manifestations of change in the caste system. He argues, caste associations gained life due to the gradual replacement of caste hierarchy with competition, relaxation in rules regarding food and drinking, and weakening of notions of purity and impurity (ibid). According to him consolidation of endogamous

caste groups through caste association heightened intra-caste consciousness and inter-caste antagonisms. Ghurye believes that rather than demise caste association would foster inter-caste divisions and hostility. Separation of caste from the caste system would result in heightened caste conflicts, not a march towards a casteless society. He holds competitions among the caste groups are not compatible with the goal of national development and integration; it retards the development of the nation and national consciousness. Like Ghurye, Srinivas (2003) expresses his concern to the emergence of caste groups in urban centers. He argues that far from being disappearing with the process of modernisation caste is experiencing a 'horizontal consolidation'. He remarks, "castes as a system is dead or dying, individual castes are thriving" (ibid: 459).

Political sociologists studying the emergence and function of caste associations in democratic politics are of the opinion that drawing a dichotomy between modern and tradition do not help in capturing the social change in Indian society. The disappearance of caste is not essential for democracy to deepen and flourish; both exist in dialectical relation, interact and influence each other (Rudolph 1965; Kothari 2014). Caste has transformed from within and from external political forces, these changes have allowed for upward mobility of lower castes in various parts of the country. As caste identities provide basis for socio-political mobilisation. Formation of caste associations has facilitated entry of marginalised as well as dominant castes in electoral politics and enabled sharing of political power (Harrisson 1956). These associations make democratic politics vibrant and representational in character (Rudolph 1965). Thereby caste associations are instrumental in bringing democracy in a traditional society and do not essentially oppose it (ibid).

2.2.3 Discourse on Reservation

In 1990, V.P. Singh government declared its decision to implement the proposed recommendations of the Mandal Commission for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The decision of the union government revived the 'concern' of forward castes over 'merit' and 'efficiency', which so far was confined to a few states, at the national level (Jaffrelot 2003:335-52). This decision of the union government met with similar hostilities across the country as had earlier been seen in states of Bihar, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh where OBC reservations were proposed/implemented. Such

countrywide reactions dispelled the notion of provinciality of backlash against reservation and highlighted the ‘national opinion’ on the reservation vis-à-vis caste.

As institutions of higher education and employment opportunities are mainly located in the cities, therefore, they were/are the main sites of anti-reservation agitations. For similar reasons, the decision of V.P Singh government perturbed mostly the cities. During the 1990s, cities resonated with the cacophony of fierce debate around the reservation policy for OBCs, as the one dimension of determining backwardness of this category, though not exclusively, is based on the ascriptive identity of caste. Identification and listing of backward communities on caste basis ensued a public and academic discourse either in support of reservation or against it (Balagopal 1990; Dirks 2003). Opponents of the reservation criticised the decision as divisive arguing that it further reinforces and essentialises caste. Contrary to this opinion, supporters of reservation viewed this step as a compensation for historical deprivation, intended to create a level playing field for the underprivileged communities in order to enable them to compete effectively in an unequal society. The Mandal moment also began a debate over to review and revise the policy of reservation.

Kothari (1994:1590) comments, “caste can be oppressive but it can also provide a basis for the struggle against oppression”. According to him caste has proved to be a secular and democratic force capable of sapping caste rigidities. He supports the reservations for OBCs, for him it represents class conflict. Social scientists like MN Srinivas, AM Shah, and BS Baviskar strongly oppose the support lent to the reservation (Dirks 2003). They argue that caste-based reservation would fail to address the poor and needy, and benefit the elites within the group. As against Kothari’s argument that caste is a secular force, they disputed his claim and argue that reservations perpetuate and divide the society along the caste lines. Shah (1991) also argues that reservation compromises the efficient functioning of institutions and impedes national development. Similarly, Andre Beteille and Veena Das note caste-based reservations are divisive and reminiscent of the colonial policy of divide and rule (Dirks 2003). Beteille (2005) argues that there is need to focus that affirmative actions should also be treated as a matter of policy, rather than irrevocable right. He argues that rather than imposing a rigid structure, both public and private institutions should be allowed to design their own affirmative actions to incorporate depressed classes. While Beteille (1991) remains sympathetic to political reservation for SCs and STs, but not in higher

education and employment. According to him admission into public institutions based on ascriptive identity rather than 'merit' subverts their efficiency and performance. He notes caste quotas work against the intellectual excellence and efficiency, and once reservation policy is implemented, they become permanent in character. Like Beteille, Dipankar Gupta (2005) also disagrees with the extension of reservation for backward castes. He rather argues for refining the policy of reservation as affirmative action, like introducing the creamy-layer provision to remove the beneficiaries of reservation among SCs and STs. Although the opposition was aimed at OBCs reservation but these debates reveal the manner in which reservations and its 'beneficiaries' are perceived. Balagopal (1990) criticises the acts of resistance and thrust of arguments against reservation. For him as long as caste remains the source of property and power it is fair to use caste identity to liberate from the unequal power structure.

In 2006, Arjun Singh, the union minister for the Ministry of Human Resource and Development, announced the intent of government to extend 27 per cent reservations for OBCs in central educational institutions, once again it triggered the anti-reservation agitations across the country. What merits attention is the thrust of arguments and language of opposition against caste-based reservations. Those who opposed the reservations in the 1990s and subsequently in 2006 argued that reservation compromises with 'merit', dilutes 'efficiency' and generates reverse discrimination as it penalises the present generation for the inequalities of past. As discussed above, such popular arguments echoed even among scholars opposing the policy. Opposition to reservations garbed in the neutral and modern language of 'merit' and 'efficiency' underlines the acceptance of caste biases which places 'superior' castes as naturally meritorious and believes that reservations for lower caste groups renders the principle of 'efficiency' and 'merit' vulnerable. The inconsistency of these arguments is observable as it at the same time accepts and refutes caste. Caste based reservations are challenged on the basis that the principle of 'merit' and 'efficiency' be deployed as the principle of selection and recruitments in public institutions. (Un)surprisingly, this line of argument views that reservation militates against both, 'merit' and 'efficiency', as lower castes are non-meritorious and inefficient. Few writings on OBCs reservations provide a critique of the method deployed in identifying the backward communities eligible to receive the benefits and advanced the need to develop a precise method for effective targeting of the beneficiaries of reservation policy (Balagopal 1990; Nigam 1990; Shah 2014; Radhakrishnan 2014). However, opponents of the reservation

marginally debate about the identification method, need for reservations and alternative vision to bring in parity between have and have-nots.

Ashwini Deshpande (2006: 2444) comments that concerns over, "...declining merit are only some of the indicators of a latent casteism that constitutes the reality of the supposedly caste-neutral contemporary urban India". She argues that questioning the status quo and attempts to restructure the society are seen as 'casteism', not the privileges accrued to few caste groups and belief in the naturalness of caste hierarchy (ibid). Satish Deshpande (2013) explicates that caste blindness or castelessness articulated in the language of 'merit', 'efficiency', 'casteism' arises from the manner in which caste has been written and understood in colonial and post-colonial India. He argues that in modern republic burden has been shifted on Dalits to seek equality which forces them to publicly articulate and claim their identity. He writes, "the pursuit of their interests requires the mandatory mediation of public politics, and their needs must usually be articulated as particularistic demands" (ibid:37). Public articulation of particularistic identity hyper-visible Dalits as caste-marked not as modern secular citizen. In contrast, traditionally advantaged caste Hindus have been successful in converting caste privileges and capital into modern capital in the form of higher education, lucrative professions and property acquisition enabling them to pass as modern secular citizens. In modern secular space they are not required to foreground their identity. Their modern identity masks advantages derived from the caste identity and its role in constructing modern citizen. Caste-class nexus and associated privileges of caste Hindus have not been disrupted. Rather it has taken modern forms and meanings which makes their ascriptive identity invisible in public. He argues interrogation of biographies of upper-caste is important to understand the meaning and source of castelessness.

Anti-reservation agitations debunked the assumption of cities as caste blind spaces; reservation posed challenge to the near monopoly of upper castes over central government jobs and in higher education it was met with violent opposition in cities. Cities are the sites where protests, debates, disagreements are lodged in favour or against the reservations. It is through these debates and actions caste surfaces in the otherwise seemingly "casteless" space of cities.

2.2.4 Urban Labour Market

Implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendation in the early 1990s introduced the representation of backward classes, in addition to existing reservations for scheduled castes and tribes, in central government jobs, public undertakings, and in higher educational institutions. However, the government is no longer the largest employer in the changed economy. In 1991, India adopted liberalisation and the opening of the economy, leading to withdrawal of state and state control. This resulted in subsequent privatisation and disinvestments of several public sectors. Unlike Indian state, private players are not bound by the constitutional responsibility of ensuring equality among unequal through affirmative policies of caste-based reservations. It claims to be operating primarily on the principle of 'merit'. The ardent claim of 'merit' made by the private sector assumes that it is natural and not a socially constructed concept. Therefore, in the process of selection and recruitment social identity of an individual is neutral and does not obstruct or privileges any group or individual. Arguing against the extension of reservation in private sector employment Gupta (2005) argues that regardless of caste identity, recruitment in private sector is largely done on the basis of right networks and connections. He reproduces the argument provided by private players that hiring in private sectors is caste blind. However, in contrast to private players who resist any imposition of reservation on the basis that they operate on the principle of 'merit' and 'efficiency', he insists on significance of networks in recruitment. He seems to assume that caste privileges and social-cultural capital derived from the caste locations are autonomous and have no role in building networks. However, Craig Jeffrey's work (2010) in western Uttar Pradesh (UP) demonstrates role of caste in acquiring social and cultural capital, and its role in building networks in modern spaces like administrative institutions. He observes despite their inability to get a secure job, upper-caste young *jat* men are able to negotiate precarity owing to their caste location, and strength of their informal networks. Further empirical studies show that it is naive to assume that hiring in private sector is caste blind.

Socio-economic indicators like landholdings, education, occupation, show the sizeable caste disparity between General and SC in the urban settings across the country (Deshpande 2014). By deploying both qualitative and quantitative methods, studies continue to show the wide array of caste based socio-economic inequalities. Material and social disparities adversely influence the aspirations and opportunities for those located at the bottom of caste hierarchy.

On the influence of economic reforms on various classes Vakulabharnam (2010) finds that the benefits of economic reforms are concentrated in the urban areas in specific sectors—IT, biotechnology, real estate, insurance— that enable certain classes like capitalists, managers, the upper end of formal workers, moneylenders to be major beneficiaries of economic policies of liberalisation. Skewed attention to service and manufacture sector also resulted in the neglect of agricultural sector and of people dependent on it. A large proportion of landless belong to lower caste and are dependent on agriculture as laborers to eke out their livelihood. The impoverishment of agriculture sector has deteriorated the livelihood conditions of the marginalised castes.

One of the explored sites of caste manifestation is urban labour market that claims to be operating on the principle of merit. Studies on urban labour market point out to the less obvious routes, where caste identities tend to produce discriminations and exclusions. Thorat and Atwell (2007) capture the bearing of identity—caste and religion—in the process of recruitment by private firms. Their study focuses on the jobs which requires higher educational qualifications, thereby suggesting the importance of merit in the recruitment and final selection to the private firm. The outcome of the study shows that successful response for the next stage is higher for the upper caste applicants than the Dalit and Muslim applicants; for the latter, it is lowest. This illustrates the discrimination faced by Dalit and Muslim job applicants at the first stage of the job search process. Another study conducted by Siddique (2009) in Chennai shows that high caste applicants have 20 per cent higher chances of being called back (cf Deshpande 2014). Deshpande and Newman (2007) in their study of postgraduate students of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University, and Jamia Milia Islamia, locate the role of social networks in shaping the expectations and employment outcomes. Similarly, Jodhka and Newman (2007) have found the role of caste identity and the implicit role of social capital in exclusion of Dalits despite the claims of modernity and merit. In their study, of information technology (IT) sector in Chennai, Fuller and Narsimhan (2006) find the preponderance of urban middle class and forward/upper castes among IT professionals. Possession of required social and cultural capital explains the overwhelming presence of this class and caste in IT sector. They argue that reservation alone cannot address the exclusion of lower/backward castes in the private sector, as in the recruitment social and cultural capital provide an advantage to the urban middle class and upper castes. Therefore, it is imperative to equip the excluded groups with the appropriate cultural capital in order to compete effectively in

the job market. Similarly, in her study of Bangalore based Indian in IT industry Upadhyay (2007) finds, contrary to claims of wider representation, the socio-economic background of the workforce in IT industry is more homogeneous, predominantly comprising of urban, middle class, and upper caste. Despite the insistence on 'merit', homogeneity of workforce profile is stark in the IT industry. This is due to the specific requirements of soft skills by IT industry to operate in globalised market, which includes good communication skills, personality, confidence and attitude, are the element of merit on the basis of which hiring is done. Those who have access to appropriate economic and cultural capital mainly possess these skills are largely belong to middle class and upper castes. Outcomes of these studies dispel the claim of 'merit' in recruitment and hiring by private firms and highlight the caste privileges in the form of social and cultural capital representative of upper caste and middle class.

The studies, as mentioned above, suggest, "discrimination and a strong market orientation or modernity can co-exist with ease" (Deshpande 2014:98). Therefore, an understanding of caste in urban spaces requires its interrogation in both the sites: public and private/domestic.

2.2.5 Spatial Segregation and Marginality

Modernisation theory¹⁰ postulated model of development according to which 'development' across the countries was assumed to follow similar trajectory as it has a "universal pattern" (Bernstein 1971). By creating dichotomous ideal types like traditional-modern, mechanical-organic, status-contract, sacred-secular, and folk-urban, the theory determined pre-conditions, destination, and direction of development. In this schema, preconditions of development like secular and contract-based relations are associated with urban space where primitive/ascriptive identities become impertinent (ibid). The theory creates urban as an autonomous and independent spatial entity detached from the rural/primitive forms of life and socio-economic organisation of society.

¹⁰ In post-1945, when socio-political conditions were changing as a result of end of second world war and decolonisation of several nations, the issue of development emerged as a matter requiring urgent attention and to be made a priority. Initially the concern over development preoccupied the scholars from the discipline of Economics. As the discipline alone proved inadequate, other disciplines stepped in to build and 'speculate' the trajectory of development of third world 'underdeveloped' nations. However, they also relied heavily on modernisation theory, case in point is Daniel Lerner's (1958), *The Passing of Traditional Society*. The postulates of the theory received objections and criticisms from scholars (refer Reinhard Bendix (1963, 1967a, 1967b), Henry Bernstein (1971)) mainly on its assumption of linear development and ethnocentrism.

Rather than dismissing the role of ascriptive/primitive identities, urban scholars explore distinctive modes and methods to understand the “peculiar characteristics of the city as a particular form of human association” (Wirth 1938:4). Enormous heterogeneity in population makes urban mode of life distinct which tends to weaken rigid social structures. Distinction between rural and urban life did not imply their autonomous existence, nor does it mean space alone determines the principle of governing and organising human life. Inhabitants play a significant role in moulding the socio-economic and spatial design of space. Robert E Park (1984[1925]:1) writes, “the city is not, in other words, merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature”. Similarly, Louis Wirth (1938) observes, “the city is product of growth rather than instantaneous creation, it is to be expected that influences which it exerts upon the mode of life should not be able to wipe out completely the previously dominant modes of human association” (p.3). People coming from different places to cities do not essentially shed their ascriptive identities and values in place of origin. They tend to carry it along in newer places and readjust it in order to adapt to distinct conditions of new city life. In fact, different forms of identity—class, race, caste, religion—form basis of cohesion, conflict, segregation, and discrimination in demographically diverse urban space. Residential segregation, which appears to be decisively based on class, has received attention of scholars to understand its role in producing and perpetuating urban inequality (Massey and Denton 1988; Wilson 1987; Ellen 2000; Rich 2009; Wacquant 2018). Urban residential segregation is inter-related with ethno-racial identities and in turn reproduces inequality and discrimination¹¹. Residential segregation is not simply an

¹¹ W.J. Wilson (1987) pointed that persistence of employment disparities and concentration of poverty in America notably shows racial difference. He argues that restructuring of American economy like deindustrialisation and shifting of manufacturing industries to sub-urban areas has adversely affected the inner city black employment. Economic changes has also enhanced class differentiation and polarisation among African-Americans. He stresses that shifting of economic activities to distant locations and abandonment of upwardly mobile African-Americans has reinforced social isolation, deterioration, concentration of poverty in inner-city poor neighbourhoods. He identifies such conditions as force behind the formation of underclass¹¹. ‘This underclass exists mainly because of the large scale and harmful changes in the labour-market, and its resulting spatial concentration as well as the isolation of such areas from the more affluent parts of the black community (2012:268). According to him underclass refers to that population or individuals who are 1. ‘outside the mainstream of the American occupational system...and 2. Share the same social milieu’ (2012:253). He distinguishes underclass from the lower class as latter only refers to economic marginality whereas underclass is economically weak and their marginality is reinforced by the social milieu in which they live. The use of the concept drew controversy

outcome of income differentials or economic condition. Ethno-racial identities and biases, economic changes and state policies crucially shape spatial arrangement of a city and create spatial clustering and segregation of urban population. Grafmeyer (1994) views, “segregation as a form of unequal spatial distribution of population groups in the space; segregation as a process relying on various mechanisms of residential and social clustering, filtering, selection and/or exclusion; segregation as a problem revealing social ostracism and/or discrimination, relegation, isolation of vulnerable and underprivileged groups” (cf Dupont 2002:158). Segregation is a mechanism which creates demographic homogeneity in settlements along the axis of identity and class. It adversely affects integration of marginalised social groups into larger socio-economic milieu of the city and impedes upward mobility. Veronique Dupont (2002) argues that distribution of city population in different forms of settlements cannot be explained away by factor of income differentials. Focus on different dimensions of residential practices like “social networks based on caste, religion, professional occupation and geographical origin” is crucial to comprehend residential clustering and its role in generating segregation (p.173).

and criticism after which the concept was denoted by ghetto poor. Likewise, by comparing poor neighbourhoods, black ghetto in Chicago (USA) and *banlieue* of Paris (France) Loïc Wacquant (2018) argues that advanced marginality characterises contemporary regime of urban poverty. In his work spatiality, territorial stigmatisation, emerges as an important dynamic of advanced marginality (Caldeira, 2009). In both the cities, poor neighbourhood intersects with the identity of its inhabitants. Highlighting the ‘gamut of racially skewed and market-oriented state policies’ in American context (p.4) he points urban location/neighbourhood and its reputation is produced through the complex interaction of various actors (residents, administrators, politicians, and those residing beyond the neighbourhood), agencies and state policies. Describing the spatial nature of advanced marginality which tends to converge in urban poor neighbourhood he writes, ‘advanced marginality displays a distinct tendency to conglomerate in coalesce around “hard core”, “no go” areas that are clearly identified--by their own residents no less than by outsiders---as urban infernos rife with deprivation, immorality, illegality and violence, where discards of the society brook living’ (Wacquant:270, 2018). Popular depiction and association of poor neighbourhoods and its inhabitants as immoral, illegal or violent by state, media and urban non-poor further reinforces spatial segregation and socio-economic exclusion of urban poor embodying specific racial/national identities. Further, Javier Ruiz-Tagle (2017) examines the effect of mixed-neighbourhood located in two geographically distant cities of Chicago (USA) and Santiago (Chile) on territorial stigmatisation. Tagle concludes that mixed neighbourhood does not eliminate pre-existing stigma attached to a place and people, it merely changes the form.

Spatial arrangement of cities, territorial stigmatisation within and attempts of building integrated neighbourhood to overcome socio-spatial segregation expresses the multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination suffered by the urban poor who also tend to belong to specific social/racial groups. In India, traditional system of caste also exerts influence on socio-spatial arrangement and segregation. Among other aspects, caste system assigns different groups a particular and segregated spatial locations. It mandates separation of pure from 'polluted' caste groups which necessitates territorial separation. In fact, caste based spatial segregation continues to be a tragic reality of rural India where village is inhabited by upper caste touchable Hindus, whereas Dalits (untouchable) stay away from villages in demarcated ghettos/hamlets. It was hoped that large scale migration to modern urban milieu would liberate Dalits from structural oppression imposed by caste system and village economy (Ambedkar 1948; Sheth 1979). However urban India shows dual character where on the one hand it offers opportunities of mobility for Dalits, on the other hand, "it also retains and reinforces certain characters of the traditional social structures leading to ghettoisation and marginalisation of Dalits" (Deshpande 2016). Territorial separation resulting in residential clustering of Dalits is one of the traditional characters retained and reinforced in the city. As caste based residential segregation is not a modern phenomenon, territorial separation has been noted even in pre-industrial cities where upper-caste and elites remained concentrated in the center of city or town, whereas lower castes engaged in 'unclean' occupations were relegated to the neighbourhoods located at the periphery (Mehta 1969; Dupont 2004; Gadgil 1952; Deshpande 2016). In metropolitan city, like Delhi, caste based residential segregation is clearly manifested in overt and official existence of untouchable settlements like harijan colony, Balmiki colony, to name a few (Kumar 2000; Dupont 2004; Ganguly 2018). Residential segregation is an inescapable urban reality on which caste system continues to exert influence and, produce spatial differentiation and segregation. Spatial segregation marks the exclusionary practice of the caste/class-based society and inter-caste disparities.

Veronique Dupont (2004) analyses mechanisms of residential segregation in metropolitan city, Delhi. Dupont emphasizes that focus on microlevel neighbourhoods

(*mohallas*) can reveal finer phenomenon of filtering and socio-spatial clustering¹². Scheduled castes and backward classes are found statistically over-represented in congested and high-density locations like urban village and resettlement. They constitute only a marginal population of high-income localities (4 per cent). She argues that residential practices of people demonstrate class alone cannot adequately explain residential clustering and segregation. Procedures of accessing housing in better localities shows that social networks and cultural capital are important in screening the future residents.

In his study of the formation of linguistic enclaves by migrant laborers in Pune city Khairkar (2008) suggests such fashioning of enclaves is aimed at maintaining cultural affinity, social bondage, retaining distinct identity and to have a sense of security. Migrants come to city through various networks of family, friends and fellow caste men and form enclaves based on shared socio-cultural identities. This explanation does not emphasize on the significant factors of caste and class, eventually resulting in homogenisation, and spatial segregation of migrants. Spatial segregation cannot be understood by emphasising and providing an overarching explanation based on similar shared identity and culture. Formation of enclaves also indicates the lack of means to access other urban residential spaces and refusal of city residents to assimilate city immigrants. Refusal to assimilate newcomers governed by pre-conceived notions about a caste, class, and region. Faith in caste ideology and in its assumed epiphenomenon of pollution, uncleanness, and non-vegetarianism play a significant role in fortifying rental housing along the scaffold of caste and religion (Thorat et al., 2015). Spatial homogenisation and segregation also involve the element of unwillingness and denial of the right to choose. Refusal along the one axis of identity or other produces homogenised spatial segregation and perpetuates the social structure like caste. Circularity between spatial segregation and social structure perpetuate socio-economic disparities in the next generation and sustains the stratification system.

Thorat et.al (2005) in a study of five metropolitan cities of the national capital region (NCR); Delhi, Gurgaon, Faridabad, Noida and Ghaziabad show caste-based

¹² She analyses socio-spatial composition of different kinds of settlements, of relatively recent origin, located in East Delhi. Her study shows correspondence between the class, caste, occupation/income, education and residential location. Residents of middle and upper-class localities (DDA flats, co-operative society housing) are well-educated and engaged in professional and technical occupations. In contrast, people earning in low income and less likely to be in regular employment are largely found to be residing in overcrowded settlements lacking civic amenities (resettlement colony, urban villages, slums).

discrimination in accessing urban rental housing. The presence of caste-based discrimination in urban rental housing defies the logic of economics based on profit, demand and supply. It shows that rental market does not operate only on an oversimplified view of demand and supply but also on non-economic concerns namely social and cultural prejudices along the axis of caste, religion and gender. The market does not operate neutrally and objectively, values and prejudice interfere and determine otherwise economically logical outcomes. For seekers of rental housing belonging to the lower caste, outright rejection and repeated difficulty in the availing house of one's choice with just terms and conditions is not an exceptional practice despite their willingness to pay the higher rental amount. Their study shows that caste identities outweigh the economic concerns in the cities rental market.

Despite achieving economic mobility, for Dalits identity imposes constraints in residential mobility and accessing better housing in cities. Gopal Guru (2013) highlights that Dalits in order to access housing and achieve integration in upper-caste localities resort to compulsive sanskritisation. He observed the instances of compulsive sanskritisation among educated and employed SCs in Nipani in Karnataka and Kolhapur in Maharashtra to get residency in the upper caste localities, for this, they avoid identification with their caste and adopt upper caste rituals and values (ibid). In her study of various settings in cities including public sector industries, offices and residential colonies in the northern states, Patel (2013) notes the acts of changing surname by people from the SC category to delink themselves from the inferior social ranking and escape from the embedded humiliation. Changing surnames is one of the strategies of 'deflecting stigma' coming from others (ibid:192). She comments, "changing names and surnames is an individual's or a groups' attempt at presenting itself as what he/she wants others to view him/her or the caste group as" (ibid). These observations demonstrate that in cities Dalits struggle with their stigmatised identities due to persistence of caste-based bias and humiliation. Compulsive sanskritisation and the socially unassertive existence of middle-class SCs in upper caste/class localities demonstrate the power of caste identity in determining the spatial/residential location within the urban boundaries. Another pattern of caste manifestation in cities emerges from the residency of most of the scheduled caste people in housing societies based on their own caste affiliation, which is reinforced by an urge to avoid compulsive sanskritisation and have a sense of social security (Guru, 2013).

Empirical studies show that in cities, Dalit and tribal groups are largely concentrated in low-income, overcrowded urban settlements, lacking basic amenities. According to the census of India 2011, scheduled castes constitute total 16.6 per cent of total population. Their demographic distribution shows 76.4 per cent SCs population continues to reside in rural areas whereas only 23.6 per cent constitute urban population (GoI 2011). Further, spatial analysis of the 2011 census shows that only 11.25 per cent of marginalised population SCs and STs stay in six metropolitan cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru—as compared to their total national population 25.6 per cent. Ward level analysis of the data points marginalised population are largely concentrated in segregated wards/areas lacking basic amenities. Pranav Sidwani (2015) examines interplay between residential location, access to basic amenities (like drinking water) and goods (two wheelers), and caste in selected metro cities of India. Findings suggest high to the moderate negative correlation between the proportion of SCs/STs population and access to services and goods in selected wards of the cities. On all three parameters, results varied in the selected cities. Like it found a medium to strong negative correlation between the proportion of SCs/STs in the population and access to in-house drinking water across wards in Chennai and Kolkata, a moderately high negative correlation between the proportion of SCs/STs in the population and access to in-house latrines in Pune, Bangalore, Chennai, Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Mumbai, and moderate to strong negative correlation between the proportion of SCs/STs in the population and ownership of two-wheelers in Pune, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Mumbai (ibid). Conclusively the findings of the study show a high degree of residential segregation in cities by caste, even higher segregation in terms of access to basic public and private goods. Similarly, in a study conducted by Trina Vithyathil and Gayatri Singh (2012) of India's seven largest cities namely Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, and Hyderabad, caste rather than socio-economic status emerge crucial in residential separation. The study testifies that despite economic changes caste persists and plays a role in spatial separation in the cities.

2.3 Contextualising the Study

From the literature discussed above, it can be discerned that understanding of caste has evolved from an unchanging system to its immense adaptability as it survives despite various external and internal changes exerted upon it. Further, our understanding has

moved from viewing it as a non-competitive, non-antagonistic system based on reciprocity. It has been clearly demonstrated that caste has material basis which manifests in asymmetrical caste relations and inequalities. While material prosperity facilitates upward mobility for middle ranking castes within the local caste hierarchy. Upward mobility is difficult for those positioned below the purity line, i.e. for Dalits, where poverty and exploitation are found to be concentrated. Their attempts of upward mobility are systematically thwarted by alienating them from land and other means of production. Infact, economy of caste and power thrive on extreme exploitation of Dalit which is sustained by their coercive subordination. Further, Dalits do not concede to their humiliating and depriving position which spring from religious dictate. Their contestation and assertion have resulted in atrocities and violence against them. This multidimensionality of caste, such as scope for mobility, conflict, exploitation, inequality, discrimination and exclusion, has largely emerged from the village studies whereas non-village settings remained neglected. Recent studies show caste-based discrimination in urban labour market, rental housing and residential segregation. Thus, caste not only manifests, it also plays an important role in generating urban inequalities and exclusions. While caste is becoming crucial to understand urban inequality, focus of scholars remains either on a single caste group, or particular sphere of urban life like urban labour market or residential segregation. Rather than focusing on a specific aspect/sphere in which caste mediates and reproduces inequalities, the present study attempts to examine the socio-political and economic life of Dalits in a multi-caste neighbourhood in a metropolitan city, Delhi. Examining different yet interrelated spheres of life, social interaction, political mobilisation and economic mobility, enables us to see the forms in which caste manifests and plays a role in generating and maintaining urban inequalities. Attempt here is also to understand the influence of urban location and life on caste.

Chapter III

Negotiating Relations in Inter-caste Neighbourhood: Spatial Organisation, Inter-caste relations, and Perceptions

The chapter sets to examine how intercaste relations are forged under spatial proximity and how various caste groups perceive the 'other' in the urban multi-caste settlement, Ashanagar. It describes the spatial arrangement and mediation of caste in everyday inter-caste interactions in the neighbourhood. It probes the spaces and nature of inter-caste interactions and looks into conventional sites of caste in commensal relations and matrimonial alliances. Exploring its expression and operation, upheavals in the most tenacious aspect of caste that is in matrimonial practices are illustrated. It explores varying perceptions on decline and persistence of caste. It discusses how caste is experienced differentially by Dalits within Ashanagar and beyond, in the city. These descriptions show though caste is not always present in its naked and brutish form. In different contexts, it appears and is negotiated differently. Conscious of identities, inter-caste relations are built through constant negotiations implying caste is yet not abandoned. The spatial and contextual adaptability of caste perhaps lends credibility to its assumed absence in urban spaces.

3. Spatial Organisation of Ashanagar

As described earlier, Ashanagar was established in 1976 during the national emergency. It is administratively categorised as resettlement colony. Inhabitants of Ashanagar have arrived from different squatter dwellings scattered across the city. Despite belonging to different caste/ethnic identities, initial settlers shared similar class condition and position in the city.

3.1 Residents: Identity, Inter-group Familiarity, and Internal Changes

Residents of Ashanagar not only have come from different parts of the city, but they also hail from different states, religion and caste. It is multi-caste and multi-religious in composition. Inhabitants practice different religion, which includes Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity, Hinduism and others. A majority of the population practices the Hindu religion. Although followers of other religions exist, yet they constitute as a religious minority in Ashanagar. Among Hindus, both, those within the

caste system - administratively categorised as General and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and ex-untouchables, Scheduled Castes (SCs)¹³ reside. A sizeable residing population of the settlement is SC, which is also the part of a reserved assembly constituency¹⁴. Regionally varying castes groups like - Balmiki, Jatav, Bairwa, Balai, Dhanak, Khatik, Koli, and Mahar, which resides in the settlement are also included under SC category. Regionally Jatavs are from Uttar Pradesh; Balmikis are from U.P. (mostly western U.P.), Punjab and Haryana. Bairwa, Balai, Dhanak, Khatik, Kolis have come from Rajasthan; and Mahars have migrated from Maharashtra. Yadav, Nishad, Lodh Rajput, Patels, and Chettiars come under OBCs. Meena from Rajasthan are Scheduled Tribes (ST) population. Outnumbered by Dalit population, Aggarwals (Baniyas/trading community), Thakurs and Brahmins are upper caste inhabitants.

Markedly, the population sharing similar caste or sub-caste identity hail from the specific regions/districts of a state. Like most Jatavs have come from the districts of central U.P., Balmikis have come from the regions of western U.P. like Meerut, Bagpat Badot, Muzaffarnagar and from the state of Punjab. Bairwas, Khatiks, and Kolis are from the Rajasthan, mostly from Dausa and Bandipur district. Brahmins from U.P. are from the nearby districts of Basti, Gorakhpur. Garhwalis belonging to different castes are from the Pauri and Teri Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. Region-specific migration is not due to local crisis/epidemic. However, in the older generations, many migrated to the city in order to overcome impoverished rural life. Coming from the same region and caste, caste members do not necessarily share kinship relations. Originally, spread over in different villages of the same district, in the settlement caste and regional identity unifies them as a community. Depending on the context, residents invoke identities of

¹³ The article 341 of the Indian constitution defines 'who would be Scheduled Castes'. The article is appended with Scheduled Caste order, 1950, which contains a list of castes included in the administrative SC category. At present, the list contains around 1,110 castes under SC category. Initially, the Scheduled Caste order categorically excluded those following religion other than Hindu from the SC category. Since then the government order has been amended twice, in 1956 and 1990, to include low caste Sikhs and neo-Buddhists in SC category. Therefore, the administrative category of SC contains members of different religion, not singularly followers of Hindu religion. For a detailed debate around who qualifies to be included under the SC category refer Tanweer Fazal (2017).

¹⁴ Any small or big settlement can have significant SC/ST population. However, the population of a single settlement alone cannot ensure the reservation of a constituency. Several settlements constitute a single constituency; in Delhi four wards constitute one assembly constituency. The proportional population of SCs/STs in a constituency, in all the wards/settlements, determines the status whether a constituency will be reserved or not.

region, caste, and religion. Contextually, differences of caste, class and religion are subsumed within the regional identity while speaking of domicile states.

This heterogeneity along the axis of socio-religious identity among the residents has promoted the consolidation of communities sharing similar identity, of caste, religion, and region. It manifests in identity based spatial segregation and preferences. Often people sharing similar identity, of religion, region, or caste, preponderantly populate same block/lanes. As in some blocks barring a few, all residents are Muslims. Similarly, in certain blocks people of Balmiki community are predominant; and in others, it is Jatavs who outnumber other communities. It is not surprising to find relatives and kin members living not only in the same block but sometimes also in the same lanes or in alternate lanes.

As Ashanagar was established by the state, the spatial proximity of people sharing similar identities - caste, religion, and region - appears startling. Relative evenness of identity in the spatial organisation of the settlement emerges from the manner in which residents were organised in their previous settlements. Unsettled from their jhuggis in the city, residents were allotted plots in Ashanagar. As residents told, resettlement was not random, people from same jhuggis were allotted similar blocks. However, the population of each jhuggi could not be accommodated in a single block. Therefore, the population of a single jhuggi were allocated plots in different blocks which resulted in their dispersal in multiple blocks. Further, 'flexible' bureaucratic apparatus involved in the resettlement. In their erstwhile settlement, residents were living in close proximity of their kin members, co-villagers and region. Therefore, on arrival most managed to stay in spatial proximity. Those separated from relatives and friends negotiated with the officials to regain previous spatial proximity. Though forced to inhabit the settlement with members of varying caste and religious communities, identity-based spatial organisation bestows a feature of uniformity to blocks in the settlement. The blocks predominantly inhabited by Muslims are identified as Mohameddan/Musalman blocks by non-Muslim residents. Likewise, Muslim residents, coalescing multiple castes, unmistakably identify non-Muslim blocks as Hindu blocks. Such reductionism of multiple identities in homogeneous categories does not recognise the internal differentiations within a community. While referring to other blocks, residents specify the predominant caste or region/state like Rajasthani, Poorvanchali, Balmiki or South Indian, to which members of the referred blocks belong. Such referencing of blocks disguises existing social heterogeneity within. Identification of a

block-based on caste and religious identity only signals preponderance, it does not imply even distribution of the referred community. Blocks are not homogeneous in its social composition; empirically, the social structure of each block expresses internal diversity¹⁵. Within the settlement, residents are informed of different existing castes and traditional occupation practiced by members of a specific caste.

On arrival, those unsettled from the same jhuggis were allotted plots in the same block. Nevertheless, stories of relocation for multiple reasons within the settlement/blocks are abound. Also, several initial allottees sold their plot to non-allottees. Not all residents are original allottees of plots. Many arrived and settled in the place after its establishment. Apart from the original allottees, other residents include those who subsequently purchased plots/houses and tenants staying on rent. Presently for many households, rent is one of the income sources. Therefore, many residents are tenants who are largely from states adjoining the city. Additionally, real estate property developers (called builders) have seized Ashanagar to accommodate the rising demand for housing¹⁶. Renting and redevelopment of existing houses have added dynamics to the existing demography of the colony. Due to migration, from within and outside the city, homogeneity forged by the settlers on the basis of the origin of displacement, neighbourhood, region, caste and religion is in a continuous state of flux. Overlooking such constant demographic changes offers only a partial understanding of the spatial arrangement of Ashanagar and its inhabitants.

Presence of caste based residential segregation like presence of Balmiki colony or Harijan has been noted in the city (Dupont 2004; Ganguly 2018). Outside the settlement, in different state offices and localities of the city, Ashanagar is recognized with the identity of its inhabitants, SC/Dalit. It holds a notorious reputation and stigmatised status among city dwellers arising from its 'exceptional' past of communal

¹⁵ Not all residing in the colony are original allottees of plots. Many arrived and settled in the place after its establishment. Apart from the original allottees, other residents include those who subsequently purchased plots/houses and tenants staying on rent. Due to migration, from within and outside the city, homogeneity forged by the settlers on the basis of origin of displacement, neighbourhood, region, caste and religion is in a state of continuous flux.

¹⁶ Those residents who cannot afford the cost of building a proper roof, transfer their property for redevelopment to property developers. The property developers/ builders rebuild a house and construct up to five floors. Of these two (G+1) are owned by the owner of the house. And on the remaining three floors builders have the right to sell, rent or own. They either sell floors directly to buyers or alternately to property dealers who resell it to prospective buyers.

violence¹⁷. Violence and space converge with the identity of its residents, SC, and stigmatises the settlement and its inhabitants. Such homogenised characterisation of the settlement overlooks the internal heterogeneity and dynamics. Arguing that residential segregation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, Massey and Denton (1988) put forth five basic dimensions of spatial segregation: evenness, exposure, concentration, centralisation and clustering¹⁸. According to these basic dimensions, the spatial distribution of a group in various settlements and the design of these settlements, whether it prohibits or facilitates interaction with other groups, can help in ascertaining its segregation in a city. Except for centralisation, which implies the spatial location of a settlement at the centre of the city, the remaining four dimensions appear and overlap in the internal organisation of Ashanagar.

- i. Concentration: In total, Ashanagar has 36 blocks containing approximately 18000 plots of 25 sq. yards. In addition to this, public institutions, like schools, health centre and religious spaces are spread over the place. Nearly on all plots, houses atleast have one floor and maximum to five. The areal unit occupied by the residents, Dalits and Muslims, is in fact small, implying the settlement is highly concentrated.
- ii. Evenness: Leaving two or three blocks, where Muslims are preponderant, Dalits are evenly distributed across the blocks. But subdivided into various castes, sub-castes, regions and religions, they are dispersed differentially in each block. Not every caste or community is evenly distributed in all the blocks. Sparse or dense, but most blocks have Balmiki population.
- iii. Clustering: Often, blocks known to be inhabited preponderantly by members of a single caste are arranged contiguously or exist opposite to each other. Like, the blocks populated predominantly by Balmikis or Bairwas are arranged serially, seemingly forming a caste cluster. Curiously, nearness and caste clustering produced

¹⁷ Discussed in chapter VI.

¹⁸ According to Massey and Denton (1988), a group is segregated if in terms of its dispersion 'it is highly centralised, spatially concentrated, unevenly distributed, tightly clustered, and minimally exposed to majority members'. a) Evenness: if a group is evenly distributed in different residential settlement that means it will face low levels of segregation, b) Exposure: A group exposed to the majority groups indicates its *experience* of segregation is low, c) Concentration: 'groups that occupy small share of the total area in a city are said to be spatially concentrated' implying to higher degree of segregation, d) Centralisation: spatial location near the centre of a city. it is connected with segregation because mostly the groups are distributed in the poor and declining areas of the centre and f) Clustering: a group clustered in residential spaces mainly refers to the 'the areal units inhabited by minority members adjoin one another' forming a large racial/ethnic enclave. Higher the clustering corresponds with segregation.

by such contiguous arrangement was starkly absent in case of the Muslim community. The three Muslim dominated blocks are located very far from each other. Every single Muslim block is encircled by Hindu/Dalit blocks mainly by Balmiki dominated blocks. According to some residents, the spatial isolation of Muslims from each other and their encirclement by Hindus/Balmikis blocks was an unwritten rule and script of the resettlement drive¹⁹. Near segregation of Muslims in few blocks and presence of Hindus in the surrounding blocks has not encouraged an intimate intercommunal interaction. Social relations are maintained congenially in the lanes where Hindu-Muslims share the neighbourhood. Importantly, despite experiencing contempt and stigma from caste Hindus, Dalits share communal prejudices and hostility against Muslims which shape inter-communal relations.

- iv. Exposure: The complex spatial arrangement underlines high concentration and caste/communal clustering in the settlement. At the level of blocks and lanes, the dimension of evenness becomes complicated. If the arrangement is understood through political or administrative categories, Dalit/SC, then an uncomplicated picture depicting the settlement as segregated on the dimensions of high evenness, concentration, clustering and lower exposure to the majority population of General castes. Spatially, inhabiting a large and marginal population of Dalits, Muslims and transgenders²⁰, the settlement manifests socio-economic segregation²¹. Spatial

¹⁹ According to one informant (Jatav caste), 'the spatial arrangement of Muslim and Balmikis was an unwritten official strategy of Sanjay Gandhi to keep Muslims under control for which surrounding blocks were allocated to Balmikis. Both the community are known to share hostile relations the primary reason of which is said to be their antagonistic cultural practices. While Balmikis rear, sell and consume pork which is blasphemous in Islam. Whether or not such spatial isolation was a conscious strategy to reign control over Muslim residents, but it certainly has generated permanent vulnerability in the time of communal crisis. Recalling the fear and helplessness experienced by Muslims during 2014 communal riot in the settlement, many iterated, '*what could have we done? We are alone in the block. On all the four sides we were surrounded by Balmikis. Even for our people, staying in other blocks, to rescue us was not easy because they were stuck like us.*'

²⁰ Some of the houses in the settlement are inhabited only by the transgender community. Hanging cardboards outside these houses declare the identity of its occupants. They do not constitute a large community in the settlement and their presence as neighbours is not resented. They are invited to the neighbourhood on special occasions. Also, their presence and blessings are considered auspicious on important social occasions. Their intervention during the communal riot of 2014 in the settlement in a block, where they stay, brought an end to stone pelting between Hindu-Muslim residents. Nathaniel Roberts (2016) describes their unproblematic presence in his field, a slum in Chennai. According to him, they (also) prefer housing in the slum because they are free from the stigmatic life endured by those living in different settlements.

²¹ Caldeira (2000) in her study shows that social and spatial segregation in urban space, of Sao Paulo, is immensely interlinked. Her study demonstrates that the organising principle of urban spaces reveals the nature of public life and 'how people relate with each other'(pp.213). Locating the shifting principle of

segregation, however, has not curtailed the social interaction of the residents with the city. Accessing and linked with different city spaces as an employee, consumer, student, or citizen, residents are exposed to the population residing outside the settlement. Embodying different role, positions and power, the nature of interactions with the city is qualitatively distinct. Generally, these interactions are formal, irregular, transient or limited. Compared to the relations forged within the settlement, relations beyond are moderate and less enduring. As the distance from the settlement increases the socio-spatial identities are relegated, and secular identities find articulation. This contextual and spatial displacement of identities partially explains the different nature of social interaction with the city (discussed later). In contrast, exposure and content of social interactions are distinctly different within the settlement. Within Ashanagar, social interactions are mediated by the known social identities (of class, caste, religion gender and space). The familiarity of others' identity (caste or religion) is an outcome of spatial proximity, dependence, and quotidian interactions. Most of the blocks are characterised by caste and religious heterogeneity. The lanes of supposedly homogeneous blocks are punctuated by the houses of people from different castes/region. No block is absolutely homogeneous as the categories as SC/Dalit have us believe. Like, in a Jatav block one of the (observed) lanes has two houses of Jatavs, two of Uttarakhand brahmins, one of the brahmins from U.P., a family from Haryana, two houses of Patels. So, the residents are not exclusively exposed to members of their own caste/community. Sharing neighbourhood and accessing similar public institutions and public spaces, they are regularly exposed to members of different residing communities.

3.2 Inter-caste Settlement

Caste-based spatial segregation is not unknown to Indian cities; it was alive even in pre-modern cities (Shah 2007:110; Dupont 2004:163). Presence of caste in cities are not new, so are inequalities, discrimination and exclusion generated by it.

Since independence, Delhi like other metropolitan cities - Kolkata or Mumbai, has continued the legacy of planned urban development in collaboration with foreign

urban organisation in Sao Paulo, from late nineteenth century till the late nineties, she shows subsequent remodelling has dispersed city's rich in 'fortified enclaves' and poor in 'legally ambivalent' zones which has accentuated social segregation of city's rich and poor.

experts and agencies²². Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is the landowning agency of the city which is under the central government. It formulates the master plan and is responsible for “carrying out all public land developments and redevelopments in accordance with its own master plan” (Sourdo 2006). To achieve the goals of urban planning and development, the city has undergone several state-driven evictions and resettlements. Prime victims of urban development have persistently been the city’s poor class who also tend to be Dalits, and are resettled in the periphery of the city. State policies of urban planning, resettlement, and rapidly changing economy have been instrumental in the formation of demographically diverse settlements where various caste and religious groups stay together in close proximity.

Ashanagar is an outcome of urban planning carried out in the seventies. It is an inter-caste settlement inhabiting Dalits and caste Hindus together in close proximity. State policies are not alone responsible for creating inter-caste settlements. Availability of employment opportunities makes the city an attractive destination for job seekers from other states and rural hinterlands. For poor migrants entering the city, it is difficult, in fact impossible, to find accommodation in upscale areas. Unlike predetermined caste-based residential location in villages, residence in cities is dictated by, among other factors, economic condition. Upper-class locations in the city are occupied by upper-caste and thus a persistent overlap between class, caste and spatial location persists in the city. These locations elude the poor across communities including upper-castes and segregate them in low-income settlements. Poor upper-castes migrating to the city for employment tend to take shelter in low-income settlements because of affordable housing. While economic status prohibits poor upper-castes from taking shelter, exclusion of Dalits from upper-class residential areas arises from their ‘double marginalisation’ (Hom and Ma 1993) of their class location and stigmatised identity. This section focuses on the significance of identity in shaping social interactions and relations.

On the surface, social identities appear inconsequential in everyday interactions in Ashanagar. A casual walk through the lanes give glimpses of quotidian life where

²² The first statutory master plan for Delhi (MPD-62) was prepared by Delhi Development Agency (DDA) in collaboration with the Ford Foundation and sought British expertise (c.f. Sourdo, 2006). The plan was laid down for two decades from 1962-1982. Subsequently, the second plan was charted out (MPD-2001) in 1990 which was to continue till 2001. In 2005, the plan was revised and published for the third time to continue till 2021, ‘to meet the challenge of accommodating the needs of the projected population by 128 lakhs by the end of this decade’ (c.f. DDA website).

social interactions seem unaffected by identity considerations. Apart from regular interactions, the collective life of residents exhibits through organisation and participation in socio-religious functions. Proximity built through everyday forms of interactions assures an outsider of the non-existence of identity distinctions. Veneer of social cohesion unsettles on a closer examination of inter-group relations which reveals perceptions and conscious strategies deployed to maintain caste-based distance. Social relations that seem ignorant of the primordial identity of caste, in fact, deliberately shapes inter-caste interactions. In everyday interactions, caste concerns are less articulate. However, it becomes a subject of passionate discussion on issues like affirmative action, local politics or matrimonial arrangements.

3.2.1 Negotiating Inter-caste Relations

Integrated neighbourhood implies a space where “people from highly different backgrounds, racially and socio-economically, share the same geographic space. But in the sociological term, these are far from representing integration” (Tagle 2017:313). Mere geographical location or proximity does not ensure the integration of a neighbourhood. Nature of social cohesion achieved through everyday relations and collective life is crucial to define an integrated neighbourhood. According to functionalists, neighbourly relations are commonly assumed to characterise, ‘homogeneity or even an internal social harmony’, devoid of conflicts and competition (c.f. Chandavarkar 2018). Arguing against the functionalist understanding of the neighbourhood, Chandavarkar (2018) points that the neighbourhood is produced subjectively through interdependencies and rivalries. In fact, subjective production makes the task of fixing a rigid physical boundary of the neighbourhood a strenuous enterprise. Further, semblance of internal cohesion is maintained by the resilience of routinely disrupted neighbourhood relations. Fleeting nature of neighbourhood relations become evident during crisis (like communal riots) when pre-existing ruptures deepen²³ and escalate into conflicts (Legg 2019). Therefore, arrived consensus and sense of mutuality are ‘survival strategies of inhabitants’ competing for limited resources of a

²³ Legg (2019) traces the presence and activities of communal voluntary associations, like, RSS and Muslim National Guard, in Delhi *Mohallas*, between 1920-47. He argues that these quasi-military organisation by communalising identities prepared the people for separate homelands which in 1947 culminated in partition and formation of two nations. The distance and difference between different communities cohabiting the same *Mohalla* became apparent interwar period when unity was forged along the communal lines rather on the spatial residence.

city (Chandavarkar 2018). Competition over lean resources on one hand, fosters connections with kin, neighbours, and friends. On the other hand, conditions of scarcity suffuse social relation with competition and conflict. Spatial vicinity is essential to develop a sense of neighbourhood. However, spatial location alone does not capture how neighbourhoods are conceived collectively and individually. In a settlement, neighbourhood also extends to different locations of activities and local power where regular socio-economic transactions take place. Ever-evolving social relations and subjective conceptions make neighbourhood boundaries fluid and undetermined. Narrowly, in Ashanagar neighbourhood shrinks, but not limited, to relations within a lane²⁴. As the neighbourhood is inhabited by people of different castes and regional origins, therefore, it is referred to as the integrated neighbourhood²⁵.

Intercaste neighbourhood relations are not inevitably based on mutual support. These relations are marked by political competitions and rivalries²⁶. Expressing comradeship and distinguishing from other lanes, residents refer people of their lane as '*hamari gali ke log*' (people of our lane). In Ashanagar, residents staying in same lanes generally know each other and come together on social occasions of marriages, birthdays, festivals, funerals, and also for independence and republic day celebrations etc. Collectively they organise, contribute, and participate in various celebrations of their gali (lane)²⁷. Shared commonalities of neighbourhood retreat in the background on specific occasions, when communal identities (of caste, religion) are overtly expressed. Unlike other celebrations, the commemoration of Balmiki Jayanti, Ambedkar Jayanti or Balinath Jayanti are linked to specific castes Balmikis, Jatavs, Bairwas respectively. In such caste specific celebrations, and also in caste elections, members of specific

²⁴ The spatial sense of belonging to the city is imagined at different levels by residents. Their claim of spatial belonging in the city can be broadly classified as 1. Domicile claim: residents view themselves as citizens of the city, Delhi. 2. Locality claim: is the claim of belonging to a specific locality. The claim of belonging to the locality in the settlement is further subdivided at block and lane level. Referring distinct identity of self from others the residents commonly say, '*hamarey block ke log*' and '*hamari gali ke log*' (people of our block/lane).

²⁵ Broadly, the focus of studies on integrated neighbourhood has been the race in contrast to present study which emphasizes on caste identities of the residents. These studies have focused on the multiracial integration of neighbourhoods by looking at the process of formation of such neighbourhoods or quantitatively measuring the proportion of different races residing within it. See Ellen (2000), Rich (2009) and Tagle (2017).

²⁶ Political competition and rivalries among various caste groups is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

²⁷ In the last chapter, a detailed description of socio-religious and political events organised in the settlement is provided.

castes/communities organise and participate. On such occasions, members transcending the boundaries of neighbourhood (limited here to lanes) rely on intra-caste networks than on inter-caste neighbourhood. Neighbours, outside the caste/community, generally assume the role of a spectator on such occasions.

Apart from the neighbourhood of narrow lanes, residents are also interconnected with members of their caste/community as kin members, neighbours and through caste associations. Striving to work for the advancement of their communities and strengthening identity by organising caste specific cultural functions, caste associations are instrumental in the consolidation of intra-caste relations. The norm of endogamous marriage is productive in connecting widening intra-caste network in the city where people continue to depend on caste members for matrimonial alliances. Thus, sharing similar caste identities do not raise the question of social distance and exclusion as inter-caste relations do. Difference in caste identity forms the basis for negotiations to build and sustain relations. Inter-caste interactions manifest through different forms of relations such as neighbours, friends, acquaintances, and in formal relations (like employer-employee/teacher-student). An inquiry of inter-caste interactions and relations unveils 'surrender' made by upper castes and negotiation Dalits make to live together in inter-caste neighbourhood.

i. Upper-castes in 'Casteless' Neighbourhood

Spatial organisation in rural India is characterised by 'territorial segregation' (Ambedkar 1948 c.f. Jodhka 2002) of caste Hindus and Dalits. Wherein the former stays in a village, while the latter is destined to reside in ghettos away from village territory (ibid). Physical separation of 'untouchables' safeguarded purity and dominance of caste Hindus staying in villages. In villages, the ordained spatial separation of Dalits from caste Hindus has prevented physical proximity and sustained the practice of untouchability. It sustains the relationship of dependence and subservience required to maintain caste hierarchy. Similar territorial separation of caste Hindus and Dalits is not reproduced within the settlement. Spatial contiguity with Dalits in Ashanagar is regarded as the erasure of caste from the city by caste Hindus. A woman in her sixties while lamenting about her neighbourhood says,

You see all our neighbours are lower caste (neechi jaati ke log). Even they (referring to an OBC family) are of a lower caste. We are Mishra Brahmins. In our village, we keep a distance from them, but here we are living with them. Here

nobody believes in caste (jaat-paat) or thinks that they are Brahmin and should be regarded as such...

A woman from Thakur caste says,

In villages, people believe in caste, not in cities... It is the older generation (puraane zamane ke log) who believe in it, not us. I remember, my grandmother was very strict about caste rules. People from lower castes were not allowed to enter in our house. Some of my and my father's friends were lower caste, but we were not allowed to bring them home.

A Brahmin woman informing about the changes in caste practices in the settlement says,

When my mother-in-law was alive, it was unimaginable to bring non-Brahmin friends (Dalit) to the house. In our village, even today lower castes stay outside the house, they are not invited inside. Since her death, my husband brings his Dalit (Balmiki) friends to the house. I don't have a problem with it. It is not possible to maintain caste distinction in the city as one can in villages.

Gopal Guru (2009:50) notes, “untouchability is forced to hide itself behind certain modern meanings and identities”, thereby it becomes unrecognisable in the modern urban context. These modern meanings and identities make the persistence of ‘caste mind’ opaque. To recover and identify the presence of caste in ambiguous settings, like in urban space, discursive practices should be observed attentively as it obliges to certain rules. By locating the provenance and stronghold of caste in villages, non-Dalits residents confine it to its ‘natural’ milieu where spatial distinctions continue to persist. Restricting caste to its traditional domain of villages, they view city as a space hostile to caste. The second and third-generation residents acknowledge the orthodox faith their parents and grandparents had in the system. They believe the stringent norms followed by previous generations and in villages are now untenable in the city. Presence of caste in villages is highlighted to articulate their superior ritual status in caste hierarchy. An emphasis on persistence of caste in villages are made to point the compromises arrived to co-exist under spatial proximity of the multi-caste settlement. Upper-castes do not abhor the caste system and practice of untouchability. They articulate the inevitability of unorthodox inter-caste relations induced by spatial arrangement of the settlement. Villages, where untouchability²⁸ sustained territorial, social, and ritual separation are referred to as the ideal site of caste practices. Village is

²⁸ With the passage of Anti-untouchability Act, 1955, the practice of untouchability has been declared unconstitutional and an act of offense.

represented as reference model containing ideal conditions to practice caste. Untouchability by enforcing social and physical separation aids the upper-castes in retaining superior position and dominance over Dalits. It is considered crucial for the survival of caste hierarchy. In the absence of similar conditions of separation enforced by untouchability, city is viewed as 'casteless' space. Noting pervasiveness of caste ideology Ambedkar (233) writes, 'caste system is not merely a division of labour. It is division of labourers'. In this hierarchy-based stratificatory system each caste group ranked above the other views subordinate castes as inferior and prevents unity among them. Despite the touchable status of backward classes (OBCs) Brahmins consider them as lower castes and tend to maintain distance. Likewise, despite being considered inferior by upper-castes, backward classes emphasize on their ritual superiority over Dalits. Ritual superiority is asserted by making partial relaxations in inter-caste relations. As a Patel family (OBC) remarks on their relations with Jatav neighbours (SC),

Since we have been living here for many years now, so neighbourly relations have to be maintained. One cannot say that our caste is different so we cannot talk. It does not work like that in cities. Reality of our village is different. There, lower castes cannot enter and eat like here in my house. Here, we interact with our neighbours (who are Jatavs).

Bound to live in inescapable spatial proximity, accessing common public spaces and institutions (like parks, schools, hospitals, and even workplace), and approaching common political representatives, inter-caste interactions become inevitable. Residing together as neighbours for over four decades, the formation of inter-caste friendships and relations are not inconceivable, in fact, it appears inescapable. Unsurprisingly, having stayed in spatial proximity as neighbours and friends, residents know the caste/religious identities of others. Maintaining caste-based social distance proves to be an elusive task for upper castes, markedly for Brahmin residents²⁹. But awareness of identity helps in cultivating everyday neighbourhood relations carefully. Sustenance of these relations, forged between inter-caste members, requires negotiation and flexibility. For this, certain customs and practices have been modified in everyday interactions. As a Brahmin family sharing their experience of living in a predominantly Dalit settlement explain,

²⁹ Thorat and Joshi (2015) found in their survey sample that around 52% of those who acknowledge practicing untouchability are Brahmins. OBCs are the second largest group around 24%. The empirical attention on inter-caste relations between Brahmins and Dalits in my study too align with their findings.

We are few in numbers and a minority here... We live among ourselves. Our interaction with others is very limited. In this block, SCs and OBCs are in majority and upper-castes reside only in one or two lanes. We need not mingle or interact with lower castes... As we are Brahmins, we only eat vegetarian food. We don't eat in their (referring specifically to Jatav neighbours) houses. They will not invite us to their houses because they know we will not eat. Even if they cook vegetarian food we cannot eat because same hearth and utensils are used for cooking. But yes, if a wedding or a birthday party is organised in a community hall or hotel we can eat there. As food is cooked and served by caterers there is no problem. The utensils in which food is cooked and offered belongs to caterers, so it's fine.

Likewise, their kin member who also shares the neighbourhood with them tell

I have many Dalit friends. We interact and meet whenever time permits. They understand that we are Brahmins and have our own customs. They (Dalits) themselves will not invite us on occasions like weddings or feast... Once my Balmiki friend invited me to the wedding of his sister. I went to attend the wedding but my friend told me that there is no separate food arrangement for me. They know that I am a Brahmin and I will not eat non-vegetarian food. Therefore, he cautioned me about consuming food at the wedding. I did not eat there. I attended the wedding and had dinner at my house.

A Brahmin woman sharing a neighbourhood with Balmikis talks about intercaste relation and says,

My husband has so many Balmiki friends which is obvious because since childhood he stayed here and played with them. They attended school and college together. They visit our house. Although they do not visit regularly, but when they come I offer them refreshment. Now children from the neighbourhood come to our house, how can you deny entry to them? Our children also go to their houses. They (Balmiki neighbours) give our children only market food, like chips or biscuits not home-cooked food. We have never asked them. But they do, as they know we are Brahmin we don't eat non-vegetarian food... It is very difficult to maintain caste norms in the city.

For many, inter-caste relations as neighbours, friends, or owner-tenant are inevitable under the spatial proximity in the settlement. Spatial proximity with Dalits and social relations with them as neighbours, friends, and attending socio-religious functions is presented as a testimony to non-existence and irrelevance of caste by upper-caste residents. Persistence of caste in neighbourhood relations is commonly denied by upper-caste neighbours. This denial overlooks the reciprocity and support of inter-caste neighbours to maintain neighbourhood relations. To build neighbourhood relations, people invite and participate in important occasions together. It evolves into a harmonious relationship through respect, tolerance and accommodation. However,

inter-caste relations are regulated and screened. It is not uncensored. Upper castes being in minority and sharing neighbourhood with Dalits could not escape forging neighbourly relations. It is important to point that in contrast to Brahmins, other 'touchable' castes (like Thakurs, Aggarwals, Patels, and Meenas) share liberal and close relations with Dalit neighbours. Abstaining from certain forbidden rules, like consuming non-vegetarian food, upper-castes interact and participate in social functions of Dalit friends and neighbours. Although, it is important to underline that caste superiority is coded through various restrictions, which also involves dietary preferences, requiring abstinence from 'impure' food. While vegetarianism is associated with superior castes, many touchable caste Hindus in the settlement consume non-vegetarian food. But they abstain strictly from eating pork which is considered as a carrier of 'pollution' and consumed only by lower castes, mainly Balmikis. Dalit neighbours/friends maintain relation with upper-castes by remaining cautious of caste-based practices and accommodating caste rules of upper-castes.

Despite denying the existence of caste, upper-castes maintain physical and ritual distance from Dalit neighbours through subtle tactics. Formally they interact with neighbours and participate in socio-religious occasions. Further, neighbourly relations have relaxed ritual prohibitions imposed on Dalits entering upper-caste houses and commensal relations. However, such relaxations are conditional. It is not absolute or evenly observed across the upper-caste residents. While some upper-castes and Dalit neighbours eat in each other's house, whereas others admit to keeping separate utensils (cup-saucers) for guest to protect domestic and caste purity. Even further, some tactfully craft intercaste relations in a way that do not foster personalised and intimate relations with Dalit neighbours/friend and restrict their interaction in public spaces beyond the domestic boundary. Thus, an unmistakable variation has been noted in social conduct of upper-castes towards Dalit residents. As the following instances illustrate that maintaining formal relations facilitates ritual and physical distance. A Brahmin family stays in a rented house which is owned by an OBC (Lodh Rajput) from their village. The owner stays across the road in a different block. About the owner they say,

He never comes inside the house. We only talk outside. He takes rent from the door and leaves. While in age he is older than us, but he greets us because we are Brahmins. In our village, if they invite us (brahmins) to their weddings we will not eat food cooked by them. Food is cooked by a Brahmin in separate utensils

and we eat separately. Such is not the practice here. They invite us to functions which we attend and also eat food as it is cooked by caterers.

In a conversation Priyanka, (OBC), daughter of the house-owner, recounts indifference received from the Brahmin families living in the neighbourhood on the death of her mother, who belonged to SC.

According to the Hindu rituals, the dead body requires to be washed and bathed before taking it out on the pyre. When my mother died, Brahmin women from the neighbourhood refused to help and give bath to the body. They came and watched everything from a distance but did not come near her body. I think, there could be two reasons for their refusal. One, as she died of prolonged illness so women feared they might contract the disease. Second, these females always sought her help in the times of need and maintained neighbourly relations. They also knew her caste position. I feel it was the caste which predominated their denial. I stay here and witness their attitude of superiority. Finally, my maternal aunts gave bath to her body... Later my brother's friend told that in the cremation ground Brahmin boys of our neighbourhood did not go near her body. They stood away from her body.

Narration of the Brahmin tenant and of the house owner's daughter underlines that caste relations are replicated even in a different locational setting, and under changed power relation. Priyanka's parents had an inter-caste marriage. Her father belongs to OBC and mother was SC. Disguised in formal relation of landlord and tenant, or as neighbours, caste governs the relation even in this urban neighbourhood. Avoiding formal courtesies in a secular setting, the upper-caste tenant disguises feudal as formal relations. The family of house owner maintain a minimal relation with tenants as they believe their tenants even in the settlement hold caste prejudices. Notwithstanding the changes, both OBC house-owner and Brahmin tenant, by adhering to caste relations practiced in the village keep it intact in the city. In this case, the urge to keep caste relations active comes from upper-castes Brahmins. In contrast, the OBC family expects/ed the dilution of such relations in the new urban setting.

Largely, in Ashanagar, Dalits are not dependent on upper caste for their livelihood and everyday needs. Relationally, they do not share the traditional relation of superior-subservient based on caste. They interact as 'equals' as neighbours, friends, acquaintance and colleagues. Much of these interactions occur outside the house on streets, parks, shops and workplaces located within the settlement. Interactions and exchanges in public spaces tend to compromise purity norms. The relaxation on purity norms turns stringent in the domestic realm. Customarily, in the caste arrangement domestic purity is of utmost importance for upper castes. Censoring entry of 'impure'

persons in the house, meticulous monitoring of hearth and utensils, avoiding 'impure' physical contact, or making separate arrangements for visitors are some of the few ways in which domestic purity is observed. Complicit in their own subjugation, women act as interlocutors of upper-caste values enabling the continued survival of caste (Sarkar, 2013; Chakrabarty, 2018). They play a pivotal role in upholding purity norms within the house by maintaining a distinction between pure and impure. Through tacit strategies, upper-caste (Brahmin) women maintain domestic purity. They maintain formal relations with Dalit neighbours. A Brahmin girl narrating about her elder brother says,

My brother has so many friends in the neighbourhood. He spends most of his time outside the house with his friends at the corner of the lane. In our house, none of his friends are allowed to enter. If he has to talk and spend time with his friends, he must meet them outside. Only one of his friends can freely come to our house.

The friend allowed to enter in the house is from the same caste and district. He stays several blocks away from their house. Despite the spatial distance, he is allowed uncensored entry into the house. Her brother has OBC and Dalit friends. Among his close friends, one is Balmiki and another is from Jatav caste. His friend from Jatav community stays in the same lane and they spend considerable time together, but outside. It was noted that his friends usually call him outside the house to meet or converse. Because of the congested houses and presence of women, young men commonly spend time outside in lanes/parks/temples. But an explicit stricture against the entry of friends is also an attempt to maintain domestic purity by Brahmin household. Entry into the household is screened and relations are maintained in a way that does not foster personalised and intimate relations with Dalit neighbours/friends. In Brahmin households, women play a crucial role in designing social interactions with neighbours. Two women related as sisters-in-law tell about the nature of interaction and relation with their Jatav and Balmiki (both the castes come under SC),

We don't talk or visit our neighbours. We spend the entire day in looking after children and family. Our mother-in-law maintains interaction with our neighbours (referring to a Jatav family) outside the house. Our neighbours invite us to weddings and parties, but we women do not join the feast. Men of our house attend these functions.

A girl in a brahmin house says

Sometimes I talk to our neighbours, not regularly (one of the neighbouring-house belongs to Jatavs). I stay mostly inside, watch television and do housework. My

mother talks with women outside. We hardly visit each other's house. Our extended family and relatives stay here. I visit their houses or my cousins come here for time pass.

A Brahmin woman in her late fifties sharing the neighbourhood with Balmikis says

We are Brahmins and we follow different customs. Neither I go to their (Balmiki neighbours) house, nor do they come here. We don't exchange food. I conducted the marriage ceremony of my children outside the settlement in our village. We interact, but outside the house. We place chairs in front of our houses and talk.

Brahmin families quoted above are dispersed in two adjacent blocks. Together there are around ten-fifteen brahmin households in these two blocks. Most of these families are related to each other as kin members or come from the same region of eastern U.P. They hold the paucity of time responsible for limited interaction with inter-caste neighbours. Also, the presence and reliance on relatives/caste members are repeated as a reason for limited interaction with neighbours. Generally, men spend much of the daytime outside the house in jobs and return home by evening. They get a brief time to socialise in the neighbourhood. Similarly, unemployed men, old and young, stay out with peers. Intermittently they return home for food and to take rest. Women working within the house remain busy with domestic chores and looking after family members. Reproducing caste ordained gender norms, Brahmin households maintain strict vigilance over women. Married women of the house practice purdah and step out only when needed³⁰. Generally, they are accompanied by a family member(s) outdoors, especially new brides and young unmarried daughters. While Brahmin women have limited interaction outside the house with inter-caste neighbours, they visit houses of their kin and relatives staying in the settlement quite regularly. Residing in proximity with members of own caste reduces dependence and interaction with groups of dissimilar identity. An increased intra-caste dependence enhances inter-caste distance and transforms members into close groups susceptible to pre-existing stereotypes/prejudices. It also facilitates a stricter adherence to caste rules among Brahmins. The rigidity introduced by intra-caste neighbourhood recedes in an inter-caste neighbourhood where upper-castes are few in number. Being a numerical minority and dependence of upper castes on intercaste neighbours introduces flexibility in relations. In a conversation with a Brahmin couple who resides in a lane where

³⁰ As was observed, staying in conjugal homes with or in vicinity of kin members women across the caste practice Purdah. Only women from southern states do not practice it.

baring two households, excluding theirs, rest are from Balmiki community, tell about their relationship with Balmiki neighbours.

We interact with our neighbours. Since I (husband) grew up here, I have Dalit (Balmiki and Jatav) friends... I remember that the situation was very different when my parents were alive. My mother was very strict. I had Balmiki friends with whom I use to play and go to school. But I was not allowed to bring them home. None of my Balmiki friends entered my house until my parents were alive. We (referring to his wife) don't believe in untouchability, and gradually things have changed in my house. Now my friends can freely visit my home. In Navratri, we invite young girls regardless of their caste for eating. It was unimaginable for my parents. They (Balmiki friends) invite us to their weddings and other such functions. We attend these functions. Mostly I attend these weddings and eat vegetarian food, if available. We are not very close to all the neighbours but we exchange greetings if we meet in public.

They are Brahmins from Uttarakhand (UK). Population from the state is sparse and dispersed in a few blocks. The block in which Pankaj stays has a predominant Balmiki population, followed by residents from southern states. The lane in which he stays, there are only two Brahmin houses both from UK. Most residents in neighbouring houses are from Balmiki community. In the block, Balmikis are not only numerically dominant, but it is also inhabited by some of the politically influential families from the community. A late MLA, one incumbent ward councillor (BJP), an active party member of the BJP and locally significant people of the community stay in this block. Staying in the block since childhood, Pankaj grew up with some of these local notables. He spent most of the time together in playing and in collaborating in local activities. He shares a close and friendly relation with inter-caste neighbours - Balmikis. He is an active member of an NGO located in the block which is owned by his Balmiki friend. He also actively works as a multilevel marketing (MLM) agent to which he was introduced by one of his Balmiki friends. To expand the network of buyers for the products, he has to build a comprehensive reach among residents. Because of the need to draw more customers for marketing and supporters to carry out social activities, his regular network of interactions cut across the castes. It is not limited to members of his own caste, religion, or region. In fact, members of his own caste and region are loosely organised in the settlement, which is not the case among castes like Balmikis, Jatavs, Bairwas, Patels and others. Thus, spatial proximity is an important but not an essential condition to build amiable inter-caste relation. Dependence on different social groups apparently induces reordering of inter-caste relations. In this neighbourhood, the family shares an unorthodox relationship with

Dalit neighbours. The entry is not barred in the house and commensal relations maintained with the neighbours. Selective adherence to caste rules like vegetarianism is practiced.

Vivek Dhareshwar (1993) and Satish Deshpande (2013) point to the asymmetry in public identification with caste. It is the upper-castes who in public spaces non-identify with caste, while Dalits 'locked' into their identities claim it in public. By publicly disavowing and non-identifying with caste, upper-caste claim to be casteless and deny its existence. Deshpande argues that the presumed belief of upper-castes in castelessness arises from their ability to convert caste capital to modern capital. The conversion of traditional caste power/position has also enabled the monopolisation of upper-castes over modern capital. Advantaged by the modern capital, upper-castes do not require to foreground their non-secular identity, caste. Contrary, they claim to be secular citizens of the modern republic. Dhareshwar (1993) argues that the 'caste repression' or public infra-visibility of caste was regarded as an imperative act to fashion a modern citizen. To achieve this new identity, the formation of secular self is mandatory "where the self gradually shed its ethnic, caste, linguistic, and gender markers and attains the abstract identity of the citizen or becomes an individual" (ibid:221). However, instead of representing secular-self as a citizen in the modern urban space, upper-caste residents deny the presence and practice of caste due to absence of pre-conditions suitable for its survival which exist in villages. In the settlement, inter-caste relations are constantly negotiated on the basis of caste identity. As negotiations refashion relations in a manner which deviate from 'standard' caste practices, it renders caste invisible for upper-caste residents. Rather than observing the significance of caste in negotiating inter-caste relations it is proclaimed absent.

ii. Dalits in Inter-caste Neighbourhood and Beyond

Uma Chakravarti (2018:6) notes that sociological writings on caste system give an excessive importance to ideology, ritual aspect, which tends to ignore the question of power and material condition that keeps the inequality intact. According to her, over-emphasis on ideology depicts the caste system to be based on mutual consensus and reciprocity that conceals the coercion and antagonisms. Likewise, Joan Mencher (1974) argues that vantage point of examining the system should be changed to understand its moral emptiness which sanctions untouchability, exploitation, exclusion, discrimination

and oppression of people below the pollution line. The coercion and antagonism contained in the system are revealed only when viewed from the position of Dalits. Presently, the claim of castelessness can neither be accepted nor be understood without foregrounding experiences of Dalits who are blamed for excessive identification with caste. Further, as Sriti Ganguly's (2018) study shows, often on initial questioning even Dalits denied the presence of caste-related practices in the city. However, experiences of Dalits in the city shows that they are not caste blind.

In the Neighbourhood

Indicating 'loss' of caste status in the city, upper-castes often recall to reiterate their superior status in villages. The 'loss' is not viewed as a triumph of secular ethos over religious commands. In contrast to upper-castes who emphasize on 'absence' of caste, Dalits stress on negotiations which mediate inter-caste relations. Accordingly, for them, negotiations, not absence, of caste characterises intercaste relations. The mere difference in setting, i.e. of city space, is inadequate to overhaul the hierarchy-based caste relations and norms. Alterations in inter-caste relations are affected by numerical dominance, political power, spatial proximity and interdependence. Interactions and experiences of Dalits challenge the upper-caste belief that caste has disappeared in city space. A Balmiki man says

They cannot fight with us nor can they pass caste slurs in the colony. They know we are in the majority. For everything, they have to approach us. So, they behave properly with us. When we invite them to parties or weddings they come. We also make separate eating arrangements i.e. vegetarian food for them.

A Jatav woman says,

We invite all our neighbours (Paas-padosi) except those with whom we don't talk. Neighbours come and eat. Without inviting them (neighbours) how do you celebrate? We have been staying for many years together now... There are some who hesitate to come or eat. But nowadays people organise weddings/parties in community halls or in the parks. Food is cooked by caterers. So people don't mind.

A Balmiki woman tells about her relationship with OBC neighbour,

Their children frequently visit our house. If I have cooked something, they also eat. There is no problem...but when I prepare non-vegetarian food (specific reference to pork) I inform them... I know they don't eat.

Making separate food arrangements in social ceremonies for vegetarians who are mostly upper-castes, cautioning the guests in absence of such arrangements which might cause potential caste breach, or not giving home-cooked meals (*kacha khana*) to Brahmin/non-Dalit children are some of the conscious strategies through which Dalits adjust neighbourly relations. By offering vegetarian food, condition of ritually unacceptable food is removed, thus obliging upper castes to yield to social occasions of interdining. The burden of building neighbourly relations with upper-castes falls unequally on Dalits. To accommodate and integrate upper castes in neighbourly relations, Dalits have to remain alert of caste norms and make separate arrangements for upper-castes. Similar caution about dietary preferences of Dalit friends/neighbours is not displayed by upper-castes. Although on unequal terms, the demand for co-existence fosters flexibility in commensal rules in social functions. While abstinence of upper-castes from non-vegetarian food is viewed as a customary difference in the diet by Dalits. They are not oblivious to nuanced acts of exclusion by upper-castes. These acts are recognised as caste-based discrimination and caste feelings. A Jatav woman speaking about her relation with neighbours tells

Several houses in the lane belong to our people (hamare log), Jatavs. There is a house also of shepherd caste, Yadavs, and, Brahmins. I hardly get time to sit and talk with neighbours. The entire day goes in running after children and doing housework. Being neighbours we talk to everyone. During the crisis we reach out to each other...but Brahmins are different. They don't say anything, but maintain a distance. They have caste feelings inside.

Recounting his experience with a Balmiki man, who is also associated with Congress party, tells

Nobody practices untouchability or treats you like an untouchable. They make you feel like one through their acts. Once I was sitting with a friend who is Bania (trader caste) by caste. At that time there were other members of my caste sitting there too. You know X (referring to a locally prominent BJP leader from Balmiki community) even he was sitting there. Tea and snacks arrived for us there on the roof. We all drank it. While we were sitting there, those cups were thrown out by his mother. When we left we saw all the cups lying just outside the house. That made us so angry. Here you can go to their house, they will talk to you and even eat with you. But caste feeling (jati ki bhavna) is still alive. They don't do it directly but only indirectly because we are majority here. It is a compulsion for them...

A Bairwa man (he is married to a Balmiki woman. Outcasted by his family, he lives at his in-laws' house on rent). Talking about his neighbourhood and inter-caste relations tells,

Here nobody does it on your face. In this block and lane, most are Balmikis. So nobody dares to say anything. But caste slurs come out during quarrels. It is when people forget that who is a neighbour or who is a friend, they just say it.

Likewise, a Jatav man, who is also a party member of the BSP party, tells

Who can say on our face that you are an untouchable? Or refuse to interact with us? It does not happen like that. Have you ever seen quarrels here? If you do, you will notice in disputes they (referring upper-castes) remind us of who we are!

A Jatav boy tells

I have upper-caste friends. We spend so much time together. We also eat together. So if you see like that there is no caste among us. But sometimes, when we all are together and teasing each other, caste reference comes in. That does happen. Many times in discussions, especially over reservation makes our conversations very serious and tensed. Then we don't talk for a while. Of course, it feels bad!... But we are friends, we resume the relation in the next meeting.

As Manor (2012:17) points the self-restraint exercised by non-Dalits/upper-castes, “is the result of a change of mind, not a change of heart. It is more of pragmatic calculations rather than empathy with Dalits”. Sharing neighbourhood, both Dalits and upper-castes are aware of numerical predominance of the former in shaping inter-caste relations. The numerical predominance of Dalits inhibits upper-caste residents from misconduct and tactless behaviour. Dalits particularly reiterate that caste-based discrimination may not surface overtly in everyday interaction because of their predominant population, but caste feeling is always present. Relegated in the background, unsurprisingly, it erupts in specific moments of quarrels, arguments and ritual performance. These moments are a reminder that nobody forgets caste identities. In addition to the predominance of Dalits, upper-castes also observe refrain in inter-caste interaction because of their regular dependence on Dalits occupying important administrative and political positions, as teachers, employers, social workers, legislators, locally.

In the study, upper-caste claims of castelessness was often challenged by Dalit narratives on the persistence of caste. The conversation mentioned below held at a coaching centre among students is reflective of it. In this group, except one girl remaining, seven students belonged to different Dalit castes. This general caste girl (GCG), was the only one selected for Delhi police and CISF both. Opposing reservation vehemently she said,

GCG: *Why should they be given reservation? We all are toiling under similar conditions. I also live in the same locality, attended the same school, and coaching. So, tell me where is inequality among us? Why do I require to score higher marks than them?*

DB (Dalit boy, Koli caste): *For years our ancestors have been ill-treated by upper-castes. We were not allowed to enter inside their houses or touch them in any way. They used our ancestors as labourers and for cleaning their filth. After so much deprivation we do require some support to move ahead and make a respectable life for ourselves. I understand your pain but you should also try to understand that you and me are not equal. We cannot compete equally.*

DG (Dalit girl, Bairwa caste): *What do I say? Let her complete her anguishing tale (referring to GCG). She got everything, two government jobs, and still her pain seems bigger than mine!*

GCG: *(resuming the conversation) what has happened has happened, it's over now. Forget the past. Let's talk about the present situation. It was all done by our ancestors. Why should we be penalised for that? Will you not be angry on knowing that to pass the same exam you have to score 100 and Dalit students only have to score forty. I feel so angry. I have an age limit and they don't. Reservation should be removed... I don't believe in caste. I don't think who is from which caste before beginning any conversation? See, we all are friends. We stay together. Then why?*

DB: *If we come to your house will you offer us water or tea?*

GCG: *Yes!*

DB: *In the same cups and glasses which are used by your family members?*

GCG: *No. We have separate cups and glasses for visitors. We wash it and keep it separately. My parents still believe in these things, especially my mother. But I don't.*

DS (Dalit students): See, this is what we were trying to make you understand. Caste has not gone yet. It's still practiced. It is not past, it continues till today even in the city, even in your house. Do you even understand how it feels to be treated like that? Our parents and grandparents have suffered these humiliations (apmaan) regularly.

This discussion reveals the prevailing sense of 'castelessness' among upper-castes residents. Quotidian interactions and exchanges in public spaces are assumed to have diminished caste practices. This assumption of 'castelessness' depicts the adaptability of caste. Wherein aspiration to improvise class position requires access to better education, secure employment, build information network. Also, co-existence necessitate co-participation in public life of the settlement with Dalit residents. Co-participation in public space frequently involves transgressions of caste norms which seems pardonable and negotiable. Within the domestic premises, caste regains its significance and attains nearly non-negotiable position. Attempts are made to sustain the caste-based purity by screening the entry of visitors, using separate utensils for guests, or by not consuming food in others houses. By confining caste practices within the private sphere of home, it is domesticated and personalised because caste centric rules apply to the family members within the domestic confines regardless of their public life beyond it. The distinction between domestic and public spheres forms a belief in the 'castelessness' in the settlement because caste is disguised in public spaces. Dalit residents, variably experience the cruelty of caste and are not led to believe in its disappearance or absence in city. They no longer believe in Karmic explanation of their 'naturally' inferior position (Jodhka 2015:22). By pointing to the immanent caste practices they challenge the belief of 'castelessness'.

As pointed earlier, non-upper caste members in inter-caste neighbourhoods are conscious of approaches adopted by upper-castes to keep social distance and formalised relation. Pointing at various subtle ways adopted by Brahmin households to retain purity by keeping a minimal distance with non-Brahmin (Dalits and OBCs) neighbours, one respondent said,

They never conduct weddings here in the neighbourhood. For weddings, they go back to the village. If they organise here, they will be forced to invite all of us. Earlier they use to distribute sweets in the neighbourhood after weddings.

I have never seen Jatavs or Balmikis entering in their house (referring to three Brahmin families staying opposite to her house.). As friends, they come and call from outside. I have seen Brahmin women refusing to take prasad³¹ when offered by Dalit neighbours. They fold their hands that's it. Even when some of them accept it, I have not seen them eating it. I doubt they throw it... their (Brahmins) children play outside the house with others but they never go inside.

In fact, Brahmins and other caste groups in the neighbourhood admit turning back to villages to find matrimonial matches and conduct important functions like weddings. Presence of relatives back in the village, ancestral home and resources like space and grains are cited as a rationale for return to the village. During my fieldwork, one of the Brahmin family went back to village to conduct the wedding of their elder son. However, on return, a reception was held in a park near the colony. The reception had attendance of Dalit friends and neighbours. Wedding reception represents a modernised and secular expansion of marriage. A Hindu marriage requires meticulous observation of various customs and rituals which necessarily requires maintenance of purity. In the traditional Hindu wedding, different caste groups perform different functions. Sustaining purity, which is supreme for Hindu weddings, could be difficult in a multi-caste settlement for Brahmins and therefore rural homes are preferred. Reception is devoid of any customs/rituals wherein guests are invited to bless the newly wedded couples. Without compromising on the customs related to marriages, reception enables Brahmins/upper castes to invite non-Brahmin neighbours and friends in the city. With progress in time and shift in generations, intermingling with Dalits has become liberal, of which attending weddings is a sign. Wedding receptions presents an occasion to reciprocate social relations with Dalit neighbours. Whereas in rural settings Dalits are subjected to exclusion and are given patronised treatment for performing rituals on social occasions like wedding.

Experiencing Caste: Beyond the Neighbourhood

Dalits are not embarrassed to reveal and assert their caste identity within the settlement. Locally, through cultural celebrations, rituals, and political mobilisations, caste identities are publicly declared. Non-Dalit residents restrain from making disparaging

³¹ It is food offered to Hindu gods.

remarks, overtly, based on caste. Derisive remarks are made but in the absence of targeted group to prevent uncalled local conflict or tension. The local predominance of Dalits and their control over local administration prevents non-Dalits to express contempt explicitly.

In contrast, Dalits encounter caste differently beyond the settlement in the city where caste stereotypes and discrimination surface in fierce forms. Dalits recount multiple occasions, outside the settlement, on which humiliating remarks reminded them of their caste. Casteist comments are commonly experienced in public spaces like bus, metro, educational institutes and workplaces. Two Balmiki boys pursuing graduation tell,

In the settlement, we do not feel conscious of our caste. As we are in the majority, nobody will comment on our identity in front of us. In fact, we assertively claim who we are. It is different outside the settlement. Outside we do not reveal our identity... Once I was on a bus to college. In the bus, two people started quarrelling over something. There was a man who was watching them silently. When those men de-boarded the bus he says, 'they must be 'churha-chamars'³². They think anybody who fights in public are from low castes.

A similar instance was shared by another Balmiki boy

I was in the metro with my friends. A couple was standing near us and they were wearing bright coloured clothes. There was another group of friends. Looking at the couple one of them mockingly says, 'only churha-chamars can wear such clothes'.

A boy from the Balmiki community who is pursuing physiotherapy course from Amity University, Noida, tells

You know it is a very expensive university. Children of all rich people like bureaucrats, businessmen, politicians come to study there. They live in flats, come in cars, wear branded clothes. They are my friends. We study, play and hang out together. Though we never discuss about caste, but during playing or bantering they casually remark, 'you can't even do this, are you a bhangi/chamar'. On hearing such comments I just ignore and laugh along. It is humiliating... When they ask about my residence, I tell that I stay in X (middle and upper middle class area near the colony). If I tell, I stay here they will get to know my caste because despite the presence of other groups it is a common notion that only Balmikis live here.

³² Churha and Chamar are caste names. The caste occupation of Churhas is scavenging whereas Chamars deal with dead cattle. To dissociate from the derisive meanings connoted by these caste names, Churha and Chamar, members of both the caste groups adopted Balmiki and Jatav as their caste names. The reference to the community by older caste names is regarded as offensive and disrespectful.

Identification of caste does not solely rely on ascribed occupation or caste names. Demeanours like unruly behaviour, gaudy attires, appearance, residential location and political support are linked with Dalits as identity markers (Ganguly 2018). To escape residential stigma, which in this case is conjoined with caste, residents hide their address “to make this status disappear and ‘pass’ in the broader society, unless they get spotted by their ‘degaine’ (physical demeanour and dress) and speech patterns” (Wacquant 2018:181). Further, the comments made in public were not directed at respondents. But the contempt was directed to the community to which they hail. It is argued that in the domestic/private domain caste is practiced and reinvented, whereas in public spaces a secular self is represented (Dhareshwar 1993; Guru 2009). However, Dalit experiences of public spaces show rigid compartmentalisation of private (as traditional)/public (as secular) is superficial. So, is the claim of upper-castes being casteless. Conscious of the stigma attached to their caste identity, instead of asserting, Dalits conceal caste identity to navigate public spaces and access opportunities. Recalling his experience of how he got his first job in Akshardham temple, a Bairwa man narrates,

I was unemployed between 2006-07 and was looking for a job. One of my friends told me about vacancies in Akshardham temple. Precondition of the job was to provide sewa (free service) for a month or two. After completion of unpaid service, it was to be converted into paid employment. We both were in dire need of money so we went to attend the interview. During the interview, they asked my name (his name is caste neutral and a synonym of Lord Krishna). After hearing my name they asked if I am a Brahmin. I understood the role of caste for the job and replied affirmatively. I was given service in VIP cell. In the cell they only hire Brahmins. Had I told them my real caste they would have given me the job of a gardener or security guard.

Similarly, a Balmiki boy working in a private company tells,

I have not revealed my caste at my office. My title is Chauhan so everyone thinks I am upper-caste. I know how they will behave upon knowing my real caste, they will not sit and eat with me. I have seen they do not sit and eat with housekeeping staff. I am not presuming it. I have seen people behaving like this.

The Bairwa man is an Ambedkarite and active in local politics. Likewise, the Balmiki identity of young men is known to people living in the neighbourhood. Unlike in the settlement where identity is claimed, Dalits assume acquiescent posture at the

workplace and in public spaces by concealing their identity³³. Caste identity of Dalits subjects them to a ‘systematic regime of humiliation’ (Parekh 2011). The separation of private and public domains and modern democratic institutions were believed to erase humiliations from public spheres (Rodrigues 2011). Such dichotomization however is not reflected in experiences of Dalits in the city. Their identities remain fixed. Modern democratic institutions based on egalitarian principles and ‘articulation of the language of rights’ has led to a consciousness of humiliation and devising actions to challenge its various forms. Although, resistance is not always expressed by the humiliated. Gopal Guru (2011:18) writes, “resistance is internal to humiliation. Since humiliation does not get defined unless it is claimed, it naturally involves the capacity to protest”. As the experiences of Dalits from the settlement shows, responses to humiliations based on caste identity is varied. It is not contested and claimed invariably. Response to humiliations depends on contexts and space. Within the neighbourhood denigrating remarks against Dalits are avoided by non-Dalits at least in their presence. On occasions, like during verbal conflicts, caution is relegated and deprecating remarks are made which Dalits contest actively. In contrast, moving beyond the neighbourhood, in the city, presumably governed by the secular ethos, caste-based slurs are encountered but remain unchallenged despite leaving the tormented in a humiliated state. Nancy Fraser (1990:63) argues that the public sphere is not equal and accessible to all. Rather, ridden with inequalities, and conflicts, it is governed by bourgeois ‘protocols of decorum and style’ which functions to exclude marginal groups. She writes, “in stratified societies, unequally empowered social groups tend to develop unequally valued cultural styles...that marginalises the contribution of members of subordinated groups both in everyday life contexts and in official public spheres” (ibid:64). As is evident from Dalit experiences, public spaces and formal settings are immersed in caste-based stereotypes which become apparent in assuming the identity of other and passing derogatory remarks. Uninhibited derogatory remarks express not only contempt for Dalits but also forces the subordinate social group to withdraw their identity and voice from the public sphere. Conscious denigration in formal setting indicates the belief in the enviable inherited superiority of the commenter. Outside the settlement denigrating reiterations in public spaces, although are registered but are left uncontested

³³ Documenting various forms of violence perpetrated against Dalit women by upper-castes in different states Aloysius et. al (2011) found verbal abuse as the most rampant form of violence. They note the normalisation of verbal abuse because, ‘this abuse does not leave any physical injury and is frequently repeated with impunity’ (pp.103).

by Dalits. In a stride to merge in ‘secular’ spaces and seize opportunities offered by the city, caste identity is backgrounded.

iii. Caste, Class, and Workplace Hierarchy

Resilience of caste becomes evident from its contextual adaptability. As argued previously, practice of caste norms depends on the space, demography, and gender. In public spaces, caste norms appear flexible. Public space includes both formal (schools and workplaces) and informal spaces (streets, parks, temples, local shops). In contrast to informal spaces where relations are more casual and intimate, in formal settings (workplaces) behaviour is guided by official codes and rules. In these settings inquiring about identities and acting on its basis is considered inappropriate. Like in a group discussion a Brahmin man says,

Where is caste? In cities, there is no caste. If you go to a hotel you don't know who is cooking the food, who was sitting earlier or who ate in the plate before you. Nobody cares. Now, we are working people. I go to office where I eat together with others on same table. Now you cannot inquire about the caste of your co-workers. It does not look good.

The intersection of space and caste modifies caste practices and inter-caste interaction. Like men, working upper-caste women who keep a strict vigil on purity-pollution are forced to abandon the stringency of commensal rules at the workplace. They work and share food with co-workers. Within the settlement, several NGOs (owned and administered by Dalits) offer employment opportunities to local residents. The two NGOs (regularly visited by me) had three upper-caste women as employees, two were from Brahmin caste and one is Thakur. All three women come from economically weaker households.

Renu belongs to Thakur caste. Her husband is an auto driver and his income is inadequate to meet the household needs alone. She runs a beauty parlour where she also trains young women in the course. For the parlour, she rented space within an NGO owned by Balmiki women. It is a single room partitioned by curtains, in one portion she runs the parlour and in the remaining other NGO conducts its work. The NGO is not only owned by Balmiki women but many of its members and workers are also from the Balmiki community. About sharing workplace mostly with Dalits Renu says,

There is no difference among us. See Meera, Anita and all others are Balmiki and I am a Thakur. Yet, we sit and eat together. We don't say that you are from so

and so caste, don't touch my food. I go to their houses, sometimes just to have lunch or rest in the afternoon. They come to my house and I cook for them. We spend almost entire day together, where is caste? Present generation does not act according to people's caste. It was the older generation of my grandparents and parents who believed in the orthodoxy of caste.

Deepti, age 22, Brahmin from the UK. Her mother, who is a peon in a private school, approached the owner of NGO, a Balmiki, to secure a job for Deepti. Her father died last year because of alcoholism. About working in the NGO with intercaste colleagues she says

I don't have any issues with them (Balmiki co-workers) because of their caste. I don't mind eating with them. However, most afternoons I go home for lunch. I don't refuse to eat if they offer something... but my mother is strict about these things because we are Brahmins. These are personal things. She does not stop me from intermingling or eating with them. However, she herself will not eat... When we are outside we behave differently... Our financial condition is not good. I needed this job and the (Balmiki) owner offered it to me. We did not think what their caste is or I will not work here because of her caste. This job is my need and I have to work regardless of caste...

Nisha, a Brahmin by caste, arrived in the city a few months back and works as a field investigator with two other women (from Balmiki caste). The NGO is owned by a Balmiki family. Sharing her experience on arrival in the colony and working in the NGO she says,

Initially when I came here I felt so strange to live here as most residents are Harijans³⁴ (the term was used by her). In my village we maintain distance, they cannot enter our house. Here I eat food from their tiffins (referring her colleagues) and offer them mine. See they are educated and clean...even in the field if someone offers tea or water I accept it. What to do? In the city, nobody cares about caste.

For women to continue to act as custodians of caste purity in a formal setting becomes elusive. In a changed setting of workplace, caste distance becomes nearly inoperative and inter-caste relations become more flexible. In the above cases, employer and co-workers are Balmikis. In these formal settings, power relation and dependence is subverted. One of the common reason for women to take up a job is financial hardship. Upper-caste women confronted with economic hardships are

³⁴ In 1920 Mahatama Gandhi gave the term *Harijan* (meaning children of God) to refer 'Depressed classes.' The term was introduced to destigmatise their unclean work and identity. The term received severe criticism from Dalits and finally, in 1991, use of the nomenclature was declared unconstitutional through an executive order of the government of India (c.f Pai 2013:xxxi-ii).

employed under and working with Dalits cannot afford to share the orthodoxy of non-working women. In formalised settings, upper-castes justify intercaste interactions by citing reasons of cleanliness, educated, well behaved, or helpful nature of Dalit colleagues. Plausibly sharing workspace alters caste prejudices and reduces social distance based on caste. Interaction in public spaces readjusts the perception regarding pollution from ‘inherited pollution’³⁵ to ‘episodic pollution’. As Saberwal (1973) write, “outside the home, the individual would be a unit of change in attitude and behaviour, but familial norms will prevail in familial contexts”.

As members of different castes stay together, access common public spaces and approach common political representatives, inter-caste interactions become inevitable in the settlement. Here residents are not only conscious of caste identities of others but they regularly negotiate inter-caste relations. People usually have neighbours, friends and acquaintances beyond their own communities. Sustenance of these relations, forged between inter-caste members, under spatial proximity in the colony requires flexibility.

3.2.2 Intercaste Perceptions and Prejudices

Spatial design and dependence make it impractical to maintain inter-caste distance. Giving a sense of proximity, relations in Ashangar are weaved with some extent of caution. This social proximity is not absolute, it is contextual and constantly negotiated.

It was believed that enactment of laws will transform social life immensely. However, Balagopal (2000) underlines that without social consensus mere legislative enactments are not adequate to bring the desired social changes. He writes, “the laws have never worked smoothly because there never was any real consensus behind them; there was only inability to oppose them with any legitimate argument” (ibid:1075). So, while untouchability has been outlawed by the constitution, caste-based prejudices continue to exist and determine socio-economic opportunities for Dalits in India (Ghufraan1996). Caste-based prejudices thrive and affect the prejudiced community

³⁵ Saberwal (1973) in his fieldwork in an urban town, Modelpur, in Punjab found that idea of pollution in a non-rural setting is not simply centred on inherited pollution based on ascriptive identity. He emphasizes inter-caste relations between ‘*Harijan*- high castes’ (he used the term *Harijan*) under the assembly of legislative measures and Dalit assertion the idea of pollution has become differential and contextual. He categorises the pollution as a) Inherited pollution b) Occupational pollution and c) Episodic pollution.

adversely even in the absence of practices of untouchability (Jodhka 2000). In fact, perceptions and prejudices have often become the basis of ‘statistical discrimination’ and ‘taste for discrimination’ determining economic outcomes ³⁶(Deshpande 2014:38). Also, perceptions and prejudices are used by powerful groups to retain dominance and privileges over the oppressed groups. Locally, intercaste perceptions and prejudices are rife showing that social distance pervades the inter-caste proximity. Locally, identity-based perceptions are used by residents to define and demarcate themselves from the members of other caste/community and form a ‘discrete caste’ category. Dipankar Gupta (1984) argues that position/status allocated to various social groups in caste hierarchy is not universally accepted. Those accorded lower position vis-à-vis status, contest and claim the superiority by emphasising on their distinct identity and existence as discrete caste. By pointing to the diverse and contrary claims he argues that caste entities are separate and rebuts the pure hierarchy as arbitrary. He shows that the discrete caste group maintain separateness by tales of origins, customs and traditions. I argue that perceptions and prejudices are important to create and claim a discrete caste category. In Ashanagar, discrete castes are formed by an admixture of customs, perceptions, articulation of secular undertakings like education or occupation, and attributing destigmatising traits. In Ashanagar, situated in modern urban space, more than claiming ritual purity and caste superiority, Dalits stress on secular acts and positive traits to assuage their stigmatised status in the immanent local caste hierarchy.

Perceptions and prejudices which different caste groups hold about ‘others’ manifest existence of social distance based on caste. It forms the frame to abhor or appreciate ‘other’ residing communities.

i. Perceptions and Prejudices of Upper-castes

Citing ‘inherently’ unruly and delinquent behaviour, upper-castes, mostly Brahmins, justify their conscious distance from Dalits in general and specifically from Dalit neighbours. As the following comments by Brahmins illustrate

³⁶ Both the terms, ‘statistical discrimination’ and ‘taste for discrimination’ are used to illustrate the discrimination in labour-market based on identity. Statistical discrimination implies that under the condition of imperfect information in labour market, employers rely on the social conventions to take hiring decisions. Taste for discrimination, ‘presupposes that any market-based phenomena should be measurable in monetary units or should have a monetary equivalent and, therefore, an individual with a taste for discrimination “must act as if he were willing to pay something, either directly or in the form of reduced income, to be associated with some person instead of others’ (Becker, 1957 c.f Deshpande 2014: 41).

Unlike them (referring Jatavs and Balmikis) we work entire day, we don't have spare time like them. They can spend entire day without working. They gladly indulge in drinking, smack and drugs. You cannot say anything to them, if you do, they will gather fifty people armed with weapons to fight. We are not like them. What can you do in such conditions? You tell, why any honorable person (shareef insaan) will keep relations with them? We are dignified people (prathisthit log), we stay within our community, spend time with our family and work. See! they don't care about social respect (samajik prathistha), we feel so ashamed to even step inside a police station. For them regular police visits to the house is a common thing, they don't mind spending time in jail. They just don't care, their father, grandfather all had been engaged in criminal activities, this is like a legacy (virasat) to them... They say, 'our children are not getting education'. Who has stopped them? they just don't have the aptitude to study. In our village, there is a record among SCs not even a single individual from their families have passed high school...in our community minimum education is of graduate level and many from our community are doctors, engineers and IAS officers. Why this is so? Because we study, we are hard-working. Boys here don't study, they just stand in streets and pass comments on women. They have contaminated the environment here. They don't want to study at all.

Reiterating similar attitude another participant says,

They send their children to government school and complain about the lack of discipline in classrooms. However, in school, teachers fear students. They cannot scold students as they sit with knives. Who will risk life to discipline them? Student jump over the school boundary and bunk classes. The government provides them so many facilities, free education, uniform, scholarship and what not? They don't want to study and work. They want easy money which they get from stealing. They desire all fancy material like modern gadgets, clothes and bikes but don't want to toil for it. They don't like to work... My son's cell phone was stolen while commuting in a bus. Who do you think they were? of course these people (Dalits) only! We could trace the location and would have easily recovered it. But you never know, if we complain to police who knows tomorrow they will come with weapons (hathiyar) to kill my family when I am away at my workplace. So why to engage with them? If society is polluted, what can you do? The person who is already naked what shame will they have, none!

Through stereotypes, upper-castes construct an unchanging homogeneous identity of Dalits which refutes internal heterogeneity within any community. They ignore internal stratification among Dalits, their aspirations and mundane struggles by bracketing them as uncivilised, criminals and devoid of honour. Subjecting to humiliation, perceptions based on negative stereotype berate the 'other' as deviant inferiors. Attribution of negative stereotypes as an inherent trait of other (here Dalits) naturalises their inferior status and degrading treatment meted out to them. By fixing identity as inherently lazy, violent, prone to crime, and greedy, Dalits are represented as 'unchangeable' group. Notorious fame of the settlement for petty crimes and foul

atmosphere (mahaul) is attributed to 'inherent traits' of Dalits. Their presence is held responsible for local depravity. Allport (1954) defines prejudice as, "antipathy based on faulty or inflexible generalisations" (c.f. Quillian 2006). Accordingly, a prejudice contains a negative affective feeling against the targeted group based on unverified beliefs (Taylor and Pettigrew 2000). Prejudiced characterisation of Dalits through 'innate' negative qualities rejects the role of social order and material reality in oppressive subjugation of Dalits. In contrast, articulation of positive traits like hard work, honesty and discipline as their inherent characteristics, the upper castes construct positive self-perception which is superior and normative. Their self-perception based on positive qualities of hard work, efficiency and education also articulate the idea of merit. The idea of merit resurfaces whenever the domination of upper-castes is challenged to justify their 'natural' superiority (Balagopal 2000). Locally, numerical, political and administrative domination of Dalits threatens traditional supremacy of upper-castes. Reiteration and circulation of stereotype shape perception about a community and essentialises caste identities. On the role of prejudice in sustaining the racial domination William Wilson (1973) writes, "racist beliefs and practices are only those that contribute to upholding of racial domination and are tied to subordinate groups inferiority" (c.f Quillian 2006:301). Likewise, upper-castes legitimate their social superiority by representing qualities which are presumed to be 'inherently' moral thereby superior.

It is to be noted that the negative perceptions are expressed in the absence of targeted group, Dalits. In villages, derisive terms are openly used to refer Dalits with impunity and without the fear of culpability. Any form of challenge to traditionally accepted norms and public assertion of civil rights by Dalits offends the upper-castes³⁷. They often have resorted to violence for crushing Dalit rebellion and collectively punishing the community (Nagaraj 2012; Balagopal 2011; Jodhka 2015). In contrast, the local dominance and power of Dalits in the settlement is resented by upper-castes. Dalits are considered undeserving beneficiaries of state support. Yet, explicit violence

³⁷ Despite the constitutional promise of equality in post-independent India many gruesome acts of violence and atrocities have been committed on Dalits by the upper-castes and dominant castes across the country. See K. Balagopal (2011), *Ear to the ground: selected writings on class and caste*. The brutal forms of violence against Dalits includes genocide, rape and murders. According to NCRB total 47,064 crimes against Dalits were committed in 2014. Since 2014, crimes against Dalits have seen overall one percent increase. According to NCRB in 2016, there was a steep rise of five percent in crimes against Dalits.

or overt derogatory references are not used to restore 'natural' social order of upper-caste superiority and Dalits inferior position.

ii. Inter-caste Perceptions among Dalits

Factions among Dalit caste clusters has been noted in political affiliations, religious practices, occupational diversifications and disunity exhibited in political demands. Also, factions are produced and solidified by diverging historical and political experiences of Dalits in different regions of the country (Jodhka and Kumar, 2007; Balagopal,2010; Jaoul, 2011).

Jatavs: The ascribed occupation of the caste/caste cluster (including ravidasis/ravidasis/chamars) is associated with leather. In different times and regions, the community has been part of radical religious movement, like Ad-dharm in Doab region of Punjab and later many turned to Buddhism under the influence of Ambedkar. The community also followed influential leaders like Mangoo Ram, Kanshi Ram, Ambedkar and Mayawati. Both, religious movements and political leadership emphasized on the attainment of education for mobility and socio-economic liberation. The association with leather also fostered entrepreneurship in the community members mainly located in cities. By deploying 'political' and 'non-political' means (Jaoul 2007), implying political representation, bureaucracy, education and affirmative actions, the community has become one of the most visible and mobile caste group among Dalits (Jodhka and Kumar 2007). Their socio-political movement is reflected in local inter-caste perceptions in the settlement. Even in the settlement, Jatavs as a community is commended for their emphasis and commitment to modern education. Determined to achieve socio-economic mobility they are perceived as a community averse to violence. Away from the crime and substance abuse, their source of income is believed to be untainted. Talking about reforming Balmiki samaj, a member of the samaj who is also a member of RSS says:

Our samaj (Balmikis) is lagging behind because of the negligence of education and eating habits. Jatavs study, they take education very seriously...they don't consume non-vegetarian food. Earlier we were brothers (Balmiki and jatavs) but over the years we moved away. We follow Valmiki as our guru and for them Ambedkar is guru. Ambedkar asked them to study hard and so they did. Now they no longer work with leather related work (chamrey se juda hua kaam)...our samaj continues to clean streets. Our people are still illiterate and backward, we are trying to reform our samaj.

Perceptions of ‘others’ towards Jatavs resonate with members of the community. A Jatav man in early thirties discussing about his community says,

In Jatav samaj, education is very important. Our parents were illiterate but they educated us all. Even now if you see we earn and live modestly but we do not compromise with the education of our children. We do not live an ostensible life. We might eat one meal less but education will not suffer. Those among us who are very poor to afford fees of private schools send their children to a government school, but they send them regularly.

Retreat from the inherited polluting occupation, disowning food habits especially intoxicants and ‘impure’ food (pork and beef), and emphasis on education are considered essential for the development of a community. The mobility of Jatavs is attributed to their dissociation from ascriptive occupation as the members of the community work in ‘caste free’ occupation and their commitment to education.

Bairwas: Unlike members of Balmikis and Jatavs who are identified by their caste, Bairwas are identified with the state of their origin. Residents identify Bairwas as Rajasthanis³⁸. Members of the community describe themselves as simple, non-interfering, peace-loving people. As a woman in early sixties says,

Bairwas are very modest people. We do not incite violence nor do we participate in it. If anywhere any fight ensues, we do not interfere physically, we try to solve it through conversation. Like us, Jatavs also do not fight. They mind their own business... It is Balmikis who provoke Muslims first...what can Muslims do, after a point they also react. How long will they tolerate?

Another man from the community says,

Our people are very simple and honest. We mind with our own work. We never harm anyone nor do we fight with anybody. We are not rich like Balmikis who have government jobs...we earn little and we spend modestly. We don't show off.

A significant population of the community resides in the settlement yet Bairwas remain unmarked or unified under a single identity of being Rajasthanis. A comment from a Balmiki woman talking about Rajasthanis says,

For me they are Rajasthanis, I don't know about the different castes among them...they keep to themselves. In local conflicts, they don't engage...they keep a distance.

³⁸ Regardless of their caste people from Rajasthan are referred to as Rajasthanis. Likewise, people from Uttarakhand are referred by their state or region, as Garhwali, not by caste. However, Bairwas are not only limited only to Rajasthan.

A Rajput man who shares neighbourhood with Bairwas tells,

They are quiet people. They don't engage in fights or violence like Balmikis. So, our lane is more peaceful than those where Balmikis stay.

Self-perception of a caste group aligns with the perception of others about the group. The distinctive qualities which a group attributes to itself are conceded and reiterated by other residents. By defining homogenously, upper-castes overlook these disparate inter-caste perceptions existing among Dalits. These inter-caste Dalit perceptions appear to emerge from real experiences of co-habiting the same location.

Balmikis: Balmikis constitute a significant population among SCs in Delhi. Traditionally scavenging is the caste occupation of Balmikis, but in villages, many worked as agricultural labourers therefore not everyone performed caste-based work (Jodhka and Kumar 2007). Paradoxically, it is in the city where link between the caste and ascriptive occupation was rigidly established and institutionalised (Prashad 2000). The need to maintain sanitation in the city, caste and occupation became tenable and 'permanent'. The certainty of job in the municipality and other state departments is attributed to their disinterest in education. "The sustained exploitation of the working people produces circumstances wherein some Dalits become clients of political strongmen to act on behalf of a status quo that oppresses the bulk of Dalits" (Prashad x; 2001). Locally, also in the city, they are regarded as 'criminal caste'. The criminalised status of community derives from their role as 'perpetrators' of violence against Sikhs in anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984. The community is implicated by non-Balmikis for their role in anti-Sikh pogrom. This popular perception of Balmikis as violent caste is conjoined with official production and representation of Balmikis as such. Uncritical linking of Dalit participation, mainly Balmiki community, in communal riots has been contested by Pauline Kolenda (2003) and P.R Brass (1998) who argue that such simplistic interlinkage abdicates both the state and upper-caste and middle-class Hindus of their role and responsibility in communal violence. Locally, they are identified by their occupation, complacency, disinterest in education and for aggressive behaviour. Widespread and recurrent perception about the community was stated by a Jatav man,

Parents are unaware about where their children are going. They don't know whether they are going to school or not. Fathers remain in the state of stupor after drinking and mothers busy in housework. They do not have time to look

after their children. Neither parents nor do children care about education and progress in life. Because they know they will get a government job anyway, whether they study or not.

The young boys from Jatav and Kewat caste in a group discussion talk about the disposition of Balmikis to violence,

Our parents just want us to study and get a job. During conflicts or riots, if we open doors to step out and see what is happening they say, 'arrey son! (baccha) where are you going, don't go out somebody will hit you'. Our parents are so scared of fights that even at the slightest hint of tension they enclose us within the house. Balmikis and Muslim men will be out in the street with weapons and we can't even peep out of the window to see what is happening. If a situation arises to protect ourselves, we will not find even a stick in our house. Houses of Balmikis and Muslim are stocked with weapons.

Locally, non-Balmikis, Dalits and upper caste blame occupational security of Balmikis for their indifference towards education and development. Again this local perception about the Balmikis resonates with Jaoul's (2011) work among Balmikis of Kanpur. He concludes, "The relative economic security they benefited from as municipal employees also created a vested interest in the despised jobs, limiting their efforts towards education and social mobility" (ibid:304). This view coincides with the angst of upper castes against Dalit. Affirmative policies are implicated by upper-castes for the backwardness of Dalits. Likewise, non-Balmiki Dalits attribute 'guaranteed' municipal employment for the unsophisticated conduct of Balmikis which prevents their advancement. Such external perceptions about the community are both agreed and contested by its members. While community members attribute their backwardness, compared to Jatavs, to their dependence on municipal jobs. Changes within the community, locational disadvantage and indifference of the state towards the settlement are often underlined by Balmikis. On the community a Balmiki man says,

It is true that our community is not well-educated...our boys (Balmiki) are emotional. They easily get outraged and involve in conflicts. Members of our community have been working in cleaning related work. Most of them were illiterate themselves, so they could not guide their children. But now the situation is changing even in our community. Our people are taking education seriously...

Exhibiting the contradictory 'reality', insiders often contest the discrediting prejudices and stereotypes against the community. They provide an existential explanation for the prevailing status quo within the community. Immobility within the community is attributed to complicity of the state which emerges in the seamless link

between the space, caste, and occupation. It is argued that the state willfully neglects impoverished condition of localities inhabited by the community and allows illegal activities to thrive in order to retain the caste-based labour to carry out sanitation work within the city (Jaoul 2011). As Ambedkarite youth, from Balmiki community, remarks,

Intentionally government gives substandard education in settlements like this. They don't want Dalits to be educated. They worry if we receive education then who will clean drains and streets. The government fears Ambedkar. It thinks, if one Dalit got education he wrote the constitution, what will happen if we all get quality education? They consciously allow illegal selling of liquors and drugs so that Dalit youth remain intoxicated and Dalits stay where they have been for centuries, cleaning drains (referring to the occupation of Balmikis)...

Apathy of the state repeated by two elder members of the community

All the settlements where Balmikis reside are located at the margins of the city... these places lack quality schools and education. Not only these places are congested but you can also find many illegal activities are carried out here. Government and police all know about these things. If they wish, they can stop these activities. But they choose to overlook. Government has no will to improve our condition or provide quality education to our children's. They don't stop any illegal activities so that our children involve in these things and don't study. They want us to stay as we are.

Perceptions held by communities against each other is often used as justification for maintaining intercaste distance and limited interaction. Strong cultural stereotypes underline perceptions about the 'other'. Widely, negative stereotypes are prevalent against Dalits by Upper castes, Balmikis by non-Balmikis, Muslims by non-Muslims and residents by non-residents. These perceptions and prejudices serve as a guide to understand and describe a referred community. The description of a community through negative stereotypes is avoided in the presence of members of the referred community and it is iterated with relative ease in their absence. Tulsi Patel (2014) points that fear of legal measures withhold the upper-castes from hurling jibes in a formal setting. In the settlement, where each caste/communal group distinguishes itself from other through common perceptions and stereotypes, conscious avoidance of negative stereotypes in public is must to maintain the orchestrated harmony in the condition of (in)voluntary co-existence.

3.2.3 Broadening Spectrum of Marriage and Caste in Urban Space: From Enduring to Transgressing Endogamy

Separation of castes is indispensable for the perpetuation of caste system arranged on principle of hierarchy. The rule of endogamy and hypergamy ensures reproduction as well as purity of castes through endogamous marriages. Thereby it sustains hierarchy-based caste system. Babasaheb Ambedkar (1936) noted that separation of castes maintained by the prohibition on intermarriage is at the root of untouchability. He argued that to eliminate the practice of untouchability the ban against intermarriage has to be transgressed³⁹. Underlining commensal and marriage rules as the basis of caste separation he (2014[1936]:285) endorsed inter-caste dinners and inter-marriages as a viable method for ‘annihilation of caste’. However, he felt, “interdining has not succeeded in killing the spirit of caste and the consciousness of caste and the real remedy for breaking caste is intermarriage” (ibid). As the status of secondary unions⁴⁰ and regional variation in marriages demonstrate that rules laid down for Hindu marriage are not always followed strictly. In instances of ‘love marriage’ and ‘companionate marriage’⁴¹ the rules of hypergamy and endogamy are breached (Grover 2011; Fuller

³⁹ In his speech on the occasion of second Mahad satyagraha Ambedkar (1927) said, ‘if the prohibitions on social intercourse and inter-drinking go, the roots of untouchability are not removed. Release from these restrictions will, at the most, remove untouchability as it appears outside the home; but it will leave untouchability in the home untouched. If we want to break untouchability in the home as well as outside, we must breakdown the prohibition against intermarriage’ (c.f Satyanarayana and Tharu, 2013; pp:26). Finally, he proposed that the only way to get rid of the caste system is to move out of the Hindu religion.

⁴⁰ Writing about the hierarchy of marriages Dumont distinguishes the difference between primary and secondary marriage (1998:53). He writes primary marriage is important for a woman as it is performed with elaborate rituals and indissoluble ‘even by the death of the spouse (superior castes)’(ibid). It is on death or divorce a woman can contract a secondary marriage which is although legitimate but has an inferior status. But for a man, the first marriage becomes *principal* marriage only when ‘it bears him a child, preferably sons’ (ibid). A man has a choice of *subsidiary* marriages. He is allowed to remarry and have multiple wives. The wives from subsidiary marriage could be of ‘lower status’. Secondary marriages of men can be performed with detailed rituals which is not the case for women. Even though women are allowed to remarry thus to contract a secondary marriage, these marriages are performed less elaborately, which is also the reason for inferior status conferred on such union. Secondary unions were likely to have less regard for the rule of endogamy. They are more ‘likely to breach the endogamous boundary’ (Parry 2001: 787-88). Presence and practice of secondary marriages only demonstrate endogamy is not tenacious in every form of marriage.

⁴¹ Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) conducted fieldwork in a village in Tamil Nadu, and also in cities among *Vattima* Brahmans. Their study among *Vattimas* shows the marriage system of the caste has undergone some of the drastic changes, still, sub-caste endogamy remains a norm. In arranging their own marriages young men and women play an active role for whom education, occupation and compatibility have become a crucial criterion to select a spouse. In rare cases when *Vattimas* fail to find a spouse within the sub-caste they don’t shy away from searching and marrying a person from non-*Vattima* Tamil Brahmans. Nevertheless because of the importance given to education, occupation and compatibility in

and Narasimhan 2008; Parry 2001). In contemporary neo-liberal times, to accommodate the aspirations of upward mobility and altering expectations from conjugal relations, boundaries and scope of caste-based marriages are being redefined. However, this expansion of boundary does not seem to diminish the centrality of caste, specifically the norm of purity and pollution. While caste continues to retain its significance, educational qualifications and occupation are becoming an increasingly important factor in arranging/selecting a partner for marriage (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008; Huber 2004). As noted by Andre Beteille (2012), the rule of hypergamy embedded in the endogamous marriages are disregarded with ease to meet aspirations in the changing times. Hypogamous alliances within the caste and inter-varna marriages are being subsumed within the liberally expanding boundaries of the caste thus allowing intermarriages 'transgressing' the strict rules laid down by the caste system (ibid). Disregarding the mandates of caste, such marriages are interpreted as the wrath of modern time on the age-old customs. These changes in caste rules are misconstrued as displacement of caste by class, an inevitable finality under the influence of modernity/neo-liberal economy. Such hastily arrived conclusions are regularly challenged by violence or resistance to inter-caste marriages especially in an alliance between 'touchable' and 'untouchable' castes (Dalit and non-Dalit)⁴² even resulting in what is euphemistically called as 'honour' killings. So, preference to education or occupation over caste rules might point to the loosening of caste-based restrictions on marriages. Nevertheless, the detailed work of Prem Chowdhry (1998, 2004) and Pervez Mody (2002, 2007) in North Indian states point that in the name of honour, violent response is meted out to the transgressors breaching the rule of gotra (clan) and village exogamy. Customary penalisation of transgressors suggests that breach of caste rules in marriage is forbidden and unforgivable.

an (self) arranged endogamous marriage Fuller and Narasimhan call such union as 'companionate marriage'.

⁴² It is only from 2014, National Crime Report Bureau (NCRB) began to collect the data on honour killings. There exists a statistical absence of records on honour killings before 2014. According to NCRB data 28 cases in 2014, 251 in 2015 (796% increase from the previous year), and 77 cases in 2016 were reported 'with motive as honour killing (which includes cases registered under murder, section 302 under IPC) and culpable homicide not amounting to murder (section 304 in IPC) in the country' (Press release posted on Mo. Home affairs, 30 July, 2018). In 2018, eight cases of gruesome acts of honour killing were widely reported by media. Again, on 06/05/2019 newspapers reported one case of honour killing in Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra. In most cases of honour killing the couples hail from different castes, commonly woman from upper-caste and man from Dalit caste. Despite such recurrent reporting, India does not have a separate law against honour killing. The cases of honour killing are registered and tried under various sections of IPC (Indian penal code). NCRB has not published its report for the year 2017 and 2018. So, data on honour killing is available only for three years, between 2014-16.

Amidst these broad debates on the loosening of caste-based prohibitions on marriage and tenacity of endogamous marriages which becomes clear in cases of 'honour' killings, this section examines the matrimonial preferences in Ashanagar. The discussion on matrimonial preferences, mode of searching spouses, response to inter-caste/inter-religious marriages, circumstances which bring attitudinal changes towards customary forms of marriage is done against the claims of declining influence or 'castelessness' in the settlement or in general in urban spaces. In the settlement, inter-caste marriages are not rare. Further, none of the known cases received the brutal fate of 'honour' killing. Nevertheless, intercaste marriages are not a preferred norm in the settlement.

i. Negotiating Love Marriages: Between Shame and Honour

Despite being located in the city and experiencing social-economic changes, caste continues to be vital and norm of endogamous marriages are preferred in Ashanagar. Densely populated and congested organisation of the settlement is one of the conditions of interaction and even plays a role in stoking romantic relations including extramarital relations. Many such relationships culminate in marriages. Romantic relations within the caste are mildly opposed. Difference in class and status are the basis on which intra-caste love marriages are opposed. Although, not all romantic affairs are intra-caste. Thus, inter-caste alliances meet with different fates ranging from acceptance, opposition, to excommunication. Alarmed by frequent cases of love affairs and elopements, parents/families are forced to reconsider their outlook towards inter-caste unions. In the changed times, surrender to the inter-caste alliance is agreed meekly which disregards the dictates of caste position and hierarchy. Negotiating the threat posed to traditional arrangement of marriage, many believe it is better to adapt to changing times. Parents fear that even without seeking parental approval children may enter into an unsanctioned alliance in courts and temples. Many parents admit that they will concede to the love/inter-caste alliance to save themselves from the embarrassment that awaits if 'couple' chooses to run away and marry in court or temple (Dhanda 2012). Instead of withdrawing support and shunning the couple, they agree to give consent and validation to the forbidden matrimonial alliances. Validation is sought through a public spectacle of marriage and performance of related ceremonies to gain wider social acceptance for such alliances. A woman narrating about a recent elopement and marriage between OBC girl and Balmiki boy says,

Nowadays even children don't think about who they are marrying or what they are doing. At such a young age they fall in the trap of love. This girl was staying in my lane and he stays right here. She is the only child. Her parents have a good job and a house. They made jewelleries for her wedding. The boy is an orphan, he stays with his brother and sister in this one-room house. Though he went to ask for her hand, her parents refused. Not only that he is of different caste, he is also poor. They are parents, certainly they will think of her well-being. One day they just eloped and got married in the court. Her parents even went to the police, but all in vain. The girl is above 18 years⁴³ so even police can't do anything... now parents don't even cross this road out of anger and shame. I think now they should forget and accept them. What can you do with children? It's better to agree and let them suffer...my own son married a Balmiki girl. Initially I refused. They began to say, "we will die, this and that" so I said fine, get married but later don't complain. Now see, every next day they fight and scream. She says, "why did I marry him?" I tell them, "now you have married, deal with it, don't blame anyone".

Likewise, a Man says

What can parents do in case of inter-caste marriage? They have to agree. In my lane, one girl eloped and got married. Father can't raise his head and sit among people of his biradari just out of shame. Do children care? What else can a parent do other than accepting such an alliance? Even if parents disagree with inter-caste marriages, they have to accept it for the fear of shame.

For many residents, love marriage is a synonym of inter-caste marriage. A group of men in late fifties and early sixties tell

Love marriage has become a practice among young men and women here. Now even among the youth of our caste (Bairwa) it has become fashionable. It is better to marry in one's own samaj. However, when children marry like this what can be done. There are many well educated and employed youngsters in our samaj who do arrange marriage. They are not influenced by these things. They respect their parents and care about their reputation in the samaj.

Customarily family plays a pivotal role in arranged endogamous marriages. Their role and authority, in searching and selecting a partner is eroded in instances of love marriages. The active role of children in contracting their own marriages challenges the established marriage system. Love marriages are viewed with cynicism. It is seen as an impulsive act bound to fail because it overlooks the hardships of real life. Disapproval of an inter-caste union is explained by respondents as not always based on caste considerations. Parental expectation towards the well-being of the children in terms of economic security and comforts are also pointed as a reason for

⁴³ Age 18 and above is the legal age of marriage in India.

declining a proposal of love/inter-caste marriage. However, it is argued that control over female sexuality is crucial for the reproduction and maintaining purity of castes (Chakravarti 2018). Non-compliance, especially of women, poses a threat to the reproduction of caste. Therefore, disapproval to love marriage, mainly of inter-caste marriage is not simply based on the concerns of future security and well-being. The question of honour and shame of the family and community emerges as a salient factor for opposing inter-caste unions. In inter-caste union, as reported by inter-caste couples in my study, caste is the focal point of opposition rather than class. Formation of consensus and advocacy to approve romantic relations is an attempt to escape shame and humiliation which concerned families undergo in cases of elopement and marriage. The validation of samaj, including people from one's community and other acquaintances, is important as they are the source of shame and honour. Mody (2002:248) writes that parental acceptance of a person selected by their children for marriage makes a love marriage acceptable as, "couple's choice is definitively legitimated through the process of compromise". Consensus is given reluctantly to the inter-caste union in order to guard the social honour. To mitigate the shame and humiliation, acceptance of the union through a ritualised ceremony in public is seen as a compromised solution. Performance of rituals in the presence of people endows social legitimacy and allays shame linked to such unions. Shame is skewed and intense for families of women who defy caste-based patriarchal authority and control.

Fear of shame is entwined with caste, class and gender. For an upper caste family or a non-Balmiki woman intercaste unions, especially with a Balmiki and Muslim, heaps severe disrepute. Devoid of autonomy, women are considered as mere carriers of caste/ lineage and its honour. Their autonomy in selecting a spouse and marriage by eloping interrupts bounded production of castes through endogamous marriage and brings disgrace to the community. In most cases of inter-caste marriages, which I came across in the field, at least one partner was from the Balmiki caste. Balmikis are considered lowest even among Dalits. An antagonistic relation, negative perception and lowest caste status of Balmikis draws disapproval to form an alliance with them. To underline the significance of caste in marriages, three cases of inter-caste union and different responses to each are elaborated below.

Case 1: Alliance between General caste woman (Sonar/Goldsmith) and SC man (Balmiki)

Setting: While we were talking about love marriages and affairs in the locality, Arpita mentions about her neighbour Seema's elder sister, Sharmila, who married against the will of her family outside their caste. Shying away to talk about the marriage of her elder sister, she shared only caricature of the marriage. She acceded that it was an inter-caste love marriage which was/is unacceptable to her family as they are upper caste (sonar-goldsmith) and the boy belongs to a lower-caste. Despite asking, she did not specify the caste of her brother-in-law. Her family disowned her sister for a year and a half. Her sister is married for the last ten years and has three children. On the next visit to Arpita's house, I met Sharmila. Informed about the purpose of my visit she agreed to share the details of her inter-caste marriage and the ordeal that followed.

Sharmila shared that her's was an inter-caste marriage against the wishes of her family. She specified the caste of her husband as an upper caste, Chauhan. By projecting his caste even above in caste hierarchy than her own she tries to conceal the lower caste status of her husband. To escape humiliation, Dalits conceal their stigmatised identity by adopting upper-caste or caste neutral titles. The title, Chauhan, is commonly adopted by Balmikis in the settlement. After marriage, family disowned her for a year and a half, and she wasn't allowed to visit natal home even once. After protracted disownment, her mother re-established relations. Justifying the disownment Sharmila says, "*my deed was such that this reaction was obvious*". Being eldest among siblings, she was overindulged by her parents and maternal grandparents. She tells, "*even after resuming relations, my parents do not treat me and my husband the manner/respect (maan-samman) reserved for a married daughter and her husband*". Her father is still angry and does not talk to her even after 10 years of marriage. Her maternal grandparents have accepted and resumed relations with her like before. She says they love her and because of them, she is able to meet her parents, mainly mother.

Going against the will of her family, she had a court marriage without informing the family. Her family filed a legal case of abduction on her husband. This ensued a legal battle between the two families. She was locked inside the house and a strict vigil was kept on her during the unfolding of legal battle in the courtroom. On some pretexts, her family members managed to keep her away from testifying in the court. However, before one of the hearings, she escaped the house. She testified in the court that she married according to her own choice and was not abducted by her husband. Her testimony in the court exonerated her husband from the criminal charges and left her family stunned. About her decision of marrying against the family's wishes and at a

young age of 19 years, she says, *“Once you fall in love then you can do nothing. As they say, love is blind, it is. You cannot see what is waiting ahead?...you do not care whether you are doing right or wrong”*. She tells, at that age (19) she was not mature to make a prudent decision; else, she would not have married then. She admits, *“I don’t think about it now. Whatever is done is done. Why should I think about it now? Nothing can be done about it and there is no point thinking about it”*.

After narrating her experience Sharmila left the house. In her absence Arpita told the actual caste of Sharmila’s husband is Balmiki. Arpita told that her husband is a habitual drinker and squanders much of the income on buying liquor. Sharmila and her family tell others that her husband belongs to upper-caste (*oonchi biradari*), but he is not. Sharmila’s relatives do not know that she ran away and married a Balmiki man. She never visits her parents’ place.

Case 2: Alliance between General caste Man (Thakur) and SC woman (Balmiki)

Jagruti hails from general caste (Thakur). She shared the case of her cousin’s marriage to a Balmiki girl.

Her cousin had a nine-year long affair with a Balmiki girl in Ashanagar. When he revealed about the affair, his parents refused the proposal outrightly. His infuriated mother very strictly told him about the impossibility of inter-caste marriage in the house. Jagruti tells that her aunt was very meticulous about observing caste rituals and obstinately believed in the idea of purity and pollution. Failing to convince his mother and get her permission, he did not marry but continued affair with the girl. Some years later, his mother fell sick and passed away. During the observance of death ritual, their samaj, mainly included family and relatives, held a meeting to dissuade the boy from marrying the girl and discontinue relation with her. They asked him to marry within the *biradari*. He did not pay any heed to the advice of the samaj members. He held his ground and married the girl in court after the conclusion of the mourning period. After the marriage, his family ostracised and refused to shelter him in the house. Presently, he is staying on rent within the settlement. After a few days of the marriage, his father agreed to let him stay on the top floor of the house. However, relatives and close family members discouraged the father suspecting that after moving in, the responsibility of feeding and raising the new family will fall on him. Relatives told the father to let his son understand and take the responsibility of his actions. So, the son with his newly wedded wife continues to stay on rent. Jagruti organised a keertan (religious function)

in her house to celebrate the marriage of her brother and invited the new sister-in-law to her house in the function. In this function, she did not invite her own family members and that of the bride. Reason for not inviting her family and relatives was their resentment against this 'inappropriate' marriage. For not inviting bride's family, Jagruti explains, "*now she has become a member of our caste so we are concerned with her. What do we have to do with her family?*" Till now her brother's family has not visited the house of the new bride.

In both cases, the temerity of entering into a relationship with a SC (Balmiki) met with resistance and rejection from the upper caste families. In cases of inter-caste marriage, the upper-caste 'transgressors' were outcasted by their families. Response of the families varies depending on gender, caste, and class. When upper-caste transgressor is a woman, inter-caste alliance was not only disapproved for the customary violation but attempts were also made to restore her in the caste. By turning to the modern state apparatus of police and courts, marriage was depicted as a coerced alliance, thereby a criminal act which is illegitimate in the eye of law. As Mody (2002) noted, in India, love marriages receive a contradictory response from the state and society. A civil marriage by choice is legitimate by law, but it is considered illegitimate/unholy by the society. In the city with an overwhelming presence of state, to re-establish the honour impaired by the woman legal route is adopted to prove the illegitimacy of inter-caste alliance which is readily illegal for the society. Once the state accords an illegal status, such alliances become ineffective and woman is restored to the community. In the first case, after the disclosure of marriage with a man who was not only from outside the caste but also considered to be the lowest in caste hierarchy, attempts were made to restore the daughter by arranging a marriage within the caste. Mody (ibid:224) writes, "*illegitimacy of marriage is conceived as an individual contract as opposed to a social one, which admits no agency on the part of the couple and concentrates agency entirely within the 'community'.*" In this case, the alliance was dismissed, and meaninglessness of the marriage was exhibited by arranging a marriage for an already married woman. Failing to control through legal channels, the woman was excommunicated for a longer duration. Even on re-establishment of relations with the natal family, the spouses did not get treatment reserved for a married couple by the family and from the community.

Fatal assaults, honour killings and recourse to law, in relation to inter-caste marriages are not exceptional, and are also used as weapons of revenge against Dalits.

Subjecting Dalits to intense humiliation and violence, these weapons are used against them for challenging caste hierarchy, jeopardising honour, and to remind them of their position. Often than not, the ranks of state machineries are occupied by officials belonging to upper-castes. Despite serving in modern secular institutions, their faith in traditional values of caste system has not loosened considerably. Such attitude reflects in the lackadaisical and biased manner in which cases of atrocities against Dalits are responded by officials responsible to uphold the constitutional values (Teltumbde 2014, 2016). However, locally, given the numerical predominance and political power of Balmikis resorting to the legal course is pragmatic over explicit violence.

In the second case, where the man transgressed endogamous norms of marriage, especially marrying a woman from the lowest caste among Dalits, family resistance did not take any legal route. Opposition to the alliance and its disapproval was demonstrated through social boycott by not attending the wedding and blessing the couple. Still, after a short period, willingness of the father to restore relation with his son points to the differential treatment meted out to men and women entering into marital union prohibited by caste norms. This disparate response to the same act has patriarchal intonations to it. Subordination of women and control over female sexuality are regarded as crucial for the effective perpetuation of caste system. Compliance of women in perpetuating the system is achieved through re-ordering gender norms and establishing the ideology of *stridharma*⁴⁴ (Chakravarti 2018). The ideology of *stridharma* defines ideal Hindu women as chaste and committed to conjugal fidelity. These qualities are essential for women to uphold the honour of their castes. Besides the ideological control, kinsmen are given authority to control non-compliant women who by marrying outside the caste or engaging in promiscuous behaviour bring dishonour to the caste. Brahmanical patriarchy under the ‘ideals’ of womanhood masks the subordination of women. By representing women as an embodiment of honour and shame, they are strictly discouraged to venture out of the caste⁴⁵ which can potentially

⁴⁴ Refers to duties of women in different roles.

⁴⁵ It is noted that before the acquisition of property, gender relations among Dalits and *adivasis* were equal (Pawar and Moon 2008). The contact and influence of caste Hindus have turned gender relations among them antagonistic. It is argued the equality of gender relations is linked with lack of ownership over land and property rights (ibid). The caste Hindus not only owned the land/property but also transferred it to their male descendants. The transfer of property within the caste required a male inheritor which was maintained by the strict control over women and their exchange within the caste. Pawar and Moon (2008) argue the regular contact of untouchables with caste Hindus led to the emulation of caste practices of the latter by former. They write, ‘it is possible that the concept of female chastity in

impede the reproduction of caste. Therefore, on violating the strictures, women are penalised more severely than men. While “*women are mere receptacles and transmitters, never the carrier of a line/vansa*” (Chakravarti 2018:30). To continue male lineage, it is women who are exchanged through endogamous marriages. The purity of male lineage depends on the purity of exchanged woman. However, the position of men remains fixed in the line. They are patrilineal successors who carry the caste and are natural inheritors of property. They are endowed with the responsibility of continuing the family name and lineage.

Each inter-caste alliance requires an independent analysis and cannot be understood within the frame of caste norms alone (Grover 2011). Driven by socio-economic concerns, the next case of inter-caste alliance shows decentring of caste.

Case 3: Alliance between General caste man (Thakur) and SC woman (Jatav)

Sunita hails from Jatav caste and has three daughters and one son. She stays with her mother-in-law, son, daughter-in-law and two unmarried daughters. Four years ago, her husband passed away due to long-term illness. Her husband had a private job.

Her youngest daughter Radhika was married before any other children. She had a love marriage outside her caste (*biradari*) with a Thakur boy from the settlement. Financial hardship and fear of dishonour were instrumental in the early marriage of her youngest daughter. Radhika and her husband met in high school and were seeing each other for four years. Sunita was aware of the affair from the beginning and was approached by the boy with a proposal to marry her daughter. At that time, they were very young, below the legal age for marriage. She told him that she would not marry her daughter unless she completes class 12th. She also warned the boy about the caste difference and difficulties this marriage could face due to non-acceptance of her daughter in his upper-caste family. The boy promised to wait for Radhika until the completion of her school education. After she finished her school education, the boy again approached Sunita for Radhika’s hand. At that time, she was going to visit her

the tying of marriage bond and the practice of child marriage, came to the untouchables from the upper castes through imitation of such kind’ (pp.104). Writing about the formation and development of caste, Ambedkar notes a significant role of endogamy in sustaining the economy of caste (in Rege 2013: pp. 60-61). Pointing at the inferior status of women who when in surplus are disposed through evil practices of sati, child marriage and widowhood. Ambedkar argues male superiority which does not subject men to similar practices has helped in guarding the labour and numbers of a caste group (ibid). Within the caste structure, women are disposable when they become obsolete. Whereas men are indispensable for the perpetuation of caste and protection of property.

village and asked him to wait till she returns. While she was away, the boy tattooed Radhika's name on his hand which he showed to her on her return. This worried Sunita as it was a public declaration and more people will come to know of their relationship. However, she again warned him about impending difficulties which inter-caste alliances have to face. For the boy and his family caste was impertinent. They were concerned about the response of girl's family. Before Sunita could decide anything, boy's side fixed the date and approached her again. She says, "*I was barely left with any choice. I did not even get time to resolve my dilemmas (asmanjas)*". She agreed to the marriage and arranged it in a haste before Radhika turned 18. Justifying the early marriage she explains, her daughter was not keen on studies and looks bulkier than her sisters thus appearing more mature for her age. Moreover, many in her neighbourhood already knew about their relationship. It would have been difficult to find a match within their own caste. Bad economic condition of the family added to her decision. According to her, "*in an arranged marriage no matter what, you have to spend minimum of rupees two lakhs on the wedding. I don't have that kind of money. My husband had a private job which barely fed us all. It is the pension of my mother-in-law that furnishes requirements of the house. My son and eldest daughter had a private job*". Given that the boy and his family were willing to marry Radhika and it was an inter-caste alliance, delaying was not good as it would have brought disgrace to the family and the girl.

In the above case, there was a dilemma and an element of helplessness from the bride's family. In the previous two cases, the inter-caste alliance faced stiff opposition from the upper-caste families either in the form of legal action or social boycott. However, in the last case, there was no overt opposition to the marriage from either of the families. Internal family relations and structure of the families partly explain the reason for the unopposed marriage. In both the family's, as father died, thus the decision-making power came to women of the respective families. Decision-making power does not inevitably get transferred to women in the absence of a male figure (father/husband). Male members in the extended family and relatives exert control over important decisions like marriage, as was the case in aforementioned inter-caste marriages. However, the influence of extended family depends on the kind of support they offer to a family in the absence of a male member, husband. In Sunita's case, most of her relatives live in the same lane, but she is not dependant on them financially. With the family of her husband's elder brother, who stays opposite to her house, they do not

interact. Despite being a government employee and financially well off, he never extends help to her family. In fact, her mother-in-law continues to live with her despite the death of her son, rather than with the family of her elder son. Abandoning her faith in Hindu religion her mother-in-law converted to Christianity. About the objection from their community on the religious conversion and inter-caste marriage they say, *'Our community is not feeding us so why should we care about the community. Whatever resources we have in the house we survive on that. We do not go out to ask for anything to anyone. Then why should we care about them.'* Although her mother-in-law converted to Christianity, she continues to practice the Hindu religion. Likewise, the groom lives with his mother, sister and elder brother. As their father was the only son, so after his death there were no obvious males/close relatives to interfere with decisions of marriage. Also, as the groom has his own mobile shop in the settlement. He is financially independent and able to support his new bride and family.

Not all inter-caste marriages undergo the ordeal of social boycott and opposition. Generally, excommunication awaits those couples who elope and marry, defying the authority of social norm. Whereas, some couples manage to pursue their parents successfully for their 'love-cum-arranged marriage'⁴⁶. Parental approval to such alliances is a situation of compromise. It is the way to stave off social shame, and strict sanctions, like excommunication, against the couple in case they marry without gaining social legitimacy (Mody 2002). As in the third case, parents do not desire an inter-caste/love marriage for their children, nor they readily accept such proposals. Parental approval and support to an alliance do not come because of their unambiguous faith in secular values like the right to choose a partner. Pressed by socio-economic circumstances, approval or disapproval is granted to such alliances. A combination of various factors determines the fate of a love/intercaste marriage. Like, public knowledge and rumours about inter-caste romantic relation reduce the chances of finding a suitable partner within the caste/community, thereby making an intercaste alliance preferable (ibid). Likewise, reduced dependency on extended kin and caste members relieve the family from the external social pressure and interference in taking decisions on the matter. Further, family structure like absence of a male figure, and relations with extended family appear crucial in shaping

⁴⁶ Perveez Mody (2002) uses the term love-cum-arranged marriage to refer those couples who secretly marry in courts/temples without prior knowledge of their families and community. It is after the marriage these couples attempt to derive parental approval and social legitimacy. Whereas my usage of the term refers to the couples who approach parents/families before entering into any matrimonial alliance.

decision on inter-caste marriage. Secular aspects like class/economic condition, conjugal compatibility and contentment, and envisioning an improved future, assume significance while giving consent to inter-caste alliance. Although, secular considerations are not the foremost concern, also it is not a decisive factor because of which an inter-caste alliance receives an affirmative response. It appears that inter-caste alliances become acceptable and justifiable for parents because of their inability to find an appropriate match that can also fulfil secular conditions within their own caste. Thus, loosening of caste boundaries and consent to inter-caste marriage cannot be naively presumed as a triumph of secular values over primordial structures of caste and religion. Diverse responses to inter-caste marriages from retaliation to negotiations shows that caste endogamy has not withered away. It continues to be an important parameter in searching and selecting a suitable match within the caste group and perpetuate endo-recruitment. Regular instances of love affairs, elopements, and inter-caste unions have not displaced the norm of endogamy. To an extent, such instances have ensued reconciliation to adapt with altering norms of marriages brought in by love marriage (that could be endogamous or exogamous). Marriages are still preferred within the caste. Searching for a match is commonly done within caste through wide networks of relatives and friends. The medium of cyber-search is viewed with scepticism. The rule of endogamy remains a central concern while arranging a marriage. Many even turn to their village and depend on kin members to find a suitable match for marriageable candidate. A Patel (OBC) woman who has already fixed a groom for her elder daughter says,

I have told my children that I have no objection to a love marriage. But it should not be outside our caste. Nowadays, income and education are very important. If they find someone who is educated and earning well, we will arrange the marriage. This does not mean that they can bring just anyone...we can't marry in castes below us (referring Jatavs and Balmikis), it is not permissible in our caste...it does not matter that you have stayed in the city for more than twenty years. It is better to find a match back in your state and marry within your caste. Even if you have stayed in the city for many years you will not know whether a person is right or wrong? What he is claiming is true or fake? In villages, people know each other and relatives can verify about the authenticity of claims. It is a question of a lifetime, why to risk? Atleast, we should find the best. Rest depends on luck.

A Brahmin family says,

In our caste and family, marriage outside the community is strictly prohibited. We ostracise if someone marries outside the caste. Why to marry outside of your caste, don't we have enough people within?... we ask our relatives in the city and in village to search for a suitable match. Finding a match through relatives and known people is best because then you know which family you are marrying into. You exactly know about their caste, property and status... all our marriages happen in our village.

Endogamous marriages are justified crucially on the basis of familiarity and security. As “the sub-caste endogamy greatly reduces the risk of selecting an unknown, unsuitable partner” thus endogamous marriages are believed to be safer and congenial (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008:746). The emphasis on familiarity sought through binding of village, relatives and caste together to protect the sanctity of endogamous marriage. Apart from the security of marrying an ‘appropriate’ person, endogamous marriages are supported on the grounds of familiarity with caste specific customs. A person, mainly women, from outside the caste, unknown to the customs might find difficult to adjust in her conjugal home. In the Brahmin families, an uncompromised take on the inter-caste marriages was noted, which is of stern prohibition. While those, mainly among OBCs and Dalits, who hold a liberal stance on marriage also limit the choices within certain castes, class and religion. Venturing outside the caste is not limitless.

However, the tenacity of caste endogamy is susceptible to changes. The constitutional right, legislation (Special Marriage Act, 1954), and secular concerns like aspirations of mobility (improving class position vis-à-vis future life) has promoted flexibility in the mode of marriage and expanded the social group for inter-marriages.

ii. Norm of Hypergamy among Dalits

The norm of endogamy and hypergamy is not restricted to upper-castes, it pervades to the bottom of caste hierarchy. Endogamy is also practiced by Dalits for endo-recruitment and maintaining the separation of castes. Paramjeet Judge and Gurpreet Bal (2008) find the stronghold of endogamy in marriages among Dalits in Punjab which is paradoxical, as they express desire towards the elimination of caste-based discrimination, subjugation and exclusion. They explain this paradox as an internalisation of caste values among Dalits. It is argued that the embeddedness of caste hierarchy among Dalits obstruct attempts of abolishing caste through inter-caste

marriage. Shalini Grover (2011) also finds entrenchment of endogamy among Dalits. Contrary to expectation, Dalits oppose inter-caste marriage with upper-caste. She illustrates cases in which love marriage of Balmiki women to upper-caste men was opposed by their families and communities. Apart from the belief in endogamy, Grover explicates this opposition in terms of the constitution and sense of comradeship within the community. Close knitted constitution of the community and enduring loyalty towards each other allows caste members to combat everyday prejudices. In the settlement, inter-marriage between Dalits draws opposition, which is similar to a union between upper-caste and Dalit. These unions are opposed for similar reasons of honour, purity and pollution. As the two cases discussed below of Dalit inter-caste marriage demonstrate.

Case 1

Rajiv and Deepti, hailing from SC castes had an inter-caste love marriage. Rajiv is a Bairwa and Deepti is from Balmiki community. They married in a temple with the help of Rajiv's friend. All his friends who aided him in the marriage are from the Balmiki caste. Their marriage was strongly objectionable to Rajiv's family because of Deepti's caste. Rajiv's family ostracised him for marrying a Balmiki woman. He was also outcasted by the members of his biradari. Since the excommunication, he has been staying separately on rent with his wife and two sons since the marriage. Presently, he is staying on rent at his wife's house. Although, his family owns a house in the settlement, yet he cannot claim his share. About the response of both the families to their marriage, he says, "*her family accepted it, not mine*". His relations began to improve recently with his family after the death of his mother. He went to attend the death rites. He was allowed to attend the rites but he was bypassed in all the rituals. Further, the intimacy between him and his brothers grew after the death of one of his sisters-in-law. After a decade, now he is allowed to enter into his parental house. Still, in religious and other significant ceremonies of the family, his wife is not invited. He says, now there is interaction (*bol-chaal hai*) yet the marriage is not completely acceptable to his family.

Case 2

This case of recent elopement was narrated to me by one of the participants who stays in the same lane where it happened. On my visit to this lane, I spotted a

marquee (*shamiana*) near a house and I asked the participant about the occasion for which it had been erected. She tells that a Bairwa girl eloped and married a Balmiki boy just before her wedding day. Her engagement ceremony was performed just a week ago to a man from her own community. On learning about the elopement and inter-marriage, her parents approached the police. As the couple were of legal age and married consensually, it was not an unlawful act. Hence, conforming to the law, police did not act on behalf of the parents.

In the first case, opposition to the marriage and subsequent excommunication which the couple has to endure came from the man's family belonging to Bairwa caste. It was resisted mainly because the woman belonged to an inferior caste, Balmiki. In the second case, the family of Bairwa girl approached the police. As discussed earlier, in the event of intercaste marriage initial attempt of the women's family is to restore daughter for which state apparatus, police, are resorted. In contrast to men, censure directed at women transgressing the principle of endogamy for bringing dishonour to the family and community. However, the second case the girl brought double dishonour by marrying outside and into inferior caste. In Ashanagar, each Dalit community claims a superior caste position over other existing caste groups. Regardless of the competing claims, a common consensus prevails about the position of Balmikis as the lowest. They are considered as the lowest caste among Dalits. Balmikis are looked down for their continued link with ascriptive occupation and their assertive behaviour. They are envied for their dominance over local politics and occupational 'security' in municipal jobs. Thus, apart from the lowest status, Balmikis and non-Balmikis relations show implicit antagonism which surfaces on occasions like inter-caste marriage.

iii. Marriage as a Route to Mobility

Emphasising on the modern/secular aspects like education, occupation, or class, many tend to underplay the significance of caste in searching matches for their children or sibling. They believe a marital union should not be reduced to one's caste. Not dismayed by the possible inter-caste alliance (love marriage) in the family, some approve it on the basis of importance of intimacy, economic security and status in marriage. A Chettiar woman who works as a domestic help talks about the marriage of her daughter, a class 12th student,

Unlike me, she is educated and mature. She will not choose just anybody for marriage. She will filter. I don't have an objection to a love marriage outside our caste. As long as a boy comes from a well-off family and well behaved, I am ok even if he is from a caste lower than us. I have lived a life of poverty. I don't want my daughter to relive the same life.

A woman from Meena community (ST) shares her views on inter-caste marriage. Her younger daughter will be marrying a man from the Balmiki community from the colony. Her husband works in a cloth shop in a nearby market and family of six depends on his income. Her younger daughter had worked in private jobs for three years. Now she is staying at home because of her upcoming marriage.

I am very close to my daughters. They share everything with me. When my elder daughter told me about the boy I agreed to the marriage. My family members, even my husband's family, was so upset with the marriage. After much persuasion, they are fine now... I don't believe in caste. If they are Balmikis, so what? I don't care. After all, they are human beings. See, she is educated and was working till now. His family is well to do. He earns well. He is the only son in the family with just one sister. His father was a government employee. They have a good house. what else do we need? They like each other. She will be happy...we don't have the budget to afford an arranged marriage. Moreover, I prefer the happiness of my children over caste.

Ajit owns a grocery shop. He is from the Jatav community. Eldest among the four siblings, he only studied till class ninth. While his two younger sisters and a brother have completed post-graduation. The elder among the sisters has a government job in a bank. Now the family is searching matches for her. About her marriage, he says

It is difficult to find a boy in our caste matching her qualifications. We are trying. We find educated boys but either they don't have jobs or have private jobs. Our family is fine if she wants to marry according to her choice, even not from our caste. We have told her. As she is a government employee, she cannot marry a person less educated than her or earning less or doing a private job.

All the above cases concern prospective marriage of daughters and their well-being. Unmarried girls in the above cases possess higher qualification (Graduation and Post-graduation) and are encouraged to have a job. While the two girls (from Jatav caste and Meena community) have been working and supporting their families. The daughter of woman from Chettiar caste is in class 12th and she wants her to pursue higher education and obtain a respectable job. Higher education and financial independence do not mean an inevitable autonomy for young girls to choose a partner for marriage or approval of inter-caste love marriage. Even in the presence of these two conditions, the

search of a partner is done by the family and within the caste. These two conditions do coincide with the autonomy of girls to choose a partner. In addition to these consistent conditions, economic class plays a vital role in furnishing the autonomy. In conditions where the family of an educated and working girl is economically weaker, an inter-caste alliance receives approval with least opposition. The approval in these cases arises from the inability of the family to find a suitable match for their daughters. Also, to protect her from the scarcity which comes with poverty. Within the caste, to arrange a marriage with a man of similar or better qualification and job is an elusive search because of the prevalent demand for dowry. It also highlights the stratification and reproduction of class within a caste. Class within caste is reproduced through marital exchanges. Prohibited by the class position, for the economically poor, upper class within the caste become inaccessible for endogamous marriage.

The second condition in which caste becomes understated and intercaste union acceptable is the unavailability of a suitable match within the class and caste. As is the case of Ajit's sister (Jatav). Ajit's father is a government employee in DESU. Ajit owns a grocery shop and his sister is a government employee. Financially, the family is secure. Within their caste, they are counted among prosperous families. Like upper-class across the castes, they maintain a limited interaction with the residents in the colony. As his sister is urban bred, educated and well-employed, she cannot adjust to the rural/provincial ways of life. So far unable to find the match, the family has no objection to marrying her with a man of her choice even from outside the caste. In this case, Ajit even assumes that she will find a partner matching her class, qualification and occupational security.

3.3 Conclusion

In the village economy, caste hierarchy appears to determine the nature of inter-caste interdependence i.e patron-client relationship (Breman 1974). Asymmetrical distribution of economic and socio-political power characterises caste-based interdependence in village economy. Ownership and control over the local economy (means of production), mainly land, ensured upper-caste dominance over Dalits. While non-ownership of land/means of production and systemic exclusion through the practice of untouchability sustained impoverishment and dependence of Dalits on upper-caste. Thus, hierarchy and organising principle of the caste system represented as basis aiding to the persistence of caste. Logically, it was argued that the erosion of caste

hierarchy not only will change but disintegrate the system. Several empirical accounts of rural India point to weakening/decline of caste hierarchy. Nevertheless, weakening of the caste system has not led to the disappearance of caste, rather contrarily, as Jodhka (2015:218) writes “it is becoming more visible and complex”.

This chapter shows the practice and persistence of caste does not essentially require the existence of a caste system in which relationships are organised on caste-based hierarchy. Perceptibly, caste-based hierarchy is absent in the settlement, as relations are not organised on the basis of inter-caste interdependence. Different caste groups do not depend on each other for services and patronages. In the absence of hierarchy, caste practices alter as in the settlement where diverse provincial caste groups co-exist. ‘Rarely is a hierarchy expressed in practice today without it being challenged by the very people who were earlier supposed to be quiescent’ (Gupta 2004: vii). Spatial arrangement of Ashanagar makes it nearly impossible to not encounter or curtail intercaste interactions. Congestion and spatial arrangement create physical proximity wherein intercaste encounters and interactions become unavoidable. Regular and occasional interactions among residents are observable. They encounter each other regularly through network of relations as friends, neighbours, political representatives, employer, employee and others, which also shapes the nature of their interactions. Intercaste relations are perceived differentially by upper castes and Dalits. Upper-castes assert that caste continues to govern social relations in villages, not in the city. They claim that the pure ritual hierarchy exists and regulate inter-caste interactions in the village. Further, generational changes in intercaste relations are pointed by upper castes to assert that earlier generations tend to ardently believe in orthodoxy of caste-based purity and pollution. The impertinence of caste in city is highlighted by underlining spatial proximity with Dalits as neighbours, friendship with Dalits, or maintaining commensal relations with them. However, closer scrutiny shows inter-caste relations are built consciously to negotiate intercaste co-existence in the neighbourhood. Conscious acts of not consuming food or eating vegetarian food in social functions organised by Dalits, or maintaining formalised relations or restricting interactions only outside the house in public spaces with Dalits, demonstrate that intercaste interactions are underlined by caste consciousness. Commensal restrictions have loosened, practice of untouchability discontinues and intercaste relations are maintained. Despite weakening/disappearance of caste practices in these spheres, Dalits continue to experience caste-based humiliation, both within and beyond the neighbourhood. The

response to humiliations varies spatially. Degrading comments based on caste or acts may not appear in everyday interactions within the neighbourhood, but it does appear in heated moments of local quarrels. Due to numerical preponderance of Dalits and their dominance over local politics behavioural refrain is maintained by upper castes. However, perceptions and prejudices towards Dalits show upper-caste believe in their caste superiority. Negotiations and accommodations enforced by spatial proximity are seen as an erosion of their superior position by upper-caste residents. By generating a sense of 'castelessness', such assertions and observations tend to conclude the demise of caste. In contrast, such claims are contested and dismissed by Dalits.

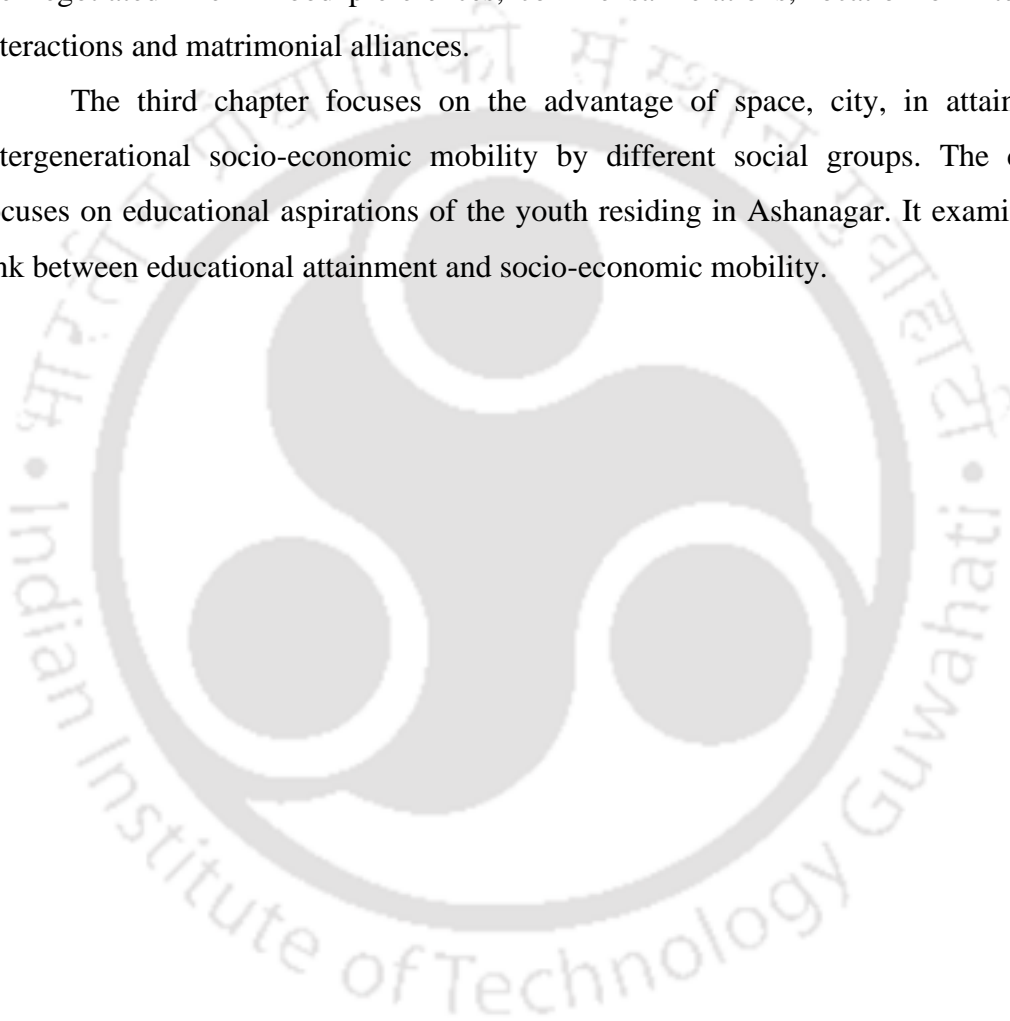
Further, the chapter highlights entrenchment of caste hierarchy across the caste groups. Belief in hierarchy manifests in matrimonial alliances in which the principle of endogamy remains crucial. Transgression of endogamy draws resistance and customary punishment in the form of excommunication. While some consider education and socio-economic conditions important for searching spouse, mainly for girls. Largely, tenacity of endogamy is expressed across the castes. Opposition to inter-caste marriage remains common both between upper-caste and Dalit, and intra-Dalit. Thereby, a stronghold of endogamy in marriage continues to maintain separation of caste vis-à-vis belief in the caste hierarchy. In the absence of economy on which caste system thrives, caste groups exist independent of hierarchy. Absence of hierarchical structure does not denote disbelief in hierarchical values. Diverse provincial caste groups co-habit and interact in the settlement, but simultaneously caste groups demarcate and define themselves from others by forming 'discrete caste' category (Gupta, 1984). In the assumed local hierarchy, each caste group proclaims its distinctiveness from other 'inferior' castes to dissociate from stigmatised status allocated to them by the varna system. Locally, members of Dalit caste groups claim superior status than the others. Despite independent existence, different caste groups rank each other based on purity and pollution.

Castelessness is assumed mainly by upper-castes, whereas by foregrounding experiential realities, Dalits contest disappearance of caste within the settlement and city. Thus, continued experiences of caste-based humiliations and attempts of Dalits to disentangle from their stigmatised status underline diminishing power of caste hierarchy but does not guarantee disappearance of casteism. Even in the absence of caste hierarchy, hierarchical values persist and are safeguarded. Ranging from education, legislation (Atrocity Act, 1989), urbanisation, to democratisation, multiple

factors are regarded to have played a significant role in weakening caste hierarchy and inducing flexibility in inter-caste relations (Manor, 2012). In addition to these, urban location, local demography and power relations appear crucial in fostering flexible/negotiable inter-caste relations in the settlement.

The chapter describes inter-caste relationships are constantly negotiated and accommodated wherein hierarchical values are preserved. Residing together residents participate in local collective life, festivals or weddings. Yet, conditions of participation are negotiated like in food preferences, commensal relations, location of inter-caste interactions and matrimonial alliances.

The third chapter focuses on the advantage of space, city, in attaining of intergenerational socio-economic mobility by different social groups. The chapter focuses on educational aspirations of the youth residing in Ashanagar. It examines the link between educational attainment and socio-economic mobility.



Chapter IV

Intergenerational Mobility: Aspiration and Education

Introduction

Ambedkar (1948) held that Indian villages, organised around the orthodox social structure of caste system, are anti-democratic dystopian spaces that persistently deny dignity to the untouchables⁴⁷ staying in ghettos isolated from the villages. As contact with or proximity to the untouchables is a source of pollution to *dwijas*⁴⁸, spatial segregation has aided in the perpetuation of the inhumane practice of untouchability. Convinced of the illiberal character of rural life where social relations are governed by caste, Ambedkar urged the untouchables to abandon the wretched life of villages for urban centers. For him, cities held the promise of liberation from the chains of discriminatory and oppressive structure of caste. Envisioning dignity for untouchables, he imagined cities as spaces of immense emancipatory potential. He believed that in the heterogeneous crowd of big cities, caste identities will be weakened and realising equality would no longer be a far-fetched dream. Cities for him were ideal places where “many interests have consciously communicated and shared” (Ambedkar 1936: cf Garza 2013). Cities were to be an “ideal society as a mobile place where free movement could be guaranteed; an area full of channels for conveying change occurring in one part and spreading to other parts” (Garza 2013). Leaving behind a life of humiliation in the village, cities were expected to untie exploitative feudalistic relations by offering socio-economic mobility.

Attempting to understand the possible emancipatory potential of Delhi, the present chapter documents the trends of economic/occupational mobility under the new economic order and its role in transcending or retaining caste identities through a study of a working class, low-income settlement, Ashanagar. ‘Is the city truly bereft of caste

⁴⁷ Chairez-Garza (2013) points that Ambedkar did not use Dalit in his writings and speeches frequently. Instead to refer the oppressed avarnas he used the word, quite provocatively, untouchables. Garza writes, ‘by using the word untouchable, then, Ambedkar tried to eliminate regional identities such as *Mahar*, *Namasudra* or *Chamar* in order to nationally unify and differentiate a heterogeneous group of people which were usually considered a part of the Hindu population. Thus, while referring to Ambedkar and his views the untouchable is used here and, like Garza, intended to provoke not disrespect.

⁴⁸ *Dwijas* meaning twice born refers to the three pure and touchable varnas---*Brahmin*, *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya*.

identities’, as Ambedkar imagined, and does it offer avenues and ‘choices’ of socio-economic mobility to all without discrimination by caste? Socio-economic mobility depends on ‘capacity to aspire’ (Appadurai 2004) which includes educational and occupational aspirations. This chapter examines the trajectory of aspirations and educational attainment to understand the nature of occupational/economic mobility. Shift in intergenerational socio-economic mobility is expected on two grounds: first, introduction of formal education and locational advantages of the subsequent generations living in the city amidst vast educational and employment opportunities; second, unanticipated shift in political ideology favoring neo-liberal policies providing greater role of private sector in the market economy. While probing dynamics of mobility, a possible question can be asked as to how the shifting economic context integrates the current generation of educated youth. The aim of the present chapter is to map the intergenerational mobility in education and employment.

Educational choices of the youth for higher education are examined pertaining to (i) selection of discipline after class 10th, (ii) types of schools, (iii) medium of education, and (iv) institutes of higher education accessed by the youth. The chapter also explores the role of space and prevailing gender norms in shaping aspirations. It concludes by describing influence of new legislation, Right to Education Act, and proliferation of private English medium schools on mobility aspirations.

In this study, anyone between the ages of 16 and 35 years is defined as a youth. The lower age limit is set at 16 because it is the age at which students are either in class 10 or passed it, and it is a transitory phase of school life where students decide upon which stream to pursue for higher studies. Final selection to pursue any one of the three branches (Arts, Commerce and Sciences) of higher studies can shed light on aspirations and opportunities available to the participant. The upper age limit set at 35 years is based on the ‘temporal extension of youth’ (Deuchar 2014), due to the precarity of their employment status.

4.1 Delhi: Educational Economy of the City

According to data from the 2011 census, overall literacy rate in Delhi is 86.3%, and 85% in the East district where Ashanagar is situated. The Delhi Directorate of Education classifies schools into nine categories: Delhi Cantonment Board (DCB), New Delhi Municipal Council school (NDMC), Kendriya Vidyalaya School (KVS),

Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Public schools recognised by MCD, MCD aided schools, DoE recognised schools, government aided schools and government schools⁴⁹. According to the 2017-18 economic survey of Delhi, there are 5772 schools in the city. Primary education till class V is the responsibility of local bodies namely MCD, NDMC and DCB. Imparting middle, secondary and senior secondary education is the responsibility of government of National Capital Territory of Delhi delivered by the Directorate of Education. Most residents of Ashanagar depend on MCD and Sarvodaya schools.

There are a total of 1750 MCD schools in the city (last updated in March,2014), of which 190 are in the east district alone (DDE). Of 190 MCD schools in the district, Ashanagar has 18. These schools are not co-ed and are run in two shifts, the morning session attended by girls and the afternoon session by boys, and classes take place in the same building. So, the figure 18 suggests the total number of shifts rather than the existing school building which are 9. 924 schools in Delhi are government schools, also known as Sarvodaya schools, of which 104 are in the East district. According to DDE, there are total six government schools in Ashanagar which again suggests total number of shifts with change in the name of the school according to the gender (Government Sarvodaya girls/boy secondary/senior secondary school) not total school buildings. Most of the school going children of Ashanagar attend MCD schools in the primary phase (class 5) and join state government schools, namely Sarvodaya Kanya/Bal Vidyalaya, for senior secondary education (up to class12). Apart from municipal schools, students also enrol in state government schools located in nearby areas. Direct admission to the state government schools is favored by the parents as MCD schools provide only primary education. After the completion of the primary education in MCD schools they have to repeat the same process of admission in state government schools. However, sending children to these schools is not always a choice parents prefer to make since there are other valued schools in the vicinity (KV and public school) which are sought after for their quality and medium of education. Constrained by economic compulsions, parents as well students are barely left with any choice except to rely on these local state government schools in vicinity. Beside government schools, the

⁴⁹ These different categories of schools are administered by different state bodies. In the city, primary education till class V is the responsibility of local bodies which administers MCD schools. NDMC schools are run by municipal council of New Delhi. DCB and KVS are come under the jurisdiction of central government. DCB is comes under Ministry of Defence, whereas KVS comes under the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

settlement is also surrounded by several English medium private co-ed schools, though high fee structures and lack of cultural capital are constraints for aspiring low income groups to put their children into these schools. With the increasing emphasis on English medium education, ability to pay higher fees and the introduction of the Right to Education Act (2009), admission in these schools has become imaginable for residents living in low income localities.

4.2 Aspiration and Educational Choices of Subsequent Generation

Ashanagar is part of a reserved assembly constituency populated preponderantly by Dalits from various regions of the country. Majority of the first generation were/are state and central government employees, as a result of which they receive regular salaries and non-wage benefits like pension, health benefits, and other state sponsored schemes. Placed in lower rungs of the different state departments performing manual and non-technical work, they constitute the salaried class with regular monthly income/pension benefits. Both salaried and non-salaried classes reside in Ashanagar and their backgrounds overlap but are not identical. To emerge from the impoverished rural life many migrated from their villages to the city. As one of the residents told the researcher, caste-based exploitation and humiliation, impoverished material life, high debts and inter-caste conflicts were common reasons for leaving their rural homes. Accounts of other older men and women on migration to the city corroborates the above statement. Educational attainment of this salaried/non-salaried class is much below than the present generation who unlike their parents had been raised and educated in the city. Most in the salaried class agree that despite their lower educational attainments, it was easier to be a state employee as struggle over these jobs was not fierce. As the competition was not intense, social networks of kinship/caste/region proved useful in providing entry into the formal/informal labor markets and for settling in the city. A cumulative outcome of migration to the city, gaining employment, and relocation into Ashanagar, was that it offered a life that was materially and qualitatively different from the rural life. Before the relocation into Ashanagar, most settlers were living in squatter settlements. The relocation of erstwhile squatter-dwellers into this settlement released them from their uncertain status in the city. The squatter-dwellers cannot procure legal documents to prove their identity and claim state services. Squatter dwellings are recognised as illegal settlements by the state, leaving squatter

inhabitants to live in a perpetual state of impermanence. The state-driven resettlement accompanied with security of tenure granted a permanent status and legalised their tenure. Although the improvement in legal status did not eliminate the struggles that permeate city life, it nevertheless held a promise for a better future. A better future depends on the nature of aspirations, which could be short sighted or long term, and viability of their realisation. According to Arjun Appadurai (2004), aspiration is not an individual trait but a cultural category (Bok 2010). According to him, while no culture has monopoly over aspirations, their attainment is determined by the richness of various ‘forms of capital’ (Bourdieu 1986) embedded in a culture. Uneven distribution of social, economic and cultural capital (also cultural dominance) establishes cultural inequality. Terming ‘capacity to aspire’ as cultural capital, he underlines that the volume of cultural capital (capacity to aspire) serves as a distinction between different cultures, mainly in terms of class, where the better off (with dominant culture) acquire it profusely leaving the underprivileged with lesser capital and lower returns. ‘Capacity to aspire’ depends on navigational information which is acquired by a culture through its past experiences. He suggests that ‘capacity to aspire’ can be widened/enhanced by exposure and sharing of navigational information with different cultures⁵⁰. Intercultural interactions can alter aspirations and turn them achievable. Aspirations of socio-economic mobility are influenced by external factors. Trajectory of migration, from villages to squatter dwellings and then Ashanagar, has introduced residents to various spatial cultures and sub-cultures. Despite entrenched predicaments, vision of a better life/mobility guided their spatial mobility and habitation in the city.

4.2.1 Aspirations and Education: Subsequent Generations

Education remains important in the analysis of intergenerational/class mobility. According to the liberal theory of industrialism, education plays a vital role in mediating intergenerational class mobility (cf Jackson et.al 2005). It proposes that, “the

⁵⁰ According to Appadurai (2004), culture and development have largely been discussed in academia as mutually exclusive spheres with little attention to study them together and its transformative potential for the future of the unacknowledged (*ibid*). According to him the distinct aspect of reimagining culture is to strengthen ‘capacity to aspire’, and begin a dialogue between ‘capacity’ and ‘capability’. He suggests that by rebuilding the norms of culture and consensus it can enrich poor’s experience to negotiate with the wider net of institutions/ (non)state actors which in return strengthens their ability not only to aspire but also widens the horizon of their aspirations. His work on aspiration and culture stands out in the wide-ranging literature on the theme for offering an exit from the impoverishment/limitations placed on a group/community though requiring patience and discipline to emerge from the structures of their own oppression.

functional exigencies of technological progress and economic efficiency in modern societies are expected to lead to a steady increase in intergenerational mobility in which expansion and reform of educational systems play a crucial role” (ibid:5). In contrast, studies on cultural reproduction by Paul Willis (1978) and Pierre Bourdieu (1986) demonstrate that intergenerational mobility is not merely a mechanical outcome of obtaining education. These studies underline that cultural transmission varies, both in families and schools, among different social (Zanten 2005). Economic, social and cultural capitals exert influence over education. According to the cultural reproduction theory, education aids in class reproduction because of uneven distribution of economic and non-economic capital. Also, education is not a neutral or an objective medium (Bowles and Gitnis 1976; Willis 1977; Althusser 1971). It serves the purpose of maintaining power relations and labour reproduction. Further, ideas of John Dewey on democracy and education left an indelible impression on B.R Ambedkar (Stroud 2017). He regarded education as an important tool for Dalit emancipation. Ambedkar recognised that the experience of an individual is shaped by the culture in which the person resides. It is the oppression and inequality imposed by the Hindu tradition he desired to resist and annihilate in which education was to be a significant ally. For him education not only represented (Dalit) mobility but also liberation. For Ambedkar, education is a tool to attain mobility and emancipation for the marginalised.

Most of the first-generation settlers in Ashanagar either abandoned school education during primary school or never went to school. In contrast, the subsequent generations had/have access to government schools and institutes of higher education. In the absence of present day private English medium schools and state policies like RTE, the second and third generation attended government schools, MCD and state schools, present in Ashanagar and its vicinity. To retain students and reduce school dropouts these schools administer a range of welfare schemes like distribution of mid-day meal, free uniforms, free textbooks, scholarships and recently introduced measure of ‘no detention’ policy⁵¹. Despite such welfare measures, state schools grapple with

⁵¹ Right to Education Act,2009, introduced no detention policy according to which schools are mandated to pass all the students till class eighth. Complaining about the declining quality of education many states have been demanding the removal of no detention policy clause mandated by the Act, 2009. The union government has agreed to reconsider and amend the clause by 2018. In the meantime, Delhi government introduced the policies to provide extra classes and tuitions to prepare students for the higher classes. In 2016-17, the government introduced *chunauti* (challenge) scheme to improve the quality of education.

the chronic problem of school dropouts. Infrastructural constraints and lack of adequate staff results in a lowered quality of education, as these schools are ill-prepared to train students to compete for white collar, skilled jobs in the labour market (Banerji 1997). Family background of youths who attend these schools are heterogenous. However, their academic choices follow, more or less, a similar trajectory. Students attending MCD and state schools did not set any particular goal to be achieved. In fact, future concerns did not arise for many before entering into higher education. Choice of the subjects/stream to pursue in senior secondary are based less on information about specific courses and the plausible future opportunities it entails. For varying reasons, ranging from negligence to misfortune most of them 'choose' commerce and arts in senior secondary, and pursue higher education through open learning. Some of the reasons forwarded by respondents regarding their educational 'choices' are discussed below:

i. Clueless: Socha nahi aagey kya karna hai (I did not think what to do in future)

Dhruv, in early thirties, belongs to Bairwa (SC) caste. His father is a construction labourer and mother is a housewife. His two elder brothers also work as construction labourers. Narrating his aspiration and educational choices he says,

I took social sciences in school and later enrolled for B.A program from School of Open Learning (SOL). I wanted to continue regular higher studies, not correspondence or distance, but I met with an accident before admission in a regular college. I was not interested in studies so I just completed graduation. I did not enrol for further studies. I did not think about what to take after class 10th. I did not think of other streams because I did not know. Here, conditions are very unfavourable for education and educational interests are overlooked. When I was in school, my parents, who are uneducated, used to scold and ask me to pay attention to studies. At that time, sports interested me. I did not focus on studies. In school, I used to bunk with friends to play cricket or to loiter in the park near the lake. But when I realised the value of education, time, and money, so much time was already over. Even after class 12th I did not know what I want to do.

His mother says,

Education was not important when I was young. My parents were very poor and uneducated, so are we. We told him to study seriously. What else could we have done, we were illiterate (anpad). We thought if he studies well, he will get a good job and income.

His parents are illiterate. His elder brothers dropped out of school to provide financial support to family. Working male members of the family spend most of the time outside,

usually at their place of work. Women in the family tend to have lesser control over male members. Lacking financial resources, time, and education, the family was unable to guide or monitor Dhruv's educational progress. However, knowing the significance of education in improving economic condition, they insisted that he continue rather than abandon it in the middle. Notionally, there is awareness of the link between education and mobility, but knowledge of precise resources, information and different capitals required to achieve the desired outcome is largely missing. Decrepit schools, lack of encouraging teachers, absence of role models in vicinity, uneducated parents and unstimulating environment failed to arouse a serious interest in education. Mentors who can provide serious advice on career paths were rare. In such a daunting atmosphere, mere insistence of family members to pursue education did not inevitably translate into serious engagement with education. In the absence of motivating ambience and informed mentors, youngsters are distracted by peer company and indulge in regular 'timepass' either playing or simply loitering around (Jeffrey 2010). In Jeffrey's work on western U.P., college youth waiting to secure employment complained about the overabundance of time. Jeffrey shows that many of the youth (middle-class Jats) invested in time as a commodity and developed skills to navigate overabundant time. In contrast, youth in Ashanagat regret over lost time. Unserious attitude towards education and reckless squandering of time during school days is blamed for their present uncertain condition. Since peers also access same school and neighbourhood. Insulated from the world outside, they possess and circulate similar nature of information. Similarity of shared information reflects in the academic choices, future aims, nature of employment and experiences of precarity. Most youth pursue higher education in open learning, prepare for government jobs, work in private jobs while pursuing higher studies, enrol in Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). Clueless about the employment outcome of different disciplines, they tend to make academic decisions without prudently weighing the different choices.

ii. Peer Influenced Decision: Low Scores and 'Easy' Subjects

The youth often cited low scores as one of the reasons for their educational choices. Excluding them from 'difficult' disciplines, low scores restrict their educational choices to disciplines which are considered 'easy' to pass. Ashish, from Balmiki caste, is in early thirties, and hails from western UP. His father retired as an MCD worker and his mother is still working for MCD. His family has a shop that sells construction material.

Ashish has three brothers, all of whom are married except the youngest, who at the time of the interview was searching for a suitable bride. All the brothers manage the shop. Additionally, Ashish also works as DTC conductor. He says,

After class 10th I opted social sciences mainly for two reasons. First, I did not score enough marks to get admission in Commerce or Science. Second, all my friends took humanities so I followed the league. My parents are not educated, so they could not guide us. They are willing to spend money on our education...after class 12th I took admission in Delhi University in regular [mode]. Then, there was no atmosphere of education here. We did not think or plan what to do next. We did what everybody was doing. People here are not interested in educating their children and there are many who could not educate due to financial paucity. Now times are changing, for that matter, we send all our children to English medium private schools for quality education.

Vikram is in his late twenties is from Balmiki caste. He says,

I took humanities because at that time people who took commerce were failing in exams. I thought it will be easy to pass without the worries of failing the exam. My friends also suggested the same. I completed education till 12th standard in government school. Now I regret for not pursuing studies after class 12th. I still want to study but I am bound by the familial and marital responsibilities, so I hold back my desire to study further...there is a proverb that - people move ahead seeing others progress,- here the environment is not such to see and aspire for mobility. When we were growing up we did not see people who were serious in studies and occupying good government positions. Yes, if that existed we definitely would have been doing better. There was no source of inspiration for us, we did whatever was easy and available.

Concentrating on students from diverse ethnic and class backgrounds, Reay et.al (2010) explore how students make decisions about higher education. They underline that though students from marginal backgrounds have registered their entry in higher education, the choice processes of the students from affluent and marginal backgrounds show a qualitative difference between the two groups in decision making which further perpetuates the historical stratification in higher education. Youth in Ashanagar quote reasons of time, money, distance, competence and family background for their institutional choice after class 12th. Their peer group emerge as crucial actors in determining academic choice after class 10th. Due to their lack of education, parents and elders in the neighbourhood are unprepared to provide academic advice to younger cohort. The school education does not prepare students to make scrupulous disciplinary choices. The education system of schools, rather than critically engaging students, promotes a mindset of simply passing one class after another through rote learning. Further, by limiting the range of disciplines to Arts and Commerce it adversely affects

the academic choices of those who aspire and qualify to gain admission in ‘difficult’ disciplines. In discussions with students, teachers rarely appeared as role models and mentors, leaving it to peers and seniors to assume the role of mentor for their friends in making academic decisions. Disguised as choice, disciplinary selection after class tenth are structural impositions, as only two disciplines, Commerce and Arts, are offered in schools situated in vicinity. Requiring less effort, the subjects, Commerce and Arts, are believed to be easy and manageable, meaning passable. The scholastic ‘choice’ of the subjects originates from the fear of Sciences as a ‘hard’ discipline. Youth also underestimate the chosen disciplines of Commerce and Arts. Many were/are averse to pursue sciences on the grounds of technical knowledge, language and economic demands of the subjects, since sciences are taught in English. Late introduction of the subject in school, by class tenth students are equipped only to read the language with fractured fluency and partial understanding. Further, in the local government schools, science is not offered in senior secondary. As a result, most tend to take disciplinary choices offered in these schools.

For women, additionally, spatial proximity is crucial to attain education. Proximity of schools and colleges makes education accessible for women. Young girls are not allowed to move away therefore they ‘choose’ the subjects offered in the nearby schools contrary to their academic interest in pursuing Sciences. The subject is also perceived as economically demanding as books are very expensive. The logical consequence of pursuing the Sciences is equated with obtaining a medical degree which requires a lot of time, money and persistence. Ineligibility resulting from lower scores is another factor often acknowledged for not opting certain disciplines and mode of education. The academic advice received from peers and school seniors is pragmatic but short-sighted. Academic ‘choices’ are already circumvented by low scores, disciplinary fear and, systemic exclusion mainly from sciences. These academic advises and ‘choices’ are not devised with the aim of improving class condition, pursuing academic interest or future employability. Disciplines are rather chosen to avoid future academic failures.

Highlighting the foreclosure of the discipline on anticipated fear/(in)competence is neither meant to reinscribe hierarchies within the academic disciplines where natural sciences claim supremacy. Nor does it intend to suggest that mobility is the natural outcome of selecting a specific discipline. Karuna Chanana (2007) argues that the unfolding of globalisation has produced hierarchy of discipline where skill/applied

courses rank above the pure subjects. In this production, new emerging disciplines have further devalued the humanities and social sciences (ibid). The changing economic context and policies favored certain disciplines/degrees that are linked with upward socio-economic mobility. The advent of neo-liberal economy in India witnessed rapid growth of IT (information technology) sector with a promising future in well paid white-collar jobs. Claimants of this workforce are primarily urban, hailing from Indian middle and upper middle classes, who obtained qualifying degrees. Contemporary literature on class reproduction shows that middle and upper middle classes/castes have been successful in attaining upward mobility and in retaining class/caste privileges under the neo-liberal economy because of their timely investment in costly but remunerative technical education of their children (Upadhyay 2007; Fernandes and Heller 2006; Fuller and Narsimhan 2006). The choice of specific disciplines suggests the education is a possible/limited route to occupational, economic, and social mobility. Proscription on entry into the most sought discipline based on tangible (absence of schools, adverse economic conditions) and intangible factors (fear) not only forecloses certain channels of mobility but also deprives the self-assessment of capacities and its accomplishment (Appadurai 2004).

iii. *Mazboori*: Aspirations Stunted

Mazboori is an Urdu word meaning helplessness/constraint. It is frequently repeated by those who identified their aptitude and aspirations early on and were keen to accomplish it. They did not seek suggestions from their peer group about disciplinary or career choices. These aspirations, such as becoming a teacher or securing a government job, are locally dominant and respected. The unanticipated hardships like sickness, accident, sudden death of an earning member or repeated failures typically prevent the pursuing of these aspirations. To respond pragmatically to exigencies or hardships, youths are forced to abandon their interests and aspirations. Several respondents referred to *Mazboori* to signal their stunted aspirations and express disinterest in what they are doing presently. For them their aspirations are achievable but *Mazboori* impede actions necessitated to fulfill them.

Chitra, in her early twenties, is from Gonda district, U.P. She belongs to Jatav caste. She has five siblings, three sisters and two brothers. Her elder sister is married and her younger sister is studying in class 10th. Her younger brother is in class 12th. Her father, man in his fifties, is a construction labour (*mistri*). Due to the nature of his work

he developed chronic joint pain which largely keeps him out of work. To support the family financially, her elder brother started working at an early age. Like him, she is also working to support the family and pay for the education of her siblings. About her education and aspirations, she says,

I studied Arts from the government school of 20 block. I opted Arts because I like the subjects. I took admission in BA (program) in SOL. I gave the final year exam. Now I am planning to enrol for MA in IGNOU so that I can continue to work. I wanted to become a school teacher and join a teaching course. Yes, I wanted to become a primary teacher [but] I could not, I was mazboor (restrained). My father fell sick. Money was required not only for the treatment but also to run the family. Our economic condition deteriorated. My brother was earning but that was not adequate. There are six people in the house, and the income of one person cannot sustain the family of six. So, I decided to work after class 12th. The teaching course required money and mental peace to study. I was disturbed looking at the condition of my family members. In a way I did not feel like studying after seeing the hardships in the family.

Her interest in teaching is prevalent among girls in Ashanagar. Several girls are either preparing for or have already completed teaching courses like B.ed (Bachelor of education) and Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET). Within and outside Ashanagar, several coaching institutes prepare students for these exams. Information about the course, guidance, and accessibility of coaching institutes in the vicinity is readily available and it makes teaching an achievable goal for girls. Chitra was certain about her career path. After class 10th she decided to pursue Arts without seeking suggestions and advises from others. She gathered the required information to become a school teacher but economic crisis halted her future plans and required her to shift to goals that can help the family to overcome their declined condition. The nature of *Mazboori* is not always as grave as Chitra's but has similar implications in terms of stunting aspirations. Ankit, 26 years old, is from Rajput (general) caste, hailing from Badaun district, U.P. His father is a government employee in Archeological Survey of India (ASI). He now makes government documents like Aadhar⁵² and PAN⁵³ card. Narrating his academic trajectory, he tells

After class 10th I wanted to take commerce as I am good at mathematics. But it was my Mazboori (compulsion/restrain) that I could not take admission in commerce... at the time of admissions I was in my village in U.P, I did not know

⁵² Aadhar is a 12-digit unique identification number issued to the citizens of India by the Indian government.

⁵³ PAN, stands for permanent account number, is a 10-digit alphanumeric card issued by the Income tax department of India.

the admission date... I had to take Arts. I studied Arts after class 10th from the government school in Block-20. Our school did not have Science and Commerce. In fact, most schools here do not offer these disciplines. In graduation, I took admission in regular in PGDAV college under Delhi University. I left the college and studies as I could not pass the economic exam for three years. Again, I enrolled in IGNOU for BA program. I took six years to clear graduation. Although I wanted to get a government job. I applied and appeared in exams but could not clear. Now I don't aspire for a government job, I can't get any. We are general category so my age to apply for the government job is already over. Now I want to have my own business. I want to open a cybercafé here.

Despite knowing his aptitude in mathematics, he could not pursue it academically. Unlike Chitra, he lacked the crucial information, date of admission, to pursue his interest academically. Often, inadequate information is at the root of compromised aspirations. Also, as Ankit's case depicts, repeated attempts and failures demoralises youths to sustain endeavors towards aspirations. Resources, time and money are limited. Local prevailing gender norms expect age-specific roles for young men and women. It is expected of young men to avoid the 'wastage' of family resources and support it economically. Under the local gender norms, non-earning young men are of inferior status. Various factors including extended time to clear graduation, appearing in exams without success, social identity and unemployment, bringing social disrespect for Ankit became his *Mazboori* to quit his aspiration of government job. *Mazboori* is the unpleasant contemplation of the above factors, compelling youths to disavow their aspirations. Negotiations with restraints (*Mazboori*), imposed by material and social conditions, shifts attention from aspirations to real situations. However, aspirations are not singular and are redefined continuously. As the above cases note, in the alternate career path/life, youth built newer aims and aspirations.

iv. Continue to Aspire

The script of educational trajectory after class 10 remains same for most students. They tend to agree that scholastic decisions were made without presupposing any specific career path. These decisions are influenced by suggestions from the peer group, scores, limited information and choices. The short-sighted interests of passing the subjects does not imply aspirational closure. Aspirations/academic interests continue to develop and evolve later in educational life. Students adopt serious orientation towards education and employment even later in academic life. Intercultural exchange which takes place

in universities and workplaces commences and reconstitutes aspirations (Appadurai, 2004).

Naresh, 24 years, is from Jatav caste (SC). His grandfather, a government employee in DESU, was allotted a plot in the Ashanagar in 1976. Naresh came to Delhi in 1992 with his parents. His father also worked in DESU on contractual basis and subsequently he opened a shop which sells electronic goods on the ground floor of their house. About his educational choice and aspirations, he tells,

I did not score enough to qualify for Sciences so was not keen on opting commerce. Therefore, I took Arts after class tenth. I am satisfied with my choice. I did B.A from Dayal Singh college in regular and M.A in political science through correspondence from Jamia university. I wanted to do post-graduation from regular for which I appeared in entrance exam of JNU. I could not clear the exam. I thought instead of draining one year let's register for a correspondence course. Personally, I believe regular college is better than obtaining education through correspondence. You get exposed to many people, new world views and learn how to speak in public. In regular college you get to meet students from diverse backgrounds and states. I made new friends in the college. I avoided the company of boys from this area as they were unserious and unwilling to change. Even in the college they behave as they do here. They can't help it, the atmosphere (Mahaul) of this place is like that. They are loud, pick up fights with other students. So, I maintained a distance. I did not want to be identified with them. I learned more with others in the college, they were serious about their future. For three years I worked as research assistant on contract basis in center for tuberculosis and respiratory diseases. Now I am taking coaching for government jobs. My plan is first to secure any small government job for financial independence and then to study and prepare for good jobs in group A. But I still want to pursue M. phil and further studies either from JNU or DU. If I succeed in getting admission in JNU or DU I will stop preparing for government job.

Yet again, the limitation of low scores stunted Naresh's academic choice. His description of the qualitative difference in college and residential location unravels that experience in the college gave a definite future goal to him. Limited interaction with students from Ashanagar points that Naresh views spatial culture of Ashanagar limits 'the capacity' to aspire. Local spatial culture of the settlement inculcates traits of recklessness and violence which disqualifies them from sheltering higher aspirations and its accomplishment. Limited fraternisation with students of same spatial background is one of the ways to unlearn the culture and escape its limit. He underlines that new ideas and compartments are learned in the company of serious students from dissimilar backgrounds in the college. The aspiration to pursue higher education (M.A, M.phil and Ph.d) germinated in the college where he experienced the advantages of

education through regular mode. He is poised between higher academic aspirations and immediate economic conditions. Not removed from the social world of the settlement, he took up a job to fit into prevailing gender norms. Also, preparing for government job, he is not untouched by local aspirational model where widely young men aspire to secure a government job. Aspirational priorities suggest connections beyond the locality not only redefine aspirations but also widens them. Anita, a woman in her early twenties, is preparing for Chartered Accountancy exams. Her father retired as a DESU worker. She is from Allahabad, U.P. and belongs to Jatav caste (SC). About her scholastic choices she says,

I had no idea about commerce. I was worried that in sciences one has to study so much and in Arts it is necessary to mug up the course. I ended up taking Commerce after class 10th. I completed B.com through SOL. If I tell you honestly, till graduation I did not think that I have to do something in life. After graduation, I started working and meeting people. I felt I don't want to be dependent on anyone. I did a research on CA and took a plunge in it. Commerce people know only one thing in life and that is CA. Clearing and obtaining CA is a long process so I also enrolled for M.com in IGNOU.

The distinct world of universities and workplace introduces newer ideas, opportunities and information. The exposure to culturally distinct spaces also influences choice processes of the youth. In this regard, schools occupying different ranking in the hierarchy also influences aspiration and future aims. In his field-site, Hammerstown, Paul Willis (1978) noted the difference in class ethos between the non-conformist young boys from the working families attending middle class schools and those referred by him as 'the lads' attending lower class schools⁵⁴. About non-conformist boys from the working classes attending middle class schools he wrote, "in spite of their origins and anti-school attitude, the lack of dominant working-class ethos within their school culture separates their experience from 'the lads' " (1978: 58). A similar distinction is relevant in my field where youths attending schools regarded for quality English medium education do not identify with the cultural experiences of their peers in the settlement who attend(ed) municipal and state schools. The school culture dominates and 'shields' them from the local influence of the peers located in the settlement. They have definite goals to be achieved in future.

⁵⁴ Paul Willis (1978) conducted his fieldwork in a town which he names as Hammertown. The study contains 'one main case study and five comparative studies' (ibid: 4) of boys attending different schools and of different class origins. The participants of his main case study had twelve non-academic working-class lads whom he refers (and now famously known) as 'the lads'.

Of all the youths interacted (over 100 youth I interacted with) only 6 chose sciences, three boys and three girls, of which two are studying in government school located in a residential area close to the colony. Three studied in renowned private schools and one is studying in central school (K.V). Of these, one boy is pursuing M.Sc. Biotechnology from IP University and another is in class 12th and aspires to work with National Geography. The third boy is taking coaching from a renowned coaching institute, FITJEE, to prepare for JEE. One of the girls is preparing for NEET (medical) exams. Of these six, four belong to Jatav caste, one girl is from Yadav caste (OBC) and one boy is from Agarwal caste (General). Unlike youngsters of earlier generation and those studying in non-science subjects in government schools, their aspirations are well defined and have a clear vision to attain it. They also tend to keep minimal or no interaction with peers staying in the Ashanagar⁵⁵. Their friends are mostly from their schools staying in nearby affluent areas. Occasionally they spend time with their school and college friends in restaurants located beyond the settlement. The bonds of friendship and intimacy between the youth attending different ranking schools is nearly absent. The influence of the peers from Ashanagar is regarded as adverse to future goals.

Introducing the concepts of economic, cultural, and social capital, Bourdieu (1986) breaks the commonsensical view that academic aptitude is an innate trait. He argues that disproportionate acquisition and transmission of social and cultural capital generates disparity in educational outcomes. All forms of capital, economic and non-economic capital, are, in general, slim in this low socio-economic status settlement. *Transubstantiation* of economic capital into other forms of cultural and social capital is circumscribed by the meagre economic resources. The cultural capital which according to Bourdieu (1986:17) is “best hidden and most determinant educational investment, namely, domestic transmission of cultural capital”, is inadequate to shape hegemonic aspirations forged by India’s new middle class (Fernandes and Heller 2006). In the settlement, aspirations and future aims are either ill-defined, absent or develop very late after exposure to the world outside the settlement. Absence of a role model in the vicinity, rampant illiteracy and academically unstimulating climate of the settlement are

⁵⁵ In contrast, the non-conformist boys from working class attending the middle-class schools attempted ‘to demonstrate solidarity on street and with the street contacts...even despite a working-class background and an inclination to oppositional values, considerably weakens their working-class identity (58).’

held responsible for lack of enthusiasm in education. Even when aspirations are defined clearly, inadequate information and financial hardships of the family restrict accomplishment. Ill-defined or lack of aspiration is reflected in the scholastic choices of the youth where most choose 'easy' disciplines, Arts or Commerce. Nevertheless, restrictions foisted on aspirations by spatial economy, class position, and condition of school education is changeable. As Dewey writes, "society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological" (cf Stroud 2017:85). Transmission of academic and employment related information, and cultural exchanges outside the settlement seems to shape, revive, and redefine aspirations.

Delhi has various institutes of higher education, established after independence and their numbers has increased ever since⁵⁶. The city has a total of 27 universities of which four are central universities and five are institutes of national importance (AISHE 2018). It has renowned institutes like central university Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), epitome of modern India Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), School for Planning and Architecture (SPA), Jamia Milia Islamia (JMI), University of Delhi (DU) and various colleges affiliated to it, Indian Institute for Mass and Communication (IIMC), recently formed Ambedkar University (AU), SAU South Asian university (SAU), The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) and several specialised research institutes. Most of the eminent institutes are situated away from the periphery and concentrated in specific locations to the south, central and north of the city. Cosmopolitan character of the city also thrives on the inflow of innumerable students from different parts of the country who come to continue higher education in these premier institutes.

In spite of these universities and institutes, most youths from Ashanagar (and areas of a similar socio-economic standing) pursue education from open learning/distance education. Distance education makes education accessible to those who are unable or reluctant to pursue education in traditional full-time manner (Banas and Emory, 1998). Residency program which means an individual can pursue distance education from her residence is important feature of distance education (ibid). In India, the mode of distance learning is adopted by those who are excluded from the regular

⁵⁶ In early years of independence, 1950-51, the country had only 27 universities which included 370 colleges for general education and 208 meant for imparting professional education. Evidently, since then number of universities has increased and now the city alone has 27 universities including central, state and deemed universities (cf Kapur and Mehta 2007).

education because of low scores, occupational commitments, gender and economic constraints.

In India, there is only one central open university (IGNOU), 14 state open universities, one state private open university, and 110 dual mode universities which offer distance education (AISHE, 2017-18). The city has no state open university as Delhi University and Jamia Milia Islamia University offer dual mode education, that is, both regular and distance education. The city is known to contain many leading universities/institutes of higher education that draws scores of students from all over the country. Most of the students pursuing higher education in the settlement 'choose' distance learning either through SOL or IGNOU or NCWEB. Education is considered crucial for attaining social dignity and economic mobility. However, it is not a mechanical outcome of education. Within the education system exist disparate hierarchies such as medium of education (vernacular or English), spatial location (rural / regional / metropolitan), chosen disciplines (Sciences/Commerce/Arts/Professional courses), public or private educational institutes, mode of education (regular/distance) and economic class. The interplay of these hierarchies collectively determines the direction of socio-economic mobility. Distance learning educational institutes accessed by the youth of Ashanagar occupy an 'inferior' status in the hierarchy of educational system. The political economy of Ashanagar unravels who chooses, why and implications of distance learning if the final degree is undervalued and employment outcomes are inferior. These choices are in turn mediated by gender, economic compulsions, spatial origins, employment strategies and 'merit' as defined by the score cards.

4.2.2 School of Open Learning: A Mode of Distance Learning

According to AISHE (All India Survey on Higher Education) report of 2017-18, total enrolment in higher education is 36.6 million with 19.2 million boys and 17.4 million girls. The total percentage of Schedule caste students in higher education is 14.4%. Findings of the survey estimate, 'distance enrolment constitutes about 11% of the total enrolment in higher education, of which 41.9% are female students.' The report very conveniently states, 'distance education has become a useful mode of obtaining degrees for a large number of students who are staying in far off and remote areas and for whom accessing university on a regular basis is still a dream' (AISHE 2017-18;16). It

evades the question of who are those for whom regular education is still a dream, where they stay, which class and social group they belong to and what happens to their dreams after receiving degree from distance mode.

The School of Open Learning was established under University of Delhi in 1962 as an alternate to regular mode of education to encourage and make higher education accessible to a wider population⁵⁷. In contrast to diverse range of courses offered in regular colleges and departments under DU, SOL is very narrow in its academic scope, offering five courses each in undergraduate and postgraduate⁵⁸. The university has introduced many short-term courses in collaboration with private companies (John 2012).

i. Academic and Administrative Organisation

Students enrolling for correspondence courses attend classes on Sundays and administrative holidays, held at various colleges of Delhi University designated as SOL centres. These classes are officially known as personal contact program (PCP). Admissions and classes lag behind the schedule of regular colleges where classes begin by the end of July and early August. Admission in SOL continues up till September and classes do not begin before November. Despite the delay in admission and academic session, final examinations are held within the scheduled time/month, leaving very short time for teachers to complete the course and students to prepare for the exams. The courses of 180 classes are condensed into 25-30 classes, and students commonly complain of not getting even the promised number of classes. For the final examination, students depend on the study materials provided by SOL and guidebooks (*kunji*: Champion, top twenty) sold on the pavements and shops around the colleges. These books contain expected questions and their abridged answers, a means to prepare for the exam in a shorter duration. SOL does not have its independent campus/colleges. Lectures are held in few rented classrooms of DU affiliated colleges. Overcrowded classrooms resulting from the disproportion between classrooms and students is one of

⁵⁷ In the beginning 900 students were enrolled in SOL and since then student enrolment in SOL has reached over lakhs. At present over four lakh students are enrolled in various undergraduate and postgraduate courses in SOL as against just over lakh in various affiliated regular colleges of Delhi University.

⁵⁸ Undergraduate courses offered by SOL are B. A (programme), B.A honours in English and Political Science, B. Com and B. Com (Hons). Five postgraduate programmes are M.A in Hindi, History, Political Science, Sanskrit and M.Com.

the reasons for many students not to attend the lectures where they barely get benches to sit or listen. One student tells that even after taking 7-8 classes he has been unsuccessful in getting a seat in the classroom. Many students coming to attend the classes sit on the floor or stand outside the classrooms to listen to lectures. Attendance gradually reduces as the academic session progresses towards its end. Initial enthusiasm for college dissipates among many students who abandon the classrooms to spend time with friends in the canteen, parks or loiter around the campus. Others come to college to collect study material or access the library. Most lecturers are recruited as guest faculty or on hired contractual basis.

Disjunction between education and employment becomes evident as SOL absorbs twice the demand for higher education than regular colleges of DU does. Higher intake in SOL obfuscate employment outcomes of education obtained in distance learning that does not prepare the students for white collar jobs in formal sector. It represents what Jeffrey (2008) calls an ‘unsettling paradox’ where interest and investment in education has increased, but simultaneously the expected benefits of formal education are dwindling, especially for the groups excluded formerly. A large army of youth aspiring to gain higher education enrol in distance learning and attain a degree that is undervalued in the labour market (John 2012).

ii. Students in SOL: Background and Strategy

A majority enrolled for correspondence courses at SOL are students of state government schools⁵⁹. Most students interacted in and around the campus come from socially and economically marginal backgrounds like many of the students from Ashanagar. As in Ashanagar, combination of low scores, economic compulsions, financial independence, gender, future security and social respect pre-dominates the discussion on enrolment in distance learning. In group discussions, students describe their reasons for opting SOL

There are many reasons for joining SOL. First, we want to work, as after attaining education one has to work. These days, to get a good position in a reputed company or MNC (multinational corporations), one requires atleast two to three years of experience. If we start working after three years of graduation we have to begin from lower positions. We cannot waste our time, we are working now. By the time we complete graduation we would have gained three years of experience. In these three years, we will get a degree and experience required for a good job. We do not want to take financial help from our parents.

⁵⁹ It also includes those completed class 10th and 12th from National Institute of Open School (NIOS), an autonomous body under Ministry of Human Resource Development, that provides distance learning up to pre-degree level.

Another student adds:

I started working so that I can develop my personality and communication skills. For good jobs, degrees are mere qualifying criteria. Companies hire those who have confidence and fluency in English. They want to see whether you can handle clients and land deals. We know that nowadays nobody gives value to someone who has studied only up to 12th, so it is useless. This degree can neither give a good job nor respect society. Studying up to class 12th has no value, neither for job nor for society. To avoid disdain and secure respect, we enrolled in SOL so that we can earn a university degree.

This logic of studying in distance learning courses resonates in discussions with other group of students who are presently not thinking about employment neither are they preparing for jobs. Their immediate desire is to get a degree and then turn their sights to what lies over the horizon. Boys present in the group on weekdays take coaching classes. One of them who is learning cloud computing from a private institute says

We know this degree (distance graduation) has no value and we will not get any jobs with this degree in our hand. But only class 12th pass certificate has no worth either. A graduate degree might help in getting a job.

Another girl in the second year of her B.A (program) is attending stenography classes in ITI on weekdays says,

I took B.A (prog) in SOL because it is easier than the honors courses. Also, I am learning stenography on weekdays. I cannot do so much. This degree has no value. But employers ask for a degree so it is better to secure one. Suppose you need a job urgently, alone on twelfth basis it is not easy to get a job. Also, if you want pursue higher education you need a graduate degree. According to me at least one should have a graduate degree.

She related that she got admission in a regular college but she wanted to learn stenography and later appear in SSC exams. She wanted to study law but was discouraged by her father for reasons unknown to her. Instead he enrolled her in SOL and registered her for the stenography course in ITI, as courtrooms require stenographers and it may be her best shot at entering the courtroom. However other students resigned to SOL due to low scores in class twelfth:

We did not have any choice. We applied in regular colleges also but it sets very high cut-off, first cut off list demands above 95%. We are from government schools it is very difficult for us to score high percentages. Most students who go to regular colleges come from private schools as it is easier for private school students to score high.

Another group of boys admit financial inhibitions and familial pressures as reasons for choosing SOL:

Because of family problems... lack of money. My father refused and said if you only need degree, get it from SOL. Why enrol in regular (college)? For him (father), the value of degree from SOL and a regular degree is equal. It is not. Regular students have an advantage over SOL students. Employers recruit them because they believe regular students have studied more and have more experience.

Confronted with a multitude of circumstantial constraints, students turn to SOL. Entering into distance learning to receive education, they eventually realise that it is just another degree that might help in securing employment in the future. This belief of SOL students indicates “the university degree has lost signaling effect, though it continues to be a minimum requirement for many jobs” (John 2013:53). Also, these degrees/courses are not a single, isolated engagement of the students. On weekdays, they attend coaching centers, vocational courses, ITI, or work in private sector jobs. Conversations with students in colleges reveal similarity in reasons behind pursuing higher education through SOL as the youth from the field.

iii. Differential Expectations from Educational Degrees

Also, a notable distinction exists in the college between Muslim and non-Muslim (Hindu) youth about the future job prospect and state employment. Muslim youth in the college are not preparing for government jobs. Many non-Muslim youth are preparing or intending to prepare for exams to secure a government/state job. Some of the boys had applied and appeared in government exams earlier. Despite the shrinking share of state employment, for non-Muslim boys salaried government job continues to be a preferential choice of employment. They take coaching to prepare for government jobs and appeared in the exams more than once. In contrast, expectations of Muslim youth find resonance with the observations of Jeffrey et al (2010) where Muslim youth of their field view government job as a ‘distant hope’. Muslim youth of the college do not conceal their distrust/disinterest in government employment. However, religious identity is not mentioned as a source of exclusion from salaried government jobs. Instead, highlighting the influence of money, networks and corruption they expressed contempt for government jobs. The new economy seems promising to them and represents an uncorrupted site where they can cultivate traits of discipline, hard-work,

social dexterity and experience required to run a successful enterprise. Most of these boys have family-run small businesses which they want to expand and transform by seising the available opportunities within the economy. Remarking on difficulty of securing state government job, Aslam says,

We have lost faith in government jobs. For a government job one needs money and connection. People are willing to give a lot of money for these jobs. They are ready to pay ten to twelve lakhs for a small post in the government job. We don't have money, neither do we have any networks.

Another boy present in the group adds

According to me only those who don't want to work hard in life want government jobs. They know it is a 9-to-5 job and whether you attend or not you will get salary at the end of the month. It is not that in private jobs there is no money. You have to work hard for few days and after reaching a managerial position you will earn a high salary. If you ask about me I earn well.

Elucidating the pragmatic entry into the new economy another boy says

See while working under someone you learn discipline which is very necessary for any business to run. Also, when you are working for others you have to deal with different kinds of people and you learn how to deal and communicate with others. According to me a government job is worthless as it only has money/financial security. These days, money is not everything. If you do a bit of hard work you can get a good position in a company.

These boys view government jobs as unattainable without money and productive networks. At the same time, they all have some form of family business run by their fathers. They show entrepreneurial zeal to proliferate the family-run business. They admit the principles and qualities to do a business are changing and they are learning the changing rules through engaging in the private jobs offered in the new economy. They believe working under someone teaches them discipline, gives exposure and tutors them to deal with people – and that this constitutes present day preparation for business. Learning English is considered significant to excel in the new economy. Centrality of English is highlighted by the fact that without English one cannot get a good job in the job market, regardless of qualifications.

Delhi University is a dual mode university as it offers both regular and distance education. Through SOL, the university provides distance education. By its very design SOL's institutional structure is discriminatory. Underlining the stark difference in quality, both administrative and educational, John (2013:61) underlines, "qualitative lag between the courses pursued by distance education students and those studying in

regular colleges”. In regular colleges, students are admitted on the basis of ‘merit’ decided by absurdly high cut-off marks. ‘Merit’ seems naturally bestowed on students of spatially, economically and socially privileged class. For those educated in municipal and state schools to compete with the English educated ‘meritorious’ students is nearly impossible. Apart from the affirmative action in the form of reservation, commonly merit, caste and class appear to be seamlessly fused. If not for the mandated reservation in higher education, for the disadvantaged groups—SCs, STs and OBCs—to receive higher education from the reputed government educational institutes would have been highly difficult which operates on the invincible principle of ‘merit’. It is noteworthy that elite or middle sections of the disadvantaged groups largely obtain the benefits of affirmative action, leaving behind socio-economically underprivileged sections within the community (ibid). High cut-off marks and limited percolation of affirmative action shunts lower class of the disadvantaged groups, mainly Dalits, in the academic ghetto of open learning, SOL, to pursue higher education. Ashanagar is inhabited largely by Dalits. Due to lack of information, economic scarcity, unstimulating environment for education, gender and want of role model who can inspire, most attain school education from the state and municipal schools. Government schools are characterised by poor infrastructure, delayed teaching of English and substandard quality of education, trains students who are ill equipped to compete in the market of regular college which permits entry only on the basis of ‘merit’. Those who succeed in securing admission in regular receive admission in low ranking colleges. Rejected by regular colleges, students ‘choose’ SOL for higher education. Like most students of Ashanagar, most of the students attending SOL come from spatially marginal and peripheral areas of the city. Excluded from the quality higher education, SOL serves as a reservoir especially reserved for the spatial and socio-economic marginals of the city.

4.3 Distractions in the *Mahaul*: Space and Aspirations

Ashanagar is administratively categorised as a *Jhuggi Jhopri* resettlement colony. However, life in the settlement is not mechanised, emptied of agentive power of people inhabiting it, as hinted by the bureaucratic terminology. Space is a social production gaining its meaning and symbols through ‘socio-spatial dialectic’ (Soja 1980). It is the

constant interaction between dwellers and space that constructs life and forges culture specific to a space.

Constraints and opportunities embedded in the living environment of a settlement is also a form of individual and collective social capital (Zanten 2005). The nature of living environment of a social group also impinges the educational choices and socialisation. Zanten (2005) contends that high concentration of lower class in neighbourhood of urban periphery leads to peripheral socialisation. Socialisation in impoverished neighbourhoods with meagre economic and cultural capital imposes social closure 'both in terms of aspirations and values, and social network' (ibid). Influence of mahaul (atmosphere) of the settlement on aspirations was recurrently invoked in Ashanagar. The overcrowded settlement and incessant activities do not constitute an ideal climate for sheltering higher aspirations and education. Physically, each house in the settlement shares walls with the next house, and so on till the end of the alley. The continuous row of houses sharing walls punctuates only at the end or in middle to pave the way for a road. In the last decade, additional floors have been constructed and many of the houses now are three-storeyed. Several of these buildings exceed the legally mandated height, and are in violation of building bylaws. Vertical extension of houses are done to expand living area for the family members or to rent out extra floors to supplement income. Horizontal continuity and vertical extension while accommodating the increasing population density adds to the congestion. All day long, calls of street vendors inviting customers to buy goods sold by them can be heard clearly from within the house. Street vendors include vegetable sellers, ragpickers (*raddiwala*), sellers of small plastic articles of everyday use (Jugs, ceramic wares, brushes, combs, mirrors etc) on a wooden cart, men/women selling cloths (bedsheets, towels, *salwar-kamees*, and *sarees* etc) and knife sharpeners. Street vendors are a fixed element of everyday life in the settlement. Voices and bustle of the streets penetrate into the walls of houses. Similarly, private lives are not confined to four walls of the house. In the alleys it is common to see older people resting/sleeping in jute beds and folding charpoys outside in front their houses. Sometimes domestic feuds become a public spectacle. Spatial proximity with relatives, vibrant socio-religious celebrations and - unlike gated residential areas - un-walled boundary of the settlement allows uncensored movement of people. Commenting on the vibrancy of everyday life on education of youth in the settlement Aditya (Koli, SC), in late twenties, says,

The settlement has different life from apartments and gated residential areas (hi-fi log). There people do not even know who their neighbours are. Here people know each other, not only of their own gali (alley) and block but from other blocks also. Even relatives of our friends are known to us. This life has its own benefit but also many disadvantages. There, children (referring to 'hi-fi log') can study without distractions from the street and family. Their parents are educated and do not disturb them for running errands. Here, if we sit to study, in a few minutes our mothers ask us to go out and buy milk, vegetables or other rations. On resuming, you hear noise of ragpickers, street vendors, songs played in the neighbourhood or a fight in the street. Again, we will be told that this or that relative has come, so we have to meet them or drop them etc. By the end of the day friends will arrive and instead of encouraging, they say 'how much will you study? Let's go out'. This is how our day ends.

Contemplating on the distinct 'mahaul' of the settlement Ritesh (Balmiki, SC), in early twenties is pursuing M. Com from SOL, says,

One day I was looking at children playing with marbles and spinning top (lattoo). It just struck me what is it in this place that children play these games. We use to play when we were young. Before me, my elder brother used to play the same games. Now, look at these children here, they continue to play the same game. I don't understand why youngsters here are interested in such games and indulge in arranging religious festivals or installing mata ki chowki⁶⁰. Children of high society do not play such games or indulge in such activities. Why only here?

Priyank is a Brahmin from Uttarakhand and is in his early thirties. He manages administrative work in a CA firm. He has two daughters and a son. He sends them all to reputed English medium private schools. Speaking of the inhibiting effect of the local 'mahaul', despite his success in enrolling his three children in good schools, Priyank says,

Now I am educating them in good schools but what to do with the mahaul (atmosphere/ambience)? My daughters are young. They study in good schools so they want to wear clothes of their choice, and I don't mind what they wear but they cannot go out here wearing just anything... Mere education in good schools is not adequate, a good mahaul is also required to study well. Here, everyone goes to government schools. Education of girls is not given importance and boys just stay out and roam around in bikes. Where should my children go? In apartments there is time for everything and parents have control over their children. In the evening they play games and then they study. There is a routine and discipline in upper class residential areas. They have right mahaul for education. What will children learn from this kind of mahaul?... Many times, I thought of shifting from this place but with my salary I cannot afford housing in apartments.

⁶⁰ In recent years the newer religious trend of installing *mata ki chowki* has emerged. Residents, especially young boys collect money and install an idol/image of goddess in either in parks or open space around it.

Ambience of the settlement is not only unsuitable for studies, it is illiberal. It curtails the mobility and freedom of young girls. Restricted by sub-culture, they cannot wear or step out at 'inappropriate' hour without drawing the attention of neighbours or comments from the young boys who occupy public spaces at almost all times of the day. To establish harmony between education and ambience (*Mahaul*), moving away from the settlement is seen as a viable, or even the *only*, solution. The contemporary state of the settlement is depicted by these statements which underline existing socio-cultural disparity between a settlement of this type and affluent localities. While education is important for the socio-economic mobility, it alone is not sufficient. Synchronisation between education and suitable atmosphere (*mahaul*) is formidable. The need for a suitable atmosphere within the house and its exteriors is important to inculcate an earnest interest in education. It is pointed out that a regime of discipline within the family and monitoring by parents is absent. Kinship obligations and relational responsibilities constantly interrupt studies/education. While education is important, it does not occupy a central status.

Apart from the congestion, complains against mahaul of the settlement are made because of its notorious reputation for violence and petty crimes. There are two dons/crooks, known across the blocks, for their indulgence in illegal activities. Although the settlement has five licensed liquor shops, it is illegally sold by these dons from the houses. Both are known for illegal selling of liquor and supplying addictive substances. Under their patronage, local suppliers from their homes sell liquor in packets which are cheaper. The low cost and proximity make consumption accessible to unemployed youngsters. These youngsters also pool money to buy larger quantities of alcohol⁶¹. They consume these substances in the relatively deserted areas, mainly parks, of the settlement. Residents troubled by illegal trade of liquor do not approach the police as it happens with their complicity. Given the political connection with powerful leaders, a nexus between the local dons/crooks and police is not improbable. In fact, one of them has contested for assembly and municipal elections multiple times

⁶¹ In the field I was informed about the illicit selling of alcohol (also adulterated alcohol) and drug substances. Many times, while interacting with grocery shopkeepers, during noon hours, I saw young men coming to buy small packets of water and plastic glasses. After their departure I was told the purpose of this petty shopping which costs less than a ten rupee. I met the two families struggling to withdraw their sons from the drug addiction. Also, during the interaction with young men I often was indicated to boys in the group who indulge in liquor/substance consumption.

on tickets of different parties. His younger brother won the municipal elections in 2012 and held the position of a municipal councillor. The other don is associated closely with the BJP. Also, both have occupied open public spaces like the park and an empty plot of land around it for personal use⁶². Apart from the presence of two locally prominent crooks and their activities, experiences of petty crimes like stealing and threats are common. According to residents, mostly petty crimes are committed by uneducated and unemployed young men for liquor/addictive substances and material consumption. While this is the present scenario of ‘crime’ and its influence in the settlement. Many first-generation settlers recount instances of murders in broad day light and, presence of rampant gang rivalry and revenges occurring earlier in the settlement. Amidst this mahaul subsequent generations grew. It is a great achievement of many families that they prevented the entry of their children into criminal activities.

Subculture of the settlement is a blend of religious enthusiasm, newer aspirations and ‘illegal activities’. The subculture is not the outcome of ‘social isolation’ (Wilson 1987 cf Jackson 1992:61) deterministically self-reproducing. Despite the mahaul, aspiration and forms of consumption indicate exchange between the settlement and the city. However, the prevailing norms and material conditions of the mahaul exert strong influence on ‘capacity to aspire’ and its achievement.

4.4 Gender and Higher Education

Youth is not a homogeneous category, but internally differentiated along axes of gender, class, caste, age and ideologies. These different social and economic locations collectively determine access to education, and importantly, the quality of education. Gender is one of the salient dimensions that mediates the access to education and expected outcomes. It is argued that ‘educational institutes are the site of social reproduction and communicate binary opposition of femininity and masculinity to little boys and girls through socialisation’ (Channana 2007: 591). Rather than eliminating inequality ingrained in gender relations, schools are spaces where gender attributes are rehearsed and patriarchal relations are reproduced. Schooling enables the reproduction

⁶² One of the local don has occupied a park in the block where he stays. The park meant for the public use is used by him for the ‘illegal activities’. He has raised a high wall so no one from the outside can see inside. Many cautioned me not to venture this block even in daylight and seek interview with the man. The other man has occupied land around the central park of the block to park four-wheelers. He rent out the cars.

of socially constructed attributes of femininity and masculinity (McRobbie 1991; Lee 1993; Willis 2017). Further, academic segregation of men in disciplines like sciences labelled as ‘good’, ‘difficult’ and masculine, and of women in humanities underlines the gendered nature of education (Thomas 1990; Acker 1994). As Chanana (2007) points out, the onset of globalisation has altered the boundaries between Arts and Science subjects and has seen the entry of young women in ‘new and traditionally labelled “masculine” disciplines’. The external factors of globalisation, newer courses, proliferation of private educational institutes, schooling has been transforming gender based higher educational choices and unsettling the established gendered dichotomy in higher education. However, gender-based socialisation within the family and local prevailing gender norms continue to exert influence on the choices and access to higher education. In the settlement, regardless of gender, youths are segregated in “easy” and “effeminate” disciplines (Thomas 1990). As most youths are restricted to “soft” disciplines of Arts and Commerce, gendered binary of masculine and feminine choices in higher education is absent. The salience of gender becomes apparent after class 12th when young boys and girls make decisions to pursue higher education for different reasons imbued with appropriate gender roles.

4.4.1 Women, Class and Higher Education

After completing 12th class board exams, girls in the settlement pursue higher education mainly through open learning (SOL, NCWEB and IGNOU). Only a few pursue higher education through regular mode. Unlike open learning where classes are held only on Sundays, classes are conducted six days a week in regular colleges. In spite of qualifying scores, economic stability of a family, and urge of young girls to take admission in regular college many take admission in open learning colleges and “the relationship between availability of disciplinary choices and women’s ability to access them are not directly related nor are they dependent on women’s academic achievement” (Chanana 2007:596). Family plays a decisive role in determining the form of education and future employment for the young girls/women. These decisions are often taken by male members of the family and supported by wives/mothers/aunts. The decision to attend college in regular or through open is often driven by fathers, brothers, neighbourhood and circuit of relatives. These familial decisions commonly

disregard the wishes/choices of daughters/sisters. Cited below are few instances of familial and societal intervention in making educational decisions for young girls.

Case 1

Nisha (Brahmin caste): She completed BA in political science through SOL (classes held on Sundays) and began pursuing M.A in the subject from IGNOU. However, she was not inclined to pursue political science in graduation. She was interested in Sociology. Her brother and his friend enrolled her for a correspondence course against her wishes. To help her mother in domestic chores, she 'chose' to continue higher education from open learning mode. As she says, *"it is not that I was not willing to enrol in regular mode, but the final decision was taken by the family"*. She tells emphatically that the responsibility of helping her mother in domestic work has restricted her disciplinary choice and mode of education. Also, it is her younger brother and not her father or elder brother who was against her studying in regular college. Though she fought and resisted, she ultimately gave because *"how much can one fight with him anyway?"* Authority to control women lies not necessarily with fathers but also with other male members of the family who assume the role of father figures or authority. She does not even attend classes on Sunday. She receives study material from IGNOU which she reads at home. According to her, *"it is useless to attend classes. They don't teach anything. Finally, you have to sit and memorise everything to reproduce in the exam. That you can do at home"*. Although she is educated, she is not allowed to be in paid employment by her family. She spends her day doing domestic chores from sweeping, mopping, cooking and attending to guests. She said she no longer she feels bored as she has become habituated to her life at home. In her leisure hours she watches T.V.

Case 2

Neena (Balmiki caste): She is a first year B.A (prog) student at SOL and stays with her parents, uncles and grandmother. She was yearning to study in college from regular mode. While her father and grandmother were hostile to the idea of regular education, she applied for DU. Her name did not appear in the first two cut-off lists and this gave an opportunity to her exasperated grandmother and father to enrol her in distance education. Presently enrolled at IGNOU, she attends classes every Sunday. She is accompanied every Sunday either by her father, grandmother or uncle to the college.

Still enjoying her escapades in college, she wants to study further and become financially independent. However, her family is already searching a groom for her though she is not keen to marry now. Her paternal aunt completed graduation in 1995 and took admission for a post graduate course at Jamia Milia, though she could not finish it. Her aunt, was known to me before my meeting with Neena. In the conversations her aunt told me that she generally encourages her nieces to take up higher education. Neena, however, said to the contrary that her aunt and grandmother are asking her father to marry her off. Her mother works as a beautician in a beauty parlour situated in an affluent market in neighbouring area. She is supportive of her daughter's ambition but is unable to contradict the decisions taken by the members of her conjugal family. Since both her mother and grandmother are working, it is Neena's responsibility to cook lunch and feed her younger siblings after they return from school. She looks after the house and performs domestic chores till her mother returns home.

Case 3

Anjana (General caste): After class 12th she wanted to pursue a career in modelling or hotel management. However, her parents were against her going into either of those fields. Instead, they enrolled her in B.A (program) in NCWEB and they wanted her to learn Spanish. Her father works in an export-import firm where he can arrange for a job for her as the firm requires Spanish interpreters. At the time of the interview, she had not yet started learning the language. Her mother complained, "*We are her parents, not enemies. Whatever we think is for her own good. She does not understand this today but she will be grateful to us in the future. What is wrong in studying in correspondence? She can study and learn domestic work, which is equally important!*" Unable to resist her parents, she has reluctantly started a graduation course through open learning. Her parents keep a strict vigilance on her movements outside the house. She cannot step out of the house without permission from her parents⁶³. For her, regular education would have been an escape from the constant vigilantism of her parents.

⁶³ Anjana's mother was present during the group discussion along with Anjana and other college-going girls from the sub-street in which Anjana's house is located. It was held on the porch of one of their neighbour's house. The girls from the neighbourhood asked Anjana's mother to let Anjana join the discussion. Anjana shared her aspirations before her mother joined the discussion, after which she remained largely silent. Anjana's mother began responding to questions directed at Anjana after she joined. She was also in haste to take Anjana back home. After every question she kept repeating, 'is it over now?'

Bina Agarwal (1997) draws attention to the link between social norms and bargaining power. She writes, “norms set the limit to bargaining. They can define which issues can legitimately be bargained over and which fall under the arena of the uncontestable” (1997:15). Social norms are not merely code of expected ‘natural’ behaviors/roles, they also embody unequal distribution of power disproportionately advantageous to one group than other. Sustaining the social order, social norms largely includes ‘uncontestable’ beliefs like sexual division of labour. In the cases highlighted above, all the young girls were disinterested to begin college life in open learning. Within the patriarchal structure of the family, bargaining power of young unmarried girls is lesser in comparison with married or older women or men in general. Thus, family members (parents, grandparent and brother) often impose restrictions on young girls. Interventions of the families attempt to guard ‘doxa’ (Bourdieu 1977: 167-70) of patriarchal protocols which is required to reproduce a normative patriarchal heterosexual family. The production and sanctity of a normative heterosexual family rests on reproductive ability of chaste women. The control over the mobility of young girls outside the home aims to ‘protect’ them from the influence of bad atmosphere (*kharab mahaul*). Bad atmosphere (*kharab mahaul*) of Ashanagar and the city in general is cited to control the physical mobility of the young girls within and outside the colony. In general, residents are apprehensive of the influence of ‘unfriendly bodies’ (Phadke 2013) of scantily dressed ‘loose women’ of the city who indulge in smoking, drinking and stay in the company of men. Within the Ashanagar, patriarchal anxiety emanates from the frequent instances of elopement and love marriages. Unmonitored spatial mobility of women is feared for the potential romantic encounters outside the caste/community. Further, the reproduction of the family is derived from the domestic labour performed by the women (Krishna Raj and Patel 1982; Agarwal 1997). Families play a key role in instilling and sustaining the order of sexual division of labour. Under the sexual division of labour, domestic work performed by women is undervalued and unrecognised, and so is their position in the patriarchal order. In the patriarchal arrangement ambitions and preferences of women are ignored with ease, as is the case with the young girls who are the participants of this study. Rather than being a site contesting the patriarchal order, the structural design of distance education sustains it. As classes are held only on Sundays, and attendance is not mandatory, there is no need to step out for correspondence students to attend classes regularly on weekdays. It aids in controlling the spatial mobility of girls. The syllabus of distance

learning is non-demanding and students rely on guide books to pass the exam. Therefore, studies are neglected on weekdays and time is invested in learning other courses or in paid employment. However, girls staying at home on weekdays assist their mothers in performing domestic chores. The execution of domestic work trains them for 'principal activity' of homemaking (Mcrobbie 2007; Hakim 1996). Not only restricted to education, parents/family decide their future prospects in terms of marriage and acceptable job roles. Apart from their studies, girls are trained in various vocational skills like shorthand, front desk operator (retail), computer courses, stitching, beautician course, *mehandi* course etc. Generally, the duration of these courses does not exceed six months. Distance learning serves multiple purposes: securing a degree suitable to finding a groom, training girls for 'feminine' roles, and making it easier to keep them under surveillance. These elements are intricately interrelated. Disregard to educational preferences of girls and negligence of their education shows both the status of girls and their education to be of secondary importance.

Bina Agarwal (1997) argues that 'doxa' can be contested and forced into a realm of heterodoxy. Social norms are not immutable, they are alterable under changing socio-economic conditions⁶⁴. For instance, while prevailing gender norm restrict women's mobility outside home, access to higher education and employment has induced changes in gender relations and positively contributed to greater mobility of women. Further, economic position of a family has a correlation with the mobility of women. The mobility of Dalit women outside home for purposes of work is taken, for instance, as a sign of gender egalitarianism within the community. But the view of gender egalitarianism among Dalits has been contested by Deshpande (2014:108): "the fewer restrictions working outside their homes could be more due to compelling poverty and less due to a radical belief in fundamental rights of women to work". She argues the distinction between upper castes and Dalits on the basis of female mobility in public sphere is increasingly becoming obsolete. The emulation of upper-caste norms to rise above in the caste hierarchy inevitably constrains women. Therefore, regardless of caste, gender norms are followed in relatively better-off families strictly with very little scope of flexibility. In these families, young girls are educated in distance learning

⁶⁴ Highlighting the three crucial points in relation to bargaining over social norms Bina Agarwal (1997) writes, 'one, the role of economic factors in pushing the people to challenge the norms; two, the role of groups (as opposed to individuals) in enhancing people's ability to challenge norms; and three, the interactive nature of bargaining within and outside the household in effectively challenging the social norm'.

and are trained in feminine vocations but are not allowed to engage in paid employment. In contrast, strictures of gender norms are frequently found relaxed in impoverished households. Among young girls the reasons behind 'choosing' higher education in distance learning are stratified. Their choices reflect the class position of the family. Not all girls undergo similar experiences of familial coercion/intervention. Many girls in fact 'choose' to enrol in distance education in order to use the time economically. Veena, from the Devangar Chettiar (OBC), and hailing from Chennai, is a case in point. Her mother works as domestic help in apartments in the vicinity and her father works as a waiter in the Kerala House. She has two sisters. She and her elder sister are employed, and her younger sister was at the time of the interview studying in class 12th. Veena is working in a BPO and pursuing graduation in SOL at DU. She tells,

My parents have no objection with me attending college regularly. They can afford my regular studies. But I am not interested in regular college. So many people advised me against open learning, according to them a degree from SOL has no value.

She differs from the general perception of distance education as inferior and is of the opinion that distance learning has its own benefits. According to her, students can learn other skills in the weekdays and earn rather than attend classes and squander money.

Priya (General caste) stays with her mother and two younger brothers. Her father died when she was young. She has been working for six years now to support her family financially. She started working after completing class 12th. Despite getting admission in regular she enrolled for B.A (prog) in SOL. Her family was supportive of her regular education but she held back. She tells,

Seeing the financial condition, I thought enrolling in SOL and earning will be more prudent than enrolling for a regular course. That would have been a wastage of time and money.

Likewise, Kiran (Jatav caste) stays with her parents, grandfather and two sisters and a brother. Her grandfather is a retired DESU employee. Her father works in a hotel and her mother is homemaker. Her father's income is inadequate to meet domestic requirements. Her grandfather's pension provides additional financial support to the family. Given their economic struggles, both Kiran and her elder sister opted to pursue education through distance learning. They did not apply for regular mode. Both of them have unsteady private jobs. Her younger brother has joined as a part-time worker at a CA firm. Her youngest sister is pursuing BA (History Honors) in regular mode.

In families with inadequate economic resources, elder children tend to prioritise work and an income. Distance education becomes a viable mode of pursuing higher education as it allows simultaneous paid employment. In addition to parental income, financial contribution of elder siblings benefits the younger siblings who tend to choose regular education or take coaching/learn employable skills. Unlike many cases where students choose SOL due to financial inadequacy, others choose it despite being able to afford a regular course and the willingness of their parents to send them to a regular college. However, poverty of the family strongly influences young girls' choice of higher education and decision to engage in paid work. In some cases, girls also refrain from regular college courses due to their lack of confidence in stepping out and travelling alone.

However, between gender norms and economic compulsions, there are some girls who do receive support and encouragement from their relatives, neighbours, friends and teachers to pursue education and career, as discussed below

Meeta

Meeta (Jatav caste) is a second year M.A student of political science (Hindi medium). She completed B.A in political science in a regular course at Kirori Mal College (KMC), Delhi University. She wanted to continue her post-graduation through regular course but was at the same time confused and indecisive. On the insistence of some of the members belonging to their caste, her parents registered her for a regular college instead of a correspondence course⁶⁵. Having taken correspondence courses themselves and from their exposure to different environments and information regarding better employment and opportunities for mobility, they cautioned Meeta's parents and persuaded them to have her registered for a regular course. Prior experience is a valuable source of information and guidance to younger members of the community. These men who guided Meeta are BSP supporters, a party that prioritises education for upward mobility among Dalits. In the same lane in which Meeta's house is located, another girl, Nandita, completed class 12th and was unsure of higher education. The same men, including her uncle, insisted her on pursuing a regular graduation course. Presently, Nandita is a second year B.com student at Saakir Hussain college, DU.

⁶⁵ She refers all these young men as *Bhaiya* (brother).

Priyanka

Priyanka (Lodh Rajput, OBC) is a Ph.d student at JNU. Narrating her educational journey, she said that the help and advice she received from her coaching teacher (also her neighbour), peers, and from a college teacher was valuable. Despite her keenness to pursue sciences, she chose Arts after class 10th. When she was in class 10th, her mother passed away after prolonged illness. Being the eldest daughter, domestic responsibilities of the family and younger siblings fell on her shoulders. Overwhelmed by family responsibilities she could not devote long hours to study, and this forced her to choose Arts after class 10th. After class 12th, she opted for BA and MA in regular mode as she was concerned that her father will succumb to the pressure of her relatives and get her married. While pursuing MA she heard about JNU from her classmates who were contemplating about higher education. In the settlement many youngsters are unaware of universities and higher educational institutes in the city. Finally, one of her friends bought a form for her to apply for an M.phil course at JNU. She was unsure about her future plans and applied reluctantly, submitting her application on the last day with the help of a friend. Upon clearing the entrance exam she was uncertain about joining the course as she thought she was not suited for research. She consulted her coaching teacher, peers, a distant cousin and a professor from DU. They all convinced her to join the university. Priyanka's father tells that he shared the information of her final selection with his superiors at his workplace who commended her achievement and encouraged him to register her for the course.

4.4.2 Men, Mobility, and Education⁶⁶

In contrast to girls, boys enjoy unrestricted movement outside home for various purposes of education, work, and leisure. With age, they gain more autonomy and make decisions on education and employment without much interference from the family. Their decisions are swayed by their peer group far more than the family or kin network. Men opting for open learning act on economic and qualification constraints, not due to reluctance of the family to send them to regular college. On completing class 12, girls tend to continue further education, but many boys discontinue and look for work. Boys enter into the labour market at an early age on grounds of disinclination towards studies

⁶⁶ Next chapter discusses in detail about the male anxieties of unemployment and strategies to cope with the same.

or due to financially weak condition of the family.⁶⁷ Financial adequacy of a family is not essential for a boy to continue higher education, either in open learning or in regular. The work of Jeffrey et.al on educated unemployed youth of western U.P. shows that the economic and social resources of rich *Jat* farmers sustains the prolonged wait of their son's entry into the secured employment. Regardless of financial resources of the family, most of boys interviewed by this researcher chose paid work over self-conscious 'unemployment' (Jeffery 2010) supported by the availability of many low paid unskilled/semi-skilled/ jobs in the private sector/informal economy. Besides the intent to contribute financially, inclination of young men to join the workforce at an early age can be partly explained through the desire to consume newer forms of goods and leisure, as "consumption is clearly articulated with the life cycle as people's spending pattern expected to change over time: young unmarried men spend cash freely on the ephemeral and personal pleasures of fashion and cinema" (Osella and Osella, 2006:82). Ownership of bikes, mobile phones, cloths inspired from the cinema (fitting shirts/tapering pants), shoes, sunglasses are the noticeable material consumptions among the young men.

4.5 Diversification in Educational Choices: New Legislation and English Medium Schools

With the introduction of Right to Education Act in 2009 (also known as the 'Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education', it was enacted in 2009 and came into effect on 1st April 2010), and the proliferation of English medium private schools, educational choices and accessibility have diversified in the last few years. Prominent public/private schools of the area are located in the surrounding middle and upper middle-class residential areas that continues to remain inaccessible to most residents of

⁶⁷ Early entry of the boys in the labor market implicitly appears beneficial for girls/women of the family. In a situation of financial crisis boys generally are expected to share the domestic responsibilities. As earnings of the boys entering into employment stabilises/consolidates the financial condition of the family, generated surplus becomes available to invest in education of the girls. Like Preeti who is eldest among four siblings and at a young age after the death of her mother, responsibility of the family fell on her. Her father is private driver. After passing class 9th her younger brother started working in a cloth shop and her youngest brother is a driver. Both Preeti and her sister are pursuing a diploma course in fashion designing. These are not isolated/exceptional instances where girls are more educated than their brothers. In other instances of girls more educated than their brothers because of academic disinterest of the boys. Higher education among girls is seen as newly emerging crisis for inability to find a groom of the same or more qualification.

Ashanagar. Inability to pay high fees and lack of cultural capital are crucial factors in exclusion from these prominent schools. However, access to these schools became partly possible with the Right to Education Act. The act mandates provision of 25% reservation for students of economically weaker sections (EWS) and disadvantaged group (DG) in government-recognised private unaided schools. Private schools are bound by the law to provide free education to the children between the age of 6-14 years. These schools cannot demand fee/capitation fee for admissions of children categorised as EWS and DG. Despite the law, getting admission in these schools requires activation of networks and financial resources. Admissions under EWS is given to those children whose annual family income is below one lakh. Most beneficiaries of this provision are children from disadvantaged SCs and OBCs groups though in many cases their family incomes exceed the stipulated limit of one lakh. The provision of disadvantaged category---including SC/ST/OBC non-creamy layer, orphan and transgender---enables entry of these deprived classes into previously inaccessible private schools. Implementation of the law has, thus, diversified educational choices beyond the local/government schools and moderated the class/caste based systemic exclusion from the eminent private schools. Despite its positive impact, it is still important to note here that the relatively better off sections within SCs are able to benefit to a greater extent from the legislation. Also, better off class/community does not rely only on state policies such as the EWS/DG quotas under RTE. They also enrol their children into expensive public schools without resorting to quotas.

Ramesh (Balmiki caste, SC), has two sons aged fifteen and five years respectively. He tried to enrol his elder son in an English medium private school under EWS reservation but could not. He said, 'by producing false income certificate upper-class people manage to enrol their children in schools... the law is just but richer people use it to their advantage'. He pointed out a distance clause in the RTE Act that gives preference to those applicants who reside within one kilometer (distance increases to three, six km depending on the availability of seats) of the radius of school, saying 'No slums or colonies are situated close to eminent schools, and they are predominantly in or close to high income residential areas.' Failing to get his elder son admitted under EWS, he enrolled him in another renowned English medium school away from his house in Patparganj without using the EWS provision under RTE Act. Presently, he spends roughly Rs.80, 000 annually on the education of his elder son. His younger son is studying in a private school. He complained about the substandard

quality of state and MCD schools and held the government responsible for drafting policies that mainly affect a specific section of class, community and area of the city. Like others in the field he is critical of 'No Detention' policy⁶⁸ under RTE that requires automatic promotion of students till class eighth. He believes subsidised government schools and the no detention policy enhances complacency among students and parents. According to him, if parents do not spend on education, they lose the power to hold school administrations accountable for the poor performance of their children.

Several respondents were of the opinion that the 'No Detention' policy is a conscious strategy of the government to restrict lower class youth from receiving quality education. According to them, allowing students to reach 8th class unhindered and without scrutiny renders them unfit for hard work and causes them to fail in exams in the higher classes and drop out from formal education. Further, having dropped out, such youths are divorced from any form of committed educational engagement, and many of them begin to indulge in substance abuse or integrate with local hooligans and militant organisations. Such policies paralyse future of government school-educated students who are left to face unpleasant consequences of an improper education when they have to compete with private or other high-quality government school students.

Besides competition for admitting children in English medium private schools, parents seek admission of their children in Central Schools⁶⁹ (KVS) with or without EWS reservation which again is not easy to obtain. Meera (caste: Meena under OBC) is a mother of four children and she has tried to enrol her youngest and only son in a central school. She was of the opinion that Kendriya Vidyalaya offers high quality education for a reasonable fee. She sent two of her daughters (the eldest and the one after that), now pursuing graduation, to schools run by the state government. There were no private schools in the area during their schooling age. After unsuccessful attempts to admit her son in K.V., she enrolled him in a local private school.

⁶⁸ The no detention policy was implemented in the year 2011 under which schools are mandated to pass all the students till class eighth. Complaining about the declining quality of education many states have been demanding the removal of no detention policy clause mandated by Right to education act. The union government has agreed to reconsider and revise the clause by 2018. In the meantime, Delhi government introduced the policies to provide extra classes and tuitions to prepare students for the higher classes. In 2016-17 the government introduced *chunauti* (challenge) scheme to improve the quality of education.

⁶⁹ Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS or central school) was established in 1962. These schools were instituted 'to provide uninterrupted education to wards of the transferable Central Government employees' (MHRD, updated, 2019).

Likewise, Anita (caste: Thakur – UC) enrolled her two children in K.V. by paying a sum of money to an intermediary having connections in the school administration. During a conversation when I was present, Anita's friend told her that she would like to enrol her children in K.V. in the next academic session. Anita replied, '*it is possible if you are willing to spend around one lakh for admission... money can do anything!*' In the field, I never came across any intermediary facilitating school admissions but was informed many times about their presence and role in getting admissions.

Primarily, it is the third and fourth generation that has broken into private schools and K.V.s. Not all the competing applicants secure admission in the famed schools of the area under the RTE Act. Those who are able to afford the fee prefer English medium private schools over local government schools (municipal and state government schools). English language is associated with the upward mobility. For parents, education alone is not sufficient; they desire a quality education which includes English as the medium of instruction since it is closely associated with upward ability. The distinction between themselves and the upper affluent classes is also based on their lack of linguistic capital. Those who fail to avail EWS/DG quota under RTE Act and cannot afford the fee of private schools without legislative security, enrol their children in local government schools.

4.5.1 Education as Collective Aspiration

Jeffrey et.al (2005:1) note, “[F]ormal education in the global south is increasingly moving away from a narrow focus on human capital to consider the meanings that people attach to ‘being educated’.” For the socially unincorporated groups of Dalits and backward classes, education implies liberation from structures of oppression. Attainment of formal education was considered important to overcome the socio-economic exclusion by these subaltern groups (Gore 1993; Lerche 1999; Jeffrey 2004). To gain equality in caste-stratified society, social reformers and political leaders such as Narayan Guru, Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram urged the socially oppressed to acquire formal education (Lukose 2010:170-77; Zelliott 2004; Jeffrey 2005). The subaltern groups - Mahars in Maharashtra, Jatavs in U.P and Ezhava in Kerala - adopted education as an instrument of empowerment and mobility. Embracing education has improved, if not decisively, their socio-economic standing. According to Ambedkar, if ‘annihilation

of caste' is to be achieved, anti-caste movements should not confine their view to limited socio-religious reforms (Zelliot 2013), but aim for political representation and formal education. BSP, a political party based on Dalit assertion, integrated Ambedkar's message in the movement. BSP's strategy gives education a place of primary significance in the campaign to achieve political power and employment. Education has borne results for Dalits. At the same time, the link between education and collective aspiration of mobility is not specific to Dalit groups. As Jeffrey (2010) has shown, the Jat landed gentry in U.P. invested on the education of their sons. Unlike Dalits, dominant/upper-castes aim to consolidate their power position in public and political institutions with the help of education.

In Ashanagar, education is important to attain upward mobility. Economic position of a family, social networks and information are key factors determining the quality of education received by young children. As mobility is not only an individual/familial aspiration, collective aspiration of a community exerts force in influencing scholastic decisions of a family. A closer look into the field of education throws up a web of factors that influence the decision on educational investments. A few crucial factors are parental strategies, collective aspirations of disparate communities, diversification of educational/school choices induced by the implementation of RTE Act, proliferation of English medium schools around the colony, and economic capacity that determines the parental/familial investment in the education. To elucidate this point two cases of Jatav (SC) and Patel (OBC) families are presented.

Case 1

Jatin (Jatav, U.P): Jatin has two daughters and a son. He is a Jatav, also known as Chamar (SC), a lower caste in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The Chamars are by far the largest and most politicised untouchables caste in U.P. (Lerche 1999) and is the social foundation of BSP (ibid). Along with political assertion, the community is known for embracing formal education and securing government jobs to overcome caste based social exclusion and oppression (Ciotti 2006; Joul 2007; Jeffrey 2010). Locally, Jatavs continue to support the BSP, a political party inspired by the ideology of Ambedkar in which education is regarded crucial to their socio-economic mobility. Jatin is a commerce graduate. Before entering into his present job as field investigator for a Delhi based research institute, he was teaching at a coaching center which he started with a

friend. Due to the losses he incurred in this venture, he decided to move on to salaried work in a private company. Subsequently he worked for a research institute in the city. He stays in a three-storey house with his widowed mother, wife, three children, his younger brother and his elder sister's daughter. Relatives from his village frequently visit his home. The third floor of the house is rented out to men from U.P. staying in Delhi to work. His father was a DESU employee. The source of income for the family includes rent from tenants, the pension his mother receives and the salaries of Jatin and his younger brother. At the time of the interview, his brother was unemployed and searching for a job. Like Jatin, he also worked as a field investigator for research institutes. Jatin's work as research investigator is irregular since field investigators are hired by research institutes according to project allotment and funding. As a result, Jatin often experiences spells of unemployment, running up to two to three months between projects. After three months of unemployment he worked on contractual basis for IGL (Indraprastha Gas Limited), a PSU, for two months. As the work was target based and required constant presence in the field, he left the job after the completion of the contract. After leaving this work, he had to wait for two months to get work as a field investigator. As a field investigator, his monthly earnings amount between eighteen and twenty thousand rupees. In the absence of his income his family depends on the pension received by his mother and on rent from tenants. His wife shared with me that though his mother gives money to them for the everyday expenses of the family, it is embarrassing for her to ask money from Jatin's mother during lean periods. So, they borrow money from the neighbours/relatives sometimes even on interest. Under these precarious conditions educational choice of the family is highlighted here.

Jatin enrolled his elder daughter in an English medium private school without EWS/DG quota. She is in 4th class, and the family spends Rs.5000 per month on her education. In addition, they are required to pay for development fund. In the last meeting, his wife said that they are finding it difficult to sustain their daughter in the school. They were unable to pay the school fee for two months and could pay it only after borrowing money from one the neighbour. The younger daughter has already reached school-going age. The youngest, their son, is nearing that age as well. Facing financial trouble, they are consciously delaying their admissions as they want to educate their children in English medium schools. His wife related that if conditions do not change in the near future, they might think of enrolling their younger daughter in a government school. About the school attended by his eldest daughter, Jatin said,

This school is not very good. My income cannot support her education in an expensive school. Government schools are not good because they do not teach anything. Our parents did not know the value of English education and enrolled us in whatever school was there (government school). There is no value of education obtained from government schools. To get a good job one requires education from the English medium schools. State schools are not valued for a good job...

Conversations with him suggest his choice is influenced by the collective aspiration of the community that lays emphasis on education and his own exposure to these research institutes where he works with English educated researchers who draw much higher salary, enjoy security and prestige than him. He is not only conscious of the value of education but the quality (medium/type of school) of education which can only be received in English medium schools.

Case 2

Sangeeta (Kurmi, U.P): Sangeeta, mother of four children, has put her two daughters in a government school situated in the settlement and her sons in a private school. She is from Allahabad, U.P., and shifted to Delhi with her husband after marriage. She stays with her husband and their four children a three-storey house. They own another house in a relatively affluent locality which is rented out. They did not rent any floor of the house they stay in to give ample space and silence for their children to study. She is a housewife and her husband works as an accountant for three small private firms based in the city. About the difference in schools attended by her daughters and sons, she says

I do not discriminate between daughter and son. I want them all to get good education and job. At the time when my daughters were of school age there were rarely any private schools present in the colony, and these are coming up only now. By the time my sons reached school-going age, private schools upto class 8th were already established in the colony. After class 8th I had to shift them again to a government school. We do not want to hold back expenses for their education. I fulfill all their wishes expecting only that they should study well and get a good government job.

Sangeeta informs that in their community education has attained a crucial value for both men and women. Presently, many women of the Patel community have started working in government posts, and they are no longer confined to domestic responsibilities. Financial independence of women is a matter of prestige in the community. Women are no longer disdained for stepping out for paid work. Like several caste groups, Patels have caste associations in the city for socio-political

mobilisation of members of the community. There is an NGO in Ashanagar working for the uplift of the Patel community. Members of the NGO also serve community leaders. These community leaders reckon lack of education as one of the causes of their backwardness. To gain the socio-political prominence they urge community to educate and prepare their children for government jobs. Men of the community expect well-educated brides working in well-paid government jobs. Girls are not married at an early age and parents invest in the education of their daughters. Sangeeta has been delaying the marriage of her eldest daughter because she wants her to become economically independent before marriage. Also, it is easier to find an appropriate match if she is working in a government job. Newly wedded brides of their families are employed as teachers and working in banks. Equally, she desires working women as wives for her sons, something that is possible only if they get good jobs. Apart from her youngest son, who is in the first year of B.A., all her children completed graduation and are preparing to appear for competitive exams. Her elder daughter completed post-graduation in Hindi, then a two-year B.Ed course from Indraprastha University and has qualified CTET (Central Teacher Eligibility Test). Her younger daughter has completed graduation in commerce and is preparing for SSC exams. Her elder son has completed B.Sc and is preparing for UPSC exams. Within the family they have a doctor and an IAS officer serving in Delhi. The role of the extended family is evident in terms of the investment of money and time in education. Like Jatavs, the collective aspiration of the Patel community induces individual families to invest in the education and prolong the search for a spouse.

In comparison to education in vernacular medium local government schools (Municipal and state aided schools) English medium education in private school is regarded superior. Despite this, many of the residents are forced to enrol their children in government schools. Improvement in school infrastructure (school buildings and teachers) and educational policies (free education, uniform, mid-day meals) are the reasons for which enrolment in public schools are rationalised. Residents also argue that schools and medium of education is irrelevant if students are hard working. State initiatives like the formation of School management committee⁷⁰ mandated under RTE adds that earlier non-transparent government run schools are becoming participatory

⁷⁰ A SMC is a sixteen-member committee comprised of 12 parents of those children enrolled in the school, member of a local NGO working on education rights, MLA of the area, one school teacher and principal of the school. SMC decides collectively about how and where the allocated funds be spent, members of the committee can go to school for inspection.

and transparent. Those able to access better schools for their children remain sceptical of the education imparted in the state-run schools. The settlement is not devoid of school dropouts. Underperformance, lack of interest and financial inadequacy continue to be the main reasons for dropping-out of the school.

Tribulations suffered by parents in their attempt to secure admissions and sustain children in 'quality schools' reflects an aspiration for upward mobility among the parents. Commenting on difficulties involved in examining aspirations, Reisman (1953) writes, "aspiration refers to a future time period and consequently there often is no opportunity to check upon the reliability of a subject's aspiration". Thus, an inquiry into the contemporary educational choices/trends hints only at the aspiration for upward mobility and not its actual realisation. An illustration of contemporary trends of educational choices made by parents/families/community merely suggests probable direction of mobility and not its final attainment. Admission in a specific school is not the individual choice made by the children but affected by community/neighbourhood, and therefore, education as an aspiration can be regarded as a collective goal of the community (family, caste, religion).

4.6 Conclusion

Tracing the relationship between aspirations and education, this chapter shows their role and inter-connection in intergenerational mobility. It signals that mere relocation to the urban centres does not bring socio-economic mobility. Administratively categorised into different settlement types based on legal status, tenure, and distribution of state resources, cities are not homogeneous spaces offering equal opportunities to attain mobility. State-instituted classification of settlements thus not only manages population diversity through clustering into administrative categories but also perpetuates socio-economic inequalities by reinstating hierarchies of caste/class within the city by allocating resources disproportionately. Inhabited space in a city gives a hint to the class of an individual or group(s) residing in it. A close attention to the political-economy of the colony shows relations between the space, identity, aspiration/social mobility, generation of workforce or and reproduction of the class/caste.

Ashanagar is a resettlement colony and the dwellers are largely from lower castes. Largely, the resettled poor working classes are also positioned at the bottom of caste hierarchy. The state government allocated small piece of plots and supplied basic amenities gradually and inadequately but it continued to overlook thriving illegal

activities and its implication on those surrounded by the criminalised climate of the settlement. In addition, municipal and government schools always remained of inferior quality. The vastly uneducated and semi-educated residents of the settlement failed to motivate students to pursue education seriously. Impoverished schools, substandard education, near absence of appropriate role models and overcrowded settlement formed an unstimulating environment where education did not become an important priority. Municipal and state schools clearly limit the range of higher education choices. The instances of people aspiring or pursuing white collar jobs are far and few. Quality of education and lack of information limits a vast majority of students to specific disciplines. Ill equipped to compete with the English educated upper class (caste) 'meritorious' students, they tend to get clustered in low ranking regular colleges & distance learning, or obtain vocational degrees from ITI in higher education. The degrees obtained from these courses are undervalued and unpromising in employment market. It prepares for inferior and unskilled jobs in the private sector which are underpaid. Dropping out of education at various levels is also a recurring outcome.

The relationship between aspiration and education has begun to transform with the intervention of various state policies importantly Right to Education Act (RTE), 2009, collective aspirations of the community, individual efforts of a family to provide quality education and flourishing English medium private schools in and around the settlement. RTE, by making education a fundamental right, mandates 'free and compulsory education for children between the age of 6 to 14 years'. The Act has allowed the admission of children from disadvantaged socio-economic background in state recognised schools which includes English medium private schools. Various strategies employed by parents to admit their children in reputed English medium and central schools reflects the emphasis on earlier neglected education for an improvised future. However, the urge to educate their children in the best schools is moderated by economic capacity. Aspirations of communities like Jatavs and Kurmis center around education for upward mobility. However, the emphasis on education is mediated by multiple factors, and it only spells the possibility of occupational/economic mobility, but does not guarantee it.

Chapter V

Intergenerational Mobility: Occupational Aspirations, Struggles, and Realities

Introduction

To understand intergenerational mobility among Dalits this chapter discusses primarily occupational aspirations and engagement of youth belonging to different caste groups. As explained in the previous chapter, mobility is assumed on locational advantage of the city which offers, both, better educational and occupational opportunities. Preceding chapter focused on educational aspirations and achievement of youth. It demonstrates that mere location does not unquestionably ensure mobility. Mobility also depends on aspirational imagination and necessitates various forms of capital for its accomplishment. Continuing the discussion on mobility, present chapter focuses on occupational aspirations and engagements of youth.

In the village settings, *jajmani* system offers a theoretical framework to identify caste, caste inherited occupations, socio-ritual location of a caste, associated obligations and status. Theoretical caricature of the system allows to discern departures from the inherited caste occupation. Empirical accounts have shown that the changing material conditions of agrarian economy and occupational opportunities in non-agrarian economy, mainly in cities/towns, have weakened the link between caste and occupation. Thus, the relationship between caste and occupation is mutable. Further, it has been brought to notice that even in agrarian economy/rural areas, division of labour does not replicate the order prescribed by the *jajmani* system. In agrarian economy, relations are significantly organised around the question of land. Apart from the caste position, ownership and non-ownership of land defines the distribution of power, resources, relationship between different castes and class position. In the absence of relations organised around land, in non-agrarian economy of city, what should be the locus of understanding the arrangement of social relations based on caste and class? Villages, of course, are not the natural enclaves of caste system, but certainly it is a site to which we owe our understanding of the system. Division of labour, based on religious and economic aspects, in villages largely explains the persistence and change in life experiences of different caste groups. In trying to trace relationship between

caste and occupation in intergenerational mobility, metamorphosis of caste in urban space is examined here. Focus on intergenerational changes in occupation is aimed to assess the economic mobility of caste groups and class formation. This chapter focuses on occupational aspirations, employment opportunities, occupational engagement and nature of occupation under the neo-liberal economy. It explores relationship between caste, class and occupation. Further, role of networks and strategies devised by the youths to secure employment in the modern economy are also explored to map the inter-generational mobility among various caste groups residing in Ashanagar.

5.1 From Status quo to Change: Nexus between Caste and Occupation

In the caste system, division of labour referred as *jajmani* system manifests the principle of hierarchy and separation. The *jajmani* system ascertains ascribed occupational roles, inter-caste relations, economic exchanges, and hierarchical position of each caste group within the caste system based on occupation. According to structuralist analysis, different caste groups bound to each other with a set of privileges and obligations as *jajman*⁷¹ and *kamin*⁷² (Beidelman 1959) have specified occupational roles which keeps the system unviolated. ‘The needs of each are conceived to be different, depending upon the caste, on hierarchy, but this fact should not disguise the entire systems *orientation towards the whole* (Dumont:1988:105, emphasis original). For the proponents of structural-functionalist approach, performance of religiously ordained caste specific occupations are seen essential for self-preservation of the system that is oriented to meet collective needs of the society. Primacy to collective needs elides involuntary entry into the system of relations characterised by inherent exploitation, unequal distribution of material and power. It also ignores the scope of change within/of the caste structure. Thus “caste not only prescribes for each person a hereditary occupation but discourages his attempts to surmount the occupational barriers existing for his groups” (Driver 1962:26). Benign structuralist approach to the

⁷¹ In *jajmani* system ‘*jajman*’ refers to the employer/patron who employs members of other castes to perform ritual and secular services. Etymologically *jajman* has come from Sanskrit word *yajamana* meaning ‘he who has a sacrifice performed’ (Dumont 1999: 97-98). Religiously then *Jajman* refers to a person who hires a Brahmin to perform sacrifice for the payment of fee. However, Beidelman (1959) pointing at the exploitative nature of *Jajmani* system shows hiring by *jajman* is not limited to fulfil the religious obligations. As *jajman* owns economic power and have superior caste position they employ members of inferior castes to serve regular secular works.

⁷² *Kamin* also known as *praja* refers to those hired by *Jajmans* to provide either secular or religious services.

caste system did not go unchallenged. The 'hard facts' from the empirical accounts deviated from the Dumotian model of the caste system (Leach 1971 cf. Madan 2014: 48). Affirming the existence of service castes offering specialised services to their patrons on regular basis, empirical accounts point that for survival most caste groups depend on caste neutral occupation, agriculture. Non-owners of land, frequently ex-untouchables, hire out labour as agricultural labourers to meet the subsistence needs. Thus, an overemphasis on the religious prestations of division of labour views "caste as an allocator of occupations is to exaggerate, since for the most part and for most of history most of the population has been confined to agriculture" (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2009). Redundancy resulting from economic unsustainability of caste occupations led shift away from villages to find alternate means of livelihood in off-farm activities, in towns and cities.

Field descriptions have brought forth the impact of external forces on village structures and mutability of caste (Bailey 1957; Beteille 1965; Harriss 1982). Entry of scholars in the countryside soon shifted focus from the status quo suggested by *jajmani* system to changes in village structures induced by external interventions of state policies and emerging politics. Implications of external forces of land reforms, mechanisation of agriculture under the green revolution, legislations against caste-based violence, and rise of Dalit politics in rural transformation were studied extensively. Scholarly interest in village studies was not limited to the caste question. Agrarian policies aimed to enhance the agricultural productivity and redistribution of land drew attention to the 'classic' agrarian question (Bernstein 2006). The 'classic' question ensued an analysis of mode of production (force of production and relations of production). For these studies, agrarian transition and agrarian question, the distribution of land, forces of production, and relations of production formed the important unit of analysis. Agrarian mode of production cautions against the dualism of economy and ideology of caste structure. Examining the political economy within which the caste structure is embedded underlines high degree of congruence between the ideology of caste and mode of production. Patron-client relationship has not eroded with the introduction of technology (Harriss 1982). Byres (1981) argues that introduction of 'new technology' in agriculture, land reforms, protectionist state policies for peasants, has accelerated class differentiation in the countryside where ownership of land/force of production still lies in the hands of upper caste peasantry. By using the state policies directed at agricultural growth and political machinery, agrarian class which largely

overlaps with upper caste peasantry emerged as ‘class for itself’. Whereas, agrarian labour, mainly Dalits, remain untouched by agrarian reforms and policies. Lerche (1999) notes little impact of land redistribution in improving the conditions of landless Dalit labourers. Mechanisation of agriculture also induces outmigration of Dalits to the cities in off farm employment. By loosening rigid patron-client relationship, outmigration of rural underclass from the villages transforms the “wholly unfree labour relation into various degree of unfreedom” (ibid:190). For many village studies, caste was not the only analytical category to understand the organisation of villages or the caste system itself. With focus on agrarian structure and relations, class became another analytical tool to comprehend rural realities. The ownership of land and relations organised around it became crucial to scrutinise the organisation of villages and rural changes.

In contrast, the obvious link between caste and occupation has been weak and obfuscated in the non-agrarian ‘modern occupational system’ (Beteille 1991) of cities. The link seems to be lost in modern economy because modern occupations are unrelated to caste based traditional occupations performed in villages. In India, traditional occupations based on caste are not open to all. They are ascriptive in nature and their occupational prestige is determined by the position in caste hierarchy. Whereas, modern occupations are open therefore can be achieved by anyone⁷³. The ranking of modern occupation is ascertained by income and social prestige accorded to it. Incongruence in the occupational economy of cities and village tends to segregate people in caste unrelated occupations in the cities (Driver 1962). Nevertheless, it does not imply the association between caste and occupation has eliminated completely. Even in modern space, persistence of links between caste and occupation has been noted for certain caste groups like Balmikis (Prasad 2000; D’Sousa 2005)⁷⁴. However, transmutation of caste in cities that makes tracing the link between caste and occupation elusive (Thorat and Newman 2007; Froystad 2010; Roberts 2016).

In this larger context of the complexities and elusiveness of tracing the link between caste and occupation in urban spaces, the rest of this chapter engages in

⁷³ Of course, conditions apply for the occupational achievement in the city. In the socially stratified society based on caste, religion, region, gender and class etc. not everyone is equal. Not only material resources are distributed are unequally, the access to resources and opportunities are influenced by the intersecting social identities.

⁷⁴ Paul D’Souza (2005) doctorate work provides an elaborate account of the life of the community in Ahmedabad city, Gujarat.

understanding the relationship between caste, occupation, and intergenerational mobility in Ashanagar. The attempt is flesh out if and how caste determines occupational achievement and status in Ashanagar and the ways in which Dalit youths negotiate this link.

5.1.1 Occupation and Caste: Initial Settlers in the Settlement

i. Men

In pre-liberalised India, the state was the chief employment provider as most public enterprises were under its control. Most of the initial allottees, and their children were/are state employees working in various state departments⁷⁵. These employees largely performed manual jobs, worked at the lower rung of the job hierarchy, chiefly serving in the Group D. The state, then, required manual labourers to aid it in the task of laying down infrastructure and ensuring sanitation of the city. Demand for manual labour was supplied by settled and new migrants reaching to the city from villages of neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab, Bihar and distant states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Non-state employees worked in private companies and factories. Others are self-employed as shopkeepers, contractors, electricians, plumbers, auto-drivers and labourers/masons. Those who purchased plots, houses or are living on rent in the colony mainly constitutes the non-state workforce. A majority of Muslim residents were/are either self-employed or worked in private sector.

ii. Women

Unlike most men of the first-generation settlers, women worked in private informal jobs, only exception is women of the Balmiki community. Most Balmiki women were/are state employees working in the MCD and other state offices. Non-Balmiki working women, irregularly, engaged in house-based work/workshop employment where they worked for contractors/middlemen who collected and sold finished products in the market or to a bigger contractor. Some even reported to have worked in a local NGO and companies in vicinity. Home based work was not a regular work or source of income. It constituted an occasional income generating activity based on demand from

⁷⁵ Mostly men are/were employees of these state departments: Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking (DESU), Delhi Jal Board (DJB), Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Bhartiya Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

contractors. Present generation women continue to work from homes for the contractors of petty goods. Women, mainly from UP and Rajasthan, alternated between their village establishment and the city. The alternation was mainly to tend the fields and family living in village. Investing savings back in village to build house, purchasing land, trees and cattle, many initial settlers of the colony took their settlement in the city as temporary. On their arrival in the colony only allotted land amidst vast tracts of forest awaited them. State supply of basic services/infrastructure did not reach immediately. It reached after several months of establishment.

iii. Links between Caste(s) and Occupation

Caste and occupation links are distinctively intact among the Balmiki community. Most members of the community are employed as sanitation workers in MCD and other departments. Members of the community are either permanent employees or work on contractual basis. In the settlement pig rearing and selling of its flesh are exclusively done by the community members. Desiring employment security, some non-Balmiki Dalits appear willing to work in MCD but are unable to secure a job over which the community enjoys monopoly. Others in the settlement aspiring for a government job, admire the courage of Balmikis and express inability to perform the nature of work done by the community. Apart from monopoly over MCD jobs, Balmikis in the colony are also employed as teachers, work and own NGOs, and own business enterprises. Many from the community hold political positions as ward councillors and MLA. Politically influential, the community constitutes upper class of Ashangar.

Apart from Balmikis, Khatiks (SC) and members of Muslim community own meat shops in the area. Traditionally, among Muslims, Qureshis who are administratively categorised as OBC, and Khatiks slaughter and sell animal meat (Ahmad 2014). Pork is not sold in shops owned by Muslims and Khatik residents. In Islam, pig is considered blasphemous and among Hindus, including Dalits, the animal is considered defiling. Contact with the animal and its consumption risks the loss of caste among Hindus. Therefore, Balmikis who rear, sell and consume pork meat are accorded the lowest position in the caste hierarchy. Further, “there are specific caste and religious strictures regarding meat which further categorise mutton shops into halal and jhatka shops... Halal is the process of slaughtering as per the Islamic Shariat... The jhatka method is the preferred process of slaughtering for Hindus and a mandatory requirement for Sikhs” (Ahmad 2014). The meat shops are accessed by residents based

on their religious beliefs. So shops selling pork meat are accessed largely by the members of the Balmiki; the customers of the Muslim meat shops hail from the same community and; Khatik meat shops generally have non-vegetarian Hindu clients.

One of the locally powerful/influential family of Yadavs rear cows and sell the milk. They occupy a public space by raising cattle shed which is resented by the neighbours. This occupation of space is not objected for the fear of ensuing an aggressive confrontation. Occupation of public space by those dealing with animals is common, so is the resentment of the neighbours not sharing the similar occupation or identity. Unhindered occupation of the commons and its commercial exploitation does speak of the nexus between the 'owner', significant officials, and politicians. In the absence of locally powerful nexus such occupation can easily be challenged by the vexed neighbours.

Several conspicuous and big shops of hardware, wholesale shops of construction material, sweet, confectionaries, jewellery shops and medical shops are owned by Aggarwals, Guptas and Goyals. They are the trading caste, who have arrived in late 1980s and early 1990s. They have purchased the houses and reside in Ashanagar. Also, some of the owners only own shops in the area but stay in different settlements. Beside the trading caste, Balmikis and Muslims own and run several shops. Muslim owned shops lie mainly around areas near Blocks that are predominantly inhabited by them.

Bairwas, ex-untouchable, from Rajasthan were mainly attached labourers in the villages. They worked as agricultural labourers. Untouchable status of Bairwas derives from the work of carrying and disposing dead cattle on the command of rural overlords. Their caste occupation also involved breaking stones and construction. Reintroduced to the caste occupation as contractors and masons, Bairwas in the city retained relation with construction related work as government employees and construction labourers.

In Ashanagar, some of the residents practice caste ascribed occupations in the city. Engagement in caste unrelated occupations is observed across the caste groups. Tenacity of caste-occupation is neither static nor absolute. Occupational differentiation is palpable across the caste groups, except the task of cleaning and scavenging which continues to be performed by the Balmikis. Broadly, "caste as determinant of occupation is clearly on wane" (Saberwal 1973:236). The first-generation settlers were/are government employees worked in lower rungs of the departments. Having introduced to the formal education, second and successive generations are

educationally more qualified than their parents. Higher degrees were expected to reward the holders better job opportunities and outcomes, preferably in public sector. Entering into labour-market by early 1990s, youth were witnessing the beginning of new era in Indian economy ushered by economic reforms of 1991 where role of the welfare state from most sectors of public sphere was shrinking and transforming from the role of employment provider to regulator of the economy. The gradual and unanticipated shift from welfare state to neo-liberal economy has implications for all. It changed investment orientation and employment goals to adapt in the newly emerging liberalised economy. Since the introduction of economic reforms and adoption of neo-liberal policies, the size of Indian middle class has increased to 25-30 per cent of total population (Jodhka and Prakash 2016). This is the higher estimate of the growth in the size of the middle class, a lower estimate suggests the growth between 5-6 per cent of the total population (ibid). By investing in the professional degree of their children, this class was quick to respond to the changing economic conditions and perhaps the largest beneficiary of the structural changes induced by the neo-liberal policies of nineties (Fernandes and Heller 2006). The large population of Ashanagar falls under low to middle income groups.

5.2 Neoliberal Economy: Emerging Class and Nature of Employment

While, 'rethinking on economic policies began in late eighties' (Ahluwalia 1997) it was in early 1990s India initiated comprehensive structural reforms and became part of globally expanding neo-liberal economy. Even before India, several countries since 1970s, either voluntarily or involuntarily, by readjusting and realigning their economic policies integrated with the neo-liberal economy. On neoliberalism Harvey (2005:2) writes,

A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.

The theory advances that individual freedom is supreme and should not be sacrificed for the collective welfare of the society. In fact, it contends that "social goods can be maximised by maximising reach and frequency of market transactions" (ibid:3). The emphasis on maximisation underlines that equality for all is not a cardinal ideal

that the theory strives to achieve. Impact of neoliberal economic policies has been discussed critically, importantly for its role in creating corporate oligarchs and widening socio-economic inequality (Harvey 2005; Breman 2016). One of the most discussed effect of neoliberalism has been on the occupational systems and class structures. According to Harvey (2005) “while neo-liberalisation may have been about the restoration of class power, it has not necessarily meant the restoration of economic power to the same people”. In India, pauperism characterising the increasingly impoverished underclass and the expansion of new middle class with its new markers of status has received the attention of scholars (Breman 2016; Fernandes and Heller 2006). Further, Guy Standing (2011) argues that the economic transformation occurring globally is producing a new class of workers which he terms as precariat class. Evolving a seven-ranked global class structure—Elite, Salariat, Proficians, Working-class, Precariat, Unemployed and Social unfits—he views precariat class as a dangerous class (Standing 2011:7-8). Originating from the uncertain economic and social conditions of new economy, its formation poses a serious threat to democratic values as the class is gullible to fascist political demagogues. According to him precariat class is in making and has yet not achieved a definite form. The people belonging to precariat class, “are in a status that offers no sense of career, no sense of secure occupational identity, and few, if any, entitlements to the state and enterprise benefits that several generations of those who saw themselves as belonging to the proletariat or salariat had come to expect as their due” (ibid:24). Basically, precariat class is chiefly formed by those who work in short-term temporary jobs lacking occupational identity and without state securities which is received by the state employees.

Retreat of state from its welfarist role and economy has accelerated the formation of precariat class. Nearly 92 per cent of Indian workforce earns its livelihood from informal employment (ILO 2017) with only 6.5 per cent of the workforce is employed in formal sector employment which implies formal stable jobs with social securities. ILO report (2017) on Indian labour market update notes that the share of workers in unorganised sector has declined to 82.2 per cent in 2011-12 from 86.3 per cent in 2004-05. But the share of informal workers in organised sector has increased

drastically⁷⁶. The labour market of liberalised Indian economy is characterised by increasing informality and occupational uncertainty. In 2002, ILO broadly defined informal economy that included, “both what the organisation used to classify as the ‘informal sector’ as well as non-formal employment in formal sector firms” (Lerche 2012). Informal employment encompasses: self-employment in the informal economy, unpaid family workers within commodity chains, employees without proper contract in the formal sector firms, workers employed through work contractors in formal sector firms etc (ibid). According to ILO world employment and social outlook report, globally by 2019 total 193.6 million people will be unemployed. The report suggests despite the robust economic growth around 77 per cent workers will be engaged in vulnerable jobs of poor quality and lower incomes caused by high informality. Of this, India will have 18.9 million unemployed constituting 9.76 per cent of such population worldwide (ibid). At present unemployment rate in the country is 5 per cent (The Ministry of Labour and Employment 2017-18). According to the survey report on employment-unemployment conducted by labour bureau in 2015, “at the all India level about 77 per cent of the households were reported to be having no regular wage/salaried person”⁷⁷. The overall employment for the country is between 3.4-3.5 per cent and it is estimated to increase from 10 per cent to 10.7 per cent for youth between the age of 15-24 years. The report on youth employment-unemployment scenario (Vol II, Labour Bureau 2015-16) estimated total labour force participation among youth aged between 18 to 29 around 45.2 per cent. Unemployment at all India level among the age group was 10.2 per cent (ibid). The chief findings of the report point that unemployment rate is higher among educated youth possessing graduate and above degrees, whereas it is lower among less educated youth. Under this broader employment situation question of intergenerational mobility is examined here. Amidst the proliferating informality in labour market and contrary to emphasis laid on self-entrepreneurship by government a youth survey conducted in collaboration by CSDS-

⁷⁶ According to the report (ILO 2017) in organised sector share of contract labour has increased from 15.6 per cent at the end of 1990s to 34.7 per cent in 2011-12. Also 79 per cent non-agricultural wage workers had no written contract.

⁷⁷ The sample for the survey was derived from all the districts of each states and UTs of the country. The survey conducted by Labour Bureau in 2015-16 is titled as ‘report on fifth annual report on employment and unemployment survey’. The report is published in four volumes under different titles. Total household sample size of the survey was 1,56,563 including both rural and urban places. Among the key findings of the survey total labour force participation rate (LFPR) was estimated 50.3%. Also, LFPR was found considerably lower among females than males.

KAS (2016) shows that 65 per cent of Indian youth wants a government job. The survey shows only 7 per cent of the sample youth expressed desire to work in private jobs and merely 19 per cent are interested in self-enterprise. A majority of employment aspiring youth seeks stability and certainty of employment, preferably in a government job. With only 6.5 per cent workforce employed in formal sector popular employment desire of youth appears inconceivable.

In contrast to state employment, avenues for employment has diversified under the neo-liberal economy but its demand for flexibility has led to the informalisation of employment relations even in formal firms (Lerche 2012; Sanyal and Bhattacharyya 2009). The job descriptions in manufacturing, service sector or in government departments suggests a significant proportion of youth works in informal employment of formal/organised sector. Jobs in private sector generally are salaried jobs and if target based then in addition to salary incentives are received. Frequently salaried jobs in private sector lack a proper contract, regular salary, and non-waged securities. Harriss-White and Gooptu (2000) note that, “most work may be unregulated by the state but the market for their labour is far from ‘unstructured’. Work is organised through social institutions of caste and gender”. They argue under the contemporary capitalist economy social identities and institutions have not lost their relevance rather economy has realigned with identities thus are responsible for the uneven distribution of profits/opportunities. Under this prevailing employment scenario occupational aspirations and opportunities available to the youth of the settlement are probed. It seeks to understand how social identity of caste, and gender mediates the economic mobility. The cohort between 15-35 years is referred as youth. The maximum age for youth as 35 years is based on the ‘temporal extension of youth’ (Deuchar 2014), due to the precarity of employment status resulting from protracted search for a secured salaried employment (Young and Jeffrey 2012). Youth interacted with are not essentially second generation of the settlers. Often those interacted or interviewed are living with their grandparents or plots originally were allotted to their grandparents and bequeathed to their parents. Interactions also include those who came in late eighties after the resettlement in 1976 and purchased the property as land or house.

5.2.1 Precariat Youth: Occupational Aspirations, Struggles, Strategies, and Realities

The category of employed youth is dynamic encompasses those who: study and work simultaneously, earlier working and now left their jobs to prepare for government jobs, unemployed for brief spell and resume work after few months of job search, completed education and are working, and school dropouts working in informal economy. The first two categories largely include unmarried youngsters and the later categories constitute both married and unmarried youths in Ashanagar. Broadly, they are armed with a graduate degree and a few among them continue or have completed education beyond the graduate level. It is difficult to draw a neat trajectory of smooth transition from obtaining degrees to successful attainment of desired employment of youth in Ashanagar. Their adulthood is not compartmentalised in to scholarly, employable and marriageable age. Many join the labour market before completing school education. They are mostly school dropouts employed in informal sector of the economy. Further educational aspirations of school dropouts blunted by financial hardships and disinterest in studies. There are those who discontinue education after class 12th and seek employment. A large proportion of youth, however, pursue higher education through open learning or in regular mode. Those joining regular college, after few months or a year in degree leave college to join the ranks in workforce, appearing only for examinations. Pursuing higher education through open learning is rationalised economically on the ground of utilising weekdays for earning income, honing skills and procuring diploma certificates.

i. State Employment

The CSDS-KAS youth survey (2016) conducted in 19 Indian states reports almost 65 per cent youth desire a government job. It underlines a large proportion of surveyed youth prefer stability of job over salary. Likewise, in the settlement many youngsters desire a secure state employment over a job in private sector. They take coaching to prepare for various government examinations like Staff Selection Commission (SSC), Institute for Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS), Combined Defence Services (CDS), Railways, Delhi Police (DP) etc. Within the settlement and outside in a nearby coaching hub of the city many youngsters attend coaching classes to secure employment in government jobs. Many liquidate preparation after completing the coaching and enter or resume job in private sector. As only preparation does not guarantee any security of employment. It is commonplace that advertisement of vacancies for posts are delayed for more than a year. Infact, in several state, vacancies

are advertised after a hiatus of over five years or even worst twenty five years. The duration between preparation till the final appointment is a long and uncertain. Even after appearing in the exam, results are not declared immediately for the next stage. Fear of being eliminated at each stage keeps the aspirant anxious about the final results. It was reported that many candidates who cleared SSC exam held in 2016 did not receive appointment letter till September 2018. The results of the exam were announced in February 2018 implying that those appeared in the exam awaited results for nearly two years. Such delays are not exceptional or unheard of.

In the settlement, not all the families can support a non-earning, primarily, young male member for an uncertain period. Although they continue to reappear in the exams but without adequate preparation. After the termination of coaching classes only few among youth, whose family income can afford a non-earner despite repeated failures, continue to prepare and appear in the exams. Family's supporting children in protracted and uncertain endeavour of gaining secured government job also provide a suitable environment for studies in the home. In some instances, youngsters do group study in house of one of the peers. However, they admit those who are serious, prepare independently and avoid group studies. Most preparing for government exams study in own house or of friend. Few, to avoid domestic distractions, go to study in public libraries near to the settlement. Among many who prepare and appear in government exams only miniscule number clear exams successfully (only two known to me cleared the exam during the fieldwork).

ii. Skilling

“In the post-liberalisation and structural adjustment phase in India the problem of unemployment is sought to be resolved through skill training and education of workers” (Singh 2003:3271). Skill development and training is not a new policy invention to resolve employment crisis and capitalise productively on demographic dividend. In post-independent India, creation of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) representing Nehruvian vision of building a modern nation, “originally designed to equip young people for specific posts in India’s public-sector industries as welders, electricians, and mechanics” (Cross 2009:358). Creation of National Skill Development Corporation in 2008 and launch of National Skill Development Mission in 2015 are all aimed to serve the same purpose of supplying skilled labour to the industries in order to aid in the economic development. Jeffrey underlines (2010:9) paradoxical situation of

contemporary globalisation wherein formerly excluded groups are able to access formal education at a time when returns from it are diminishing. Skilling the employable demography through establishing institutions and revamping vocational training policies is envisioned as an efficient way to grapple with the overabundant educated unemployed youth. It is important to note that demography drawn into state supported skill training regime are educated youth from socio-economically marginal backgrounds (Cross 2009; Ruthven 2018). Armed with undervalued vocational degrees and skills, youth find itself segregated in low wage, precariat and labour-intensive work far away from the jobs they dreamt of (ibid).

Despite the incongruence between education and expected employment, to strengthen the chances of occupational security, families invest in ITI diploma courses⁷⁸. Enroled in distance learning or dropping out from school education many utilise weekdays by equipping themselves with skills in ITIs. Aspiring for specialised professional skills, majority of youngsters remain oblivious of premier institutes—IIT, SPA and NIFD—located in the capital. With vague idea of higher professions, they enrol in diploma courses of ITI. The labour market already crowded with technical graduates from government and private engineering colleges it is hard to imagine the desired success of ITI diploma holders. Youth are not optimistic, rather they are unsure of occupational security. About their present impermanent job and attempt to secure a permanent government job they commonly remark, “*we will see what happens, we are trying*”. Mere educational degrees are not enough for securing a good remunerative job. To overcome occupational uncertainties, along with work or education, they simultaneously engage in learning employable skills. Apart from the state supported institutions, they depend on local NGOs and private institutions to acquire marketable skills. Their skill resources are heterogeneous containing certificate of computer course, a diploma from ITI, certificate of beauty course or work experience certificate. Usually youth possess multiple qualifications and employable skills. As a twenty year girl from Balmiki community pursuing graduation through distance learning tells,

I did a course in shorthand, retail, computer, stitching and English speaking. You just think of me as a customer in a shop who bought everything shown to her.

Likewise,

⁷⁸ Spread in different parts the city has total twenty government ITIs (D.TTE, 2018). In addition to government ITIs there are 37 private ITI institutes.

Gulmohar from Muslim community has completed BA program in regular. She obtained diploma in IT from NIIT. She learned stenography. At present she works on contract basis in department of heavy industries under MoHI & PE (Ministry of heavy industries and private enterprises). In addition to this she is also preparing for SSC exam.

The young participants learn vocational skills such as basic computer, stenography, stitching, parlour courses and ITI courses to improve their chances of obtaining a gainful employment. The gender dichotomy is followed in specific courses. While basic computer, ITI courses or stenography is learned by both boys and girls. Skills like stitching and beauty parlour courses are considered as feminised skills in which only girls are trained. One of the main reasons cited by girls for taking up these courses is that they are not allowed work outside. These courses, however, ensures self-reliance in the times of crisis or otherwise. Without even stepping out they can generate an income.

A phase of transition is experienced where unknown future, importantly for unmarried youngsters, can still be negotiated by acquiring educational degrees, vocational diplomas, certificate courses and preparing for competitive exams. Educational qualification is just one among the various acquired documents as a proof of knowledge and skill to secure an 'appropriate employment'.

iii. Self-employment: Tuitions

Apart from working in precariat jobs in private sector and preparing for government jobs, giving tuitions/coaching to school and college going students is one of the common forms of self-employment among youth. They continue to teach simultaneously with their studies or preparations for the government jobs. Tuition to the school and college students is widely offered by young unmarried graduate/post graduates preparing and searching a job worthy of their qualifications. They envision this self-employment as a temporary phase of their un(under)employment till they settle with a salaried government job. Here, as noted by Jeffrey (2008), unemployment and underemployment denote poorly remunerated, involuntary part-time work, with spell of unemployment. Tuition is the means for youths to earn an income that can support their educational goals and economic needs. Mostly tuitions are held within homes, some are private home tutors who go to student's house to teach. Beyond the confines of houses, coaching is also provided in formalised and commercialised set up of coaching centres.

These formalised coaching enterprises other than school/college curricula also prepare government job aspirants for the written exams and offer computer courses. Formalised coaching centres are distinct from home-based tuitions in the degree of formality it embodies. These enterprises promise to complete course in pre-fixed duration, offer packages on courses, and importantly fee structure is non-negotiable. In home-based tuitions fee is lower than what is charged in the coaching centres, delay in payment of the fee is a common complain of the tutors. Although not desired by tutors, but fee is negotiated by parents and sometimes even tutors waive the fee considering economic backgrounds of the students. Other dominant forms of self-employment encompass retails shops owned collectively by the family where members of the family attend the customers/clients. Several of them also work in private informal jobs as drivers, in hotels or as security guards.

iv. Social Networks, Vulnerabilities and Employment

Striving for secured employment youth, largely men, still in twenties appear multiple times for the government jobs. Employed either in the private sector, on contract in state offices or self-employed they all desire permanent and stable jobs. Closest one could manage to reach a state employment through contractual job with a possibility of upgradation to being a permanent employee. The variation in family backgrounds of the youth can be classified on the basis of the parental employment, caste, religion and region. Parents of most youth are either employed in government or private sector. Those among the youth whose parents held/have government jobs are economically as well as socially are better placed than their peers coming from a family of non-state employees. In the labour market scarce of state employment, proximity and access to the state departments enables state employee to get right information about the expected vacancies. The information often leads to acquisition of means, financial or human, to retain the benefits within the family. Though permanent government jobs are becoming scarce as most of the lower level labour-intensive jobs are either outsourced or are given on contract basis. Mostly it is the sons of government employee get the job on contract basis (never came across a case where attempt was to get the contractual job for daughters). It is commonly told by the parents, “*I have placed him*”. While making this claim of successfully placing their sons in a government office, they never reveal the economic cost incurred by the family in securing the job. Some of the unsuspecting participants shared that they have to pay an amount of about 3 lakhs to

fetch a lower level job in MCD for their son. Under intense struggle over government jobs, effectiveness of social network depletes with the increasing distance from the facilitator (Davis 2006). Beneficiary of the contractual government jobs thus are closest kin, mostly sons. Devoid of social security benefits and better pay, contractual jobs in government offices are sought as it is expected to get regularised into permanent position after serving some years on the job. Although majority of youth desire well-paying permanent job, preferably a government job. But they remain apprehensive of middlemen promising a secure government job in return for money. They desist to approach for the fear of deceit and losing money to the middlemen. Stories of fraudulent middlemen are narrated to describe reluctance to reach out to them. Youth whose parents are/were non-state employees believe that without any connection in government offices it is nearly impossible to get job even on contract basis. However, not all state employees manage to get either contract or permanent position for their close kin members and relatives. Widely, most youth work in private sector despite parents being (ex)government employees.

For job search and employment, social networks are relied dominantly in private sector. Employees working in obscure or prominent workplaces have easy access to information about the imminent vacancies which is shared among friends, relatives, and acquaintances. Hiring at lower level position in private sector is commonly done on the basis of 'reference'. Referees could generally be incumbent or former employee of the workplace. Not anonymous neutral persons, referees tend to be a friend or relative of the job aspirant. Hiring new employee through known networks mitigates risk for the employer and moderate recruitment requirement for the job seeker. Youngsters in the field not only share the influence of their social network in successfully attaining the job but some lament at the loss of a job because of social networks channelised by the incumbent. Employing social networks of—kinship, region and religion—to acquire job is not new, the role of regional and caste ties is well documented in studies of industrial relations (Bremner 1999; Panjwani 1984). Persistence of social networks in gaining employment in the private sector goes against the ethos of the new economy which is believed to be led by the principle of merit not on social identities. Mushrooming consultancies and job portals draw suspicion of job aspirants, similar to those aspiring for government jobs, who fear treachery by modern intermediaries. Real and imagined, narratives of deception by the portals and consultancies circulate widely in the settlement. Newer forms of technology mainly

mobile phones and apps are used by the youth to share the information about new vacancies or examinations for the government jobs.

v. Discourse on Reservation

A discussion on reservation animates otherwise denied existence of caste in modern public life of the city. Political articulation of caste through reservation makes evident that it is not limited merely to realm of tradition guided by Hindu religious scriptures. Apart from signalling political existence, reappearance of caste through discourse on reservation uncovers relentless contestation over its existence. Final fate of the reservation policy, whether it should be continued or revoked, is argued vehemently.

A large proportion of contemporary workforce in the settlement is employed in private sector jobs of formal and informal nature. After receiving formal education and brief struggle to secure a government job, regardless of caste most youth settle for a job in private sector. This evenness in nature and sector of employment springs from the expansion of private sector and contractualisation of state jobs. Hiring in private sector is not bound by the principle of positive discrimination thus making reservation increasingly irrelevant. However popular opposition to reservation around efficiency and merit remain forceful; it has not eroded in the changed times where share of government jobs has reduced drastically. Defenders of affirmative action are largely Dalits who have failed to be benefitted from the positive discrimination in terms of procuring secured state jobs or white-collar jobs in the new economy. Their integration in the new economy is uncertain like the upper caste opponents who also have failed to secure a stable employment. Defenders and opponents of reservation are not homogenised as Dalits and upper castes. Discourse on reservation is variegated both among Dalits and upper caste.

In varying contexts of discussion and interviews it was Dalits as opposed to upper caste who supported affirmative action of reservation system. They demand continuation of reservation policy as rightful entitlement to attain socio-economic and political equality that has historically been denied by the caste system. Sharing humiliation experienced by his father, Dinesh, from Balmiki caste, remarks:

Who says there is no caste. My father works in MCD. While working, if he is thirsty and asks for water he is given water in the plastic bottles, not in glass. Even that bottle is not taken back rather it is returned to him or discarded. Who do you think these people are? Of course! upper-castes. If this is the situation

when we have laws and reservation, imagine what will happen to us if it is removed.

Ramesh, is in early twenties, from Jatav caste says,

Reservation should continue till we achieve equality. Relaxation in marks and age is our right not charity. We have not been given a chance to educate ourselves. Now we entering in to higher education how can we be expected to compete with those (upper castes) who have used every opportunity for their advancement.

Similarly, Romesh from Bairwa caste,

Yes, reservation should continue. It does help us in getting government job. Our support to reservation is not limited to benefits, it is a channel to overcome inequality perpetuated by caste system. Why only SCs are hounded for reservation when it is also extended to OBCs and STs. Reservation should not be revoked. If it is terminated Dalits will again be pushed to backwardness and exploitation. Without reservation Dalits will never be able to attain equality. Why should we not get reservation are we uneducated or undeserving?

Manoj belongs to Jatav caste says,

We need both, laws to protect us from upper caste atrocities and reservation to better our social standing. As most administrative and political positions are monopoly of upper caste. Before laws for us for many years Dalit women have been raped and Dalits were set afire in countryside but media never reported such incidents...because upper castes wield power even in media and politics.

The need of the policy is rooted in fear of losing level playing field and mundane experiences of caste within and outside the settlement. It also underlines monopoly and dominance of caste Hindus in important economic and political positions. Exclusion of Dalits from these spaces and position enables maintenance of power relations in secular domains. Affirmative actions are viewed as important tool of inclusion and alter power relations. Narrating experiences of violence and discrimination not encountered by them personally, they emphasize on the need for affirmative actions. In varying contexts of group discussions and interviews, Dalits supported positive discrimination through reservation policy. However, view on reservation is not unanimous among Dalits, it is disputed even among Dalit youth. As one participant from Koli caste says,

I am against every form of reservation. I don't believe in reservation, I don't want to get reservation. Everyone is capable of achieving everything, to do anything. It is not necessary to do anything exclusively for SC/ST or minorities...I am absolutely against it. I am a SC.

A 28-year Balmiki youth working in a private company says,

What is the use of reservation? See I am working in a private job. We don't even get government jobs, so what will we do with reservation? And above all, others deride us for having reservation. We don't have jobs but we are mocked just for reservation. Now a days, videos and messages circulate on Facebook and WhatsApp showing how without possessing any quality we misuse reservation. This I say is cyberdiscrimination. Instead of facing this regular humiliation (apmaan) government should abolish the reservation.

Discontentment with reservation among Dalit youth stems because of two reasons. First, contrary to their failure to gain a secure employment they are made to feel the burden of reservation as free riders, living off hard earned money of taxpayers. Such views which earlier were exchanged through interaction with peers is now been circulated through digital medium of Facebook and WhatsApp messages. This shift of public discrimination from more personal and controlled interactions to the digital medium was termed 'cyberdiscrimination' by one young man in the field. This has facilitated wider and faster circulation of popular discourse on reservation. He described graphic details of an image that he received on his Facebook page in which a water tap opens into the mouth of a well fed and dressed man who supposedly is a SC. While drinking water he wastes it, whereas a thin and thirsty general caste man looks on. There are pages on Facebook like *India Against Reservation* (and quota). Circulation of these messages and images through cyber medium target Dalits as undeserving beneficiaries of reservation system. Second, Dalit youths expressing displeasure over reservation are of the view that merit is not relative, irrespective of identity everyone is equally able to compete in a field that is levelled. Affirmative actions are seen as political misuse of identity. Such a view resonates the upper caste sentiments on reservation. Divisive position on reservation among Dalits is also hinged on their political beliefs and affiliations. Young Dalit supporters of affirmative action either were members of a local Ambedkar organisation (MAAS) or shared political ideologies of the BSP or INC. Similarly, upper caste members of parties like the BSP support positive discrimination for Dalits. Views were not always depended on the affiliations, independent of any affiliation views are expressed. Unsurprisingly, stiff opposition to reservation came from upper-caste residents. Like the remark of a man in his forties from Aggarwal caste highlights,

Reservation has to be abolished to annihilate caste system (jaati pratha). Government perpetuates reservation to retain political power. For the risk of losing power no political party strives to discontinue reservation system. Nobody

wants to touch the issue of reservation...caste system will not diminish soon, may be never.

A man from Brahman caste says,

It is a political matter and stays there only. It is a political ploy to garner votes which people understand. Even Dalits deny reservation, it is politicians who divide people labelling them as Dalits and general to stay in the power... Dalits want to pay taxes but government refuses to accept to keep the agenda of reservation alive (pointing that Dalits are economically prosperous and able to pay taxes and fees).

Another response from the Brahman man reiterates opposition against the reservation for Dalits:

How many seats do we have? They (SC) require to score only forty whereas we require 120 marks. Government has created this difference. According to me quality should be seen not that who is Jatav, who is Balmiki or who is Brahmin. According to quality job should be given. Reservation is wrong, it is absolutely wrong. Now look at you, you are an educated girl, you score hundred marks and a Balmiki boy who scores only thirty marks gets a job and you are sitting at home. Will you not feel bad? You will, why not? The candidate who is qualified should get the job...sometimes we think that we should also have been Jatav, that would have been good. We would have scored forty and got a job. (sly smirk on the face).

Access to education and employment in caste unrelated modern occupations is presented as evidence of non-existence of caste in the city. Dismissing caste as a thing of past, political class is blamed for dividing the society on caste basis. Opponents of positive discrimination argue that for the fear of losing electoral base political parties, in power or as opposition, are reluctant to question pertinence of reservation policy. To prove positive discrimination as a political compulsion rather than social necessity several participants claim that government imposes polices/relaxation despite being declined by Dalits. For the continuation of reservation political class is not blamed alone, Dalits are held equally responsible. Concerns are raised over compromised merit and efficiency as Dalits are seen as undeserving beneficiaries. Reservation given to Dalits is resented ignoring the changing economy of employment. Emphasis on merit, quality, and efficiency is believed as given not socially constructed. Marking Dalits as inherently lazy and shying away from hard work is argued to discontinue positive discrimination in higher education and government jobs. Delinking historical inequalities perpetuated by caste system, reservation is welcomed on economic basis. Ignoring the context, reason behind the advancement of developed countries are cited

for their firm belief in ‘merit’ not affirmative actions like reservation. Continuity of caste is recognised at apparent levels of performing caste occupations, commensality, practicing untouchability and caste relations. Caste is believed to have withered away in the ‘absence’ of its perceptibility despite caste-based perceptions against Dalits that barely changes in (in)formal conversations. Colloquial reappearance of caste goes unrecognised.

vi. Experiencing Labour Market under the New Economy

The employment trajectory of five youths of varying age and caste backgrounds is spelt out to demonstrate occupational aspirations, opportunities, spell of unemployment, sense of (im)permanence and strategies to attain stability.

Case 1: Veena, OBC (Devangar Chettiar): A New Entrant in Labour Market

Veena hailing from Tamil Nadu is from Devangar Chettiar caste (OBC). She is in early twenties. Her parents earlier owned a house in the settlement which they sold off due to financial hardships. Now they stay in a two storeyed rented house. Most people in her block are from southern states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Both of her parents are working. Her father works in Kerala house and mother is a domestic help in a nearby plush area. Veena has three sisters. Her elder sister is married, but presently she is staying with her parents in Delhi. Veena and her younger sister are studying. While her younger sister is in class 12th, Veena is pursuing graduation (BA) from DU in open learning. She tells her family could afford her education in regular mode. But she was not keen to enrol in regular college. Also, she was advised that education in regular is not so beneficial, “*it does not make any big difference*”. She chose to study through distance learning despite willingness of her parents to send her in regular college. At present, they are financially stable as both the parents and two sisters, which includes her, are earning. However, married women working as domestic help suggests the financial condition of a household in the settlement. Generally, when financial condition is poor, uneducated women seek employment as domestic help. In such households, income generation by family members are supported to stabilise financial condition and gender norms are relatively flexible for women. Thus, although she emphasized on her family’s ability to spend on regular education but her withdrawal from the labour-market could revert family to financial fragility.

Like her elder sister, Veena works in a domestic BPO, iEnergiser, in Noida sector-60. Placed in complaints department she attends both inbound and outbound calls for a Kerala based stabiliser company. She got information about the job from her paternal cousin. Her cousin told her about the new job opening in the company and asked her to attend the interview. Job is commonly searched through social networks in which kin members, friends and neighbours play a crucial role. She appeared for the interview where her reading and writing abilities were tested. In subsequent rounds, her knowledge and fluency in Kannada was tested by making her talk with those who know the language. There were three to four rounds which she cleared. She is a polyglot so can speak two regional languages, Tamil and Kannada, with flair apart from Hindi. She can also understand Malayalam and Telugu. Knowledge of multiple languages are desired and highly demanded in domestic BPOs to attend clients from different regions. As she is polyglot she gets salary higher than her co-workers who speak only two languages, Hindi and English. She tells, *“there are many who can speak Hindi and English but very few have competence and flair for other regional languages”*. In the newly emerged service sectors, nature of jobs tests soft skills of the applicants like communication, personality or other social aptitude rather than knowledge transmitted through education. As such educational qualifications are only eligibility criteria to apply for the jobs, but it is not of primary utility for the job. Display of social and cultural skills acquired from diverse agents and institutions is important to claim job in the service sector. Veena’s knowledge and command over different regional languages proves advantageous in securing job and salary higher than her colleagues. Joining the ranks of employed workforce after class 12th, her degree makes her eligible for applying the job. Knowledge and skills acquired through education is displaced by the demand for soft skills.

She views her job in the BPO as temporary. As she is planning to change the job after completing graduation. Even now she intends to leave the job but says, *“to get better salary package in the next job work experience is must. So, I will continue to work and gain work experience from this job”*. Employment is associated not only with generating income but also gaining ‘work experience’ for better job prospects in future. Work experience enhances the bargaining position of the employees. She is earning approx. 15000/month in the present job. According to her, after gaining work experience of a year or two she can even demand a raised salary from the employers in her next job. In her lane many youngsters work in BPO including in International call

centre. Despite many being employed in BPOs, working in it is derided in the neighbourhood. People deride the work as menial and unsuitable for girls.

Beside working in BPO, she is learning computer course from a computer centre in Ashanagar near her house. On returning from the office, she directly goes to attend computer class. She is learning the course to improve her chances of getting a better job within BPO sector. For youths in the settlement computer, like English language, is a panacea to secure a good job and improve economic status. Both English as linguistic capital and proficiency in operating computer is associated with success in the new economy. However, response on how the knowledge of computer or English language improves socio-economic status remains vague. As she tells, *“if one knows computer well there is scope within the BPO to rise up in the hierarchy as team leader (TL). Our team leaders tell us about opportunities and scope in the BPO which is inspiring. They tell us about their own humble beginning in the job and the gradual rise”*. She is impressed by the growth of her team leaders in the industry and convinced that one cannot get the top-notch position in job at the very beginning. Apart from honing skills for a better salary and growth in BPO, she also aspires for a government job in banking sector. One of her friend’s staying in the same block advised her to appear for the exams. She has not appeared for any exam, as it requires some preparation. Her hectic work schedule is insufficient to prepare for the exams. She commutes everyday in metro and a rickshaw to reach her workplace. No transportation is provided by the BPO. Her office hour is from 9:00 am-6:00 pm. Working hours are fixed, without weekend holidays. Although she is entitled only for one holiday in a week. She does not have time to prepare for state jobs because most of her day goes in traveling, working in BPO, and attending computer course which leaves her tired with little time to do her own work. Despite the prospects of growth, security of public sector job is preferred over the uncertainty of employment in private sector. To gain economic independence and support family, youth engage in paid employment in private sector. However, they desire to build an occupational identity in government jobs. Exigencies, obligations and aspirations keep youths linked/in touch with the occupational economy of both public and private sectors. Many, for whom government job is final goal, view their presence in private sector jobs as transient.

Case 2: Vijay, SC (Jatav): Grappling with Occupational Uncertainties

Vijay is an unmarried young man of 25-26 years. He hails from Pratapgarh district of U.P and belongs Jatav caste (SC). His grandfather was employed in DESU and father is working in DDA. Including him, they are four siblings, two sisters and two brothers, and Vijay is the eldest. He has a younger brother pursuing M.com and attending a coaching to prepare for government exams (SSC). His brother also gives tuition to school going students. Father's government job has given them a sense of stability but his retirement nearing in 2018. Now, the parents are worried about their unemployed sons.

Vijay completed graduation in Arts from regular college. He completed M.A through correspondence in IGNOU. While in school he did not plan on future he says, *"then I did not think much. My goal was just to pass twelfth class"*. After class 12th he worked for three months with a company in Noida as an assistant. After joining the college, he left the job in the company. He discontinued the job after taking admission in regular college to attend classes. His family supported him financially and did not pressure him to work. But in B.A second year he decided to earn and manage his expenses. So, he started working in a research organisation. Regardless of economic condition, young men tend to join workforce on completing school education. Quite evenly, distance learning is an obvious choice made by them to remain active in the labour market. Even young men enrolled in regular mode discontinue attending classes regularly to join the workforce. In the settlement financial 'wastage' is avoided. Attending classes regularly is deemed futile. Income generation, acquiring skills, degrees and work experience is given preference over merely attending classes regularly. Time is utilised economically, it is not spent in earning a single degree or skill at a time. Obtaining an educational degree is important, but it alone does not guarantee a secure employment in future. By gaining work experience and acquiring skills along with pursuing higher education the probability of employment security is strengthened. Also, in the city's burgeoning economy gaining an employment is not hard. The relative availability of jobs in private sectors eliminates the period of 'waiting' between education and employment. Both can be done simultaneously.

Since graduation years, he worked in various research organisations as field investigator and data entry operator. In 2013, he started working in a research institute where he is working presently. He continues to work in the institute depending upon the vacancies and requirements of the projects. For job search he uses both technology (job portals) and social networks. However, he says for information about the vacancy

and gaining a job social networks are more resourceful. In friend circles, discussion over job search and vacancies emerge frequently. The medium of informal discussions supplies information about availability of work to jobseekers in group. The informal social networks apart from supplying and circulating job related information also alleviates the formalities. A friend working or have left the job shares information about the job, its location and also refers the jobseeker to the superiors.

On the first meeting with him in 2016, he was unemployed. He was searching for a job. The next day, he was to appear for an interview for the post of data entry operator in Dwarka. He knows basic computer which he has learned from a locally famous institute. Most students have learnt basic computer from this institute situated in the settlement. In the second meeting, which was less than a week, he told me that he got job in DDA on contract basis but he was not planning to join this, as offered salary was Rs. 10,000 that is almost two third of what he was earning in his previous job at the research institutes. Finding and securing a job in private sector is not an elusive task for young men. But despite being unemployed, jobs are negotiated or declined 'if a worker is not able to realise the price of his labour power' (Singh 2003). In subsequent visits to the settlement during the fieldwork, I was informed he got work for three months. He was hired by the same research institute for which he has been working quite regularly. He was taken by the institute to scrutinise data gathered for one research projects. On my third visit to the field he was unemployed and searching for job once again. Again, within a month he was working with the same research institute. Mostly his work is impermanent in nature and he is on look-out for jobs after the completion of the projects. In the private sector, employment status of youths is never permanent. Frequently they alternate between the status of being employed and unemployed.

To resolve occupational uncertainty, youth appear in government jobs. Vijay also wants a government job. In 2012 and 2016, he appeared for railways exams, though he did not make it to the list because he obtained lesser percentage than the cut off. Waiting for the results of 2016 exams, he was sceptical of positive outcome. He says, "*If I do not get a government job, I will work in private sector. I want to work in Indian railways*". For the exam preparation, he, like many of his friends whom I met and interacted with, was going to a government job aspirant Ashit to learn English, Maths and reasoning. Ashit has cleared group A services (posted in Bangalore). Since Ashit got a job and is posted to another state, Vijay has discontinued coaching. Earlier he had plans to join a coaching soon. Since then, he did not join any coaching and has

been working in private jobs mostly in research institutes. Government job is desired by most of the youth but they are aware of the improbability of securing one. There is intense competition over a few vacancies in government jobs. Further a prolonged period is required to be spent on its preparation. Youth neither have time nor money, largely female, gradually withdraw from the preparations. They instead have alternate plans for employment. The incongruity between their occupational desire of government job and availability of jobs in private sectors prompts the youth to acquire multiple skills and experiences.

His parents do not expect any financial support from him except that he should be financially independent. Notwithstanding, he gives money at his home bearing a responsibility as an elder son of the family. A repair work was underway when I first met him at his house for which expenses were borne by him. When work is available, in two months he could earn between rupees 20000-30000, half of the amount he gives at the home. He is fond of cloths so spends a lot of money in purchasing new cloths. He tries to manage his expenses and help his family. His younger brother is preparing for government jobs and he supports his education. As he is earning, he expects his brother to concentrate on preparation and clear the exam. Preparatory coaching for the government jobs requires devotion of time and money which is not in abundance in the settlement. Family's carefully allocate funds for such 'extra' spending. Within a household, spending of the fund is determined by the gender and perceived capability of a member to succeed. Majority of those attending coaching centres are men thus the fund is skewed in favour of men.

Case 3: Deepak, General (Brahmin): The Final Job

Deepak is 28 years old hails from Basti district of U.P. He is Brahman by caste. He has two sisters who are married and staying in Delhi. He is the only son of the family. Studied in a government school in Ashanagar, he enrolled for BA (program) in a college under DU in regular mode. Though registered for the regular college, he attended college infrequently. He blames political feuds between different student organisations and frequent suspension of classes for his irregularity in college. To him college seemed a wastage of time and money therefore he searched for a job. The time has to be productive, profitable, and remunerative. So like Vijay, he also started working in a research institute during his graduation years. Subsequently for another two years he worked in real estate. With one company, he worked for one and half years as field boy

where his role was to collect documents and payment from the client. His job description as field boy also required him to show property, land, and house, to the prospective clients. For few months, he worked as a sales man for water purifier company. About the vacancy of salesperson in water Purifier Company, he got the information through a friend and he was hired for this position without any interview. For him it is the social network, mainly of friends, which helps in getting information regarding job openings. However, he also uses internet to gain job related information. About the requirement at real estate company, he got information from an employment portal. Acquaintances and social network eases entry into the job. As influence helps in relaxing/waiving the formal procedures (interview). he says using job portals mostly involve the fear of fake consultancies which charges money from jobseekers and runs away. It involves risk of losing money and being cheated by consultancies. Approaching a job through an acquaintance/friends minimise the risk and ensure help on work.

After a gap of few months he worked with another real estate company as sales person. As salesperson, his responsibility involved calling potential clients, convincing them for buying property and selling it to them. He received incentives on every successful property sale. His monthly salary was fixed and raise in the salary depended on the incentives. He gives an example of incentives, that on a successful sale of a plot costing 10 lakhs he would get 10,000 as an incentive. He worked in this company for four months after which he joined NDMC in 2014. Working in many private jobs during graduation, he developed interest in marketing and wanted to make a career in it. To this end, after completing graduation, he enrolled in MBA course in a private institute located in Faridabad. In the institute, classes were held on Sundays. He found difficult to cope with the course due to linguistic barrier. All the course books were in English and exams were conducted in the same medium which discouraged him to continue the course after first semester. In the first semester, he flunked in four courses out of five. He tells, *“pursuing MBA directly from BA was very difficult for me. It was so burdensome. I got failed in four subjects and entire course was in English. My mind is sharp in marketing also I had experience in it so I thought of obtaining MBA degree and find a good job. But my English is not that good, so I left the course”*. He had the same struggle with the language when he appeared for law entrance in DU, where question paper was in English and he prepared for the exam from Hindi textbooks. He could not clear the entrance exam for law (BALLB).

His father is an employee in NDMC, retirement is due on 2024. In 2014, he enlisted Deepak in education department of NDMC as security guard on temporary (section) basis. He is not recruited as a permanent employee, but after completing 560 working days he can qualify to register in regular muster roll (RMR) and will be upgraded as a permanent employee. He took up several private jobs before settling for his present job in NDMC. About the job in NDMC he says, *“papa got this job for me”*. He joined NDMC previously in 2010 but could not continue in the job because of regular college. Besides working for private sector and before settling for NDMC, he also has prepared and appeared for several government jobs---postman, railways, police--- but because of certain setbacks/tragedies he could not clear any of these exams. Before the exams, for the position of postman in Lucknow, paper was leaked and the exam was suspended. Again, he appeared for the physical examination for Delhi police, two applicants died there on the ground (in 5 mins they were to run 1600mts), which distracted and disturbed him. He never took coaching to prepare for these government jobs. He aspires to become a politician. He says, *“now NDMC is final as it promises more stability and an appropriate income and if I work hard, I can grow in it. Private jobs though provide a fix salary and incentives, but on failing to meet targets employers either fire or force employees to leave the job. These jobs often fail to provide either job security or social security, as they are output driven and operate on the logic of open market that strives for maintaining/augmenting personal profits”*. He prefers and now settled on a government job because it is comfortable and secure.

Case 4: Rajesh, SC (Balmiki): From Affective Labour to Self-employment

Rajesh is from Balmiki community that comes under SC category. He is from Aligarh district, U.P. He has a younger brother and a sister. Including Rajesh all his siblings are married. He stays in a joint family with his parents and brother. Married in early twenties now he is in mid-thirties. He has two sons studying in renowned private English medium school. His elder son is in class tenth and younger son studies in second standard. The family represents an upwardly mobile and prosperous family in the Balmiki community. His father is a retired employee of Times of India and mother is MCD employee. They have a two-storey house in which first and second floors are used for residential purpose. The ground floor of the house has three shops. One is rented and two shops are run by the family. One is Boutique in which his wife along with a helper sews cloths for women. The second is a grocery shop run by his father

and him. His younger brother also has two sons. Of which one goes to English medium school and the youngest son has not reached the school going age. The family has multiple sources of income, rents, shops, and salaries, which is used to educate young children in private English medium schools.

Rajesh studied from a government school in the colony. He completed BA vocational in foreign trade practice and procedure from Jamia Milia Islamia University in 2005. When he obtained a graduate degree his family and relatives were very jubilant about his academic achievement. They thought having a graduate degree will ensure a government job at a decent position. He tells because of lack of right knowledge about how to prepare and appear for the government jobs he never applied for any government job. Instead after completing graduation, he worked for a year in a travel agency and then entered into the retail sector. He started working retail sector in 2007 during, as he calls it, retail boom. Explaining about the initial boom in retail and gradual decline he tells,

Initially people were consumerist and brand conscious. There are two types of customers visiting malls one is quality conscious and second is brand conscious. Price conscious customers are drifting away from malls as they can get quality at cheap prices in flea markets of the city. Working in a mall requires a quality to identify your customer and offer choices according to their class and taste. Now most people visit malls for window shopping and watching movies not for actual shopping. In malls weekends are very important it is on these days most of the discounts and schemes are offered to attract the customers.

He also highlights the strategic hiring of women in retail sector/in malls. Feminine display soft-spoken nature. For the reception, mostly unmarried young women are hired, in fact it is a precondition for selecting woman in the sector to extract uninterrupted working hours. Strategic employment of women in other private jobs was highlighted by other participants as well. He continued to work in retail sector till 2013. In this period in retail sector he worked in more than three different shopping malls in located in Noida, Ghaziabad and Karol Bagh as sales executive. This was target based job which he thinks is good for the company as it pushes employees to work hard. After working for six years in various malls he left the job because of indefinite working hours and days. There were no holidays, not even on Saturdays and Sundays. The nature of his job left little or no time for social life. He felt life was disturbed as he had no time to spend with his children. The nature of jobs in service sectors like in call centres, in reception, salesperson in mall and real estate requires ‘performance of

affective labour' (Mankekar and Gupta 2017). Mirchandani (1999) notes that performance of emotional labour is crucial and often necessary in work that are interactive in nature. Many at young age enter in some of the service sectors thrown open by the new economy only to leave after a brief stay. The scripted performance of affective labour is linked with incentives that are granted only upon meeting the ambitious targets. Even if the job in these service sectors is satisfactory for few, it is untenable for many given the targets requiring disproportional affective labour and alienation from the social life. Realising that he will not get any good job/income beyond what he was doing, he left the job. He was fine with the salary and incentives but wanted to earn higher income. After leaving the job he rented and opened home furnishing shop in an opulent area close to the settlement. The enterprise proved unprofitable as customer footfall was less due to the location of the shop. Then he began retail supply of packaged milk which he continues to do. Also, he is a member of a Multilevel marketing (MLM) company, Vestige, which sells its products through direct marketing. In MLM a member gets dividends and gifts for recruiting new members and selling the products of the company.

Case 5: Harish, SC (Koli/Shilpkar): Caste in Quest of Job

Harish is from the state of Uttarakhand. He lives with his widowed mother, grandmother, and a younger brother. He also has a younger sister who is married. His father worked in a private limited company, Campa Cola, that closed down in 1992 due to which he lost the job. Since the job loss, he was never reemployed and died in 2010 due to ill health. After his father's job loss, to support the family his mother started working in a hardware manufacturing company in Noida where she worked for two years. Later, she got work in Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in central Delhi. She began working at YWCA at a nominal salary of INR 300 and at present her salary is around 24,000. To meet financial exigencies of the family, in addition to his mother's salary, widow pension of his grandmother, and income which Harish received from different jobs is used⁷⁹. While previous cases show occupational imageries of youth and their constant effort to secure a stable job. In this case, caste identity regularly interferes in Harish's quest for a decent job.

⁷⁹ Harish is recipient of Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship (RGNF) which is instituted for SC/ST students to pursue higher education like full time M. Phil and Ph.D. He received the scholarship to pursue Ph.D from JNU. During Ph.D he supported the family with the scholarship.

He completed school education from a government school located in Ashangar. Later, he enrolled for B.A program in regular in Delhi University (DU) where he continued M.A program in regular mode. He received admission in graduation and post-graduation under general category. Till 2010, he did not possess caste certificate. He obtained the certificate only in 2010, when he was about appear for M.Phil./Ph.D program. He appeared for Ph.D entrance exam in JNU and DU and passed both the exam. He took admission in JNU for the course.

To provide financial support to his family he worked while pursuing M.A. With other boys of his block he worked as waiter in a hotel in Noida. After two weeks he left the job and joined a manufacturing company located in Noida for a few months. Later, he worked in NGO for eight months as an assistant for a salary of 8000/month. Subsequently, he worked as a research assistant with a professor for one year. As he was receiving scholarship he did not work after joining Ph.D.

In 2016 he completed Ph.D from JNU. Only after a prolonged search of over a year and half, he got a teaching position in Uttarakhand on contractual basis in December, 2017. He tells that during job search phase he had to endure a series of moments where his identity dwarfed his academic achievements. His caste became a roadblock in his quest of obtaining a respectable job befitting his educational qualification. In this duration, he applied in universities, think tanks, and research institutes without any success. It is in state institutes, public universities, he experienced caste discrimination. As he shared, during the interviews cunning ways were deployed by interviewers and institutions to identify caste. In universities, faculties are recruited on contract/ad hoc basis, as guest faculty and as permanent employee. He was called for interview for a contractual teaching position in Uttarakhand Central University. Before the interview he was asked to fill a form seeking details like name, status of Ph.D, status of National Eligibility Test (NET), caste category and so on. He was asked to present his caste certificate, biodata, and list of publications. In the interview, rather being asked questions related to research, he was asked irrelevant questions about region and village he hails from, his surname etc. As days passed by, he did not receive any information about the final appointment, so he inquired in the university. He was informed that he is not selected because of his lack of teaching experience. Upset about not getting the job, he consoled himself thinking that he did not have publication, and degree was yet to be awarded because of which he was not considered suitable for the position. After the degree was awarded, he

reappeared for the interview in the same university. As he had degree and few publications to his credit, he was hopeful of getting the job. Again, the same pattern repeated and he did not get the job. Second time when he appeared for the interview in the same university, only two SC candidates came to attend it. Therefore, he thought he will get the job easily. Also, he was asked to submit caste certificate so he assumed that reservation roster will be followed for the appointment of ad hoc faculty. The administration informed him that for the appointment on ad hoc basis university does not follow reservation roster. It is clear that the form that sought information about applicants including their caste category and demand of caste certificates were used by interviewers to identify SC candidates. As reservation roster was not followed for the ad hoc appointments, clearly demanding caste certificate was not at all required. Likewise, Harish informed, DU invites applications from aspiring candidates willing to teach on ad hoc basis in its different colleges. The university prepares a list of suitable candidates from where it can recruit ad hoc faculties whenever a teaching position falls vacant in the university. As applications are sought to recruit on ad hoc basis therefore reservation roster is not followed in recruitment. Even then, the form has a field about caste category. Caste identification through indirect means like inquiring about family background or surname is not an uncommon practice in private sector hiring to eliminate 'unsuitable' applicants (Thorat and Attewell 2007; Jodhka and Newman 2007; Jodhka 2015). Affirmative action of reservation mandates representation of disadvantaged groups in public sector. However, reservation rules do not apply in contractual public sector jobs. Contractualisation of public sector employment is counterproductive to objective of reservation which seeks proportional representation of disadvantaged social groups. As Harish's tribulations show, caste prejudices reappear on withdrawal of reservation policy. In the absence of affirmative action, rather than objective criterion, caste prejudice becomes the basis of eliminating 'unsuitable' applicant affecting the marginalised group adversely.

According to him, while in his domicile state, U.K., caste became a major impediment to get a job, in Delhi it is the lack of right connection and culture that impedes his progress. As he was a day scholar, rarely he stayed in the campus because of which he could not develop right networks to facilitate him a right job. On my last meeting with him in November, 2017, Harish was still unemployed and waiting for positive response to his job applications. At that time, he was also contemplating to start tuitions in order to generate some income. He was unwilling to take tuitions

because he is overqualified to do it. Since he loaned money from his friends to sustain his expenditures which was diminishing, so he was also looking for means to earn income. He was reluctant to do low paying menial jobs in private sector as he says, “*people will say what is the benefit of possessing such high qualifications/degrees if you have to do what others are doing*”. In his house and even in the lane nobody is as educated as he is. Residents of the neighbourhood and relatives come to seek his advice on educational matters. He is also role model to many young boys staying in his neighbourhood. In such circumstances his failure to obtain a respectable work can discourage those who look up to him. However, after a week of our last conversation (Nov, 2017), he got a teaching job on contractual basis and left for Uttarakhand. Like others mentioned above, Harish also worked in different kind of jobs while pursuing higher education which were low paying informal or semi-formal in nature. Competition over these jobs are not intense and comparatively work in informal/semi-formal sector is easy to get by. But unlike others, he did not acquire multiple skills to improve his chances of securing a better job. For socio-economic mobility his focus remained on quality education and definite job role of teaching/research which it entails. But quality education from prestigious institutes alone is not adequate, additionally, ‘merit’ and right networks are crucial to achieve desired goal of mobility.

Above account of five persons varying in age, marital status, caste and regional backgrounds shows specific pattern of how work life in general is experienced by the youth in Ashanagar. The cases are presented chronologically in terms of their age. Of the four men three are Dalits (SC), one is Brahmin (General), and the girl is OBC. Youth from the SC category, Jatav, Balmiki, and Koli, are from the states of UP and Uttarakhand. The man from general category is from UP. Serially the youngest among the five is the girl in early twenties. Among the men youngest is in mid-twenties (25 years old) and the eldest is in early thirties.

Three among the five have parents who worked/working in the government jobs. Regardless of caste, region, and status of parental employment, all have completed or are pursuing formal education till graduate level. Except one, remaining joined workforce while pursuing higher education which is commonly the case where most men and few women begin work at an early age without obtaining a graduate degree. An early integration in workforce is important to use the time in productive activities of generating either income, work experience or acquiring marketable skills in the pursuit of an appropriate work. An appropriate work exemplifies stability of job,

regular income, non-waged securities like holidays for social life to thrive. According to the youth, these conditions on which an appropriate work rests can be offered by a job under public sector. The shrinking role of state as employer and contractualisation of work within the public sector suggest that probability of obtaining secure government employment is becoming highly difficult. Flexibility induced by economic changes in public sector has reduced the share of state employment. It operates against the representation and inclusion of disadvantaged groups guaranteed by affirmative policy of reservation. The above cases show, the youth particularly from Dalit/backward communities encounter double exclusion both from white collar employment created under the new economy and secure permanent jobs in public sector. Further, contractualisation of state employment seemingly introduces corporate principles of 'merit' and 'efficiency' for hiring which is presumably possessed by members of general. These principles require employers to identify and segregate 'unsuitable' candidates and one of the ways is to accomplish the end is to identify candidates with 'caste'. However, search for occupational security is not confined to public sector. 'Success' is also searched in private sector formal jobs which is embodied by white collar superiors who earn higher salaries and lifestyle. Occupational success and stability elude them in both the sectors. Mismatch arising from meagre demand of employees in public sector and excessive supply of applicants makes government job unattainable. While they desire, prepare, and appear in exams held to fill job vacancies in public sector. Near improbability of attaining a job in public sector prevents complete withdrawal from the occupational economy of private sector. Emerging from (in)voluntary unemployment, withdrawal is partial and impermanent. In their attempt to create a secure stable employment by acquiring multiple skills, youth remains linked, even tenuously, with the labour-market of both the sectors.

Seemingly, their entry in labour-market coincided with the still unfolding of new economic order reorienting occupational aspirations from state jobs to newly emerging opportunities. The choice of subjects and acquired diplomas overlap with the 'professional imageries' (Clark 2016) and future possibilities in the new economy of employment. Occupational planning and investments in degrees like MBA, diploma in engineering, B. com, accounting courses (tally) aimed at garnering skills required for the integration in to newly emerged employment market. While in university several of them take up jobs in burgeoning service sector like BPO, malls, real estate, retail and in manufacturing industries located in Noida, encompassed in National capital region of

Delhi. The nature of jobs in service sectors like in call centres, in reception, salesperson in mall and real estate requires 'performance of affective labour'⁸⁰ (Mankekar and Gupta 2017). Young and unmarried people don't hesitate to enter into economy of affective labour. However, routinisation of the work and limited growth within the work induces retreat among the employees. In the private sector, employment appear to be somewhat easily available. These jobs are multilevel, and largely, youth from the settlement are employed in lower level jobs in the private sector. Case in point is jobs in BPO (Business process outsourcing). It emerged as one of the important service sectors in the new economy. With the outsourcing of services, several BPOs appeared in India, early in 2000, creating cheap labour force for its transnational masters (Mirchandani 2004). Arrival of this service industry was depicted as one of the many opportunities unleashed by liberalised economy for national growth and personal mobility. The industry, BPOs, shows a high level of internal differentiation⁸¹. Considerable services in BPOs fall under call center space. There exists a division between call centers depending on the geographical location of served clients categorised as domestic and transnational clients. The transnational call centres absorbed trainable English educated aspirants in the industry. It excluded those who lacked linguistic capital, English. In the settlement many have had some experience of this service industry but limited to domestic call centres which do not essentially require English to communicate with their clients. Mostly educated in Hindi medium schools and college, partial understanding of English structurally excludes youth from transnational call centres. To overcome this limitation and structural exclusion imposed by the meagre knowledge of English several even take speaking courses which proves a futile exercise to learn the language. The language, English, is a linguistic capital and idiom for upward mobility in the settlement. Despite the social alienation, routinisation, excessive surveillance and impermanence, working in transnational call centres is considered superior for those unable to gain entry in it. While some aspire to attain respectable job in the high ranked call centres, for others the job fails to build

⁸⁰ Michael Hardt (1999:96) defines 'affective labor as work that produces a "feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion---even a sense of connectedness or community"' (cf Mankekar and Gupta 2017:70)

⁸¹ Companies in the industry have various categories which includes, 'multinational corporation (MNC) captives, MNC third party providers, and domestic players whose scale and operations differs widely' (Taylor et.al 2008). Apart from this, the industry is also categorised on the basis of 'geographical dispersion as Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 whose urban character, infrastructure, costs and labour supply and quality differ considerably' (ibid).

‘discourses of futurity’ (Mankekar and Gupta 2017). Pointing to unfettered greed for profit maximisation instead of future growth, youth see exploitation in this service sector. Likewise, job opportunities under liberalised economy although available but fails to instil a sense of permanence and security which youth search for. Earning at young age, youngsters view their footing in private employment as temporary. Absorption of workers into the labour market created by neo-liberal economy is clear but indefinite. Continuous shift from one job to other and an urge to settle in permanent job reflects only partial integration in the labour market. Impermanence of job is a distinct feature of the lower ranked position in the private sector and partial privatisation of public sector where employees become dispensable and changeable. Strategies are devised at individual and collective level to manage imminent occupational and economic precarities. Shifting between different jobs/establishments occupational mobility is horizontal.

5.3 Women and Work

Women sharing similar conditions with men are less likely to join the workforce. Despite rise in education levels of women, female participation in Indian workforce has been declining and stagnating (Klas and Pieters 2015). Among various factors that keep women away from paid employment, social norm is one which prevents female participation in workforce. In the settlement, prevailing social norms not only restricts female participation in economic activities, it also determines ‘acceptable’ and ‘respectable’ occupations for women. In the field, entry of men into labour market is not matched by women in the same age cohort sharing similar class, caste, education, age and marital positions. In most cases, status of women as earning member is contingent on the economic condition of household where class plays a crucial role in inducing flexibility in patriarchal norms. Cultural norms, class and caste are reinscribed on women not on men. Across the class, caste and age, the decision of men to enter into the labour market is strikingly similar where role of family is underplayed. The insignificant role of the family/society is actually a tacit consensus to reinforce the patriarchal expectation from men to be a breadwinner. In case of women, ‘decision’ to join the rank of paid employees is permeated by factors which appear irrelevant for men to consider.

i. Class and Brahmanical Patriarchy

Unlike men, material conditions and ideological beliefs of family largely determines whether young women will join the workforce or not. Role of class has been highlighted in the previous chapter. Better off households do not necessarily encourage their daughters to enter the labour market. Men in a Brahmin household talking about their elder daughter, who is of marriageable age now, say:

She is doing graduation from distance learning. Yes, she remains in the house and does household work. No, there is no need for her to step out and work. We are here to earn and we earn good. Then why should she or our womenfolk go out to work. In our community women do not work. There is so much work within the house. We are educating her, elder daughter, but as long as we are here she does not have to work. Once she gets married and if she wants to work she has to take permission of her husband and his family members. If they allow her then we cannot interfere. But we will find a prosperous house like we did for our sister.

Likewise, Ashish, from Balmiki community, says about his wife and sisters-in-law:

Women in our family do not work outside. They stay in house look after the family and children. Already there is so much work within the house. Our mother works in MCD. But when she started to work, time was different. Now all of us earn well and can provide for the family. There is no need for them to work.

Another Balmiki man who is a teacher in MCD school tells about his sister:

My sister is pursuing graduation through distance learning. She also did a course on make-up and grooming. Now, we educate our daughters and sisters but don't let them work outside. As men of the house it is our responsibility to bring income. She can study and learn any course she wants, we will never refuse. But she is not allowed to work. After her marriage if her conjugal family (sasural wale) permits then she can work. But here it is our decision.

Materially and ritually Brahmins have enjoyed superior status and established Brahmanical patriarchy which limits movement and role of women within the household. Historically, women in Brahmin households were not allowed to step out and engage in remunerative activities. Non-engagement of women in remunerative work is marker of both superior caste and class. In 'modern' urban spaces vestiges of the Brahmanical order not only have managed survive but continue to persist. Values of Brahmanical patriarchy has permeated among Dalits, positioned below the pollution line. The emulation of the Brahmanical order reflects in restrictions placed on women to enter in the labour-market. Influence of improved economic condition of the family/community has reverse effect on the women employment. A relative increase in economic condition of Dalits strengthens the patriarchal norms resulting in withdrawal of women from the labour-force (Deshpande 2014; Grover 2011). Traditionally,

scavenging and sweeping are caste occupation of Balmiki community who also command near monopoly over lower rung MCD jobs. About the higher labour participation of Balmiki women Parvati Raghuram (2001) notes, “participation is accompanied by a much more positive attitude towards women who engage in paid employment, than in some other castes”. However this is not the case for upper-class Balmiki women of present generation. Regardless of gender, members of the Balmiki community engaged in MCD jobs. Higher education has led to occupational diversification of the community in caste unrelated sectors which has improved their economic condition and social expectations. While ‘dissociation’ and ‘distancing’ of women from the degrading caste occupations are one of the strategies of socio-cultural assertion. This assertion in the form of distancing women from the degrading menial job restores the normative masculine identity of breadwinner who can earn and raise family without financial support/contribution of women. Although in menial jobs of sweeping or scavenging, women of the community remain linked to the paid employment outside the house. It is expected the rise in education levels will delink women from traditional caste occupations and encourage them to join secular modern occupations. Education has clearly changed the social expectations of Dalit community expressed in the form of distancing from traditional occupation, especially of women. However emulation of Brahmanical values to claim superior social status has reduced the role of women to domestic work. Confinement of women within the house performing the domestic chores has diminished the agency of women and their occupational/economic mobility.

Social norms do not curtail access to employment only of Brahmin or Balmiki women. Interplay of economic condition and social norms evenly operate on women across the communities. Educated women across the caste and communities are not essentially encouraged to engage in paid employment. Even if they work before marriage in natal home, the decision to continue rests with conjugal home. Disapproval of spouse or his family is also an important reason for women to withdraw from paid employment. Many quit jobs to execute domestic responsibilities, pregnancy, and childcare responsibilities.

ii. Imagining Work as Social Respect and Dignity

For women, mere income generation does not bring respect and dignity in society. The source of income and nature of job are important in determining the social respect of

working women in the society. Meena, from Balmiki community, is a working woman. She works in a NGO where she aids and arbitrate the spousal disputes. About the retreat of Balmiki women from paid employment largely in MCD to unpaid domestic work she says, quite sternly,

Is this a job to clean toilets, drains, and sweeping roads? Job is where you have your own office, table-chair, fan, good salary and social respect. People should respect your work. Who respects the cleaning job?

For one thing, this question did not assume MCD jobs as the only work choice for women of the community. However, her response suggests that apart from the patriarchal control over women, the dignity accorded to work is an important reason for delinking young females from traditional occupation in MCD. Women working in menial and demeaning jobs like domestic help or in factories do not consider their job as a respectable work. Women concede that their entry into physically laborious work aims to mitigate the economic difficulties and to secure a better future for children. The meaning of respectable job embodies physical infrastructure, nature of job, salary and dignity. Thus, a job that has an office, air conditioning, chairs, and work performed by mind/brain rather physically straining manual work, a good salary and social respect are considered as a respectable job. Women engaged in 'menial' work prefer to stay unemployed if their husbands can alone fulfil the domestic needs. As, Sumati, (OBC), who works as a domestic help in a nearby apartments says,

Who wants to go and wash utensils and clean others house? Nobody likes to perform such kind of job unless one is left with no choice. I would not have worked if earnings of my husband were enough to run the family. I am not educated, I will not get a respectable work. My parents did not educate me. Since my childhood I have been working in factories. It hurts being illiterate, for even a small thing in government offices I have to run to people for help. I want my children to get good education and a respectable job. it is for them I work.

Sikha (General) is a married woman. She has two school going children. She provides patient care to an old woman in an apartment. It is a part time work. Her views resonate with Sumati's. she says,

The work I am doing is not because I like doing it, it is because of helplessness. Income of one person is not enough to sustain a family in Delhi. I will not get good job with my education. So, whatever I get I do...every married woman wants that her husband should earn well and she can stay home or have some nice time. This is not in our fate. We have to work to make future of our children...If he, husband, gets a good salary I will not work.

Catherine Hakim notes (2003:52), “many women with paid jobs did not see themselves as career women. Rather they felt obliged to contribute to household finances because housing costs and riskiness of relying on a single breadwinner, given job insecurity”. In the settlement many women were driven to join non-respectable laborious work in the face of economic vulnerability and in hope of improving future of their children. Disabled by the want of education they cannot get a respectable job that gives them a sense of dignity. A job earned without education is derided and engaged mostly in conditions of financial crisis. Commonly, unmarried young women work to contribute in the declining/maintaining the economic condition of their families.

Strictures against women employment are malleable under economic hardships, collective aspirations, regional origins, and need to adapt to the changing time. Locally, residents determine and define what constitute ‘respectable’ and ‘dignified’ work for women. Families covet government jobs for both men and women. While for men government jobs are considered stable and secure. The respect and safety are reiterated in parental preference to government jobs for their daughters, occasionally daughter-in-law. Motivated to make daughters economically independent, parents invest, in addition to education, in coaching for government jobs and respectable courses in their attempt to secure a place in feminine occupations represented like teaching. For women B.Ed, CTET and STET (Central/state teachers eligibility test) are the most advisable courses. They are encouraged to qualify these courses conforming with gender role. Boys outnumber girls in coaching centres that prepare students for government jobs like SSC, DP, banking and armed force services. The number of girls attending coaching centres is half or at times one third of the boys. Girls preparing for teaching jobs and other government posts are not expected by their families to venture out and work in private sector jobs. Search for a groom and marriages are delayed for girl’s preparing for safe government jobs⁸². Engagement of young girls in private sector jobs draws suspicion and social disapproval. A Jatav girl, pursuing graduation from distance learning, on being asked about jobs like BPO or retail sector produced by new economic policies, responds:

⁸² During the field work two unmarried girls were working in government job. One has a permanent banking job and other is working in secretariat on contract basis. Marriage proposals coming for the girls are declined by parents for not matching job security and educational qualification of their daughters. Further parents accede difficulty in finding suitable match for girls but do not regret high qualification of their working daughters.

These are not the kind of jobs my father will allow me to do. After educating me so much he wants me to do a respectable job like teaching or some government job. A good job has a good salary, proper timings and respect. This is not the case in private sector jobs.

Despite availability of jobs in the private sector women are not encouraged to join them. These jobs are not esteemed by people and deem unfit for women. Unmindful of the social esteem attached to a job, men can join private sector jobs as they are not governed by the same patriarchal standards of honour, also they do not require permission from anyone. But for women government jobs are coveted immensely.

Social norms, respectability attached to work, and economic status, are decisive in determining the whether women will join the workforce or not. Collective commitment on education and employment is also crucial in speculating the future of women in labour-market and their status in workforce. The focus on education of women is conspicuous among Jatav community. Among Jatavs importance of education is politically acknowledged for the socio-economic advancement of the community. Importance to education stems from their ideological proximity with political party, BSP, that views education as a tool to liberate the Dalits from socio-economic subjugation. 'Professional imageries' (Clark 2016) of unmarried girls from the community is wide and varied. The girls interacted within the community are preparing for CA, NEET, banking, teaching, and fashion designing. Parents from the community aspire to induct their daughters in a dignified government job.

Based on work-lifestyle preferences Catherine Hakim (2003) classifies women into three categories as: a) home-centred women, b) adaptive women, and c) work-centred women⁸³. Some of the young girls in the field prefer to adopt the role of home centred women post-marriage. Two remarkable reasons emerge which explains the readiness of educated girls to embrace home centred lifestyle which internalisation of gender role and search of a hectic free life. It appears that constant supply of ideal roles and life by media facilitates in internalisation of gender roles and makes the role of housewife acceptable. The glorious portrayal of romantic relationships and idealised marriage life in daily soap operas enable the construction of conjugal homes as a

⁸³ According to Hakim (2003) for, 'a) home-centred women family life and children are the main priorities throughout the life, b) adaptive women consist of those women who combine both work and family, the category also contains drifters and unplanned careers and c) work centred women prioritise work over family life'.

desired space that can set them free from their toiling life. Also, it is a space where unexperienced relations can be experienced⁸⁴.

iii. Employable Skills for Precariat Future

Girls registered in higher education through open learning are expected to help their mother's in domestic chores. As often the case, young girls do not simply assist in work, they perform a considerable amount of household work from cooking, cleaning, to attending the guests. Apart from performing domestic responsibilities, girls attend different kind of courses to acquire employable skill. Common courses are beauty course, stitching, computer course, *mehandi* course etc. The training of these skills is offered by many NGOs in the settlement for free or at nominal prices⁸⁵. These are accessed by the women to gain skill and diploma. Despite being encouraged by their families to learn skills (*hunar*), girls are dissuaded to earn an income. In group discussions girls told that most families, both natal and conjugal, do not agree to send their daughters and women outside the house to work. With these courses natal families are arm their daughters with vocational skills for the future uncertainties that may arise after marriage due to unemployed/underpaid spouse, widowhood, event of marital discord or separation. Natal families maintain that post marriage the decision of their daughter's employment rests with conjugal family, importantly on the groom. Only on the condition of obtaining consensus from the husband or his parents, women are supposed to search and gain employment (Chanana 1988). The pressing concern, for most girls is post marital adjustments in conjugal homes, as it is not easy to resist the dictates of the members of new house. Their choice to work after marriage, largely, is

⁸⁴ In the settlement most women and young girls keenly watch and discuss Indian daily soap operas. To name a few are *Sasural simar ka*, *Ye rishta kya kehata hai*, *Aashiqui*, *Diya aur baati*. These daily soaps generally have a similar plot line centred around romantic relationships, marriages, separation, and ostensible lifestyle. Despite the display of extravagant lifestyle, the focus of these serials remains on Indian values and tradition. These serials construct and perpetuate the image of 'ideal' Indian relationships like son, daughter, parents and very significantly of an 'ideal' couple where romantic relationship between unmarried lovers has to culminate in marriage battling all the adversities.

⁸⁵ An NGO under the patronage of former ward councillor of the colony was providing diploma courses in stitching and beauty for free to the women of the colony in her NGO which has now been shut down. In 2017 MCD elections, ward was reserved only for SC women, as the councillor was from general category filed nomination from another ward to contest the elections which she lost. Another NGO in the colony, run by the son of former ward councillor and Congress leader, offered free computer course to the youth of the colony for few months and now it is charging 300 rupees from the students. This NGO also offers parlour course to the women on a fee of rupees 500. Similarly, a NGO run by an aspiring female politician that offers beauty course. Another NGO within the colony offers English speaking course and computer training to those passed class 12th.

contingent on the permission of conjugal homes. These attained skills can be operated from home and may not draw much resistance as against working outside, beyond domestic boundaries. Equipping girls with such skills is a way of securing financial independence. This can be read as a negotiation, though not a radical bargain, within the limits of what is possible in the social structure of the area. The gendered nature of skills generally gets easy approval and encouragement of the families therefore it becomes a method of securing their financial future and limited autonomy.

5.4 Intergenerational Mobility and Class Structure

Dichotomising class into ownership (bourgeoisie) and non-ownership (proletariat) of means of production Marxian model or class approach have proved untenable to understand internal differentiation within each of the class (Beteille, 2007). Referring to 'decomposition of capital' and 'decomposition of labour' Dahrendorf (1959 cited in Beteille 2007: 286) underlines that these polarised classes are becoming internally differentiated. With the changing economy, occupational structure has been altering and further intensifying class stratification. The model fails to explain existence and expansion of composite middle-class. Expanding middle-class indicates while ownership of capital is important. However, basis of class formation has been changing with transforming economy where education and occupation have become salient factors in changing of class position. Thus, political revolution is not the only means to change class structure and position. Class is imagined differently and class position can be changed by employing both economic and non-economic capitals. In contrast to class approach that fixes class into rigid compartments, scholarship on intergenerational mobility point that the class is a fluid category that can change gradually. Socio-economic mobility depends on interaction between economic class, social identity, and socio-cultural capital (Krishna 2013). Beteille (2007) points class structure is not same across places, it differs based on region, social structure or nature of economy etc.

5.4.1 Local Class Structure

In Ashanagar, an amalgamation of petty bourgeoisie, salaried class, and political class constitute local elites. They are economically stable and socially well connected. Locally, a household that has members engaged in all the three fields of public sector job, established as political leader and own petty business (also, running NGOs) is regarded as an upper-class. This class is locally influential, and, its expenditure and

consumption patterns are qualitatively different from other co-residents of different classes. Perceptibly they own better, sometimes multiple, houses, four wheelers, send children to English medium private schools and spend on vocational degrees to secure better future for the subsequent generation. Ranked below these local elites, is a composite local middle class. Members of this class includes salaried class employed in public/private sector. Many in this class are also associated with local politics but they play ancillary role in it. Simultaneously, members of this class can be employed and engaged in local politics still they do not qualify to be referred as local elites. Middle-class lacks the capacity to acquire and spend like local upper-class, it deliberates on trade-offs before making crucial expenditure/investments. For example, like upper class, many belonging to rank of middle class spend on quality education of their children by enrolling them in expensive English medium schools. However, concurrently they cannot acquire/possess expensive consumer goods or acquire more assets (land/house) or even sustain educational expenses. To sustain its relative stability and prevent sliding in the direction of impoverishment this class engages in multiple income generation activities like renting house, formation of chit fund committees, act as marketing agents, real estate intermediaries, or providing home tuitions. It is possible for the upper layer of the middle class to join ranks of local upper-class although most in the class strive to secure economic stability. Lower class in the settlement includes largely those employed in informal labour market as labourers, security guards, helpers in retail shops, domestic maids or women headed households (divorced/widow). While in the other two classes, financial support from parents, in form of pension/salary/investments, assist in alleviating economic vulnerability and strengthening economic condition by establishing petty businesses or investing in properties. In contrast, lower-class households lack financial support from parents.

Categorisation of local class structure is neither exhaustible nor it is unambiguous. As argued earlier, class structures are complex and fluid. For example, within a single family (joint or divided households) characteristics of all the classes can be observed where one brother/sibling is economically thriving while other struggling to meet ends. Further, a middle-class family in the present can slide down to lower class in future upon the death of parents when financial support from them ceases. Such conditions show the fluid character of class. Locally, members of different social groups are dispersed across classes, occupying different class positions. A large population occupies the ranks of middle and lower class, whereas, comparatively, petty

bourgeoisie are fewer in number. Among different social groups it is Balmikis and upper-caste trading community predominate the category of upper class/local elite.

Income alone does not express the class status, capacity to consume—commodities, neo-liberal spaces or leisure, quality education—and experience ‘modern times’ are new markers of class-status (Srivastava 2015). Across the class structure, residents aspire to improvise class status and adopt strategies for its attainment. Sanjay Srivastava (2015:261), points that, “a recurring aspect of studies on consumerism is the conflation with affluence and the notion that consumerism requires a degree of disposable income that is beyond the capacities of the poor”. Contrary to such studies on consumerism focusing on well-off class, he argues consumption is imagined by urban poor and they devise strategies to overcome economic restraints and be able to consume (ibid). Here I lay emphasis that imagining consumption is also an important element of reimagining upper-class/socio-economic mobility. The class is expressed through its cultural and consumption practices. To adopt contemporary consumption practice disposable income is important which is not easily available to residents. To enhance income, they engage in multiple activities like membership in MLM⁸⁶ (multi-level marketing), working as LIC (insurance) agent, giving tuitions, formation of chit fund committees, renting of house are a few common ways to earn an extra income. Multiple engagement in income generation does not signal merely at poor economic condition of a family, it in fact uncovers different strategies adopted for upward economic mobility or to escape impoverishment.

If seen in terms of material acquisition, limited mobility has been realised. In contrast to the past, residents live in better pucca houses with access to various transport modes connecting settlement to different parts of the city, schools, and higher education. Better material conditions are generally achieved through collective striving of parents and children. To improvise living conditions they invest in education, acquire land, construct new houses and other material goods. Education, occupation, and income indicate the possible intergenerational mobility. In the subsequent generations, educational mobility is apparent where the youngsters have higher educational qualifications. However, education is not a definite route to ensure

⁸⁶ MLM ‘also known as network marketing refers to the practice of distributing, selling or supplying the products or services through various levels of independent agents. These agents are paid commissions, bonuses and dividends or other forms of consideration in return for selling products or services and/or for recruiting other agents’ (Koehn, 2001). In MLM the agent who recruits a new agent in the marketing network is paid commission for drawing new agent and for the sales made the newly recruit.

economic mobility. It merely hints at plausibility of achieving mobility. Better education is supposed to lead to better employment and income. Existing disjunction between highly educated youth and limited demand for their skills renders education as an obsolete means to attain desired mobility. Further, the quality of higher education received by subsequent generations segregates them in specific private sector low paying insecure jobs. To retain or improve socio-economic status residents devise and engage in diverse activities of income generation. These engagements are fragile and subject to uncertainty. Intergenerational mobility is unsure where employment is impermanent in nature devoid of securities. Conspicuous intergenerational occupational shift has taken from the public sector to private sector largely in informal and semi-formal jobs. Possessing higher educational degrees, diplomas, and skills, most of the young workforce is employed in the private sector. Their employment is characterised by uncertainty of tenure, low salary, and devoid of securities enjoyed by government employees. Working youth absorbed in private sector jobs in modern economy lack the employment security.

5.5 Conclusion

Describing employment opportunities and nature of employment, this chapter shows occupational outcome that can plausibly be achieved by educational degrees possessed by youths, specifically Dalit youth in the settlement. Details presented in the chapter aligns with Jeffrey's (2010:26) argument that 'education is a contradictory resource' while offering a few opportunities of politico-economic mobility, it simultaneously consolidates the system of inequality. Importance of education for attaining socio-economic mobility, personal freedom, and collective well-being has often been stressed (Dreze and Sen 1997). For socially excluded groups, Dalits, education has become a tool to overcome their historical exclusion, attain mobility and social dignity. However, privatisation of education catering to demands of occupational structure of the new economy has produced educational hierarchy which increasingly determines desired occupational success and exclusion in labour market. Education alone cannot ensure a swift entry into the lucrative white-collar occupations. In the newly produced educational hierarchy, 'quality' education is crucial to achieve occupational success in the labour-market. 'Quality' education gets defined as English medium education obtained from private schools located in metropolitan cities is highly valued whereas education in vernacular medium from state schools is undervalued. In addition to the

medium of instruction and dichotomy of private/public mode, educational hierarchy further categorises and ranks 'quality' education on basis of spatial divisions of rural/urban location. The hierarchy means that not everyone can access and afford 'quality' education. As the previous chapter shows, despite presence of eminent universities and institutes youth in the settlement pursue higher education in distance learning, enrolled in low ranking colleges and obtain diploma courses commonly from ITI. Educated in municipal and state government schools' youth in the settlement are ill-equipped to gain admission in distinguished institutes of higher education which can potentially change occupational imageries and make its attainment possible. In the settlement, state administered schools ensured enrolment and education to young children coming from socially marginalised and economically impoverished backgrounds. However, these schools are incompetent to prepare students to compete at par with those who have received 'quality' education for white-collar, remunerative and secured jobs created under the new economy. Within the educational hierarchy, municipal and state government schools, and higher education through distance learning occupy inferior rank. In the settlement, this inferior form of education is largely accessed by urban poor/lower income groups who are also from Dalit backgrounds. In the modern economy, socio-economic exclusion of Dalits which was historically sustained by caste system translates into newer forms of hierarchies enabling traditional disparities to persist. Educational hierarchy covertly appear to distribute socio-economic opportunities and disparities among different social groups. Unequal access to 'quality' education supports perpetuation and reproduction of pre-existing socio-economic inequalities based on caste, class, location, gender and so on. Educational attainment plays crucial role to ascertain occupational success, exclusion from 'quality' education almost mechanically prohibits integration into the white-collar occupations and to attain desired socio-economic mobility.

Occupation represents a close link between social identity, economic class, educational attainment and mobility. Under liberalised economy, employment opportunities proliferated in IT and service sectors, generating a high demand for English educated and engineering graduates. The beneficiaries of these newly generated white-collar jobs are commonly English educated and technically skilled graduates. A vast majority of this white-collar workforce in private sector hails from middle-class and upper caste backgrounds (Upadhyia 2007; Krishna and Brihmadesham 2006; Fuller and Narsimhan 2006). Also, at workplaces, like in factory shop floor, caste

relations mutate into work-relations. In industrial set up, white-collar positions, managerial and above ranks, are held by upper-castes who supervise and control precariat industrial labour possessing undervalued degrees (Cross 2009). As the chapter shows a large proportion of educated Dalit youth residing in the settlement supply workforce to private sector economy where they perform work varying in degree of formality. Acquisition of multiple skills/degrees, constant move from one job to another, and intermittent experience of brief and prolonged spells of un(under)employment, exhibit their quest to attain occupational security which they lack because of inadequate skills and qualifications required to obtain it. Appropriate skills and qualifications are important to partake ranks of white-collar jobs that can ensure socio-economic mobility and relative occupational stability. It is imparted by 'quality' education which is structurally denied to youth residing in the settlement. However, as the preceding and present chapter show, education alone is not to be implicated for fragmenting the trajectory of desired mobility. Intersection of space, sub-culture, social identity and economic class is vital in shaping aspiration and determining intergenerational mobility. Although the settlement predominantly inhabits Dalits but occupational trajectories of non-Dalits/caste Hindus is not starkly different from the former. Residing in the same location dependent on similar local institutions and resorting to similar strategies to attain occupational stability suggest, experiences of occupational precarity does not vary much across the residing social groups.

Further, the new economy has affected gender structures differently in the settlement. Educational trajectory of both young men and women overlap but not of employment. Expectations from educated men and women are starkly different. Quite evenly, educated men are expected to obtain a job matching their qualifications and earn a reasonable income. Contrary to this, educated women are not inevitably expected to lend financial support to household. Unsettling masculinity, the new economy has not radically subverted the feminine roles. Most of the men and women choose distance learning for higher education in which classes are held on Sundays. While most men during the weekdays are part of paid workforce, young women dispense domestic responsibilities. For young men despite possessing higher educational degrees gaining a state job is bleak. To negotiate precariat status, young men engage in local politics, income enhancing activities and emulate popular fashion to stabilise 'fractured masculinity'. Whereas young women in addition to perform domestic duties utilise weekdays learning courses like beautician, tailoring or teaching. Fitting comfortably

with feminine role descriptions these courses do not pose threat to prevalent gendered norms of the settlement. Working women are employed in service sector, manufacturing and informal jobs. There are a few women from differing class backgrounds who are preparing for state jobs. However, entry of women in workforce is moderated by economic condition of their families, collective aspiration, class and social consensus. Young women working in private sector jobs are commonly from economically impoverished class. Government jobs are coveted across gender and class. Yet, it is economically stable families that can afford the cost of preparatory coaching of government exam. Superior class, views women working in private sector jobs with derision in which women from the poor class work. Further collective aspirations of a community shapes relation between gender and employment. Aspiring to improve socio-economic standing certain castes like Jatavs and Kurmis encourage the community to educate children to prepare for jobs. These communities spend on educating daughters and encourage them to gain employment.

The chapter argues that occupational outcome vis-a-vis mobility is shaped by intersection of identity, class, spatiality, aspiration and access to resources. In the labour-market, both Dalit and non-Dalit youth of the settlement struggle to attain occupational security. Unlike their parents they are educationally qualified, thus educational mobility is apparent. However, educational landscape of the settlement and of the city serves to the need of liberalised labour market. By producing and segmenting the nominally educated labour force to perform routinised deskilled labour, convergence of education and new economy allow unhindered social reproduction. Aspiring for a government job in the settlement most youth completed/continuing education enter in private sector jobs. Generally, these are precariat jobs which are low paid, contractual and devoid of social security. Living in materially improved conditions they lack the social security and sense of permanence which most of their state employed parents had.

Still, social identity is vital to understand the system of inequality. A large proportion of working youth are from Dalit communities who were structurally denied access to education delaying their entry into formal education system. Their presence in the settlement and ability to access education seemed to promise occupational vis a vis intergenerational mobility. However, changes introduced by economic reforms created a disjunction between educational access and desired occupational aspiration of secured state jobs. Shrinking of state employment under the liberalised economy refashioned

occupational structure and educational demand. Expansion of globalised economy relies on workers with specialised skills/knowledge and on semi or unskilled reserve army of labours. Proliferation of private schools and higher educational institutes under changed economy took up the role of training the former category of worker by imparting required knowledge/skills. While the latter are largely trained in inferior low-ranking schools and institutes. As the chapter shows, the labour trained in inferior schools come from spatial periphery of the city inhabited largely by social marginals, Dalits. According to Guy Standing (2011) the defining character of emerging precariat class is the people divested of state support lack occupational identity and security. The chapter concludes, members drawn into this class are not evenly distributed across social groups. Traditionally, Dalits were prevented to reach higher echelons of social and economic spheres. Now the transformed economy renders affirmative actions outmoded are further drawn to marginality. As the chapter shows, locally it is Dalits who disproportionately represent the precariat class.

Chapter VI

Local Politics: Caste, Co-option and Dalit Politics

Introduction

This chapter looks at political articulations of Dalits in Ashanagar. It probes the ways in which Dalits organise and make political claims in the city. The present chapter analyses electoral participation, political parties, local negotiations, political representations and discourses to understand significance of caste in local political mobilisation. Since Ashanagar is a part of reserved assembly constituency⁸⁷, caste assumes saliency in political/electoral mobilisation. It enables us to understand implication of political reservation on local Dalit politics. Broader focus of this chapter is on the policy of reserved constituency and the manner in which it influences the constitution of Dalit identity and politics. Local politics of the settlement under study is dynamic. It is continuously influenced by interventions of local events, national and state politics, individual as well as collective actors and institutions. To elaborate dynamic nature of local politics and events like caste elections, religious celebrations and altering landscape, imminent relocation of Muslim residents, are taken in to account. The chapter illustrate implications of reserved constituency for Dalit politics, influence of communalism in shaping contemporary Dalit identity, and altering politics under multi-party system.

6.1 Competing Political Parties in Ashanagar

The main parties engaging in electoral process of the settlement are three national parties INC, BJP, BSP and one newly emerged state party AAP. Political rivals to each other, these parties define the nature of local politics in the settlement. Before delving into political competition among parties and their significance in influencing local politics, brief introduction of varied contexts in which they emerged. A familiarity with

⁸⁷ In 1931 the second-round table conference, held in London, Ambedkar demanded separate electorate for depressed class which Mahatama Gandhi vehemently opposed. In the following year, 1932, the demand of separate electorate was accepted by the British government and communal award was announced on 17 August, 1932. Gandhi then imprisoned in Yerwada jail, Pune, announced fast disapproving the award. Following which Ambedkar met Gandhi and 'conceded' to sign a pact known famously as Poona pact which permitted reserved constituency instead of separate electorate for political representation of depressed classes. Later in the constitution provision of reserved constituency was incorporated to safeguard political representation of depressed classes.

the contexts of their origin will help in developing an understanding of relation and role of the parties in evolving political dynamics in the settlement.

i. Indian National Congress (INC): Since the independence in 1947, the party remained a dominant force in Indian politics, it is only in early nineties political fortune of the party began to decline. Ability of the party to accommodate a wide array of social groups made its electoral success possible. Instead of representing a core electoral base ‘it was a genuine “catch-all party” (cf Jaffrelot 2014:427). Success in blurring the distinction of caste and religion brought it allegiance from a wider spectrum of social groups moulding the party into ‘coalition of extremes’ (Brass 1980:3-36). One of the many reasons for its diminishing vibrancy in early nineties was its opposition to implementation of Mandal commission report (Jaffrelot 2014). Influence of the party was curtailed by the rising assertion of backward classes and Dalits in nineties. These social groups organised under regional parties like BSP or SP for political assertion and representation. With the rise of Dalit and backward party’s dependence on the Congress reduced drastically for representation. Yogendra Yadav (1996) categorises the political life of the Congress party into three phases as ‘single party dominance’, Congress-Opposition system and post-Congress system⁸⁸. He points the emergence of multiparty system in early nineties marks the phase of post-Congress system wherein supremacy of the party begins to erode. In this phase, party not only lost to regional parties but also saw drastic reduction in its vote share. However, the political fate of the congress in the settlement is contrary to the broader trend observed at macro-level. In 1993, after a hiatus of three decade the national capital territory went to assembly elections. The assembly constituency, of which Ashanagar is a part, elected MLA from the Congress party. Electoral preference to the party was interrupted only in 2008 when MLA of the constituency was from the BJP. Electoral success of Congress party in the constituency derives considerably from its role in resettling *jhuggi* dwellers in the resettlement colony, Ashanagar, back in 1976. Electorally the party benefitted for resettling erstwhile *Jhuggi* dwellers in to planned colonies ensuring uncritical loyalty from elders.

⁸⁸ First phase as Congress system that lasted almost for two decades after independence characterising ‘single party dominance’⁸⁸. The second phase is described as Congress-Opposition system where party remained salient but not dominant. Third phase marked by second ‘democratic upsurge’ in Indian politics ushered in early nineties is termed as post-Congress system where the party is neither dominant nor salient, it is just one of the many political alternatives under multi-party system.

About their arrival in Ashanagar commonly heard remarks of first-generation residents are

This is a resettlement colony (Punarawas colony). We were settled here by Indira (Indira ke basaye huye hai). She gave us land here... we came here during emergency

A Muslim woman remarks,

Indira was concerned for welfare of poor people. In Indira's time everything was cheap (ration) for poor because she was concerned. Now we don't know whether we are eating food or food is eating us. Everything is so costly, how will poor survive?...since the BJP came to rule all you hear about is disputes between Hindu and Musalman...

A Balmiki woman associated with the Congress says,

For Balmikis Indira was like their mother.

Apart from suggesting the political hour in which the settlement was established, these remarks suggest importance of Indira Gandhi for initial residents. It was established in 1976 during the emergency at a time when in the name of 'socialist' ideology 'socialist policies' were imposed on people in moment of authoritarianism (Prashad 2012). Idea behind slum clearance drive was to sanitise the city by displacing the deprived and poor living in squatter settlements across the city, to the margins. Distancing the city poor into resettlement colonies situated at the periphery of the city had (un)intended fall out for this socialist leaning government. Populist programs pushed by Congress at that time in power (de facto) reaped electoral benefit much after the execution of policies. Contrary to academic and journalistic abhorrence of the government's slum clearance drive during the National Emergency, it made the party and its matron leader widely popular among the settlers. Academic criticism directed at the displacement of the *Jhuggi* dwellers depicts slum clearance drive as an unpopular and anti-poor activity. This is contrary to opinions of those who were displaced and herded into planned colonies for resettlement. In hindsight, most original settlers feel indebted to the leader, Indira Gandhi. They recognise and hail socialist credentials of the leader (of the party, Congress) and long after her death the party continues to be synonymous with the leader for these original inhabitants. Popularity of Indira Gandhi as a socialist leader has electorally paid off the party locally in three assembly elections and also in municipal elections. Unlike the acerbic criticism of Emergency, the most vulnerable and affected in those times remain grateful to the leader for allotting plots to

poor in the city, which is increasingly becoming land scarce and predated upon by the corporate/real estate for developing the city. They do not dismiss the initial annoyance and hardships encountered in forested terrain called 'resettlement colonies'. Nonetheless residents show maternal affection and reverence towards the leader. It is not only land allotment and supply of basic services but also loans supplied, most of which were later waived, to people in resettlement colonies for building concrete houses instead of living in makeshift homes that helped constructing socialist image of the party/leader. Despite (re)emergence of different political parties' most original settlers choose to vote en bloc for the party led by Indira Gandhi. Electoral support to the party is one of the ways to express their commitment to the leader and a mode to repay the debt they owe to the matron leader which I term as 'obligatory politics'.

According to the present study, obligatory politics implies an unconditional electoral support to a party (apparently its leader) in recognition of work carried out by it in past while in power. It differs from patronage politics where leaders distribute patronage routinely expecting loyalty from vote bank⁸⁹, and to keep it intact regardless of whether ruling or not. Patronage is not only distributed from above to consolidate vote bank, it is also sought by clients in return of support. Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) define 'patronage' as "the direct exchange of a citizen's vote in return for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods and services" (cf Bjorkman 2014). Locally, Congress party for long enjoyed electoral advantage of obligatory politics. Support to the party came from execution of socialist welfare policy of resettlement. Playing role of socialist welfare state, the party while in power parcelled piece of land to the settlers in lieu of removing them from squatter dwellings in the city. Resettled as a matter of policy, dwellers recognise it as benign gesture of matron leader of the party, not as a right of dispossessed citizen to be protected by the state. Those displaced during slum clearance drive between 1975-77 were entitled to a DDA plot for resettlement⁹⁰. Plots were distributed as resettlement policy mandated, not explicitly to

⁸⁹ In the essay 'The Social Structure of a Mysore Village' M.N Srinivas coined the term vote bank. According to him, the three main actors who configure vote bank are a) a village middle man, b) a political party, and c) local constituents (cf Breeding 2011).

⁹⁰ On the interlocking of two state policies, DDA housing policy and family planning policy, during national emergency between 1975-77 Emma Tarlo (1995) points, 'first 10 months of emergency all of the people whose homes were demolished had the right to DDA plot without having to produce the proof of their participation in family planning'. She notes by the summer of 1976 overlap of the two policies began to meet the sterilisation targets. Residents spoken to recount their arrival in the settlement in 1976 between Jan-Feb. Although nobody attributed their arrival in the settlement to

keep vote bank intact. In this obligatory politics, support from citizens is/was not essentially expected in return, neither advantage is sought by them⁹¹. Obligatory politics differs from De Witt (1996) explained ‘politics of illusion’ in which “poor are tied to the political system by (promise of) material benefits and by almost personal and emotional ties to the highest authority” (ibid). In Ashanagar, commitment to the party is mainly limited among initial settlers who instead of awaiting promises to be delivered, vote in retrospect for ‘benign consideration’ of the leader while in power.

Political supremacy and uncritical support to the Congress obscures that political alternatives like BJP and BSP were emerging parties in the early nineties when the assembly election was held in 1993. Partially the absence of stronger alternatives reinforced obligatory politics in the Ashanagar⁹². In her study of vote banks in Bangalore rural and urban districts in Karnataka, Breeding (2011) argues that although vote banks operate through the same structure as outlined by Srinivas (1955). But unlike earlier political loyalty to a single party in post- independent India, presently electorate has politically diversified. She argues that the rise in interparty competition also reinforces vote bank competition⁹³. Likewise, political landscape of the settlement changed with stronger presence and wider influence of relatively newer parties like the BJP, BSP or AAP.

ii. Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP): While the Congress has been present on the political stage since Independence, BJP and BSP, attained its current form much later in early '80s after several remodelling. Both the parties have different electoral appeals and vote blocks. BJP is popular among urban

overlap of the two policies, but once an informant mentioned of few families who are ‘beneficiary’ of the overlapping policies. For more on the converging policies and its implications refer, ‘Unsettling Memories: Narratives of Emergency in Delhi’ by Emma Tarlo (2003).

⁹¹ Certainly, the obligatory politics did not pay off the party in 1977 Lok Sabha election when the party was voted out of power.

⁹² Between 1952-56 Delhi had two chief ministers, both from the Indian National Congress (INC). Under the states reorganisation act, 1956 Delhi was made union territory to be administered centrally. In 1993, central government passed Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) bill after which assembly elections were held in the same year and Madan Lal Khurana from Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) became the third chief minister of Delhi.

⁹³ Breeding (2011) outlines three main reason for diversification of vote bank, remaining two are; ‘(2) Targets of vote banks have changed as caste and identity politics have changed; and (3) vote banks have become much more materialistic with changes in Karnataka’s economy’.

upper-caste Hindus, but not limited only to it. Efforts of its parent organisation, RSS, that has been working among Dalits and tribal have helped the party to expand its electoral base by attracting the marginalised groups⁹⁴. Its support among backward classes varies from state to state. The architect and ideologues of RSS strongly advocated to build a Hindu nation (*Rashtra*) and to realise the idea all its subsidiary organisations work in a concerted manner in which the party plays a significant role. The necessary condition to build a Hindu nation requires to erase ethno- religious differences by homogenising citizen under a single identity of ‘Hindu’. Ethno- religious groups, Muslims and Christians, maintaining distinct identity are viewed with suspicion and hatred by the organisation, party and its affiliates. The project of building Hindu nation by the party and its affiliate organisation identify religious minorities and Dalits as others, requiring them either to subsume within the Hindu identity or exorcise. The unapologetic perpetual effort of the RSS and BJP to carve a Hindu nation has fostered communally tensed relation between ‘Hindus’ and religious minorities, mainly Muslims. Since its return to power, after a decade, in 2014, numerous cases of atrocities and violence against minorities and Dalits have been reported in media. It points that project of Hindu nation is underway. Ashanagar is not untouched by the communal politics where both the party and RSS are working actively.

The BSP emerged as a significant political force in regional politics, almost parallel to rising significance of the BJP, in late eighties. Deriving its political strength from Ambedkar, the party aimed at political organisation of subaltern groups which included SCs, OBCs and Muslims. Guided by emancipatory ideals, it embodies Dalit assertion in politics. Generally associated with SCs, mainly Jatavs/Chamars, its electoral appeal transcends the religious and caste barriers. Realising the limitation of caste-based politics, BSP restructured its politics from *bahujan* (the majority) to *sarvajan* (all the society). This shift widened political appeal of the party across caste groups. It is a national party but its influence remains confined in few states. In the capital, where political power alternated between the BJP and Congress, presence of the BSP. In local politics cannot be overlooked. BSP is active in local politics. Its significant political presence intersects with the residents hailing from Jatav caste of U.P. Despite its long-standing local presence, BSP has not even once managed to reach

⁹⁴ Like in north Indian state of U.P among Dalits, Balmikis form a strong support base (Prasad 2012; Jaffrelott 2014) and non-Yadav OBCs like Kurmis and Lodhs are treated favourably in distribution of tickets by the party (Verniers 2018).

and represent the constituency in state legislature. Since its formation in late 1980s, provincially BSP has been successful in U.P. It has wrestled political power five times in the state through coalition and unexpected partnerships with rival parties (BJP and SP). The party could not replicate similar political success in assembly elections, despite the settlement being a part of a reserved constituency. Infrequently, it won in the civic body elections. In the assembly elections, the national parties--- Congress, BJP and AAP--- not known exclusively for their Dalit politics, have represented this constituency. Despite this, they have been successful in political representation in municipal and assembly elections. They are often criticised for co-opting and factionalising Dalits for political benefits (Jaffrelot 2014). Away from the domicile states and its regional subaltern politics, political consciousness of Dalits in Ashanagar is observed to have swayed by the political contexts of the city and the space they live in, their aspirations in the urban space, (re)surge of political parties, and political competition between the parties.

iii. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP): The party arose from a popular movement against corruption, known as India against corruption led by a professed Gandhian, Anna Hasare in 2011. The movement was aided by prominent civil society members consisting of lawyers, ex-bureaucrats, social workers, and a former Supreme Court Chief Justice, ‘all middle-class icons’ (Sitapati 2011). After conclusion of the movement, some members agreed for direct involvement in politics and launched a political party, AAP in 2012. After 48 days stint at power in 2013, it came to power again in 2015 assembly elections with spectacular victory, winning 67 of the 70 assembly seats. As its political appeal was limited to metropolitan cities among urban middle class the electoral success was seen as ‘metropolitan phenomenon’ (Hilal 2014). Active involvement of city’s middle class in its election campaign depicted it as a party representing idealism of India’s new middle class (Sitapati 2011). However, success in settlements of varying socio-economic character proved the popularity of the party exceeded far beyond middle-class aspirations (Srinivasan 2013). In 2015 elections, it received massive electoral support from urban poor residing in resettlement colonies and slums of the city for its pro-poor policies. In 2013 elections, the party won 28 of 70 assembly seats. The Delhi assembly has total 12 reserved constituencies and from the 28 seats won by the party 9 were reserved constituencies. In 2015, the party won all 12 reserved constituencies, recording high-very high voter turnout (Verma 2015).

Moving away from established traditional parties like the Congress and BJP, residents of the settlement supported AAP candidate in both the assembly elections. Further, Balmikis in the settlement supported the party overwhelmingly as one woman from the community remarked, “*AAP’s party symbol is broom to which Balmikis associated with and supported hoping that it will work for them*”. Return of the party in 2015, changed the political direction in which Ashanagar was ‘anticipated’ to go. In 2014, the settlement witnessed communal flare up between ‘Hindus’-Muslim, incited by former BJP MLA and RSS workers. This communal violence was expected to benefit the BJP and its party workers in 2015 assembly election. However, residents preferred tangible gains delivered by AAP in its previous tenure over local communal politics of BJP. Presence of AAP in the capital and locally in the settlement did not succeed in containing communal forces, it just delayed the resurfacing of communal politics.

6.2 Castes and Political Factions in the Settlement

Ashanagar is a part of reserved assembly constituency. In addition to settlement, the constituency includes different localities delimited as wards for local body elections. Four wards, varying in class, social composition and residential arrangements form the constituency. Urban village⁹⁵, residential gated societies, resettlement colonies and slums are subsumed within the delimited boundary of the constituency. Of the four wards falling under the constituency, two municipal wards are located in the settlement. While the population of third ward is dispersed in the settlement and adjoining localities that includes two urban villages and an upper-middle class area. Thus, political destiny of the constituency in assembly and local elections is not determined by Ashanagar residents alone. Role of identity, class position and, political and civic aspirations of residents staying off its boundary also determine the political fate of the constituency. It is the collective political decision, not always mutually agreeable, of

⁹⁵Incorporation of villages with unfolding urbanisation within a metropolis/city present in and around it represents an urban village. Spatially urban villages are situated within a metropolis/city not away from it but is enveloped by the city. Administrative use of *lal dora* (red thread), an imaginary boundary separating jurisdiction of village from the city, in Delhi Development Act and Delhi master plan acknowledges the presence of villages within and around the city. The land within *lal dora*, village boundary/land, is exempted from the building by laws and construction regulations of municipal corporation of Delhi. Urban villages are unregulated by the civic body rules of construction have evolved into rentier economy with proliferation warehouses, godowns, commercial shops and rental housing. The resident of urban village adjoining the field site own agricultural lands but economy depends on non-agricultural means. Also, the urban village near the field is surrounded by high end residential areas, luxury hotels, expensive plaza for shopping and a metro station.

the people residing in different spaces of the constituency with diverse identities and aspirations determines success of the person/ party elected to political positions such as ward councillors, MLA and MP. However, outcome of assembly and municipal elections are largely swayed by residents of the settlement from where most candidates belong, and considerable proportion of voters reside and also vote.

i. Balmikis: The settlement has sizeable Dalit population stratified into different castes, regions and class. Locally, Balmikis are dominant caste in terms of numerical strength, economic prosperity, and political representation but not in ritual status⁹⁶. Traditionally members of the caste dealt with human refuse/manual scavenging. Non-ascriptive role of Balmikis as agricultural labourers in village economy, Balmiki women as midwives, or in the city community's engagement in caste unrelated occupations is erased and identities are reduced to their stigmatised occupation as scavengers/sanitation workers. Arrival in the city did not affect qualitative alteration in their stigmatised status and identity. Hiring of community members as sanitation workers/scavengers by municipal corporation in the city entrenched and reduced Balmiki identity to their ascriptive occupation.

Unflinchingly supporting Congress for over five decades, Balmikis are at present known as 'vote bank' of BJP. By the late 1980s decamping the Congress(I), Balmikis became committed ally of BJP's Hindutva project firmly supplying its electoral support to the party, and muscle power to 'anti-muslim pogroms' designed by Hindutva forces (cf Prashad 2001; xii). Tracing the social history of Balmikis, Vijay Prashad (2001) argues that rupture from Congress (I) and electoral support to BJP is not abrupt and unexpected. Political trajectory shows cultural contradiction in the community were cultivated in colonial and post-colonial times under the influence of militant Hindus of various reform movements, within the Congress, and by overseers of sanitation employees (Prashad 2001). Politically connected to Congress, the community was swayed by militant Hindus present within the party and outside, divesting them of

⁹⁶ M.N Srinivas defined and subsequently revised the term dominant caste. Initially, dominant caste was defined by him on four parameters of numerical preponderance, economic and political power, and ritual status of a caste which should not be too low in local caste hierarchy. Revising and expanding the criterion in, 'The Dominant caste in Rampura', he includes 'number of educated persons in a caste and occupations they pursue' in the definition. According to this definition then Balmikis cannot be termed as dominant caste. However, the present study refers Balmiki as dominant caste only on select count of numerical preponderance, economic power and political dominance which is resented by other caste groups/communities residing in the settlement.

their distinct religious traditions and figures of Bala Shah Nuri and Lalbeg who envisioned emancipation of the oppressed (ibid). Holding Hindu overseers of sweepers responsible for Hinduisation of Balmikis, Prashad (2001: xi) remarks

The institutional roots of the alliance in the colonial municipality were these Dalits who were hired as clients of Hindu overseers who exercised inordinate control over their lives. This institutional connection was given an ideological framework in 1930s when these Dalits hired exclusively into the municipality as sweepers, adopted and refined an anti-Muslim Hindu identity proffered in the first instance by militant Hindus.

The community was neither inherently submissive to their political overlords in the Congress party nor was devoid of radical members challenging the oppressive regime which failed to give them a life of dignity. But the militant zeal of the community was frustrated by 'structural forces set in place by the state' in post-independent India (cf Prashad:137). A reading of social history of Balmikis by Prashad suggests the commitment to the Congress was partially due to the absence of political alternative offering integration with Hindu identity to the community. Emergence of BJP in eighties and the shift in political loyalty from Congress to BJP is attributed to success of the latter in fashioning social and political visions in which Balmikis were made rightful claimant of Hindu identity (ibid). Vast array of Dalit movements and formation of political parties underline the importance of identity and collective interest of a social group---religion, region, caste or class---in mobilising support of masses. Electoral support to a political party or a leader is also determined by ability of a community/social group to identify with it (Pai and Jagpal 1997). In their study of four villages of western U.P in Meerut district Pai and Jagpal point disidentification of Most Backward Castes (MBCs) and Balmikis with parties like BSP, JD, SP espousing interest of specific underprivileged castes turned them to BJP, a Hindu party, "which is a part of their search for an alternative political party" (ibid:1360). In 2008, BJP had its first and only candidate so far to represent this constituency in the state legislature. Delayed political representation of the party however belies the active presence of its parent organisation, RSS, in the settlement. It is only in recent years the community witnessed a rapid shift from Congress to BJP dividing the political loyalties of the community between different existing political parties.

ii. Jatavs and Bairwas: Another most populous caste are Chamars. As Rosenthal (2014:330) describes they were “originally agricultural serfs and leather workers in villages, they have moved to relatively independent economic activity...and are presently highly active in politics”. Members of the castes and sub-castes adopted respectable/neutral caste names thus known by different names in different regions/states. Bairwa is one of the many names claimed by Chamars in Rajasthan. In the early 1930s and 40s Bairwas were called Chamars and were returned as Chamars in decennial census till 1956 (Bhatia 2006). In eastern part of Rajasthan, they are known as Jatavs and Chamars, in the central region largely as Bairwas, and in the western and south-eastern regions as Meghval, Balai, and Meghvanshi. Even till recently, Bunkars in Rajasthan used to do leather work, though they have now taken to weaving (cf Vasistha 1984). Delinking from caste occupation, members of these varying castes have made occupational shift. In the settlement Bairwas refer masonry and weaving as their primary caste occupations. Similarly, Chamars, known as Chambhars in Maharashtra, mostly from the Poorvanchal region of U.P. refer their caste as Jatav. Jatavs from U.P no longer use derogatory reference Chamar, as the connotation manifest derisive occupational relation with leather work. Unlike Balmikis, their occupational engagement in the settlement is seldomly related to caste occupation. Collectively these castes---Jatavs, Bairwas, Khatiks, Mahars--- constitute political rivals to Balmikis in the settlement. Jatavs, Bairwas and Mahars admitted to lend electoral support unambiguously to BSP⁹⁷ (*Haathi ke saath/ supporting elephant*) and its party leader Mayawati. Regionally, in U.P, Jatavs constitute a core vote bank of BSP and the leader. Commitment to the party is evident in the settlement as well. Affection of Mahars to the party stems from centrality of Ambedkar in its political ideology. Clearly no community supported any party en bloc; internal political differentiation was observed among all the caste groups. Still, each caste group is homogenously associated with specific political party, like Jatavs to BSP, by residents.

⁹⁷ Party symbol of BSP is elephant (Haathi). In my field electoral support to BSP is referred as *haathi ke saath* by supporters of the party.

6.3 Reserved Constituency: Political Parties and Candidates in Assembly Elections (1993-2015)

In 1993 assembly elections resumed in the city and Ashanagar was carved out as part of a reserved assembly constituency.

Since the formation of this constituency in 1993, six assembly elections had been held. The constituency has sent three MLA's from different parties as political representative to the assembly. It elected one MLA consecutively for three terms from the Congress party (1993-2003), once from the BJP (2008) and twice from the newly formed party AAP (2013 and 2015). The socio-political context in which parties succeeded in assembly elections is vexed and varied. However, owing political allegiance to different political parties, all three MLAs from the constituency so far come from a single caste, Balmiki. All MLA's are resident of Ashanagar; after winning three-time MLA from congress moved out of the settlement. House of late MLA from the BJP saw expansion in the settlement and rumoured to own property in neighbouring upscale locality. In 2015 assembly elections, three out of four contesting candidates were from Balmiki caste. The fourth candidate was Jatav who contested from BSP. To minimise electoral loss nearly all parties, except BSP, display a clear bias in distribution party ticket and fielding candidates from a Balmiki caste. Favourable bias towards Balmiki community is because the community possesses numerical majority and material resources.

Since 1993, outcome of assembly elections in the constituency reflect a consistent link with locally proclaimed political loyalty. It has been pointed earlier that for three consecutive terms Congress (INC) won the constituency seat. Sustained loyalty to the party emanates from deep sense of gratitude towards matron leader, Indira Gandhi, which is expressed in currency of votes. Even when the party lost to BJP in 2008, it was only by a narrow margin of 635 votes. Till then, BJP remained runner up, while BSP, representing federation of non-Balmiki communities, continued to be positioned at third rank.

Table 1: Vote numbers and share of the four rival parties in assembly elections since 1993 to 2015 correspondingly the party ruling GNCT

	INC		BJP		BSP		AAP		Winner/Caste	Ruling Party
	Vote (no)	Share (%)	Vote (no)	Share (%)	Vote (no)	Share (%)	Vote (no)	Share (%)		
1993	17844	37.26	14989	31.30	4203	8.78	NA	NA	INC (Balmiki)	BJP
1998	22887	43.79	18116	34.66	9419	18.02	NA	NA	INC(Balmiki)	INC
2003	26469	39.82	20254	30.47	13938	20.97	NA	NA	INC(Balmiki)	INC
2008	30137	36.51	30772	37.28	19413	23.52	NA	NA	BJP(Balmiki)	INC
2013	19702	17.46	26243	23.31	16053	14.22	43960	38.93	AAP(Balmiki)	AAP
2015	4129	3.25	45001	35.34	2199	1.74	74815	58.62	AAP(Balmiki)	AAP
2020⁹⁸	3262	2.44	57641	43.01	1224	0.92	69947	52.36	AAP(Balmiki)	AAP

Source: Election Commission of India (Statistical Report on Legislative Assembly of NCT, Delhi)

Note: AAP was formed in 2012 and contested first assembly elections in 2013.

The ranking of these parties on the basis of percentage of polled votes indicates INC commanded considerable electoral support. In 1993, total percentage of polled votes for the BSP within the constituency was 8.78% which increased ever since reaching to 23.52% in 2008. In 2013, with entry of the AAP in political field, position of BSP shifted even further to rank fourth as contender, and its vote share dwindled to 1.74% in 2015 assembly election. Although, locally, Jatavs and other non-Balmiki castes are considered as vote bank of BSP. But, vote share in assembly elections shows the link between the party and its perceived vote bank has not converted into tangible votes. BSPs electoral performance indicates that despite electoral presence its supposed

⁹⁸ Assembly election for Delhi concluded on February 8, 2020 and result were declared on February 11, 2020 close to the time of thesis submission. At the time I was away from the field. Therefore, discussion above does not analyse the influence of local political conditions on the outcome of constituency representation in assembly elections of 2020.

core vote bank, if not inactive, largely remained politically partitioned between two national parties, INC and BJP. Over the years, the party managed to broaden its voter base but phenomenal appearance and success of the AAP, in 2013 and 2015, further fragmented and reduced percentage of its vote share. A look at vote share of major political contenders and shift in political power between competing rivals shows political drift of the electorate from INC to BJP and AAP. Clearly, larger political context (state/national politics) impresses upon the local politics. Since 1993, outcome of assembly elections in the constituency reflect a consistent link with locally proclaimed political loyalty. Often incumbent MLA's of the constituency hail from ruling party administering GNCT. Drifting political support/loyalties manifest that electoral politics is dynamic/fluid, it is not characterised by status quo of commitment to identity or obligation. Emergence of new political formations, alternate visions of governance and changing political aspirations of electorate sways them to try newer political alternatives. Diversification of political alternatives transform political landscape as it intensifies electoral competition and presents electorate with wider political choices for representation of interests. So, success of AAP in the constituency saw erosion in vote bank of the two leading parties, also it signalled shift away from identity or obligatory politics to integrative politics⁹⁹. But this shift is not enduring or stable.

Indian democracy is characterised as patronage democracy (Chandra 2007). It thrives where elected officials not only control public sector but enjoy an overwhelming discretion over allocation/distribution of state resources. It is argued that ethnic identities play a pivotal role in reinforcing patronage democracy. As common ethnic identity binds voter and political entrepreneurs who expect to benefit mutually through ethnic favouritism (ibid). Chandra argues that under severe information constraint about competing political aspirants, voters tend to vote positively for those with whom they share common ethnic identity. Locally, ethnic favouritism is demonstrated by political parties in distribution of party tickets to strategically important caste group. A clear political bias is noticeable towards the Balmiki

⁹⁹ According to Robert A. Dahl (1931:34-36 c.f Rosenthal, 2014:328-329) to become a part of political system an ethnic group undergoes three stages of assimilation which also characterises the types of cohesion in each stage. In the first stage, an ethnic group displays high degree of political cohesion because of 'common identity, social ties and similar economic position' (ibid). In the second stage, political cohesion begins to weaken because of limited mobility gained by the group through its organised political actions which results in emergence many aspiring leaders generating internal factions. The group becomes highly differentiated in third stage and it is less likely to draw on its primordial identity in political action.

community which is not limited to assembly elections. Preference to Balmikis extends also in local body elections, notably when municipal wards are reserved only for SCs. Compelling need to win elections for political survival, preferential treatment by the parties on the one hand leads to political representation of a single (or a few) caste in the colony, on the other hand it proves counterproductive for Dalit unity in the colony. In a constituency where a specific caste group predominates, giving preference to other caste groups could be a self-defeating act for political parties.

However, in unreserved municipal wards of this reserved constituency it is not unusual for a general candidate to contest and get elected as councillor¹⁰⁰. In unreserved constituencies and wards, SC candidates are bypassed. They contest either as independent candidate or from lesser known parties. General caste aspirants with better socio-political network and economic status are found to be preferred in unreserved constituencies/wards. A large population of these unreserved wards reside in better off localities and belong to middle and upper-middle-classes. For guaranteed political representation of SCs and other marginalised social groups reserved constituency seems indispensable. Carolyn Elliot (2014:126) writes, “political power depends much more directly on the number of followers that can be rallied for competition than the possession of resources or power in other arenas”. However, locally, economic resources of political aspirants are an important condition even to enter in political competition. While distributing tickets, political parties, among other factors, weigh ability of a candidate to spend in the run up to election. As Kanchan Chandra (2007) emphasizes that in patronage democracies elites of a community who have capital launch a political career. According to her elite implies ‘upwardly mobile middle class’ who are educationally and economically superior than the electorate. In addition to numerical power, economic resources and social networks are important to contest elections effectively. Further, class status is important in elections in urban spaces, like in unreserved wards, which contains voters of mixed caste origins and class backgrounds. Politically aspiring Dalit candidates residing in the settlement not only lack socio-economic status of their counterparts but also have weak social networks

¹⁰⁰ In the previous municipal election, 2012, of the four wards three were reserved for women, of which only one was reserved for SC women. On the remaining two wards women from general caste were elected. Likewise, in 2017 municipal elections one ward reserved for women was won by women hailing from general category (Brahmin caste. Even previous councillor belonged to the same caste). In both the women reserved seats, elected councillors belong to General category. Also, all elected MPs of its Lok Sabha constituency hail from general castes.

among voters coming from better off class. As Dalit aspirants lack social network and economic resources to contest in unreserved wards they are less likely to be preferred by political parties which in quest of electoral success devise micro level strategies. Political strategies adopted to maximise the electoral success inevitably tend to exclude certain groups causing inter-group political rivalries. It was observed that political inclusion, exclusion and factionalism manifested itself in the settlement in run up to municipal elections of 2017. While provision of reserved constituency did ensure Dalit representation. Yet, political impulse to gain electoral victory impeded inclusion of numerically and economically weaker Dalit castes in distribution of tickets by major political parties.

6.3.1 Municipal Election, 2017: Electoral Competition and Representation in Reserved Wards¹⁰¹

In 2017 municipal elections of Delhi, of four wards under the constituency, three were reserved for women and one was reserved for SCs on which both men and women could contest¹⁰². From the three women reserved wards, only two were reserved for SC women. Within the settlement, of three incumbent ward councillors two belong to Balmiki community and one is from Jatav community. The ward councillors from Balmiki community hail from different parties, BJP and AAP. As in three wards, two

¹⁰¹ To understand the politics of reserved constituency Municipal elections are taken as proxy for assembly elections. Municipal elections are very localised, limited only to ward level. However, the assembly constituency is constituted of only four wards from which two wards are within the settlement, the third ward shares population between the settlement and a neighbouring residential area. While the fourth ward does not share physical boundary with the settlement nor the population. As in 2017 municipal elections of the four wards within the constituency three were (SC)reserved. Total population of the constituency is 241,540 of which SC population is 76,606. The total SC population of these three wards is 72,916 from the total population of 185,372. The total population of the ward away from the settlement is 56168 of which SCs constitute 3689. Wards are drawn on population basis and after the delimitation of wards in 2017, each ward roughly has 60000 population. Understandably, the constituency of which settlement is part is declared reserved for the substantial SC population distributed in the three of its four wards. Sharing the same geographical area and population, local body elections as proxy can give a broader understanding of the ways of political organisation and participation that occurs during assembly elections in the reserved constituency. Also, assembly elections can be taken as proxy because it is constituted of smaller administrative unit, ward unlike a parliamentary constituency which is constituted of several assembly constituencies. East Delhi parliamentary constituency, under which the settlement falls, alone has 10 assembly constituencies.

¹⁰² The Delhi Municipal corporation, trifurcated in 2012 into North, South and East municipal corporations, has total 272 wards. While North and South municipal corporation has 104 wards each, East municipal corporation (EDMC), under which Ashanagar comes, has 64 wards. Winning over 180 seats in 2017 municipal elections the BJP voted back consecutively for third term.

reserved for SC women and one SC general. On both the SC women reserved wards BJP candidates hailing from Balmiki and Jatav caste were elected. In SC ward, AAP candidate from Balmiki community was elected.

Total 23 candidates contested in the municipal polls—7 in ward 1, 12 in ward number 2 and 4 in ward number 3. In these three wards around 12 contested as independent candidates. Leadership aspirations among the residents of the settlement is high; in conversations, they express a desire to contest elections at appropriate time, mostly in distant future after building local networks and acquiring enough material resources. Contesting of nearly fifty two percent candidates as independent signals an attempt to realise this political aspiration. Also, an inflated number of independent candidates indicate political scheming of candidates/parties who raise independent candidates to dent on vote share of their rivals.

Table 2: Electoral Competition and Representation in Reserved Ward

Ward number	Category of ward	Total no. of candidates	Name of the party, gender and caste of the candidates	Independent candidate	Party, gender, and caste of winning Candidate
Ward 1	SC (Women)	07	AAP(Balmiki) BJP (Balmiki) BSP (Jatav) INC (Balmiki)	03 (Balmiki)	BJP (Female/Balmiki)
Ward 2	SC (General)	12	AAP(Balmiki) BJP(Balmiki) BSP (Khatik) INC (Balmiki) Swaraj India (Balmiki)	07 (Caste of all candidates is not known. Except one woman, remaining seven contestants were men)	AAP (Male/Balmiki)
Ward 3	SC (Women)	04	AAP (Balmiki) BJP (Jatav) INC(Balmiki)	01 (Balmiki)	BJP (Female/Jatav)
Total		23	12	11	

Source: Field-study

***Note 1:** Parenthesis indicates caste of the candidate

These independent candidates also included disgruntled members denied tickets by their party. It is noteworthy that highest number of independent candidates, eight, contested in SC (general) reserved ward included only one female candidate. Another

woman contesting from the ward was from Congress party who consecutively won two previous municipal elections. In the wards reserved for SC women the number of independent candidates were fewer than in SC (general). From these three wards, only five women contested as independent candidate. Two independent candidates came from families with political backgrounds. Like many female candidates contesting on party tickets, they were encouraged to contest because male members were ineligible to contest in women reserved wards.

From total 23 contesting candidates, I met or attended rallies of 15 candidates. Out of these 15 candidates 12 were from the Balmiki caste and only three contesting candidates came from non-Balmiki caste--- two Jatavs and one Khatik.

Of the three non-Balmiki candidates, two were BSP candidates belonging to Jatav and Khatik community. Apart from BSP, a Jatav woman was given ticket by BJP to contest from one of the SC (women) reserved ward. In their bid to win seats, all political parties distribute tickets to candidates from the Balmiki community except BSP which favourably give tickets to its core constituency, the Jatavs and allied castes. Even, Swaraj Abhiyaan, a new political party floated by academician turned politician, Yogendra Yadav, debuting in local elections also gave ticket to a man from the Balmiki community. Of the three candidates who won in elections and now are incumbent ward councillors, two are from Balmiki caste from AAP and BJP and one is Jatav from BJP. Also, MLA of the constituency hails from the Balmiki community. Political success of a single caste, here Balmiki, reveals existing political dominance of a single caste. Blatant politics of number generates a sense of political non- representation among non-Balmiki Dalits.

Political significance of Balmikis on reserved seats/constituency is attributed to their numerical preponderance. Electoral preference to the community manifested during 2017 municipal elections in which all the four wards under the assembly constituency were reserved. During the election campaign, a non-Balmiki party member expecting to get ticket from affiliated parties expressed displeasure over preferential treatment given to Balmikis. Shanti, from Jatav caste, is an active party member of BJP and for a decade she has been working for the party¹⁰³. She was

¹⁰³ Another woman from the Balmiki community after being denied ticket from the Congress party attempted to contest as independent candidate. Her nomination was rejected due to error in documents. She did not contest in the election and neither did she campaigned for the party candidate.

disappointed with the party when it gave ticket to a Balmiki woman to contest in civic body elections in a ward reserved for SC women. Hurt and upset over party's political reductionism to a community with numbers she says,

Party makes us work throughout the year but when the time comes to reward they give tickets only to Balmikis. I have worked for the party for ten years. Now they did not consider me for party ticket. This is against party's promise of introducing new candidates in the election. They just want to win elections.

As a measure to address anti-incumbency in the party, BJP devised a strategy to distribute tickets to new candidates. Without compromising on important factor of numerical dominance, it promised to introduce fresh candidates regardless of community/caste. Unsuspecting of the party's intention of political victory, the woman understood promise as a remedy to address political marginalisation of non-Balmiki members. Despite undisguised grievance with the party, she campaigned for it till the conclusion of election campaign.

In addition to numerical preponderance, to maximise the plausibility of electoral victory all the competing parties assess candidates on basis of their economic strength, local popularity/dominance of the individual, and legitimacy of the person supporting their candidature. Along with membership of 'right' caste, right networks are also important for an aspiring politician to gain successful candidature from a party. The Balmiki woman who contested from BJP and won the seat is wife of late MLA who was from the party. In 2015 assembly elections, she contested from the party and lost to AAP candidate from Balmiki caste. Her candidature in both the elections, assembly and municipal, was endorsed by former district president (*siladhyaksh*) of BJP who enjoys considerable influence within the party and locally among Balmikis. In fact, he contested twice on party ticket, in 1993 and 1998, in assembly elections from the constituency and once for the office of ward councillor in 2012. Likewise, all the candidates contesting from congress party were not only economically prosperous but also had served as ward councillor in the past.

Gilles Verniers (2018) argues that primary concern of a party is to gain electoral success than representation. In order to ensure political success in elections, party's devise local strategies and do not essentially treat their core constituency with homogeneous favours. Electoral representation in the municipal elections agrees with his argument. In two of the wards with sizeable Balmiki population all major parties, except the BSP, distributed tickets to members of Balmiki community. While in one

ward where comparatively Balmikis are less in number and collectively Jatavs and Bairwas constitute preponderant population, deviation in candidature was observed. The ward was reserved for SC (women). Contesting female candidates in the ward belonged to different castes. Of the three candidates, two were non-Balmiki candidates, Jatav (BJP), and Bairwa (AAP). Two candidates were Balmikis one was from INC and another was an independent contender. BJP's candidate from Jatav caste won the office. Husband of the Jatav candidate runs NGO and is a cable operator. He is affable and liked by residents across the castes. Also, he is closely associated with higher leaders of the party that ensured ticket for his wife. Jatav votes in the ward remained intact as BSP did not field any candidate from this ward. BSP's decision of not fielding candidate was electorally advantageous for Jatav candidate. Support of the fellow caste (wo)men who also share regional identity seemingly redirected to BJP's candidate. Jatav votes, possibly, saw minimum splitting as other candidates not only came from Balmiki community, but also did not parallel influence and popularity of Jatav candidate from BJP. Surge in local popularity of the party also functioned in her favour. The party's decision to field a Jatav candidate was tactically directed to secure victory in the election than to placate resentments of non-Balmiki community. Further, electoral tactics applied for political survival unravels conundrum of reserved wards/constituency. As Ratan from the community speaking about the voting behaviour of the residents says,

Municipal elections are very small and local elections. Undoubtedly all parties will give ticket to Balmiki candidates because here our population is highest. In municipal elections people don't vote on the basis of party but on familiarity.

Similarly emphasising on the numerical strength of Balmikis and disinterest of the community in BSP a man from Kayastha (General) caste comments,

Only Jatavs support BSP, not Balmikis. Why should they? Balmikis have numbers. Every national party readily gives tickets to members of Balmiki community, they don't have to depend on BSP. It is BSP which struggles to muster winnable numbers. If it gives ticket to a Bairwa or Khatik then Jatavs get upset and if Jatavs get ticket then Bairwas or Khatiks might not cast votes favourably. It is difficult to achieve unity among Dalits... anyways all the parties be it BSP or BJP have worked to divide the Dalits.

Remarks highlight that Balmikis are not dependent on a party which politically obliges to its core constituency, Jatavs and affiliated sub-castes. As they are strategically important in local politics for all the parties. However, political difference between Balmikis and Jatavs is not local. In fact, as discussed earlier, it is historical.

Arc of political experience and affiliation of the two caste groups diverge from each other. Local political condition intensify distance between the two caste groups as the following conversation shows. Denying that preferential treatment meted out to Balmikis, Ramkishan, from Balmiki caste and a BJP supporter attempt to explain political difference between Balmikis and Jatavs says,

It is not that different parties prefer Balmikis. It is Jatavs who do not want to integrate and always launch support behind the BSP. (In a subtle attack on BSP) BSP never gives ticket to Balmikis, they exclude them...anyone seeking ticket to contest in elections has to pay an enormous sum to the party fund.

Defending Balmiki community from the charge of undue political favours, Ramkishan reverts blame on Jatavs and on BSP for the exclusion of Balmikis. During election campaign a senior party member of BSP acknowledged that candidates fielded by the party had to pay a sum of three lakhs into the party fund. Thus, allegation made by Ramkisan is not untrue. But BSP is not alone to demand money for the party fund in return for ticket. Members of BJP campaigning actively similarly conceded that candidates paid an amount above 5 lakhs in to the party fund. According to Ramkisan, exclusion of Balmikis from the BSP is outcome of its inclination towards Jatavs and its monetary greed because it gives party tickets in return for money. Exchange of money has increasingly become a political norm to secure party tickets which is followed by all political parties, including the BJP (Witt 2009). This information is not surprising for voters and aspiring candidates locally. However, such levelling of accusations singularly against BSP, depicts the party as corrupt, parochial and delegitimises its claim to represent Dalit interest. In contrast, BJP is presented as an unbiased party willing to represent Dalits. His views manifest inter-party rivalry and existing socio-political relations between supporters of BSP and non-BSP parties. In a separate conversation before the elections, contemplating over the differences between Balmikis and Jatavs he said,

Earlier all Dalits including Jatavs and Khatiks were Balmikis. Over the years except us all other moved away and severed ties with our original Guru Valmiki ji. Jatavs started following Ravidas and revere him as their guru. Yet again they forgot Ravidas and shifted to Ambedkar. Though we are brothers, they (Jatavs) betrayed the community. Here of course we interact and greet (ram-ram) each other but we maintain a distance. They celebrate their festivals and we do ours (referring to Valmiki Jayanti and Ambedkar Jayanti)...we Balmikis just want love; earlier Maharishi Valmiki gave us love we devoted ourselves to him, later it was Indiraji who showed us affection so we supported her. Now RSS embraces us, it talks of removing untouchability so we are with them.

Emphasising on community's search for love and its loyalty to those who embrace them, he distinguishes Balmikis from Jatavs. This distinction is based on different revered icons of the communities where latter follows Ambedkar inspired radical politics. Exonerating the Hindu religion for its dehumanising practice of untouchability, he recognises efforts of RSS in removing untouchability as an act of benevolence/love in contrast to BSP's anti-caste politics. Overlooking political ambitions, he foregrounds need for love as the cause of political shift of Balmikis from Congress to BJP. Eliciting historical and political differences between Balmikis and non-Balmikis the conversation historicises Dalit disunity. Both the caste groups revere and idealise two different icons, Valmiki and Ambedkar, as their leader. It is also an important basis on which both the groups demarcate themselves from the other. As a woman leader, district president of SC/ST cell of the Congress party, from Balmiki community remarks,

Dalits have ignored the teaching of Babasaheb to educate, agitate and organise because of which they still remain backward. It is only Jatavs who have followed Babasaheb seriously by taking education seriously and have succeeded in obtaining respectable administrative posts in government services. Balmikis did not take education seriously, but now gradually they are moving towards education...if you ask why Dalits here don't stand unitedly behind BSP then the reason is that they seek votes on the name of Dalits but serve only to Jatavs. The party only support Jatavs then why would we support it? Welfare should be for all why only Jatavs? Is this not casteism (jaatvaad)?

For non-Balmikis, political success of Balmikis relies on their numerical majority and social unity. Balmikis also accede to their political significance and they distinguish themselves from Jatav residents. Balmikis ascribe political and economic success of Jatavs to their serious commitment to Ambedkar and his teachings, specifically to education. Success of Jatavs is attributed to their adherence to education which enabled them in procuring esteemed government jobs by using affirmative policy of reservation. While praising improved socio-economic status of Jatavs, Balmikis express dismay over the backward condition of their own community. The BSP, while urging Dalits to unite, is held responsible for political exclusion of Balmikis which gives preferential treatment to Jatavs at the expense of other Dalit castes. Marginalised by the party, Balmikis justify their support to other parties.

As all candidates, except few, come from the same caste intra-caste factionalism is inevitable. Candidates share similar caste identity causes intra-caste political rivalry,

and fractures community's mandate. Voters from the community cast vote not only on basis of common caste identity. Apart from identity, other factors like party, or familiarity with candidates, are considered in making electoral choices. Political rivals of Balmiki candidates are mostly from the same caste therefore to win election they tend to compete fiercely with their caste fellows. Although members of other castes also contest. Claiming legitimacy to contest and win elections, Balmiki candidates recount ineptitude of incumbent leaders, who could be from same caste, of different/opposition party. Rather than caste, the political party and personality of adversaries are attacked by contesting candidates. Candidates from preponderant caste group are unable to stress on common caste identity, they mobilise electoral support on basis of kinship, social networks, individual traits/influence and local popularity of the party they contest from.

6.3.2 Horizontal Caste Alliance

Inter-caste political rivalries are neither unique to Dalits in Ashanagar, nor it is restricted to them¹⁰⁴. But political schism(s) in reserved constituencies does impede achievement of Dalit political unity. Locally, political competition on reserved seats divide Dalits into Balmiki and non-Balmiki factions. Disgruntled and excluded because of political preference to a single caste, non-Balmiki Dalit castes, Jatvas, Bairwas and Khatiks, forged horizontal political alliance in the election and supported BSP candidate from Khatik caste. This alliance was based on socio-political dominance and disruptive behaviour of Balmikis in the settlement. On one occasion while a large meeting was scheduled to be held by a BSP candidate. A vegetable vendor in late twenties from Bairwa caste introduced himself as supporter of BSP candidate. In previous elections, he supported a Balmiki candidate from the Congress party but now refuses to cast vote to any Balmiki candidate regardless of party. Reproachful of Balmiki ward councillor's wilful neglect of non-Balmikis he tells,

They come seeking our votes during elections. After winning elections they disappear and listen only to the concerns of their community. In our block, parks are used by Balmikis for marriage and playing, but we cannot use it. They lock it and use it as if it only belongs to them. Our children cannot play safely for the fear of fight with Balmiki boys. If we go with complaints or solicit help, we are not heard by councillor. Only our own person (khud ka aadmi) will listen and solve our problems.

¹⁰⁴ Inter-caste political competition and hostility manifest in other regions of the country such as in case Mala Madiga or Kammas and Reddis in southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Sachin, a Jatav man and committed supporter of BSP opines,

Balmikis are rulers of the colony. Nobody can say anything to them. If any brawl breaks between Balmikis and others, they all unite to protect the person of their community. Unity is their strength. Of course, in elections they fight against each other but after winning they support their caste members irrespective of political ideology...here Balmikis are engaged in illicit businesses of selling liquor, gambling, and theft. For any small thing they take out knife and gather twenty people. People avoid intimate relations with them. Of course, as we stay together so we maintain formal relations with each other.

Deepak from Bairwa caste shares

In my block most of the families are from Balmiki caste. Now you are here you will know that they are troublemakers. They drink, gamble, fight and use lewd language for others. Because of them it is difficult for women to go out alone...Here, only they become MLA and councillors. They win elections and only help their own people (apne logo ko).

A Bairwa woman in her sixties complaining about Balmikis residing in her block says,

We don't engage with them, they are intimidating. Their leaders don't work for us. In earlier elections we supported BSP candidate (from Bairwa community) but he lost the election. First, we don't have sufficient numbers to win elections independently. Also, some members of the community and of the party join hands with other parties. This time also we will support BSP candidate from Rajasthan.

Similar charges against Balmikis regularly featured in conversations even before and after the elections. Inter-caste resentments against Balmikis reinforce consolidation of underrepresented sub-castes. The single party, BSP, representing the horizontal alliance of sub-castes emphasize on regional identity, commitment to ideals of the party and its struggle to overcome socio-political marginality, and experiences of quotidian friction with the predominant caste in the settlement. In block meetings, candidates and supporters invoke regional identity which tacitly implies caste identity of the candidate and supporters.

Being a reserved constituency, Muslim residents are ineligible to contest in assembly elections. Similarly, they were ineligible to contest in 2017 local election in reserved wards. Numerically, Muslims form a small electorate limited mainly to few blocks. Thus, even in unreserved ward being a numerical minority and owing to 'communal differences' with 'Hindus', Muslim residents uncertain of consolidating votes do not contest in elections. For their political representation, Muslim residents give primacy to political party over a candidate. In the municipal elections (2017),

women campaigning for BJP in one of the Muslim blocks urged Muslim women to vote for the party. To the request, Muslim women replied laughingly, ‘no matter whoever we vote for, it will go to BJP’. Election campaign of BJP in Muslim blocks were met with indifference and sneer. Expressing explicit disapproval and distrust for the BJP, they make political choice based on party. For long they supported Congress candidates in elections but in local elections this support appeared to be shifting to newly formed party AAP. Cultural antagonism with Balmikis does not automatically make Muslim residents an inevitable political ally of the BSP which projects a non- Balmiki candidate and claims to represent *sarvajan* (for all people) interests. Thus, regardless of varied political outlook, and choices numerical indomitability of Balmikis is inescapable in the settlement.

Based on discussions made above, it can be argued that electoral competition in the settlement factionalises different castes eligible to contest elections in a reserved constituency/ward. Without competition from upper castes and other powerful groups, reservation of constituency though provides representation to Dalit groups, it simultaneously induces both intra and inter-Dalit caste factionalisation.

6.4 Generational Divide: Youth and Political ‘Castelessness’

As discussed earlier, electoral support to parties has shifted from Congress to BJP. Further it moved to AAP. By 2017 municipal elections, young electorate was contemplating on political alternatives and many seemed to already have found one. As conversations below with youth suggest. A group of young Jatav boys and two from Kewat¹⁰⁵ caste, in early twenties, say,

We don't vote on the basis of caste. We see who is capable of governing and delivering. We give opportunity to everyone, not like our parents. This time we gave vote to BJP candidate, we will not support them in next elections as they don't act on our complains. Other day we went to her office (ward councillor) to ask her to install lights in central park and prune grass. Now it's been a month & nothing has been done. If they don't perform, we will not support them in the next elections...we are not like our parents and grandparents who have been giving vote to same party without considering other alternatives.

¹⁰⁵ Kewat comes under OBC category in Delhi. Traditionally they were boatmen. The community from the U.P has sought inclusion in union SC list sending the request to the ministry of social justice and empowerment.

On matters of preferred party/candidate, a Jatav girl pursuing Chartered Accountant course says,

I don't cast my vote for the caste or where my elders tell me to. We young people make our political choice independently on the basis of electoral promises. I will vote for BJP. Modiji is doing good work. He really is working for the development of the country. I will support BJP.

Another Jatav man in his early thirties running a grocery shop in the settlement tells

Most members of our community vote only BSP no matter what. They ask me to vote for the party. In last elections I voted for BJP. In this election I will see which party to vote. Those associated with BJP are my friends and people supporting BSP are from my village. At present, I haven't decided who I will cast vote for. I like Modi, according to me he will work. There is no problem with BJP...they won in U.P.

In a group discussion with boys, in early twenties, from Koli caste most of whom are pursuing graduation and post-graduation through distance learning opined,

We are not supporters of BSP. They only talk about caste and being Dalit. In Delhi so many communities stay together... We don't identify with any particular party. Earlier we supported Kejriwal (AAP) in Vidhan Sabha elections, now we don't support him any longer. Instead of working he keeps fighting with the PM. Now we support BJP. Illiterate people cannot understand the status India has achieved internationally since Modi became PM. They just complain about inflation but don't know that India's GDP is now higher than China...you cannot tell who will vote which party or person...Here Congress still commands supremacy (Congress ka dabdaba hai) mainly among the older people. They are still so committed to the party because Indira Gandhi gave these plots to them. They don't understand it was in past. Now it has done nothing for the country. They still sing songs in praise of Congress.

In another group discussion with Balmiki boys, between 18-30 years, participants said,

In the previous Vidhan Sabha elections we supported AAP because of Kejriwal. We elected AAP's candidate as MLA not an individual on basis of his caste. The party promised to expedite the salary payment of municipal workers, which it could not deliver. We know he does not have much power but in the dispute between central and state government, employees suffer, our families face difficulties. Non-payment of salary is the reason that our parents borrowed money from moneylenders and interest is high. Of course, salary will come after delays but imagine salary will be drained in repaying debts and interest... This time we will reconsider whom to vote... We don't even know who is contesting from BSP.

In a group discussion, young members, most in twenties, of Ambedkar organisation in the settlement while sharing their political views tell

It is not that because we follow Babasaheb so we only will vote BSP. Politics is different. We just want people to come out of religious and social flamboyance. We want people to step towards education. Politics is their choice. Last time in Vidhan Sabha we supported AAP candidate not BSP. Again, in municipal elections we supported and asked others also to support AAP candidate not because we are associated with the party, but because the party works for its constituents.

Similar view was expressed by a Congress worker from Balmiki community. He says,

Because I am a Dalit, it is not necessary that I will only support a Dalit party (implying BSP) or Mayawati. I respect what the party has done for advancement of Jatavs. But the party has been very narrow in its approach. It is positively biased towards Jatavs and did not take other Dalit communities in confidence. Had she thought for all, she would have been the tallest Dalit leader in the country... I think Congress has done more for Dalits than the BSP.

Disturbing the political unity/commitment of their communities, youth across caste groups disagree with unsaid rule of supporting a single party on the singular criteria of caste identity or perpetuate obligatory politics. They exhibit contempt for identity politics based on caste or region. It is disapproved on the ground that general interest of the nation/society is impaired by parochial communal interests. Loyalty to primordial identities is believed to incorporate bias and hinders equality for all. Discarding identity politics, based on ethnic loyalties, is regarded important to serve everyone equally without any inherent bias. Disregard for identity politics among youth testifies consolidation is not absolute as no caste/community supports any party/candidate en bloc¹⁰⁶. Departing from traditional support bound for a party, they instead search newer political alternatives. On marked shift from the Congress and BSP to other parties, youth insist that political diversification has allowed for a progressive move away from identity to issue based politics. Political plurality has resulted in dispersion of power and enthused political democratisation at the local level. Wielding power to choose, youth can gradually shift earlier voting patterns based on obligatory and identity politics to the issue-based politics. Following local and state politics closely through various media forms – whatsapp, news channels and newspapers – youth is politically informed. Aware of political choices, youth appear pragmatic and

¹⁰⁶ Political dissension is not unique to the youth. Within a caste/community political disagreement exist among the elders of the community. However, among the youth the pattern of political differences emerged sharply.

prepared to shift support to the potential party or candidate capable of governing. They disapprove obligatory politics and identity politics, to which many from earlier generation continue to submit. For youth, delivery of poll promises, and good governance is important. Seemingly ‘unshaken’ by caste identity or patronage, political response of youth in terms of voting/support is shaped by local concerns—maintenance of civic amenities, and anticipation of delivery of promises made during elections—but not limited only to it. Beyond local issues, development in national politics—installation of new government at the center and its agenda—influences political choices of youth in the settlement.

Recent developments in the settlement point that popular appeal of BJP is surging, notably among young voters. As the aforementioned conversations shows many of them are drawn to the party which is also cause of concern for its non-supporters, chiefly members and supporters of BSP, INC, and Ambedkarites. These apprehensions are not merely due to the loss of political dominance or erosion of electoral base. In 2014 communal riot broke out in the settlement, soon after the BJP’s victory in Lok Sabha polls. The riot had conspicuous participation of young men which substantiates the expressed concerns of residents about inclination of the youth towards BJP. Involvement of young men in the communal violence and their subsequent jingoist zeal to organise religious activities is blamed on to lack of education, unemployment, substance abuse, and mob mentality. According to political rivals of BJP, rising material and political aspirations of unemployed youth is responsible for their rightward shift. As Jatav elders explain the disinterest of Jatav youth in BSP,

These days youth want money or material like motorbikes, phones, cloths, shoes and many more things. Our people are not wealthy, we are very modest. Other parties offer them money and shower favor on youngsters...where do we get money from? Youth therefore support other parties and people. They have not seen the struggles of our forefathers who fought against caste practices and domination of upper castes. We had no food, money, house or respect. Now, they (youth) have it all, then why will they worry about the party?

Similarly, reflecting on youths attraction to BJP, members (all male) of a local Ambedkar organisation say,

We are a small organisation with very little money and influence. Youngsters even other people want favors like admission in a school, ration card, job. Shakha members (referring RSS) exercise tremendous influence here as they are part of BJP they have links with leaders and officials. They can lend help to people, so if the party ask for support certainly people will return the favour. We don’t have

such powers and connections. It is obvious people are not attracted to our organisation.

A 28-year Balmiki man about inclination of youth towards BJP says,

As a child, I remember RSS presence in the settlement. In fact, I used to participate in shakha activities. Hindutva was not prominent then. The Hindutvavaadi atmosphere is rising here since the coming of Modi government (Modi Sarkar) to power (in 2014)... shortly after its arrival a riot happened here in the same year. It is easy for uneducated and jobless people to get drawn to violence. They spend entire day doing nothing, just roaming, playing cards and chatting about. They are ready to initiate a fight at slightest provocation...

Surge in popularity of the BJP among youth and communal populism acquired overt expression since 2014. Communal polarisation is one of the tools deployed by BJP and its parent organisation, RSS, for cultural retrieval of masculine Hindu identity (Blom 1996). For political turn of youth to BJP, two important reasons, unemployment and resources at the party's disposal to fulfil newer material aspirations are pointed by the residents. It has been noted, afloat youth with uncertain socio-economic future constitute a vital bloc to sustain communal politics. As, on popular appeal of Shiv Sena and communalisation of Bombay, Blom (1996:156) writes, "these campaigns (by Shiv Sena) have in the 1980s contributed to communalisation of Bombay by transforming the floating and available energies and frustrations of an ever-growing army of young unemployed men into anti-Muslim aggression communal populism". In the settlement, there is no shortage of afloat young people struggling to secure employment preferably a stable job in public sector. Also, many are addicted to drugs and alcohol which is clandestinely supplied by people of criminal reputation who enjoy political and administrative support. With leisure time and imminent insecurity of jobs, unemployed youth become an easy prey to communal rhetoric. Many youths admitted participating in 2014 communal riot. Several among them are employed in contractual and private sector jobs which spares less leisure time. On weekdays, it is in fact an elusive task to meet or interact with this young employed population. While many young men have attended and participated in *shakha* activities in the past, now very few attend meetings regularly. Neither the state of unemployment is permanent, nor is the leisure time for devoting to activities of RSS. Therefore, political success of the party cannot be explained alone by pre-condition of overabundance of un(der)employed precariat youth. Political turn of the youth towards BJP is also due to popularity and faith in the leadership of incumbent prime minister, Narendra Modi. Political support to the party in

local elections and otherwise does not derive from recognition of work done by the party leaders locally. Electoral support to the party is lent for various schemes and decisions announced by the PM. Unified political loyalty to INC that was present to an extent in the previous generation was based on personal benefits received in the form of land, loan, and employment. In contrast, loyalty of youths for BJP rests on incessant construction of PMs image as self-sacrificing man always at service of the nation. For the national development, compliance and unquestioning support to the PM vis a vis to his party is not only considered essential but as a sort of national duty. It is believed that the leader does not favour any particular ethnic group rather he represents the nation and stands for its integration. It will be innocuous to believe that (ethnic/religious) identities are casted out from contemporary electoral politics and rendered obsolete in the interest of nation. On the contrary, religious/communal identity is at very core of imagining and building the nation for the party. It attempts, also immensely successful now, to refabricate the nation by foisting communal identity onto citizens, making communal identity synonymous to citizen. This project of remaking the nation is markedly different from earlier decades of 'nation building', as it aims to homogenise the 'nation' as Hindu *rashtra* and its citizens as 'nationalists'. An implicit undertone of constructing this nation inherently sidesteps differences and sets the normative to be followed diligently. It envisions nation as Hindu *rashtra*, a homogenised entity where only Hindus are rightful citizens, whereas 'nationalist' credentials of non-Hindus are constantly tested and demanded. The quest of producing communally homogenous nation suspends temporarily other differences, like caste, to unify under meta-identity as Hindu. Badri Narayan (2009) argues that to build a Hindu nation BJP requires incorporation of Dalits to enhance numerical majority. The party and its affiliates organisations have engaged in appropriation of Dalit leaders to recreate past and provide a new cultural identity to them as Hindu (ibid). Therefore, the basis that identity is irrelevant for present political dispensation and its leader, on which young people commit electoral support to the party is belied. Indeed, caste identity is displaced by communal/religious identity for its electoral success and realising its conception of the nation.

Antonio Gramsci borrowed the concept of hegemony from Lenin and theorised it to understand delays and failure of proletarian revolution (Karabel 1976). Conceptual theorisation of hegemony by Gramsci is a response to the posed questions, as it elaborates what impedes much-awaited revolution and how bourgeoisie, dominant

class, retain the status of ruler. According to Gramsci, ruling class do not always resort to coercion/ domination. Indeed, they legitimate their rule by garnering favourable consensus of masses. Despite possessing weapons of coercion, hegemonic rule largely relies on persuasion/consensus. Hegemony is an admixture of both, coercion and consensus. Gramsci insisted that securing consensus of masses should precede political control (ibid). According to him civil society institutions, like education, media, trade unions, etc. play an instrumental role in winning consensus by establishing cultural hegemony. Civil society institutions and actors enable inculcation of bourgeoisie ideologies and beliefs among the masses. Masses concede to bourgeoisie ideology because cultural and ideological hegemony obscures antagonistic relationship between the ruler and ruled. It makes ruled complicit in their own subjugation. Therefore, despite the existence of objective conditions, revolution is retarded. To combat the hegemonic rule and achieve a society devoid of class divisions, Gramsci proposed stirring and transformation of civil society by forging a counterhegemonic culture. Although, Gramsci's propositions urged communist parties to forge counterhegemonic culture in order to overthrow capitalist rule. In India, rather it is bourgeoisie party, BJP, which functions simultaneously in all the spheres---politics, civil society, economics--- and has established cultural hegemony (Eashvaraiah 2004). Growing popularity of BJP and rightward political shift is not specific to the settlement. It in fact reflects countrywide political temper towards the party and its leader. The party won two successive parliamentary elections, of 2014 and 2019, with overwhelming majority. It was also electorally successful in various assembly elections held between these two Lok Sabha elections. Seizure of political power both at national and state level is not a marvel achieved by it overnight. Even before the seizure of political power, long standing presence of its affiliate social and cultural organisations, like RSS, VHP, Sewa Bharti, contributed immensely in establishing 'cultural hegemony'¹⁰⁷ and built a fertile ground for its political success (Basu et.al 1993; Bhattacharjee 2016). Locally, presence and influence of the party was notable in cultural organisations like caste association. Components of hegemonic culture of the party manifest in cultural/religious celebrations and intercommunal relations between Hindus and Muslims. Following

¹⁰⁷ The term cultural hegemony was elaborated by Gramsci. But his translated works do not contain any precise definition of it (Lears 1985). The closest he comes to describe it as, "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (c.f. Lears 1985:568).

section describe how cultural and political hegemony of the party thwart formation of alternative culture and influence the direction of local politics.

6.5 Caste Samaj: Consolidating Identity and Political Aspiration

Referring to modern reincarnation of caste as caste association and its political function Rudolph and Rudolph (1960:5) write:

Within the new context of political democracy, caste remains central element of Indian society even while adapting itself to the values and methods of modern democratic politics. Indeed, it has become one of the chief means by which the Indian mass electorate has been attached to the process of democratic politics.

Emergence and liberating potential of caste association came frequently under academic scrutiny (Srinivas 1956; Selig 1956; Rudolph and Rudolph 1960; Natrajan 2011). It is argued that caste associations have been successful in forging solidarity among sub-castes for claiming political rights and economic advantage, and to transcend social restrictions girding mainly backward caste groups. The precondition to join the ranks of caste association is common ascriptive identity of caste.

To compensate for the uncertainty of employment and future, young men tend to engage in building politico-cultural identity and local reputation. In constructing this identity, support of various socio-political networks is sought. To mitigate the vulnerabilities and for cordial stay in the settlement where everyday life could be harsh, people draw on social support from networks beyond family and also seek to acquire influential positions. In local aspirational model, one of the prominent aspirations of youth is to become a political leader. The political class in the settlement includes former and incumbent leaders who hold political positions like ward councillors and MLA. It also comprises of those who compete for the political positions. Many holds sundry position of local prominence in political parties. Local political class constitute a significant section of local elites who pursue relatively distinct lifestyle and are wealthier than majority of co-residents. Beginning modestly most of these political leaders rose to prominence in the settlement which inspires youth to choose the similar path for socio-economic mobility. Political connections and positions are viewed as a route for upward mobility. Local politics also draws youth because of the power/influence people hold in these positions. Gaining membership of political class, also of local elite, promises social status and power that manifests in local influence. To begin a political career many young men, resort to their caste associations through

cultural and political participations. In the settlement Balmikis, Kurmis and Bairwas have caste association varying in organisation and functions. Another layer of political manoeuvring at local level and means used by caste groups to realise political aspirations is unravelled by internal dynamics of caste elections in two caste *samaj*; Balmikis and Bairwas. The previous section discussed disinterest of youth towards lending support to a party on considering the caste identity or interests. However, existence of caste *samaj* and active participation even of youth demonstrates mobilising potential of caste and its electoral relevance.

i. Elections in Balmiki Samaj

Each year, Balmikis, in the settlement elect a president for Balmiki samaj through elections. In these elections only Balmikis qualify to contest and vote¹⁰⁸. Elected president of the samaj represents and leads a procession called *shobha yatra* on Valmiki Jayanti marking birth anniversary of Valmiki, a sage revered by the community. In contemporary India, Balmikis draw their political and social identity from the name of this sage. Elected leader who leads the procession is called *pradhan* (headman/president). While Valmiki Jayanti is celebrated across the city but process of selecting *pradhan* varies. In the settlement, president is elected by the members of the samaj. Tenure of the president is only for a year. The main function for which the samaj elects a president is to lead a procession, called *shobha yatra*, which is taken out on the day of Valmiki Jayanti. Pradhan also mobilises money and other resources to conduct the procession successfully. On that day, president leads procession, wears a turban, and decides route from where procession would or would not pass.

In 2016 elections, all contestant for the post were young men between late twenties and early thirties. To ensure victory, both contestants and their supporters did well concerted canvassing which was discernible from posters on the walls, mounted flex sheets on lampposts, and presence of young men out in the streets garnering support from people of the community. There are no financial entitlements or any other form of benefits accrued to the post of president. It only gives recognition in the community and an opportunity to lead the procession ceremony on Valmiki Jayanti. In the absence of such benefits, it is bewildering to understand what incentivises one to

¹⁰⁸ I observed first election of Balmiki *samaj* in 2016. Elections were concluded in the first week of election into the field. And in 2017 method of election was changed from direct election to nomination.

contest for this post in which campaigning itself requires an average expenditure of 10 lakh rupees. According to the community leaders, contestants bear the election expenses from their own pockets. Similarly, candidates denied financial or non-financial assistance from political parties to which they were affiliated. Despite claims of apolitical nature of these elections, independent of political patronage, overlooking such possibilities could be misleading. The manner in which *samaj* elections were contested and conducted were similar to civic body elections requiring money, materials, and supporters to win. As members of the *samaj* told, candidate who won the election in 2016 alone spent approximately 15-17 lakhs. Campaigning expenditure involved mobilising supporters, providing material and monetary incentives, hiring vehicles for plying people to the election booth on the day of voting. During the 2016 elections, rumours of material inducements like distribution of sarees, liquor and money, was rife. Function of the president is limited only to organise and lead the procession, but contestants do seek votes on agenda promising welfare of the *samaj*. As one candidate promised help in procuring SC certificate for the *samaj* members, sewing and beauty course centres for girls, and to ensure timely payments of sanitation workers whose salaries have been delayed (due to delay in payment of salary municipal workers went on strike.). *Samaj* elections are used by young men as springboard to catapult their political careers. Some of the locally renowned political personalities, including former MLA and councillors, gained prominence through *samaj* elections before entering into local and state level politics. Despite political links being denied, three contesting candidates in 2016 elections were associated with national and state parties; INC, BJP and AAP. Success in *samaj* elections enables young men to demonstrate their political prowess and command over demography which is crucial for securing larger political victories. It is an opportunity for young political aspirants to prove their political mettle.

But in 2017, *samaj* initiated a new process to select Pradhan. It shifted from earlier method of democratic elections to selection of Pradhan by few male members of the *samaj*. A faction within the *samaj* opposed method of election to determine Pradhan. They contested the method arguing that it infuses political competition among young men and causes disunity within the *samaj*. Most members opposing the election are closely associated with BJP and RSS. They rallied successfully for the termination of the elections in 2017. Famously known as *guruji* in the *samaj*, Gopalkrishna is a member of RSS shakha, was among the members who actively opposed elections in the *samaj*. Striving to eliminate the evil customs (*kuritiya*)---rearing and selling of

pigs/pork, consumption of non-vegetarian food and liquor consumption---practiced within the *samaj*, he refers himself as a reformer of the *samaj*. He explains that the elections were opposed to prevent unrequired squandering of money on elections by young men who aim to build a political career. Termination of elections were justified on the ground that it sabotages internal cohesion within the *samaj* by fostering political factionalism. Opposing members proposed that candidates be screened on the basis of age and their contribution towards the *samaj*. They also proposed replacement of election committee, a body responsible for managing and conducting elections, by a Shiromani Prabandhak committee which will have representation of politicians, businessman, social workers to arrange Valmiki Jayanti. In contrast, dismayed members, mostly youngsters, resisted the elimination of elections not for the disenfranchisement rather claiming that elections bring recognition and popularity to the *samaj*. In 2017, a gathering of around 250 caste members consensually made a youth, affiliated to BJP, as president and the incumbent, from INC, co-ordinator of the samaj elections¹⁰⁹. Previously each member of the community had right to elect the samaj president through elections. However, recent method of selecting disenfranchises large section of the community, noticeably women.

ii. Caste Election: Bairwa Samaj

In the settlement Bairwa¹¹⁰, Khateek, Balai, Bunkar, and Dhanuk are SCs from different districts of Rajasthan. Politically Bairwas are more organised than other castes from Rajasthan residing in the settlement. BSP's preference to the community ascertains its significance in local politics. Since the formation of reserved constituency, of the six assembly elections in the constituency the party has fielded the same candidate from the Bairwa community for three times. Bairwas like other SCs from Rajasthan are referred as '*rajasthani*' by residents. Unless asked specifically about caste name they refer themselves as *rajasthani*, sometimes use regional identity interchangeably with caste. In Ashanagar there is a temple dedicated to Baba Ramdevra, a regional deity believed to be a reincarnation of Vishnu, built by the

¹⁰⁹ The estimated figure of 250 members attending the meeting was told by one member. Another member suggested this to be around 450-500.

¹¹⁰ Bairwas in Rajasthan and under union list are categorised under SC. In Delhi they come under OBC category. Now members of the community are demanding to be categorised under SC in Delhi.

contributions of Balai samaj in 1976. There is also a Bairwa Bhawan within the settlement which built and owned by the community.

Among the various SCs from Rajasthan, Bairwas conduct elections to elect a Pradhan of the samaj like Balmikis. The process and goal of electing a community Pradhan is starkly different between the two communities. The role of Balmiki Pradhan in community matters or as a mediator between the community and administration is secondary to leading *shobha yatra*. In contrast, Bairwas conduct elections primarily to unite and manage internal affairs of their samaj. Pradhan of Bairwa samaj is expected to arbitrate in the community matters, help community members, and act as a mediator between the community and administration. Expressing her concern about the indolent incumbent Pradhan, Sharda, a woman in her late sixties held

He does not concern himself with community issues. Earlier community issues related to marriage, separation or family disputes were taken to Pradhan and were resolved within the community. Now a days Bairwas are approaching police stations and courts to settle internal issues of the samaj. Once you take these issues to police station then it becomes public, attracting shame to samaj people.

Role of Pradhan towards the *samaj* is more elaborate and expected. Failure to meet expected duties can generate discontent among the members. Prevailing mood in the Bairwa community indicated dissatisfaction with Pradhan. The *samaj* elected incumbent Pradhan eight years ago in 2010. Since then, no fresh elections were held and the Pradhan continued to hold the position until 2018. Underlining the undemocratic and non-performing nature of Pradhan, young members of the community stirred demand for a fresh election and dissolution of election committee. The Pradhan was reluctant to step down. But after persistent pleading from respected elderly men of the *samaj* he agreed to dissolve election committee and announce fresh elections. Announcement of elections ushered campaign by candidates and their supporters within the *samaj*. The campaign was unheard and undetected to the residents which is nearly impossible in run up to elections of Balmiki samaj. Knowledge of election and ongoing campaign was only known to samaj people. Imperceptibility of election campaign was elucidated by an elderly Bairwa man, emphasising on difference in the manner samaj elections are held among Balmikis and Bairwas,

We cannot do this much...because Balmikis have massive wealth, they have government jobs. Their brothers, daughter-in-law, sons all have the job. They earn lakhs and lakhs of money...they have so much money they will spend...do you see that photo on that poster, that boy won elections of Balmiki samaj, he

spent 10-12 lakhs only for this election...we are very simple people. We don't have money like them.

During this time elections of Balmiki samaj had concluded and results were declared. On probing about the practice of elections within Bairwa samaj they told the community selects Pradhan with mutual agreement. The date of nomination of aspiring candidates was postponed due to heated arguments between the election committee and dissenting members of the samaj who allegedly were against the incumbent Pradhan. They alleged that the members of election committee are supporters of Pradhan and acting on his instructions. The qualifying criteria laid down by the newly formed election committee to contest in *samaj* elections was partly responsible for dispute and displeasure of protesting members. Election manifesto of the samaj clearly states the qualifying age, education, and money to be deposited for filing nominations for the four posts of president, vice president, general secretary and treasures (*Pradhan/Adhyaksh, Uppradhan/Upadhyaksh, Mahasachiv and Koshadhyaksh*). Only those of who fulfil the criteria laid down by the election committee qualify to file nominations in the four posts, it requires; minimum class 10th pass and should be of age 35 and above for the post of president; for Vice-president it stipulates class 10th pass with no mention of age; for the post of general secretary candidate must have B.A or equivalent and; treasurer requires minimum class 12th. The mandatory conditions to file nominations banishes illiterate and persons below the qualifying degree from contesting in the elections. Justifying the qualifying conditions convener of the election committee tells,

A well-educated leader is a precondition to lead the community successfully as their role requires them to interact with various administrative officials. An educated person quickly becomes well versed with the administrative policies and laws. They can articulate the needs of the community confidently. An illiterate person who does not even know his own signature cannot represent the interests of the samaj to officials and politicians. These qualifications are minimum, people are much more educated than this. Those opposing qualifying conditions want their political interest to be served, they are not thinking about the interest community.

Young members who raised the demand for fresh elections suspect the members of election committee inclined to BJP are politically motivated. Opposing members are of the view that incorporation of educational qualification to contest in the election is a strategic move to diminish influence of popular but illiterate figures within the community. Elections to the *samaj* is being used to perpetuate larger political ambitions

by members of *samaj* differing in political ideologies/alliance. Elections of the *samaj* were expected to be held on December 25, 2017 which finally was suspended due to discontent, suspicion and factionalism within the community. This election however was conducted in other parts of the city. Finally, elections were held in June, 2018, and Bairwa samaj elected a new Pradhan. The new Pradhan is a supporter of BJP and an active member of RSS. He also mobilised members of Bairwa samaj to attend a rally called by Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) to revive and initiate construction of Rammandir at Ayodhya.

Caste elections socially consolidate members tied with a common ascriptive identity of caste. It represents caste members as close homogeneous community, distinct from others, sharing same identity, culture and interest (Rudolph and Rudolph 1956). Elections are conducted for serving specific purpose of celebrating festival, maintaining internal cohesion within and outside, and securing interest of the *samaj(s)*. Thereby, leadership role is not titular. To meet expectations, elected leaders meander through varied social and political networks. Perceptibility of caste groups, united as *samaj* under a leader, tempts political parties to convert the members into vote bank. Vice versa, members of *samaj* with different political affiliations attempt to seek political support of the community. Socially united as *samaj*, diverse political interests act as divisive force. Political parties are not alone responsible for the quiet but visible inroads of political parties and obvious schisms within the *samaj(s)*. In the settlement of meagre resources /channels, politics promises young men of *samaj* an improved social status and economic advancement. Election gives legitimacy to leaders to position themselves as representative of *samaj* to political parties/leaders seeking to widen electoral support. In both the cases, demand for fresh elections and united opposition to changing method of selecting a leader, came from youths whose political aspirations were at stake. It is not to state that young men are devoid of commitment to serve their *samaj* and only pursue self-interest. Similar interest in elections was expressed by young men from Jatav caste; which does not hold any elections¹¹¹. This demand to select a youth leader through elections is discouraged by the community elders and leaders. Some of the elder people view *samaj* elections as a means for jobless and unserious young men to do politics and make a career from it. The demand for initiating caste elections, conducting

¹¹¹ In the municipal elections of 2017 a young man, influential among youth of his community, promised to mobilise support for BSP leader on the condition to begin *samaj* elections after winning the election which was agreed by the leader. The candidate lost the election.

elections or restoring election method within a caste is foregrounded by the youth. Caste is negated and claimed at the same time by the youth. While youth expresses contempt for identity politics and deny lending support to a party on considering the caste identity or interests. But their participation in activities of caste *samaj* shows youth are not caste blind. Caste has political relevance for youths trying to enter into local politics. To gain political attention they focus on *samaj* and seek the support of *samaj* members. Finally, decisive control of members affiliated to BJP in *samaj* elections indicates the sway of the party at present.

6.6 Communalising Space: Politics of ‘Riot’, Eviction, and Resettlement

In October 2014 a communal violence erupted in Ashangar which was reported widely by media as a hotbed of communal riot. To many of its residents, violence of 2014 reminded them of three decades old communal past the settlement. Witness to one of the worst communal pogroms, the Anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the residents are not unfamiliar to the outcomes of communal polarisation. Contrary to media reporting one resident pointed,

This was not riot. Riot happened in 1984 (chaurasi). Sikhs ran for life; entire community was massacred. We heard screams for help, smelt burning bodies, saw smoke suspended in air for hours. We hid neighbours in our house to save their life and honour. We could not save them all. Most of them were massacred and those who survived left their houses. Don't ask about those days...

Another man says,

This was not chaurasi danga (1984 riot) but it could have become one, had police not arrived on time

The scale and intensity of 2014 ‘riot’ cannot be compared with the bloodshed and culpability of state in 1984¹¹². The 1984 was a state organised violence against the

¹¹² The communal carnage against Sikhs was set in motion after assassination of Prime minister Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards on October 31st, 1984. The investigation of joint fact-finding team of people’s union for democratic rights (PUDR) and people’s union civil liberties (PUCL) shows unambiguous complicity of civil administration and political actors in instigating and allowing the violence unleashed on the Sikh community uninterrupted. Report comments, ‘the attacks on the members of Sikh community in Delhi and its suburb during the period (between November 1 to November 10), far from being a spontaneous expression of “madness” and “popular grief and anger” at Indira Gandhi’s assassination as made out to be by authorities were the outcome of well-organised plan marked by the acts of both deliberate commission and omission by important politicians of Congress (I) at the top and authorities in the administration’. The official figure of killed in the carnage is 613, an underreported death toll. Unofficially the toll reached close to 3000 alone in the capital city. Similarly, official figure puts total displaced persons to 20,000 a figure contrary to 50,000 reported by the investigating team. Communal riot, 2014 was localised within the settlement. The death toll reported by the residents is two-

Sikh community. However, complicity of the state reappeared in 2014 through role played by former and incumbent legislators in instigating the communal violence, administrative delay in controlling the communal frenzy, and complicity of the police. People from both the communities sustained injuries and two to six persons were reported dead. Conscious of the scale of damage to life and property a riot causes, some residents referred 2014 communal violence as riot like situation, not riot. However, the experience of 2014 communal violence differed for the confronting communities. For 'Hindus', it was tensed time that disrupted mundane life. In contrast, alarmed by sudden eruption of communal tension and their numerically minority status in the settlement, Muslims took a drastic measure. Being preponderant only in three blocks, most Muslim residents sent women and young children to safe places under the protection of relatives and friends staying outside the settlement. Some stayed within the city in a different location while others went back to their villages. Temporary migration to protect women was not enacted by the 'Hindu' residents. Moreover, terror felt by Muslim residents which expressed clearly in female migration, was undermined by 'Hindus' as preparation to enter into unrestrained communal war. Commenting on temporary migration of Muslim women, a 20-year old Jatav girl said,

They (Muslims) were prepared for the confrontation. They sent their women to other places to wage an unfettered war against Hindus. They had swords, cylinders and guns. We did not have any of these, neither did we go anywhere. We thought let them come, we will see.

In a conversation sharing their experience of riot a 20-year Muslim girl and her mother recall the day vividly and describe it as below,

Daughter- On that evening I went to meet my maternal grandfather who stays in that block (referred a Block number with predominant Muslim). Before I could think of returning home, news of riot reached at his place. One of my cousins told us about the riot in the settlement. It was already evening. I called my mother and we both were crying. I was scared and stuck at my grandfather's house.

Mother- That night was very tensed, we all were expecting worst to happen. In our lane only we are Muslim, everyone is Hindu. We all were frightened and decided to leave this place during the night. That night all women and children of our house left the house in a car for our village in U.P. I was unwilling to leave the place without my daughter. I cried all night and was worried for her all the time while we were away in village. My father and men of the family assured me

six and did not lead to mass displacement as was the case in 1984. Those who left their houses during the tension, mainly Muslim women folk, returned after removal of the curfew.

of her safety, but how could I be assured. She is a girl and times were so bad. I fear to think of those days.

Residents from both the communities remain clueless about the exact story behind the riot. Yet, their experience of riot and concerns on subsequent days of curfew differ immensely. For 'Hindus' limited and overpriced supply of goods, and inability to join work were prime concerns during the curfew. Muslim residents were chiefly worried about the safety of women, family, and property. They also complained of the biased treatment of armed forces driven by the suspicion against Muslims and their anti-Muslim attitude. It is only after the departure of armed forces everyday life resumed.

Winning a sweeping majority in 2014 Lok Sabha elections, BJP formed government. A brawl between two young boys from different communities, 'Hindu' and Muslim, escalated into riot like situation. After the initial fight, members from both the communities resolved the issue and sent the boys back to their homes. However, brawl simmered among 'Hindus' and aggression erupted after two days beginning with chanting slogans of '*Har Har Mahadev; Jai Sri Ram*'²⁴. It subsequently led to stone pelting and firing at Muslim blocks. On subsequent days a curfew was imposed which remained in force for more than ten days. Paramilitary forces left after restoring 'normalcy'. Exact cause of the brawl and identity of the two boys remains unknown to many of the residents. However, events and main actors who caricatured the subsequent tension is familiar to most. In the gap of two days a large meeting was conducted by late MLA from BJP with an intention of turning the brawl between two youngsters into a communal riot. Tension between Muslim and Balmiki residents had been simmering for since 2012 over relocation of the former in a vacant plot of land lying within Ashanagar¹¹³. The brawl became the context to transform confrontation merely between the two communities into religious polarisation enveloping the entire settlement.

6.6.1 Communalising Public Space and Identities

¹¹³ The details of the issue are described in the annexure.

While 2014 communal riot in the settlement reported widely in media as Hindu-Muslim riot¹¹⁴. For most residents it was a Balmiki-Muslim tension arising from the proposed relocation of Muslims in the green belt. This is despite the fact that members of different castes and political affiliations constituted the 'Hindu' perpetrators participating in violence against Muslims. During the field work, many young boys, apart from Balmiki community, confided embarrassingly of their participation in stone pelting during the communal tension. However, in general, members of different caste groups like Bairwas, Jatavs, caste Hindus constantly refused their role in the communal tension. They named it as tension between Balmikis and Muslims, and explained,

You want to know what is the problem? Problem is Balmikis rear and eat pig and Muslims don't. For Muslims pig is offensive (Haraam), for Balmikis it is livelihood.

Government might have approved the relocation of Muslims on the park. But you will see another riot will happen here. You think Balmikis will let Muslims live here?

Balmikis rear pig, slaughter, sell and kill it. Muslims cannot tolerate this. They will not like the pollution caused by the animal. Tension will be there.

They don't like each other because of dietary differences. Balmikis eat pork which is not tolerable to Muslims and Muslim eat beef which no Hindu likes.

That 2014! It was all because of Balmikis don't want Muslims losing their houses in metro to be resettled here. Of course, those losing should get house in the settlement. It is question of their livelihood (rosi-roti ka sawaal hai).

Cultural antagonism between the two communities is viewed by non-Balmiki residents as main flashpoint of communal tension. Despite distancing, non-Balmikis hold stereotypes against Muslims. Muslim residents however also believe that chief perpetrators of the tension were Balmikis and not all Hindus. According to some of them,

It is not all Hindus but Balmikis who cause problems for us and always want to fight with us.

I have many Balmiki friends. We don't have problem with Balmikis. They sell and consume pig which is considered polluting in our religion. This causes differences between the communities.

¹¹⁴ Soutik Bisawas (BBC News), Tarique Anwar (Firstpost), Anumeha Yadav (The Hindu), Mayura Janwalkar (Indian express).

Whenever India-Pakistan match is played on TV, Balmikis come near our block shouting slogans India zindabad, Pakistan murdabad (long live India, down Pakistan) to provoke us. What is the need of this? Are we not Indians?

Nowadays for any small thing these people (Hindus and Muslims) start fighting. Marriage between these communities is just out of question. If girl is Hindu and boy is Muslim there will be a fight and vice versa. Since 2014 riot relations have turned very sour.

During the riot, Muslim predominant blocks and surrounding blocks witnessed ferocity of violence. Electorally the party and leaders leading the communal agenda were defeated in 2015 elections. Re-election of AAP candidate as MLA in 2015 assembly elections, proved that electorate was not instantly swayed by the communal agenda. In its debut in 2013, AAP, was successful in delivering few of its key poll promises that helped to regain political success in 2015 assembly election. However, unfolding communalisation in the settlement cannot be overlooked. However, since 2014, geographical landscape, cultural practices and claim to the public spaces have been altering making identities visible and malleable. Spatial transformation is concretised through national flag, newly installed gates and religious celebrations with jingoist zeal. After 2014, residents erected gates in their blocks. Some gates separating 'Hindu' from Muslim blocks are painted with unfurled national flag. In Muslim predominant blocks the gate is painted with the green colour with crescent moon and star. On the rooftop of many houses unfurled flag has been lodged. Most noteworthy is dramatic increase in public celebration of Hindu festivals like *Ganesh Chaturthi, Krishna Janmashthami, Jaagrans, Hanuman Jayanti, Ramnavami* blending with roadside patriotism (Hansen: 2005). Regardless of political affiliations or caste, these festivals are celebrated across Ashanagar. Mostly it is young men in each block play an active role in organising such religious events. Also, temples which previously remained unattended are visited regularly by devotees. In several temples young men gather on every Tuesday and Saturday to worship lord Hanuman and loudly chant Hanuman *chaalisa* ¹¹⁵. Immediately after the riot, devotees concluded prayers by raising provocative slogans against Muslims. These recently introduced religious festivals until four years ago were limited to specific regions, like Maharashtra, are now celebrated with heightened theatrics at grandeur scale in Ashanagar. The banners on vehicles carrying processions

¹¹⁵ It is collection of hymns praising the lord Hanuman. Tuesday and Saturday are considered auspicious days to worship him.

out on the street mentions number of times a procession been taken out. These banners mostly describe second, third or fourth celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi or Janmasthami (*Dwitya/Tritya ganesh parwa*) declare that these regional festivals are new entries in religious calendar of the settlement. On increased number of religious celebrations, a young man from Jatav caste (SC) says,

Such forms of celebrations were unknown in the settlement. Earlier even if somebody celebrated Ganesh Chaturthi it was limited to Marathis. Now each block, in fact each alley celebrates the festival. All this is new. Now people don't celebrate festival for the sake of it. They do it to tell who is Hindu and who is Muslim. If you (Hindus) do then they also will do. Religious festivals have become a competition. Hindus want to show their superiority and dominance, what else!

A young man from Balmiki caste (SC) remarks,

Celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi appeared in last 2-4 years, earlier we never noticed celebrations. Number of religious celebrations has increased, visibly at least. Earlier we never saw. Now even the way we celebrate Janmasthami has also changed. Now boys tie the pot filled with curd at height like shown in the movies.

Likewise, a man from Koli caste (SC) says,

While growing we knew of only one religious celebration that was Ramleela. Even that used to be played in one or two blocks. To watch Ramleela we use to visit those blocks. Now, as you already have seen one celebration gets over and other is ready. So many festivals are celebrated and processions taken out that you don't know which marks which festival. The settlement is immersed in religious celebrations.

Ganesh Chaturthi celebrated with pomp in the state of Maharashtra, is now celebrated spectacularly in most of the blocks. The trend of passionate celebration of festivals out in the streets previously either unknown or was celebrated at an insignificant scale. After 2014, religious festivals are celebrated with ostentatious public spectacle. The purpose of celebrations is to assert communal presence and numbers. These religious processions blend religion, nation and entertainment. They contain images/idols of gods/goddesses, national flag, large music system/loudspeakers playing Bollywood (Hindi/Bombay movie industry)/regional, popular Bhojpuri and Punjabi, songs. Most songs played in these processions contain different but playful lyrics referring to celebrated god(dess) are set to the tune/music of popular Bollywood songs. Although songs during processions are played beyond decibels acceptable to the ears, they are played strategically and quite provocatively. Within Hindu blocks, songs

are played suiting the exuberant mood of celebration. When the procession reaches Muslim blocks tenor of songs and mood of the young devotees turn ‘patriotic’/jingoist (patriotism set against Pakistan and Muslims living anywhere). In front of these blocks pace of the procession becomes inordinately slow, it does not move without sending patriotic/jingoist sentiments clearly to Muslim residents. Near Muslim blocks songs like *vande matram/maa tujhe salaam* are played. Slogans like *bharat mata ki jai; doodh mango kheer denge, Kashmir mango cheer denge* (‘ask for milk we will give you *kheer* (a sweet dish), if you ask for Kashmir we will tear you apart), *ghar-ghar bhagwa leharayega, ramrajya ek din aayega*¹¹⁶ are chanted including very provocative dialogues from movies portraying jingoistic nationalism vis-à-vis Pakistan are repeated. Such gestures of provocation do not appear to incite the targeted explicitly. One Jatav boy says,

All this keeps happening. They do in their celebrations and we do in ours. Now it has become the part of celebrations. There will be no fun without provocation.

A Muslim boy watching a procession commenting on the intended provocation remarks,

We don't care, we just listen and ignore. We are habituated to such provocations.

Seamless amalgamation of religion, national emblems and Bollywood songs ties its participants with a singular identity that is of religion, Hindu. The theatrical zeal to celebrate religious festivals in public is not limited only among ‘Hindus’. Religious spectacle in secular spaces does not go unnoticed by the targeted community, Muslims. Muslims though celebrate their festival with similar vivacity, but use of Bollywood songs or dialogues in the processions is refrained. Compelled to prove their loyalty to the nation they as well integrate unfurled national flag and raise slogans like long live mother India in religious processions to absolve the community from the suspicion of treachery and claim the nation as citizens notwithstanding different religious faith. Religious identities as Hindu-Muslim prefiguring in communal antagonisms naturalises Hindus as rightful citizens because one is Hindu while challenging the citizenship of Muslim residents.

Before 2014, few minor altercations between young boys have happened which were contained. Prior to communal tension of 2014, relations between the two

¹¹⁶ In every house saffron flag will wave, one day rule of lord Ram will come.

religious' communities, 'Hindus' and Muslims, if not essentially amicable neither was hostile. Everyone is not pliable to communal forces. People recognise the individuals and groups responsible for strengthening communal identities. However, local communal reality of the settlement is in sync with growing communal polarisation across the country. Generally, communal polarisation had electorally benefitted the BJP. Although main actors behind instigating communal tension were from the party and its parent organisation, RSS. The party lost the constituency in 2015 assembly election. However, in 2017 municipal election the party gained three of the four wards under the constituency. Communal assertions in public spaces and tensed relations between the communities influences the local politics of the settlement. To oppose surging communal polarisation local groups, such as Ambedkar organisation, also are refashioning their politics for popular acceptance.

6.7 Ambedkar in Ashanagar

So far, this chapter discusses multiple layers of intra-Dalit divisions and coalitions based on caste, political affiliations, caste *samaj*, generational divide, and religion. Drawn to different political parties, Dalits are politically factionalised in Ashanagar. Further, to maximise political space, caste groups assert their distinct identity, and significance as caste *samaj*. The gradual communalisation in the settlement sculpts the identity of varying Dalit caste groups as Hindus. On invoking Ambedkar, these malleable identities as caste(s) and Hindu shifts to Dalit identity. A discussion on Ambedkar evokes a sense of exclusion and exploitation as 'untouchables.' However, this momentary unity does not conflate into political unity of Dalits that can erase caste differences permanently. Ambedkar, was heir to anti-caste intellectual tradition (c.f. Roy, 2014: 37), is revered highly by Dalits. He challenged social, political and religious hegemony of caste Hindus. He pointed that, "the outcaste is a bye-product of caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of caste system" (ibid: 26). After stiff resistance of caste Hindus to give equal treatment to Dalits, Ambedkar announced his decision to abandon Hindu religion in 1935, converting to Buddhism in October, 1956 after 21 years of search and contemplation (Zelliot 2013). Despite admiration and respect for the leader, his ideology doesn't enthuse political unity among Dalits who claim to be Hindus. An understanding of Ambedkar and his ideology by residents demonstrate existing

contradictions among Dalits. It explains respect for the leader does not inevitably evoke commitment to his professed ideology, ushering political unity.

6.7.1 Ambedkar as a Dalit Icon and non-Ambedkarite Politics of Dalits

Countrywide 14th April, birth anniversary of Ambedkar, is observed as Ambedkar *Jayanti*. In Ashanagar, unlike overwhelming grandeur of religious celebrations, the day is celebrated with minimal spectacle. Both, Ambedkar Jayanti and Mahaparinirvan diwas¹¹⁷ are commemorated in few blocks by residents and Ambedkar organisations. Jatavs, Bairwas, Mahars, Buddhist, young tutors, Ambedkar group and BSP members are select constituency which observes the birth and death anniversary of the leader. Through large banners, political parties and local leaders also remember the leader.

In a few blocks young men and elders organise Ambedkar *Jayanti*. On the commemoration day collective feast is arranged in parks under *Shamiana*. Central to the commemoration is a large picture of Ambedkar where followers pay tribute to the leader. Relegating political and ideological differences, people come together to commemorate the day. Caste Hindus do not participate in the commemoration. Scale of spectacle and pomp does not match the celebration of Hindu festivals like *Janmasthanami* or *Ganesh Chaturthi*. Hindu festivals are celebrated with great rigor in almost every block. Generally, within a block two or three groups celebrate the same festival separately unlike Ambedkar Jayanti. In one conversation, Jatav boys informed that the upper castes, Thakurs, residing in the block do not attend and eat in the feast organised on Ambedkar Jayanti. But they support and participate in Hindu festivals, like *Ganesh Chaturthi* or *Janmasthanami* organised by them. Dalit residents celebrate both Ambedkar Jayanti and Hindu festivals. However, it is contradictory as Ambedkar abandoned Hindu religion and adopted Buddhism in 1956. He found Hinduism inimical to upward social mobility for Dalits as Hindu scriptures demean Dalits along with women and other lower castes.

For Dalit youths, Ambedkar and Dalit politics is separable. They see no logical continuity running from Ambedkar to Ambedkarite politics. Interestingly, people holding different political views invoke and claim Ambedkar as Dalit icon. Regarding consensus on Ambedkar's status despite differential affiliation in local politics two young men from Jatav caste say,

¹¹⁷ Ambedkar died on December 6, 1956. The day is commemorated as Mahaparinirvan diwas.

Here people might belong to different political parties but they will never tolerate disrespect of Babasaheb. People respect Babasaheb so much.

Amresh and his family members are staunch supporters of Congress party and he has been youth president of the party in the settlement. He belongs to Balmiki community.

According to him,

Ambedkar is respected by Dalits because he has done so much for them. When he became the first law minister of the country he did a lot for Dalits. He himself was a Dalit, he knew our sufferings... During school, upper castes used to give him water from above maintaining distance. So, he himself saw and experienced all caste humiliations... he got education and fought for us in 1947-48. Before this period casteism was pronounced. Dalits regard him, we (Balmikis) also do.

Similarly, another Balmiki men and member of Congress party says,

Whatever Ambedkar has done for the Dalit community nobody, not even Gandhiji, has contributed. In my eyes even Gandhiji is very great man but I believe if there is one greatest man in the country it is Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. In the caste system Dalits were most oppressed and were unprotected. Ambedkar tried to improve status of Dalits and got us Constitutional rights.

A woman from Balmiki community, retired employee of Municipal corporation, says,

Had he not fought for us we would have continued to face untouchability and violence. He got everything for us, education, job, reservation everything. Earlier people will not sit with us and talk to us properly. We got some respect because of him.

In a group discussion boy from Koli caste says,

We know Ambedkar framed Indian constitution. He ensured provision of reservation for SCs for their socio-economic advancement.

It is not merely Ambedkarites, of which Jatavs, Bairwas and Mahars constitute main followers, who lay claim on Ambedkar. Those critical of Ambedkar inspired politics of BSP also acknowledge and revere the leader for his role in improving socio-political status of Dalits in Indian society. Celebration of Ambedkar Jayanti is one of the means of paying respect to the leader and recognise his contribution to the community. His leading role in drafting the Constitution and incorporation of socio-political safeguards including reservations are repeated in recounting the leader as an icon. Yet, his radical anti-Hindu/caste politics goes largely unacknowledged among Dalits. Rather than his ideological radicalism, Ambedkar is respected for his constitutional role. Ideological radicalism of Ambedkar has come to be associated with

specific party, BSP, and its Dalit leaders. For instance, a mahant of Balmiki Samaj and an active member of RSS opines despite belonging to Balmiki community, Ambedkar obtained higher education at that point in time¹¹⁸. The mahant also acknowledges contributions of Ambedkar for Dalits. However, in conversation with him, Ambedkar does not emerge as glorious leader of the community. Rather, saint Valmiki is portrayed as the true leader of all Dalit Samaj. He laments that many in Dalit community disowned the saint and shifted to other figures for identity. This lament is directed mainly towards Jatavs who made this shift from Valmiki to Ravidas and then to Ambedkar.

While iconic status of Ambedkar encourages residents to identify themselves as Dalits. However, it does not motivate to abandon their political affiliations which were opposed by him. Despite respect and gratitude, not all draw their political ideology from Ambedkar led politics. For them Ambedkar represents subverted image of Dalits challenging historical prejudices of caste Hindus against lower castes. The tall stature of Ambedkar, as a foreign educated fellow member who obtained higher degrees from prestigious institutes and became a successful statesman representing the community, is a matter of pride. It is notable that in the midst of divergent ideological positions Ambedkar holds the position of Dalit icon among the Dalits. Yet, despite being respected across Dalit caste groups he is not the only leader to be claimed by Dalits. For political association drawn to different parties/organisations Dalits are not united under any single political party/ideology, they associated with different political parties.

6.7.2 Attempting Ambedkarisation: Ambedkar Organisations, Sarvabhom Ambedkar Sanghathan (SAS) and Moolniwasi Akhandata Ambedkar Sanghathan (MAAS)

Moolniwasi Akhandata Ambedkar Sanghathan (MAAS) is a nascent twelve-member organisation formed in 2015 after separating from its parent organisation Sarvabhom Ambedkar Sanghathan (SAS)¹¹⁹. Initial efforts of the parent organisation focused on encouraging education among the vulnerable groups like economically deprived and

¹¹⁸ Ambedkar hails from Mahar caste not from Balmiki caste.

¹¹⁹ Anand Teltumbde (2018:133) points that although Ambedkar rejected the racial theory as basis of caste system, many 'BAMCEF factions now swear to an autochthonous racial identity of mulniwasi (original inhabitants) for themselves'. Many of SAS members also disapproved the name of MAAS and did not join it. The name of the new organisation as MAAS was rejected by the older members as misinterpretation of Ambedkar.

girls. SAS, established in 2007, offered free tuition for the children coming from economically weaker backgrounds. To encourage girl education, fix deposit of rupees 25000/- was distributed to two girls on successful completion of class tenth. Apart from attempting to popularise tenets of Ambedkar among people, members of the organisation negotiated with political actors to register his symbolic presence in Ashanagar. They were successful in getting a playground in the settlement named after Ambedkar. Their proposal to name the playground after Ambedkar was declined by then sitting MLA from BJP who was from Balmiki community. Receiving proposals from other communities (from own community and from the party) to name the playground as Maharishi Valmiki or Shri Ramachandra etc MLA refused to comply with the request of SAS. SAS members got signature of 3000 residents supporting the proposal. After the submission of signatures, the proposal was approved for naming the playground after Ambedkar. SAS planned to install Ambedkar's statue in the settlement which could not materialise due to the resignation of fellow members from the organisation. Dissatisfied with non-transparent manner of running the organisation several SAS members resigned and reorganised under a new organisation, MAAS. Political ambitions of some of the SAS members is believed to have led its splinter and constitution of MAAS.

Like the initial aim of SAS, members of MAAS formed the organisation with aim to disseminate ideas and vision of Ambedkar. A task that has not been easy to achieve because of financial paucity and firm faith of residents in Hindu religion. Members tell "though residents revere Ambedkar, they are not prepared to listen/think against Hindu religion". Citing an instance, one of the members informs, after the formation of MAAS a public lecture was organised by them at one of the chowks (crossroads) in the settlement. One of the members gave a fiery speech against Hindu religion that effected a feud on the spot between the speaker and attendees. Although the feud was contained by intervention of other members and residents, many attending the program left the space offended. After that incident, although members continue to perpetuate ideas of Ambedkar, but they evade even partial reference to the religion. In this context another member remarks,

If you say anything related to religion then people think that you are a terrorist. Now you go out and say anything against mother cow, people will forget everything in dealing with you. We pursue people to give importance to education and abandon squandering money on rituals. But soon they resume religious practices and expenditure on it.

Another founding member of the organisation sharing difficulties of perpetuating Ambedkarism (*ambedkarwaad*) in the settlement says,

See nobody stops us here from speaking about Ambedkar. Our difficulty lies in the manuvaad mentality of people. Our ideas do not penetrate among the people because of their faith in Hindu religion. They do not understand that earlier they were not even allowed to step inside a temple and the very religion has been the source of our oppression. They continue to build temples and indulge in rituals. People don't fear Ambedkar but Ambedkarites like us.

In one of the low moments one member upon being asked about the function and influence of the organisation says,

Now the thing is, we are tired. How many times should we go and make people understand? We go and pursue people they nod in affirmation and again go back to religious opulence.

For members of the organisation, religion presents a main challenge which prevents formation of Dalit consciousness and unity. Similar views were shared by BSP leaders and workers who reiterate commitment to radical politics represented by Ambedkar. Contrary to men, most women within a family supporting BSP are religious believers and observe the rites/practices of Hindu religion. It is common to find that families united politically to BSP differ on religious views. In houses of several avowed Ambedkarites it is common to find image of Ambedkar, Gautam Buddha and small temple co-habiting together. Such co-existence of contradictory faith within the homes dismissed either as a matter of faith or ignorance by the leaders.

Most members of MAAS are unmarried, educated young men who either are employed in private jobs or searching for one/looking for employment. The dignified conduct of the young members in public spaces and in neighbourhood seemingly has helped them to be taken seriously by residents. They are students attending colleges, simultaneously searching jobs. Few among them provide home tuitions to earn income in order to reduce financial dependence on their families. Of the eight members met and interacted on different occasions five are students with varying educational degrees and ambitions. Engaged in studies or giving tuitions they are rarely seen outside bidding time leisurely. Further, of the three members one is MCD employee and two are in private jobs. They are known to be very hard-working men.

One of the NGOs in Ashanagar dedicated to Ambedkar's thoughts and causes is run and supported by members affiliated to the BJP. Scholars have documented that

BJP and its affiliate organisations are known to engage in co-option of Dalits by appropriating Dalit leaders, importantly Ambedkar, incorporating Dalits in power structures and by exploiting internal conflicts among them (Guru,1991). In 2016, five places within India and London were declared to be developed as *Panchteerth* by the prime minister¹²⁰. Such deification of Ambedkar attempts to elevate him to a godly status to be worshipped blindly, simultaneously subduing critical engagement with his ideas (Teltumbde, 2018). Appropriation of Ambedkar by the BJP is contradictory as it avows to represent Hindu interest and retrieve ‘glorious’ past of Hindus. Despite Ambedkar's antagonistic views on Hindu religion and caste system, he has been appropriated by the party to draw Dalits within its fold. Appropriation is a tactical and sophisticated act. As in the NGO that claims to realise Ambedkar's dreams by imparting education to Dalit children, it fails to engage with his fierce attack on Hindu religion and caste system. By hollowing the leader of his radical/rational ideas and selective representation creates pretence of incorporating Dalits. The NGO's patron, president and contributors are from the party. Most of the contributors are upper-castes from Brahmin and trading caste. President of the NGO is from Jatav community and member of BJP. He is also active in local politics. Because of its enriched socio-political links, the NGO has a proper office and resources to sustain itself. It's presence further retards the public acceptance of organisations like MAAS and SAS attempting to engage residents with radical views of Ambedkar. These organisations, MAAS and SAS, lack consistent supply of fund or support from political parties. Under strong presence and intense dissemination of Hindutva (right wing) ideology, for progressive organisations to function has become very challenging. Workers and supporters of BJP get funding from the party to organise big functions as the party has political representation at municipal and assembly level. Paucity of funds is quite common complain of Ambedkarites and also of BSP. Further, members of Ambedkar organisations don't have much time to pursue people every day as they are working or studying. To organise functions MAAS & SAS depend on the contributions from their own members and other Ambedkarites in the settlement. Ambedkarites are either from BSP, or Buddhists affiliated politically to other parties. After its formation, MAAS organised 2-3 events in the settlement seeking moral and financial assistance from

¹²⁰ These five places are a) Mhow (M.P), birthplace of Ambedkar b) London, a building where he stayed c) Nagpur, Deekshabhoomi where on massive scale Dalits adopted Buddhism as their religion in 1956 on Ambedkar's clarion for conversion d) Delhi, Mahaprinirvan sthal, and e) Mumbai, Chaityabhoomi.

fellow Ambedkarites residing within and outside. The most successful feat that MAAS achieved after three months of its formation was of installing Ambedkar statue in a central park of a block. It was earlier proposed by SAS but realised by MAAS. Upon the symbolic value of Ambedkar statue in the park one young member explains,

When a child sees his (Ambedkar's) statue he will atleast inquire about him. That first step has to begin and then only we can start explaining about Babasaheb's struggles and his contribution to the community. Atleast a child will ask, 'mummy who is he standing wearing coat-pant holding a book in his hand. Then only parents will explain who he is? Where did he stay and what he did?' Then they will tell that he wrote our constitution...otherwise so many in the settlement know that chacha (uncle) Nehru wrote the constitution. Change will happen though gradually...

On significance of Ambedkar statues for Dalits in north India Jaoul (2006:204) writes, "...Dalit statesman wearing a red tie and carrying the Constitution involves dignity, pride in emancipated citizenship and practical acknowledgement of the extent to which enforcement of laws could change their lives positively". Installing Ambedkar's statue is not merely a symbolic gesture, it has political function of raising knowledge about him and a process of self-discovery. Responding to opposition met to radical views on religion, members moderated strategies to widen their reach and appeal among the residents. Avoiding initial scathing attacks targeting Hindu religion, members now emphasize on education for socio-economic advancement of Dalits. Further, instead of completely separating from religious activities members of the organisation channelised one such occasion of Valmiki Jayanti to reintroduce Ambedkar to public space/gaze. Procession of Valmiki Jayanti celebrated in 2017 contained a tableau carrying a tall image of Ambedkar, along with images of gods, Bharatmata & others. Members of MAAS sought permission from Pradhan to include Ambedkar's image in Valmiki Jayanti procession. As many members of MAAS are from Balmiki community, incorporation of Ambedkar in Valmiki Jayanti, a community specific celebration, was eased. Balmikis equate sage Valmiki and Ambedkar as leaders/deity representing two separate caste communities; Balmikis and Jatavs. Adherents of Valmiki did not deny incorporation of the leader assumingly followed exclusively by Jatavs who are long lost Dalit brothers continuously shifting the terrain of leadership from Valmiki to Ravidas and presently to Ambedkar.

Acknowledgement of Ambedkar as Dalit hero arises from political compulsion and his near acceptance as champion of Dalit cause, not of any specific community.

Often it is the limited biographical information, not the ideological radicalism he represented, shapes Ambedkar as Dalit icon among many of the residents. Dalits, be it Jatavs or non-Jatavs, associated with different political parties understand their inferior position within the caste system and oppression unleashed on Dalits by this social arrangement. Despite profuse respect for Ambedkar, Ambedkarisation has not flourished to the extent of providing scaffold for Dalit unity and abhor the caste system/religious dominance of Hindus. According to Pai and Jagpal (1997:1358) Ambedkarisation is, “tremendous growth in the consciousness among Dalits about the idea and life of Babasaheb Ambedkar”. Local Ambedkar group(s) are making organisational efforts to popularise and advance Ambedkar’s ideas. Trials of local Ambedkar organisation indicate challenges confronted by them retard Ambedkarisation and a cause of its limited appeal.

6.8 Conclusion

The chapter elaborates political trajectory of Dalits in post-independent India with specific focus on the settlement. As the settlement is part of a SC reserved constituency, centrality of caste is inescapable in local political mobilisation. The objective of instituting reserved constituencies was to ensure political representation of erstwhile unincorporated social groups, SCs, STs and women, and their interests. However, political interest of any community is diverse that makes achieving unity of interest difficult. Local political factionalism reveals multiple existing divisions among Dalits originating from their regional, cultural, and historical differences interfere in formation of unified political interests.

Members of various caste and religion co-habit in Ashanagar where Balmikis constitute predominant caste. In order to remain politically relevant, political parties devise strategies to ensure electoral victory and ascendancy to power positions. The local political dynamics unravels that co-option is not merely limited to electoral accommodation of Dalits/dissenting groups. By deploying various explicit and implicit techniques in sustained manner, political parties attempt to subsume dissenting/antagonistic groups. At an apparent level, co-option manifest in favourable treatment meted out to Balmikis, who are numerically dominant and relatively economically prosperous, by most political parties in distribution of tickets. More favourable votes are the need of electoral victory. Therefore, numerically predominant caste group become electorally strategic for all the competing political parties. As all contesting candidates and MLA’s of the constituency

hail from the Balmiki community manifests biased treatment given to the community. Locally, only BSP gives party ticket to members of non-Balmiki Dalit castes. While all parties treat favourably to strategic caste group, but political success also depends on supralocal issues and concerns.

Success of different political parties in constituency and civic body elections shows political loyalty of residents/voters is not ~~static~~, it is subjected to change. For three terms, INC ruled the constituency and majority of voters from the settlement voted it to power. Political loyalty of the residents to the party was to express their sense of obligation to the party and its matron leader for providing land in the city during slum demolition drive between 1975-77. Such loyalty to the party was interrupted only in 2008 when a BJP candidate won the constituency for the first time. In 2013 and 2015, again political loyalty shifted to a newly formed party, AAP. Denying on the votes of older parties, AAP received an overwhelming support cutting across identities. Withdrawing from older established parties, residents transferred political support to AAP overwhelmingly. AAP garnered overwhelming support from lower socio-economic settlements by projecting intimacy with poor through its claim to represent the *Aam Aadmi* (common man) issues where its symbolic appeal of broom signalled an assault on corruption. Its political appeal and success were based on delivery of its key poll promises. However, in 2017 municipal elections, political support was noticeably shifted towards the BJP. Emergence of the AAP as a party representing citizens, not caste or religious identities, interrupted local communal politics briefly which was set in motion in 2014. Ever since the conclusion of Lok Sabha election of 2014, political and cultural landscape of the settlement has been changing quite obviously. In the same year in October, a communal violence erupted. Although the violence was contained before it ran amok, but post communal violence has seen a drastic alteration of public spaces which have become increasingly communalised. Public spaces like parks and roads are personalised for asserting communal identities. The collective religious celebrations out in public gaze and space, strengthens the sense of 'Hinduness' and belonging to Hindu religion among the participating Dalits. These celebrations 'realise' the urge/claims to be associated with a religion that refuses to accept Dalits unconditionally and equally. This progressive communalisation subsides differences between various sub-castes in Dalits to unite under the rubric of Hindus against Muslims. Politically, youths claim to reject the politics of identity and obligation to which the older generations are committed. They

reject electoral support to a party representing specific caste(s) or on the basis of obligation which bestowed successive electoral victories on the Congress party. However, they are prominent organisers and participants of religious/cultural celebrations which are held under public sight to assert communal identity. While identity-based politics is disapproved, but objections are not raised against assertion of communal/caste identity in public. It is important to note the communal turn is reinforced by the larger national discourse on identity that validates goals and actions of the present government. So, at perceptible level, co-option is achieved by political parties by distributing party tickets to strategically significant community/caste group. Technique of co-option operates discreetly beyond the political sphere gradually on everyday basis. As the presence and competition among different political factions in cultural organisations, like caste association or in NGOs, shows co-option operates at social and cultural levels too. The struggle between different political factions to gain control over different organisations operating in social and cultural realms aims to build a favourable consensus for electoral support. Control over social and cultural realms allows to widen political appeal beyond the electorally crucial groups. Favourable consensus built in these spheres also helps in mitigating the tension between the political parties and neglected caste groups. Like, while all the party's prefer Balmikis for political representation, still they command support of non-Balmiki castes which manifests in local popularity of BJP across caste groups. Co-option is not easy to attain, for its success it depends on economic, social and human resources.

In the reserved constituency, to secure electoral victory, political competition among different party's induces both inter and intra-caste factionalism. However, such factionalism cannot merely be reduced to political competition for the power. Everyday experiences of inter-caste relations and diverging socio-political histories widens the distance and differences between the co-existing castes. Political competition only amplifies and visibilises these inter-caste differences.

Electoral representation with affirmative actions promised liberation and equality to marginalised groups, importantly, Dalits (Alam 2015). While, through electoral processes of voting and representation, Dalits are not only incorporated but also assert their claim to equality. However, design of electoral system based on simple majority and social structures of caste fuses to retain the dominance, ideology, and power superior castes. Political and cultural co-option of Dalits is used as a strategy to subsume Dalits which takes away core of Dalit agenda seeking elimination of caste

perpetuated discrimination and, socio-economic and political equality (Teltumbde 2018). Perpetuation of co-optational politics not only reduces the power to resist, but it also seeks compliance of Dalits with the ideology and policies perpetuating their subjugation (Jaffrelot 2014). If aim of Dalit politics is to recognise structures of oppression and forge a collective struggle to annihilate these structures, co-optational politics obscures these structures. It blurs the distinction between oppressor and oppressed. Appropriation of Dalit leaders and their symbols, and political accommodation mitigates sense of exploitation and exclusion, and impedes formation of Dalit politics and unity.



Chapter VII

Conclusion

This study has attempted to understand the ways in which caste is lived and reproduced in an urban space. It has studied the routes through which caste manifests itself and perpetuates inequalities in an urban neighbourhood in Delhi. Through a qualitative field study, it has sought to unpack the manner in which caste is mediated by urban conditions, spatiality and aspirations created by neo-liberal regime. More specifically, this study has identified and elaborated on how factors such as space, occupation, local politics, neighbourhood culture, neo-liberal aspirations and the political economy of education and employment intricately interact with caste and transform it in cities.

Moreover, this dissertation has argued that caste in cities is not simple. It is transformed and even inverted in everyday life. But, it would appear, traditional aspects of caste are also retained on certain fronts. For instance, inter-caste interactions in the urban neighbourhood include both a willingness to overcome caste and yet holding on to fundamental ritual/purity values. Caste even appears disguised many a time in the urban neighbourhood. What mainly renders it invisible and disguised in the cities is its ability to produce modern and secular hierarchies of power and prestige wherein its role and salience are largely concealed. More specifically, in its interaction with modern spaces and institutions, caste is often disguised as class in the city. Therefore, a focus on the relation between caste and the political-economic structures assumes significance while studying urban marginalities and inequalities.

This work provides a comprehensive account of caste in different spheres of an urban neighbourhood. Caste appears in various covert and overt forms and permeates different spheres of urban life. The study shows that caste persists in the city not as a system, but as an identity. It is constituted and reconstituted by members within a caste in relation to each other. It is also recreated and defined by others and in relation to other caste groups which are decipherable from inter-caste interactions and perceptions. In the chapter III and VI, caste as an identity becomes a source of shame, humiliation (for Dalits), pride, mobilisation, politics, power, factionalism and networks. It merges with other forms of marginalities (locational, educational, occupational) which reinforce urban inequality.

Chapter III *'Negotiating Relations in Inter-caste Neighbourhood: Spatial Organisation, Inter-caste Relations and Perceptions'* focuses on spatial organisation, intercaste relations, and perceptions, describes spatial arrangement of the settlement to understand mediation of caste in everyday interactions. It examines how intercaste relations are forged under spatial proximity, nature of these relations and how various caste groups perceive the 'other'. It also looks into the conventional sites of caste, namely commensal relations and matrimonial alliances. Further, the chapter also describes how Dalits experience caste in the city. Caste and other identity based spatial organization i.e spatial segregation and concentration of groups, is evident as members sharing common ethno-religious identity tend to reside in proximity. At macro level, in terms of city, Ashanagar as a residential locality represents a segregated urban space, segregated on caste lines, and identified as a Scheduled Caste or Dalit settlement. At micro level, most blocks within the larger settlement are identified with a particular caste, region or religion of its inhabitants (like Balmiki or Jatav or Rajasthani or Muslim) owing to their numerical significance. Though there is some level of heterogeneity of identities in a cluster, it is often one particular identity that predominates. First, Muslims form a separate block, which broadly underlines religion, especially of Islam, as the axis of segregation. Second, being a Dalit predominant locality, a broad pattern appears separating three Dalit groups, distinct in their regional origins, interspersed with other castes from respective regions. Such intersecting-identity based residential pattern at micro-level was reproduced from the previous 'juggies' in the process of relocation and resettlement. In other words, Ashanagar represents an urban spatial formation (locality) rooted in socio-spatial locations of the past, where caste continues to be a significant dimension, a tangible spatial marker and everyday reminder.

Ashanagar as a settlement represents relatively poor conditions of living and is high in population density with congested housing. Intercaste relations are inevitable to a certain extent because of the spatial proximity arising from the compulsions of involuntary relocation and structuring of the (re)settlement. Also, numerical strength of Dalits in the settlement, their overwhelming influence in local politics and power structure necessitates interaction with Dalits, and flexibility in inter-caste relations. Interactions and relations are forged as neighbours, friends, colleagues, among members of different castes groups. As inter-caste relations are influenced by local

socio-political, economic, and demographic conditions, these are not entirely voluntary in nature.

Residents tend to know the caste and religious identity of their neighbours, friends and acquaintances. But the nature of inter-caste interactions varies from congenial to formal relations in the neighbourhood. Some visit each other's house regularly and share commensal relations. Whereas others, markedly, Brahmin residents, refrain from forging proximate relations with Dalit neighbours. They maintain formal relations with the latter and restrict interactions with them to 'outside the home'. Such formal interactions restrict regular entry of Dalits into upper-caste households. Moreover, the gender dimension of inter-caste relations is evident in the neighbourhood. While, upper-caste men regularly transgress the caste norms in public, women act as interlocutors of safeguarding caste values in domestic sphere. Moreover, the purity concerns of upper caste people are kept in mind by the Dalit counterparts in course of the inter-caste interactions. For instance, Dalits, particularly Balmikis, make separate arrangements of vegetarian food for their upper-castes invitees during social festivities. This only illustrates that though inter-caste relations flourish in the city neighbourhood; these are not entirely devoid of caste values and purity concerns.

Separation of castes, ordained by principle of hierarchy, is maintained and sought to be maintained through caste endogamy. Endogamy remains crucial in searching for prospective bride/groom and arranging marriages. Prospective spouses are sought within the caste, mostly through social and kinship networks. Among others, densely populated and congested organisation of the settlement also influences interaction and play a role in stoking romantic relations including extramarital relations. Many such relationships also culminate in elopement and runaway marriages. Such marriages are meted out with different fates, ranging from acceptance, to opposition or excommunication. It is important to note that generally runaway inter-caste marriages are not approved. But, alarmed by frequent cases of love affairs and elopements, many believe it is better to approve inter-caste alliance rather than drawing public shame in the event of runaway court/temple marriage. Broadly inter-caste marriages are not preferred, but marriage with members of Balmiki caste, is strongly opposed by other Dalit castes and upper-castes. In case of non-Balmiki women marrying a Balmiki man, families try to restore the women by approaching state machinery, police and courts. On failing to restore, women are excommunicated for shorter or longer durations by their families. Response to inter-caste marriages also varies depending on caste, class

and gender. In the Brahmin families, an uncompromised take on the inter-caste marriages was noted, which is of stern prohibition. In such unions, families try to restore women or excommunicate them. Whereas, men receive approval or are boycotted for indefinite period, but state machinery is not approached by their families. Apart from endogamy, education and economic condition are considered crucial by parents in searching spouse for their children's. Marriage is also considered as a route to upward socio-economic mobility.

Thus, distinctiveness of caste is preserved by cautiously navigating relations in aspects of commensal relations, matrimonial alliances, quotidian interactions and through celebration of festivals/functions specific to a caste. Consciousness of caste among different caste groups not only appears in negotiated relations, but also in inter-caste perceptions. Different caste groups proclaim its distinctiveness from other 'inferior' castes and rank each other on the basis of caste position. Like upper-castes consider Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Dalits inferior and hold negative stereotypes, OBCs rank Dalits as inferior castes, similarly such hierarchical ranking prevails among Dalits. Locally, Balmikis are considered the lowest caste by both non-Dalit and Dalit castes. Across the castes, Balmikis are identified by their occupation as sanitation workers, complacency, disinterest in education and for aggressive behaviour. Likewise, among Dalits, Jatavs, traditionally associated with leather work, are perceived as educated, hard-working and upwardly mobile caste. Such perceptions and prejudices demarcate each caste from the other.

Despite the weakening of caste in different spheres (interdining, congenial intercaste relations) and its denial by upper-castes, Dalits experience humiliation within and beyond the settlement. Such experience varies in different space and context. Numerical predominance of Dalits and their political significance in the settlement restrict overt expression of caste related prejudices and disparaging behavior by upper-castes. Many upper castes view negotiations in inter-caste relations as erosion of their ritual superiority. By generating a sense of 'castelessness' such assertions and observations tend to conclude the demise of caste. In contrast, such claims are contested and dismissed by Dalits. They experience caste-based humiliation in public spaces of the city. Public spaces of the city are caste ridden and unequal. To participate in it equally, caste identity and related identity markers are consciously concealed for the fear of revealing caste identity vis a vis caste location, and stigma attached to it. In the city, shame and stigma arising from the 'inferior' status of a caste is also associated

with other forms of depravity like violence, crime, backwardness and residential location. In public spaces, beyond the settlement, Dalits dissociate with their caste identity and related markers to evade stigma and despicable treatment. Caste survives and appears in urban space even in the absence of presumed precondition of hierarchy. Negotiations, and selective relaxation underline that hierarchical values of caste persist and underline intercaste relations (Manor 2013).

Attempting to understand the possible emancipatory potential of the city, Chapters IV and V documented the trends in intergenerational socio-economic mobility among different castes. This study also sought to explore how the labour-market under liberalised economy integrate educated youth, especially of Dalits and the nature of their inclusion. Upward intergenerational mobility is expected, among others, on the ground that residing in a metropolitan city has a locational advantage: city offers, one, opportunities to access better formal education and skills, and, two, proximity to a large urban labour market and employment opportunities.

Chapter IV '*Intergenerational Mobility: Aspiration and Education*' focuses on aspirations and education among the youth and also examines the role of particular socio-spatial location within an urban agglomeration in educational choices and outcomes. Attaining education is crucial for socio-economic mobility, personal freedom, and collective well-being (Dreze and Sen 1997). For socially excluded groups, such as Dalits, education is an important means to overcome historical exclusion, attain mobility and social dignity. The city of Delhi, aspiring to join the ranks of 'global city' has opened its economy and has witnessed establishment of transnational corporations in different city regions (Dupont 2011). This has brought changes in the character of labour market, occupational structures and aspirations of youth. It has also defined the educational qualifications and skills required to access employment in the transforming labour market. First generation settlers of Ashanagar mostly lacked formal education – they either dropped out of school education or never enrolled. In contrast, the subsequent generations have/had access to government schools and institutes of higher education. However, their school education in government schools has been of poor quality, and was not imparted through English medium. This has/had implications for future educational trajectories along with a general lack of awareness and guidance in education-career linkages and possibilities. In this context, the youth's academic choices in the locality follow similar trajectories. Choice of the subjects/streams to pursue in senior secondary are based less on

information about specific courses and the plausible future opportunities it entails. Most of them 'choose' commerce and humanities in senior secondary. Although the city has many higher educational institutes of great repute, youth from this locality can rarely access them. They, however, pursue higher education, mostly through distance learning mode. Ill equipped to compete with the English educated upper class (caste) 'meritorious' students, they tend to get crowded in 'easy disciplines', distance learning and low ranking colleges, or obtain vocational degrees from Industrial Training Institutes (ITI). The degrees obtained from these courses are undervalued and are unpromising in employment market. Dropping out of education at various levels is also a recurring outcome. Thus, educational aspirations and future aims are either ill-defined, absent or evolve very late after exposure to the world outside the settlement. Absence of a role model in the vicinity, rampant illiteracy and academically unstimulating climate of the settlement are held responsible for disinterest in education. Even when aspirations are defined somewhat clearly, financial hardships of the family restrict accomplishment.

Regardless of gender, youths are segregated in "easy" and "effeminate" disciplines (Thomas 1990). As most youths are restricted to "soft" disciplines of Arts and Commerce, gendered binary of masculine and feminine choices in higher education is absent. However, the reasons behind the educational choices in higher studies are gendered. Saliency of gender becomes apparent after class 12th when young boys and girls make decisions to pursue higher education for different reasons imbued with appropriate gender roles. In spite of qualifying scores, economic stability of a family, and urge of young girls to take admission in regular college many take admission in open learning colleges where classes are held only Sundays. Families exert influence in determining the form of education and future employment for the young women. Young men enjoy a greater degree of autonomy in making educational and occupational choices. They pursue higher education in distance mode and simultaneously work or learn vocational skills on weekdays. In contrast, most young girls enrolled in distance learning spend their weekdays performing domestic chores and learning skills (*hunar*) that are gendered like beauty courses from local institutes. Notwithstanding the limited outcomes so far, education is valued and seen by the communities as the important medium of socio-economic mobility. The recognition of quality education and English medium schooling is evident by various strategies

employed by parents to admit their children in reputed English medium and central schools.

However, despite an urge to educate their children in best schools, admission into them are moderated by class. Cutting across caste and religious identities, it is economically secured families of the settlement are able secure admissions in the eminent schools training 'meritorious' students. Collective aspirations of communities like Jatavs and Kurmis, place high premium on education for upward mobility. However, emphasis on education only spells the possibility of occupational/economic mobility, while outcomes, mediated by multiple factors, are very uncertain.

Chapter V '*Intergenerational Mobility: Occupational Aspirations, Struggles and Realities*' discusses intergenerational mobility in terms of occupations, and aspirations of youth belonging to different caste groups. It closely looks at educational degrees possessed and the occupational outcomes and possibilities, especially among the Dalit youth. The evidence presented in the chapter aligns with Jeffrey's (2010:26) argument that "education is a contradictory resource" while offering a few opportunities of politico-economic mobility, it simultaneously consolidates the system of inequality. Privatization of education catering to demands of occupational structure of the new economy has produced educational hierarchy, which increasingly determines desired occupational success and exclusion from the labour market. Education alone cannot ensure a swift entry into the lucrative white-collar occupations. In the newly produced educational hierarchy, 'quality' education is crucial to achieve occupational success in the labour-market. 'Quality' education gets defined as English medium education obtained from private schools located in metropolitan cities is highly valued. In addition to the medium of instruction and dichotomy of private/public mode, educational hierarchy further categorises and ranks 'quality' education on basis of spatial divisions of rural/urban location. The hierarchy means that not everyone can access and afford 'quality' education. Despite presence of eminent universities and institutes Dalit youths pursue higher education in distance learning, enrolled in low ranking colleges and obtain diploma courses commonly from ITI. This inferior form of education from schooling level is what Dalits and urban poor access. Socio-economic exclusion of Dalits in the modern economy, which was historically sustained by caste system, translates into newer forms of hierarchies enabling traditional disparities to persist. Educational hierarchy covertly appear to distribute socio-economic opportunities and disparities among different social groups. Exclusion from 'quality'

education prohibits integration of Dalits into the white-collar occupations and to attain desired socio-economic mobility. Occupation represents a close link between social identity, economic class, educational attainment and mobility. Under liberalized economy, employment opportunities proliferated in IT and service sectors, generating a high demand for English educated and engineering graduates. The beneficiaries of these newly generated white-collar jobs are commonly English educated and technically skilled graduates. A vast majority of this white-collar workforce in private sector hails from middle-class and upper caste backgrounds (Upadhyay 2007; Krishna and Brihmadesham 2006; Fuller and Narsimhan 2006).

Securing a state/public sector employment is a predominant occupational aspiration among youths in the settlement. They take coaching classes to prepare for various state jobs (Delhi Police, Indian Railways, Defence services etc). Despite aspirations and attempts, youths are also aware of difficulty of securing state employment because of reduced share of public sector employment in economy. However, search for occupational security is not confined to public sector. 'Success' is also searched in private sector formal jobs by acquiring marketable skills like learning stenography, English, computer courses or procuring diploma courses from ITI, and work experience. Acquisition of multiple skills/degrees, constant move from one job to another, and intermittent experiences of brief and prolonged spells of un(under)employment, exhibit their quest to attain occupational security in the labour market. The chapter shows a large proportion of educated Dalit youth supply workforce to private sector economy where they perform work varying in degree of formality. In their attempt to secure a stable employment youths remain linked, even tenuously, with the labour-market of both the sectors. In the local aspirational model, becoming a political leader is also a common aspiration (described in the chapter V). To compensate for the uncertainty of employment and future, young men tend to engage in building politico-cultural identity and local reputation. In constructing this identity, support of various socio-political networks is sought. To begin a political career many young men resort to their caste associations through cultural and political participations. Political connections and positions are viewed as a route for upward mobility. Also, in the job scarce labour-market, social networks become crucial to gain information and employment. State employed parents play a crucial role in securing employment for their children, mostly for their sons.

Further, the new economy has affected gender structures differently in the settlement. Educational trajectory of both young men and women overlap but not of employment. Expectations from educated men and women are starkly different. Quite evenly, educated men are expected to obtain a job matching their qualifications and earn a reasonable income. Contrary to this, educated women are not inevitably expected to lend financial support to household. Unsettling masculinity, the new economy has not radically subverted the feminine roles. Most of the men and women choose distance learning for higher education in which classes are held on Sundays. Most men during the weekdays are part of paid workforce, whereas young women dispense domestic responsibilities. For young men despite possessing higher educational degrees gaining a state job is bleak. To negotiate precariat status, young men engage in local politics, income enhancing activities and emulate popular fashion to stabilise 'fractured masculinity'. Whereas young women in addition to perform domestic duties utilize weekdays in learning courses like beautician, tailoring or teaching. Fitting comfortably with feminine role descriptions these courses do not pose threat to prevalent gendered norms. With these courses natal families try to arm their daughters with vocational skills for the future uncertainties that may arise after marriage due to unemployed/underpaid spouse, widowhood, or in the event of marital discord. Despite rise in education levels of women, female participation in Indian workforce has been declining and stagnating (Klas and Pieters 2015). Among various factors that keep women away from paid employment, social norm is one which prevents female participation in workforce. In the settlement, prevailing social norms not only restricts female participation in economic activities, it also determines 'acceptable' and 'respectable' occupations for women. Entry of women in workforce is moderated by economic conditions of their families, collective aspiration of community, caste, and social consensus. Aspiring to improve socio-economic standing members of different castes notably, Jatavs and Kurmis, encourage the community to educate children to prepare for jobs. The girls from the community are preparing for CA, NEET, banking, teaching (B.ed, CTET, STET), and fashion designing. However young girls from different caste also prepare and pursue similar courses. But the collective emphasis on education is notable among Jatavs and Kurmis.

Working women are employed in service sector, manufacturing and informal jobs. Young women working in private sector jobs are commonly from economically impoverished class. Women working in menial and demeaning jobs like domestic help

or in factories do not consider their jobs as a respectable work. Also, better off families view female participation in menial jobs with derision. Not mere remunerative employment, but a respectable job constitutes an important condition for women to join the workforce. Locally, government jobs are coveted across gender and class, it is considered as a respectable employment for women. Likewise teaching jobs are considered respectable for women. Most of the women prepare to secure qualifying degrees like B.ed, CTET to become a teacher. Yet, it is economically stable families that can afford the cost of preparatory coaching of government services and degrees. Further collective aspirations of a community shapes relation between gender and employment. Material conditions and ideological beliefs of family immensely influence whether young women will join the workforce or not. Influence of improved economic condition of the family/community has reverse effect on the women employment. A relative increase in economic condition of Dalit households strengthens patriarchal norms resulting in withdrawal of women from the labour-force which is noted in Balmiki community (Deshpande 2014; Grover 2011).

The chapters IV and V show, education alone is not to be implicated for fragmenting the trajectory of desired mobility. Intersection of space, sub-culture, social identity and economic class exert influence on intergenerational mobility. Although the settlement predominantly inhabits Dalits but occupational trajectories of non-Dalits/caste Hindus is not starkly different from the former. Residing in the same location dependent on similar local institutions and resorting to similar strategies to attain occupational stability suggest, experiences of occupational precarity does not vary much across the residing social groups.

Chapter VI, titled, '*Local Politics: Caste, Co-option and Dalit Politics*', discusses significance of caste in political organisation, electoral trajectory and strategies of building electoral support. In India, democracy became an emancipatory tool for historically marginalised groups like Dalits to aspire and achieve bourgeois equality by acquiring political power (Alam 2015). This chapter illustrates that dominance of Dalits and their control over local politics have potential to invert traditionally preexisting power relations. As power gained in political sphere also permeates and influences nature of social relations. However, interaction between affirmative action in the form of political reservation and electoral logic to win elections have a flip side. Apart from guaranteeing political representation to Dalits, political reservation at different levels has also led to co-option (Jaffrelot 2014). In

order to mobilise support and achieve success, political parties resort to various tactics of Dalit co-option. As the chapter shows, affirmative action ensures political representation of Dalits, but it also impedes the formation of a coherent Dalit identity and politics. In reserved constituency, different Dalit castes from varying political affiliations compete to secure political power which further deepens the pre-existing inter-Dalit divisions. It retards and adversely affects the formation of an 'autonomous political identity' and unity among Dalits which can challenge the structures of oppression and find "solutions to their own substantive problems outside the state framework" (Guru 1998:17).

Caste as an identity appears as one of the crucial mobiliser both at macro and microlevel electoral politics. However, it is noted that commonality of identity is not the sole criterion on which voters decide to vote. Affinity and allegiance to one or other identity varies across caste groups. Electoral support to a party or a leader is influenced by multiple concerns and often transcends parochial bounds of common identity. As the chapter describes, besides caste, religion emerges as another conspicuous identity in local contemporary processes of political consolidation. Along with particular identity of caste, Dalit residents also identify themselves as Hindus and assert as such in public spaces. Relationship between the two identities is conceived obvious, not antagonistic. Identification with the religion which otherwise legitimises inferior and stigmatised status of Dalits, appears electorally beneficial for the right-wing party, BJP. While in Ashanagar all the political parties have been deploying strategies to co-opt Dalits. However, it is the ruling right-wing party, BJP, and its affiliate organisations creatively uses Dalit castes in expanding its voter base. Apart from political accommodation from above, by entering in the cultural and historical arenas the party has been active in recreating a new meta identity, memory, and relation to subsume Dalits within the fold of Hindu religion (Narayan 2009).

Caste, Hierarchies, and Urban Inequality

The study elaborates on the manifestation and operation of caste in different spheres of urban life. Through the chapters, presence and transformation of caste in urban location is evident. Caste does not necessarily exist as a system in which caste entities are socio-ritually and economically interdependent. It is often articulated and represented as autonomous and distinctive identity, ritually detached from other caste entities. Caste groups engage in creating and retaining their autonomous identities through marriage,

caste specific celebrations, formation of caste *samaj* and its activities. However, caste as a distinct identity is not restricted to or domesticated within the private spheres. As an identity, caste escapes the boundaries of private sphere and manifests in public spaces in the form of cultural celebrations, political assertions, inter-caste relations, perceptions and also merges with modern institutions. Contrary to representation of caste as an autonomous identity, a closer look at the manner in which inter-caste relations are negotiated shows that caste ideology underlines and operates in these relations. Inter-caste relations and perceptions manifest consciousness of ritually superior or inferior status which originates from the caste ideology. The ideology ranks caste entities as pure and polluted. In urban setting, the idea of pollution fuses with other markers of space and traits (like crime/violence). Operation of caste ideology also manifests in experiences of discrimination and humiliation by Dalits which are rooted in their 'impure' status in the caste hierarchy and their attempts to detach from stigmatised identity. Caste entities, ritually independent of each other, assume horizontal character as advanced by the thesis of substantialisation/ethnicisation of caste (Dumont 1988; Fuller 1996; Jaffrelott 2000; Gupta 2004). According to the thesis, horizontal caste entities operate as, 'impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another (Dumont 1988:222). However, the study shows boundaries of horizontal caste entities are permeable and relationally linked with other castes by ideology of 'purity' and 'pollution' as the intercaste perceptions and relations indicate.

The study brings forth that caste does not operate in a rigid and unchanged fashion. Flexibility and adaptability of caste are notable which also obscure the subtle operation of caste ideology and imparts the belief of 'castelessness' in urban locale (Deshpande 2013). External factors of spatial organisation, residential proximity, class conditions, numerical preponderance, affirmative action (political reservation/representation), legislations, modern education and occupational structure have reconfigured nature of caste and brought changes, if not radical, in pre-existing power relations. In the city, to detach from contempt attached to their caste status, gain socio-economic mobility, and dignity, Dalits take recourse to religion, legislations and avenues available in modern secular sphere. Reservation of seats at municipal and assembly constituency level has guaranteed political representation and acquisition of power by Dalits. This inversion of political power impinges on the structure of dependence. However, electoral logic to win elections prompts co-option of Dalits by

political parties which introduces intra-Dalit political competition and factions. It is also instrumental in widening pre-existing historical and socio-economic gulf among various Dalit groups. While political reservation mandates transfer of political power to Dalits, the logic of securing electoral victory restricts political representation to a single or few caste groups. Benefits accrued by transfer of political power are not distributed across the various Dalit castes. Multiplying divisions and political competition often result in the crystallisation of intra-Dalit frictions and factions. Political factionalism also impedes Dalit unity and formation of a coherent politics oriented towards their emancipation. Further, Hindu religion is swiftly integrated and overtly represented by right wing politics which considerably hinders the consolidation of Dalit politics. An urge to delink from the stigma and humiliation has produced a contradictory identity among the lower castes. It is expressed in simultaneous reverence for Dalit leaders, sages as well as for Hindu deities. Contradictory identity is manifested in simultaneous constitution and contextual celebrations and assertions of identities both as Dalits and Hindus. While Dalit as an identity connotes shared autonomous identity of the traditionally oppressed seeking the annihilation of structures of oppression, thereby organising around the identity contains promise of liberation. In contrast, reconstitution and claiming religious identity as Hindu are contradictory as the religion legitimises subordination and 'impure' status of Dalits. This contradictory identity claim and its contextual shifting resist the formation of a stable identity that can challenge the structures of oppression and exclusion.

Further, in the secular domain, education and occupation are significant means to attain socio-economic mobility. In the caste system, power, material, and privileges are distributed unevenly. Dalits who are positioned at the bottom of hierarchy remained deprived on all the counts. Mobility to urban locations, caste unrelated occupation in modern economy, liberal democracy, political participation of marginalised and access to modern education were expected to create viable conditions of liberation from the caste system. Chapters on intergenerational mobility show shift to urban location has aided in alleviation of impoverishment of Dalits. Absorption in caste unrelated occupations under public and private sector employment, improvement in material condition like permanent housing in the city, and access to education are some of the locational advantages Dalits have achieved in the city. Thus, spatial shift to city guarantees mobility to a certain extent. However, spatial shift to city does not ensure equality. Multiple hierarchies of residential location, education, class, gender, caste,

and employment reclassify the city population and produces differential citizenship. Existence of these hierarchies influences access to resources and opportunities of different classes and communities. It is highlighted in the study that spatial/residential location which one occupies in the city is one of the crucial factors in influencing the trajectory of mobility. Local prevailing conditions, institutional resources, and socio-cultural capital embedded in a residential location influence aspirations vis a vis socio-economic mobility. Socio-economically marginalised population tends to be concentrated in spatial peripheries containing inadequate socio-cultural capital. Their choices of mobility are influenced by the different forms of capital contained within the family and locality. Marginality is also concentrated in spatial locations possessing scant economic and non-economic capital and restricts access to quality resources in urban space which plays a crucial role in the reproduction of inequality. However, urban inequality cannot be reduced to residential location/neighbourhood as it conceals the role of structural changes in economy, public institutions and nature of state. Such reductionism offers only partial understanding of urban inequality. Wacquant (2018:284), while cautioning against spatial reductionism to understand advanced marginality, writes, “‘neighbourhood effects’ that conveys a falsely depoliticized vision of urban inequality, in which spatial processes appear self-evident, self-generated, or left unexplained when in reality they track the extent to which the state works or fails to equalize basic life conditions and strategies across places”. He argues that reducing urban inequality to space is misattribution of what is created politically. So, in the settlement, regardless of caste location, most youth are educated and possess higher degrees. Despite possessing higher educational degrees, they are excluded from the white-collar jobs in private sector as they lack ‘quality’ education. In private sector, they tend to get segregated in insecure low paying precariat jobs. Further, due to a drastic reduction in the public sector employment and intense competition over limited jobs, they are unable to secure stable employment with wage and non-wage securities. Economic reforms which have altered the role of state and the nature of labour market, along with the disinterest of the state in improving the quality of public institutions, like education sector, have reclassified inequality in India. Intersection of caste hierarchy with modern hierarchies of education, residential location, and occupation influences urban marginality and inequality. Also, intersection of these hierarchies conceals the production and perpetuation of caste-based inequalities in the cities.

Rather than dissipating in modern urban spaces caste finds newer modes of expression while retaining its older values and expressions. Through negotiated inter-caste relations and in the fusion with other forms of modern hierarchies, caste in the city appears in an obscured manner. To comprehend urban marginality and inequality, it is thus important to focus on the dialectic between the local conditions and experiences of marginal groups with that of the larger political and economic structures.

Decolonisation and the introduction of modern values and institutions ensued a debate on the final fate of caste. The terms of debate remained whether caste would survive or disappear under modern conditions. Rather than declining, empirical studies underline both the persistence and transformation of caste. Contemporary debates on caste view survival of caste in two forms. While scholars agree that caste continues to exist, it is believed that under the modern economy and political system, caste has lost its ritual significance and has become de-ritualised. According to this view, while de-ritualised in public transactions, caste is domesticated and has become an autonomous identity within the private spheres. Such a view on persistence of caste fails to explain caste-based disparities, experiences of humiliation and discrimination in the modern public spaces and institutions. Whereas, some other scholars argue that far from being domesticated and de-ritualised, modern conditions have actually aided the reproduction of caste and caste-based inequalities. According to this view, caste has acquired a seemingly 'secular' form through the interplay of caste, modern institutions and ideologies. This focus, however, on the 'secular' form under the modern public life masks the manner in which caste escapes private sphere and operates in the modern public spaces. In brief, it would appear in course of the study, caste is not only a domestic ritual and a secular inequality in the public; it also has several public implications as a ritual value and practice in the city. This complex functioning of caste across both the public and private spheres in an urban neighbourhood is illustrated in this study.

Limitations of the Study

The important aspects which emerge infrequently in the present study are experiences, attitudes and role of women in caste reproduction. Lack of women's perspective on the subject is not an outcome of conscious outcome, however it is paradoxical given the researchers own gender location that would have been advantageous in gaining in-

depth details. Further, since in the settlement, apart from Dalits, Muslims also reside. Therefore, caste among Muslim residents could have been explored to enrich understanding and pervasiveness of caste. This study, however, did not engage with the question of caste among Muslim residents. Also, since the study present provides detailed account of a single settlement located in the city. The conclusions drawn in the study are not easily generalisable. Similar studies in different types of urban settlements can enable in providing a holistic understanding of operation of caste in cities.

Scope for Further Research

Identity forms an important basis on which disparities are generated and reproduced. Caste is an ascriptive identity which traditionally determined the distribution of privileges and disadvantages in India. To comprehend the widening socio-economic disparities under modern conditions, it is important to understand the influence and role of caste in its production. While the study is situated in specific setting of an urban settlement in Delhi. Conducting similar studies in different settings like public and private organisations, and different types of settlement inhabited by members of different class is required to enlarge and deepen our understanding of contemporary forms marginality and inequality. Also, as caste is noted to be present among non-Hindu groups, thus understanding of caste requires to move beyond the fold of Hindu communities

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Annexure

Chapter 5: The Notice of Spatial Reorganisation

Further extension of the metro network to North-eastern parts of the city has been retarded due to disagreements over rehabilitation of those involuntarily leaving their homes for 'public interest'. The delay arose due to uncertainty over the resettlement of affected population in three different locations in the city including the settlement. While DMRC was struggling to acquire land to rehabilitate the unsettled of other two location. Construction of the metro line through the Ashanagar is interrupted as houses standing on one hundred eight plots, housing over 300 families, obstructs the route on which metro viaduct is to be built.

In 2012 Dr. Abdul, the president Resident Welfare Association (RWA) of the affected block, received notice from Delhi Metro Railway Corporation (DMRC) about impending demolition in the block and resettlement. Muslims constitute a predominant population of the block where demolition is set to take place. After receiving the notice three members, Dr. Abdul (RWA president, local leader of Congress), Hashim (president of minority cell of BJP) and Ashfaq (a retired employee of CAG) went as representatives of their block to meet DMRC officials. Thereafter these representatives visited DMRC office and met officials regularly to decide the course of relocation. In these meetings DMRC officials proposed three sites for the resettlement of the affected families, two within the settlement and the third away from the settlement. Despite offer of alternate relocation site, initial attempts of representatives were directed to pursue DMRC to change the metro route which proved futile.

Initially, in the meetings DMRC offered affected family's different sites and compensation packages. Ashfaq puts, 'initially DMRC made several promises of our resettlement and compensation. But these meetings were not reaching to any meaningful conclusion'. After few meetings DMRC proposed a site, vast ground in the settlement which was declined by the representatives citing the cultural antagonism with Balmiki community. Balmikis live near it, rear pigs on the ground, and own slaughter shops selling slaughtered pigs. As the animal is considered blasphemous in Islam, thus relocation on this site was unacceptable to Muslim residents. Dr. Abdul one among three representatives informed that the then MP assured a site which was close to the metro station. According Dr. Abdul that was the best proposal but after 2014 Lok Sabha

elections Congress MP, Sandeep Dixit, lost seat to BJP candidate and the plan remained unexecuted. Ashfaq's narrative of meetings with DMRC officials differed from Abdul's. He tells the two representatives agreed for the relocation in a site away from the settlement. He says, 'they sold the community to officials.' Sceptical of the agreement reached between the officials and other representatives Ashfaq defected from the representatives and filed RTI inquiring about the proposed site of rehabilitation.

Politics Behind Legal Confrontations and Tribulations

According to RTI response, DMRC sought vacant plots, known as green belt, in the settlement from Delhi Urban Shelter Board (DUSIB). Ashfaq raised demand for the resettlement in the erstwhile green belt acquired by DMRC for rehabilitation. In this long strip of land, called green belt, three plots lie consecutively. The fourth plot is separated by a road with remaining three plots adjacent to it. Single lying plots is situated across the affected block while the remaining three plots are situated opposite to Balmiki preponderant blocks who have been opposing the relocation. It was certain that affected families will get their new houses built within the settlement on the land acquired by DMRC. Ashfaq told between the month of February-March 2014 DMRC even sent surveyors to collect information about the houses marked for demolition²⁵. In the same year Delhi Development Authority (DDA) converted land usage of the green belt to residential area. Despite complete ownership of the land with DMRC construction of houses did not begin till 2015.

In May 2014, a new MP from BJP was elected to the constituency. The green belt is adopted by brother of former MLA from BJP. In intervening period, a local BJP leader from Balmiki community requested the new MP to intervene in the matter of relocation of the affected families citing the cultural differences with Muslims. The letter emphasized on cultural differences with displaced and not congestion to be caused by rehabilitation of displaced on the green belt. The letter was explicit in suggesting that the settlement has no place to rehabilitate the displaced. In 2015, DMRC began construction which was suspended shortly after local resistance from the residents, mostly Balmikis, RSS workers, local leader, former MLA and incumbent MP. To embolden the agitators opposing construction, the MP clamoured, 'every person present here is X (name of the MP), we will not allow any construction to begin on this site'. Ashfaq tells, (he showed the photocopy of the letter sent by MP),

construction work was suspended by DMRC after receiving the letter from MP sent to DMRC chairman. The letter suggested DMRC to propose another site which eventually resulted in refusal of DMRC to relocate the families within the settlement. In another meeting in 2015, DMRC expressed its inability to recommence work on the proposed site without citing any specific reason. Between 2015-16 Ashfaq wrote letters and applications to CM, MP and MLA of the constituency, chief of project manager of DMRC, and authorities at DDA, DUSIB, NGT and minority commission. Simultaneously, he along with some other affected members has been appearing to Delhi court for hearing of the case. In 2016, Ashfaq with others approached Delhi High Court which directed reluctant DMRC to resume work forthwith on the acquired land for resettlement. DMRC recommenced the work under the security of Delhi Police in 2016. In 2016, RWA of opposing blocks filed a case in the court to intervene as the acquired land encroaches and alters the Delhi master plan, 2021. Following which DMRC communicated to the affected families that it will construct houses only for 64 plots. To the families on remaining 44 plots it offered either to give monetary compensation or house in different parts of the city. Ashfaq and others again approached the court and succeeded in getting a favourable judgement. The court directed DMRC to build house on the acquired land for all families staying on 108 plots. For the construction DMRC sought alteration master plan 2021 from DDA. The construction and legal battle over other aspects of resettlement is underway²⁶.

Communal tension surfaced and gathered momentum after decision to resettle displaced in the settlement. Shift in the political power at centre and newly elected MP from the BJP emboldened community leaders, Balmiki, affiliated to the party. Apart from Balmiki community, caste Hindus associated with the party or RSS also supported the resistance against relocation of displaced on the acquired land. The opposition to impede relocation was led by a late MLA, a local BJP leader, caste Hindu lawyer and supported by the MP. The leaders were also chief provocateur of the communal tension following the brawl. Between the gap of two days, since the conclusion of the earlier mentioned brawl between two young boys and beginning of communal frenzy, late MLA and local BJP leaders gathered residents, and gave fiery speeches invoking sentiment of 'us' as Hindus against the 'other' Muslims. The belt is said to be adopted by the MLA's younger brother and his friend who runs NGO in the locality. For the late MLA, who lost assembly seat to AAP candidate in 2013 assembly, leading

opposition against the relocation bestowed the role of community leader. The brawl and communal tension presented an opportunity to revive political relevance not only as a leader representing own caste but of entire 'Hindu' community at a time when the city was expecting next assembly election in 2015¹²¹. Electoral outcome of 2015 elections however did not bring the expected results. Before 2015 elections, the MLA died due to cardiac arrest and instead his wife contested from the party. The party failed to restore the seat on which AAP candidate was re-elected. Thus, protracted battle against the resettlement of displaced, largely Muslim residents, did not yield immediate electoral benefits to the party and its local leaders. But it stirred communal sentiments of the communities and fostered public assertion of communal identities.



¹²¹ After serving 49 days (28/12/2013 to 14/02/2014) the CM of newly elected government resigned from the post. Since then for a year the city was under president rule until 2015 when the party was reelected to form the government.