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Dalit Academic Experiences: Stigma, Social Reproduction and Systemic Exclusion in
Indian Higher Education

A Dissertation Presented

by

BHARAT RATHOD

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 2021

College of Education

Educational, Policy, Research, and Administration

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Dalit Academic Experiences: Stigma, Social Reproduction and Systemic Exclusion in
Indian Higher Education

A Dissertation Presented

By

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My doctoral program journey has been a roller coaster ride for me and my family. Now I am done with my dissertation, and when I look back the journey, there are many individuals who extended their support beyond my expectations.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my chair, Professor Sangeeta Kamat and her continued support in academic and personal issues. She invested a valuable time and resources in my academic and professional growth. Sangeeta played a pivotal role in my doctoral program; and I can say that without her extra efforts to support me and my family, I would not have been able to accomplish the dissertation. Under her leadership, I was able to participate in a collaborative project between UMass Amherst and Pune University on inclusion and equity that paved the way for my dissertation research. The project funded by the US-India Education Foundation (USIEF) supported a significant part of my graduate studies for which I am grateful. Thank you also to members my committee, Professor Ximena Zúñiga and Dr. Chrystal A George Mwangi. Professor Zúñiga expertise in social justice education and intergroup dialogue and Dr. Mwangi's scholarship on race and campus climate contributed valuable perspectives to my research and dissertation. Their insights and suggestions regarding the dissertation process were instrumental in writing a persuasive dissertation.

Over the years, I have been motivated and inspired by Professor Janaki Natrajan, who has been my mentor and a role model during my higher education journey in the United States. Janaki demonstrated that education is all about politics, and her teachings of social justice inspired me to pursue the topic of my dissertation. My deepest gratitude goes to my relatives, Kirtibhai Rathod, Girishbhai Dodia, Zafarben and Amir Mohammad

Khan for their utmost support for my education journey in the United States. A special thanks go to Sheetal Chanda, Prasanna Chanda and Biju Mathew, who greatly supported me and my family throughout the journey.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my community members and friends – Rahul, Satish, Sharda Ben, Vishnu Bhai and Sadaf who worked with me in development projects in Ahmedabad (India), and helped me to grow as community leader which paved my path to come to the United States for higher education; thank you all.

My dissertation is based on the stories of my interlocutors and their lived experiences. I am highly thankful to each one of them interlocutor for sharing personal stories and giving me time to talk about their lives. I wish to also thank Bhavesh Chauhan, Vijay Makwana, Ashwin Dafda, Praful Navakar, Rajesh Lakum, Rajnikant Chauhan and Nayan Rathod; all of them helped during my field visit to Gujarat. I wish to thank my friends and peers; Sadaf Rathod, Maugette Diame, Swati Birla and Gaurav Pathania who discussed and shared their perspectives on a range of topics of my dissertation. Special thanks go to David Litterer and I am deeply indebted to him; he had voluntarily proofread drafts of my dissertation, and offered his relentless service and insights about various aspects of the dissertation.

I am indebted to my late sister, Vimla and brother, Rajesh, who took care of me during my childhood. My doctoral program journey was an important phase of my life and during the journey I received exceptional camaraderie and love from my partner, Sadaf and daughter, Saara. Finally, my parents, who have played a monumental role throughout my life; my doctoral degree is a culmination of my parents' dedication to provide me a better education and their inspiration to pursue higher education.

ABSTRACT

DALIT ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES: STIGMA, SOCIAL REPRODUCTION AND SYSTEMIC EXCLUSION IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 2021

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Over the last two decades, public universities in India have witnessed a demographic change and an increase in the numbers of Dalit and marginalized students on college campuses. However, there is scarcely any research on the impact of the changed demographic and its implications for the Dalit students, campus life and the campus climate. This study focused on experiences of Dalit students and their narratives of resilience in the university life. I conducted interviews and interlocutor observations to understand the experiences and perspectives of Dalit students in a public university in Gujarat. The research drew from scholarship on racial minorities in United States higher education, and developed a theoretical framework and policy to help conceptualize what an inclusive university space would look like in an Indian context. My research provided insights into the academic journeys of Dalit students in Indian universities. The study uncovered a complex understanding of the experiences of Dalit students and also generated institutional and policy frameworks that are relevant and responsive to the issues of Dalit students in higher education.

Keywords: Caste, Dalit, Universities, Critical Race Theory, Diversity, Campus Climate, Inclusion, Equity

ABBREVIATIONS

ABVP:	Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad
AIIMS:	All-India Institute of Medical Sciences
AISHE:	All India Survey of Higher Education
ASA:	Ambedkar Students' Association
BAPSA:	Birsa Ambedkar Phule Student Association
BRS:	Bachelor of Rural Studies
BASO:	Bhagat Singh Ambedkar Student Organization
BJP:	Bharatiya Janata Party
CATA:	Common Admission Test Admission
CRT:	Critical Race Theory
DLE:	Diverse Learning Environments
HCU:	Hyderabad Central University
HRW:	Human Rights Watch
IAS:	Indian Administrative Service
IIT:	Indian Institute of Technology
INC:	Indian National Congress
IRB:	Institutional Review Board
JEE:	Joint Entrance Exam
JNU:	Jawaharlal Nehru University
LGBTQ:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
MA:	Master of Arts
MBBS:	Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery

MCom: Master in Commerce

MD: Doctor of Medicine

MHRD: Ministry of Human Resource Development

MNC: Multi-National Corporations

MPhil: Master of Philosophy

MS: Master in Surgery

Msc: Master of Science

MSW: Master of Social Work

NASA: National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NCRB: National Crime Record Bureau

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

NSSO: National Sample Survey Office

NSUI: National Students' Union of India

OBC: Other Backward Caste

OPD: Outpatient Department

PC: Preparatory Course

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

PWI: Predominantly White Institution

RGNF: Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship

RSS: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

SC: Scheduled Caste

ST: Scheduled Tribe

U.S.: United States

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW AND SIGNIFICANCE

1.1 Background of the Study

In January 2016, a Dalit¹ scholar at Hyderabad Central University (HCU) - Rohith Vemula - was driven to suicide. He was a doctoral student in HCU and a student leader who was vocal about sociopolitical and caste issues on the campus. Rohith was a member of the Ambedkar Student Association (ASA), which engaged in social justice issues of the oppressed castes and other marginalized students on the campus. As a result of these activities, the university administration was hostile to him and to ASA members in every possible way. To discipline him, Rohith was stripped of his fellowship, expelled from the hostel, suspended for a semester and harassed by multiple investigations (Henry, 2016). After a great struggle against the authorities, casteist propaganda and “Hindu nationalism”², Rohith took an extreme step to demonstrate his final protest by ending his life. Rohith’s death was widely reported in different mainstream media and discussed in social media. Reports of previous cases of atrocities and suicides on the campus inspired a robust protest at the HCU campus. The protest grew rapidly into a massive nationwide

¹ Dalit means the oppressed and it is a commonly accepted term by former untouchables of India. A Dalit has a stigmatized social identity and is considered to be polluted according to cultural norms and Hindu religious doctrine. For more than two millennia, the Dalits have been experiencing a range of exclusion and oppression. According to 2011 census of India, more than 200 million (16.6 percent) people belong to the Dalit communities in India.

² Hindu nationalism is a political ideology, which promotes Hindu religious values and beliefs to shape the state and its policies. Since the last three decades, Hindu nationalism has become a significant agenda in electoral politics. Since 2014, BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, translated as Indian People’s Party) has been in power, and they implicitly and explicitly endorse Hindu nationalism in every sphere of life in India. Hindu nationalism is profoundly grounded in the privileged castes’ culture; therefore, inherently it is casteist and anti-Dalit.

outrage against discrimination of Dalit students and also raised pertinent questions regarding the hegemony of the “privileged castes”³ in Indian higher education.

The experiences of Dalit students in Indian higher education have been reported in several studies by Patwardhan & Palshikar (1992), Neelakandan & Patil (2012), Rao, (2013), Singh (2013), Ovicegan (2015) and in officially appointed committee reports. Some prominent reports such as Anveshi Law Committee report (2002) in HCU, the Thorat Committee report (Thorat, Shyamprasad, & Srivastava, 2007) and the Mungekar Committee report (Gatade, 2012) in Vardhman Mahavir Medical College (VMMC) have concluded that Dalit students have experienced a range of caste-based discrimination in these institutions. In brief, Dalit students’ experience a prevalent climate of widespread hostility in higher education institutions. Incidents of caste discrimination in higher education have been treated as isolated and individual issues. However, the evidence demonstrates that it encompasses a range of systemic discriminatory practices and behaviors by privileged caste individuals and privileged castes’ controlled institutions. The study focuses on the academic journeys of Dalit students and on the “campus climate”⁴ issues pertaining to Dalit identity on university campuses.

Caste as an identity is one of the most grounded and pervasive social identities in Indian society, often overriding class identity (Jodhka, 2012). Despite constitutional guarantees (anti-discriminatory laws⁵) to protect against caste discrimination; after more

³ In this paper, I have used “privileged caste”, instead of hierarchical nouns such as, “higher caste” or “upper caste”. Privileged caste itself exemplifies that they are in a hegemonic position in Indian society.

⁴ Susan Rankin, a leading scholar on campus climate research, defines campus climate as “the current attitudes, behaviors and standards of faculty, staff, administrators and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities and potential” (University of California, n.d., para.1).

than seventy years of independence, caste remains a significant marker of an individual and caste discrimination remains a pervasive cultural phenomenon in rural and urban India.⁶ This is made evident by the fact that untouchability is still widely practiced by the privileged castes.⁷ According to the dominant narratives, untouchability has declined and become virtually non-existent (Jodhka, 2012); however, incidents of untouchability frequently surface in the media. Such reports have documented Dalits being denied entry into temples and limits imposed on their ability to fetch well water. Further, instances of inter-caste marriage have resulted in the murder of the groom, bride, and family members (Chowdhry, 1997; Siddharth, 2019), with very few perpetrators being prosecuted. Even untouchability is accepted as an egregious form of caste discrimination, albeit it manifests in subtle ways in urban India. A majority of the nation is still rural, where untouchability is routinely practiced (Shah et al, 2006).⁸

In the twenty-first century, Hindu religious orthodoxy still defends the caste system as a division of labor and created by God.⁹ However, Dr. B R Ambedkar

⁵ The legal provisions such as Anti-Untouchability Act (1955), Protection of Civil Rights Act (1975), and Prevention of Atrocities Act (1989). These acts are facilitated by the Article 17 of the Constitution that considers the practice of untouchability in any form as an offense.

⁶ The phenomena caste as culture is itself a strategic ideological adaptation of caste rather than a benign, defanged twenty-first century avatar of caste that is seemingly about difference and not inequality or hierarchy” (Natrajan, 2012, p.164).

⁷ A physical contact or touch by Dalits is considered as polluting, so the privileged castes avoid touching Dalits. Untouchability as a practice is still prevalent in rural and urban areas. Though, in rural areas it is evident and urban in areas it is mostly concealed. Guru (2009) elaborates the concept of ‘pollution and purity’ in the context of untouchability as dynamic realities and the meaning of untouchability experiences in the society.

⁸ A survey conducted in 565 villages across 11 states, documented untouchability in rural India. It concluded that the practices of untouchability are pervasive in all rural areas, and moreover, it reformed into new and deceptive forms (Shah et al., 2006).

⁹ The Indian caste system is a social hierarchical structure that perpetuates discrimination and stigmatization based on a caste status. A caste identity is hereditary and a permanent social identity of a person. There is no scope for upward mobility in the caste hierarchy, caste identity is entirely different than

presented a scholarly critique of the caste system and argued that it is also a “division of laborers”, which imposes social divisions on laborers – it is a hierarchical separation of laborers where one group of laborers is graded above the others (Ambedkar, 1944).¹⁰ He brilliantly articulated - “Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste” (Ambedkar, 1944, p. 24). Caste is a mechanism and caste discrimination is a social weapon, both reinforce each other and the privileged castes know its functional utility; therefore, in spite of laws, caste not only perseveres but transforms as per its utility in different settings (Thorat & Mahdewaran, 2018). In the twenty-first century, despite the modern and secular outlook of Indian culture, feudal caste relations and caste identities dictate the consciousness of the society; hence, caste is seamlessly merged within the institutions of the country (Teltumbde, 2001)

Studies have reported that the oppressed caste students have been experiencing discrimination from primary through higher education institutions (Nambissan, 1996, 2006 & 2009; Sedwal & Kamat, 2008; Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016). The Indian Exclusion Report (2014) stated that biased attitudes of the teacher often inspire discriminatory behavior by privileged caste peers. The impact of negative experiences of

class identity (Jodhka, 2012). The caste system is an integral part of Hindu religion and justified by religious text such as the *Rig-Veda* and *Manusmruti*, which are ancient Hindu scriptures (Jodhka, 2012). For a detailed historical and sociological understanding of the caste system in India, see Jodhka, S. S. (2012). *Caste*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Dr. B R Ambedkar (1981 - 1956), also revered as “Babasaheb Ambedkar” among Dalits, was a jurist, economist, politician and social reformer who fought for the human rights of Dalits, women and labor. He was the first Law and Justice minister of Independent India, the architect of the Constitution and a founding leader of the Republic of India. He was a relentless critic of Hindu religious orthodoxy and scriptures, and started the Dalit Buddhist movement in the last stage of his life to challenge the caste system in India. Dr. Ambedkar (1944) presented a scholarly critique of caste and quoted that the caste system is “division of laborer” which imposes social divisions on laborers, a hierarchical separation of laborers where one group of laborers is graded above the others.

the lower caste students are seen as a psychological injury that reflects in frequent absenteeism, school dropout, lower participation in learning processes, limited intergroup relations among peers, and lower educational attainment. Studies show that this is still widespread in schools – clearly evident in the implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MMS¹¹) in public schools (Thorat & Lee, 2005), without discounting the persistence of untouchability to the absolute neglect of other subtle but nevertheless harmful ways that stigma, bias and prejudice are communicated.

Over the past two decades, higher education in India has been witnessing an increase in enrollment across social groups such as first generation, female, rural and the oppressed caste students, specifically, Dalit students in public higher education. The presence of a significant and growing number of Dalit students on college campuses has changed the student demographic, and also shaken the historical hegemony of the privileged castes. This phenomenon creates new social tensions and conflicts with privileged castes who have been a dominant force among faculty, staff and students in the universities (Rathod, 2019). Due to conglomeration of social identities of students, higher education institutions are facing diversity, social justice and discrimination issues. Moreover, caste-based discrimination in higher education has been neglected for decades, and now is pervasive and institutionalized across institutions in India (Patwardhan & Palshikar, 1992; Neelakandan & Patil, 2012; Ovichegan, 2015).

A few empirical studies have been conducted to study caste-based discrimination in higher education. In a qualitative study conducted to examine causes of discrimination

¹¹ Mid-Day Meal Scheme provides a meal to students in government primary schools. In 2003, a detailed survey was conducted by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS) in 531 villages across five states of India. The study found that various kinds of exclusion and caste discrimination have been experienced by the Dalit students and people associated with meal preparation in MMS.

at IIT, Rao (2013) noted that the oppressed caste students and particularly Dalit students face various subtle and explicit forms of discrimination at the institution. The author explored the concept of “stigma”¹² (Goffman, 2009) in a context of Dalit identity and its impact on social relations in the institution. Similarly, Singh (2013) recorded seventeen suicide cases of Dalit students in various elite institutions across India. The article is based on interviews and a compilation of testimonies of families, peers, and friends of the deceased students. A qualitative research study was conducted in the elite University of Shah Jahan (pseudonym) in north India; in the study, Ovichegan (2015) reported several experiences of caste-based discrimination of the Dalit students and concluded that the caste divide is evidently pervasive across the University. These studies on Dalit students are confined to recognizing the prevalence of caste-based discrimination in elite institutions; they do not provide a detailed explanation of the institutional life of Dalit students in Indian higher education.

Dalit students experience two types of stigma; first, oppressed caste as a polluted (stigmatized) identity in the sociocultural contexts and second, the title of “quota student” (quota policy¹³) in the institutional contexts of higher education. Both stigma reinforce each other, therefore, consciously and unconsciously, privileged caste individuals perpetuate implicit and explicit forms of bias, stereotypes and discrimination (Hanna &

¹² The concept of stigma (Goffman, 2009) is associated with an identity of a person, group, ethnicity, caste, religion, nation, race, gender, and physical and mental condition. A stigmatized person is an undesirable character in public spaces as well as in social relationships. A person with a stigmatized identity is considered not quite human, disqualified from full social acceptance, and prone to discrimination and physical assault.

¹³ The quota policy is a legal mandate (Article 15(4) and Article 16 (4)) to reserve seats in education, employment, and political representation at various levels. Both the Articles enable the state and central governments to reserve seats for SC (Schedule Caste means Dalits), ST (Schedule Tribe means Tribals) and OBC (Other Backward Castes) groups. The number of reserved seats varies in both the central and State government-run public institutions. In central government run institutions, 7.5 percent for ST, 14 percent for SC, and 27 percent for OBC seats are reserved. However, each state has slightly different quota policies as per population of the oppressed caste and other marginalized social groups in the State.

Linden, 2009). The oppressed caste students routinely experience stereotypes, prejudices, differential treatments and discrimination from peers, faculty, the administration and the institutional climate. Studies have shown that routine subtle, explicit and complex caste-based discrimination and humiliation drives Dalit students to academic failure, stagnation, lower degree achievement rates and even suicide due to extremely hostile academic and social conditions (Pal & Arjun, 2013; Desai & Kulkarni, 2008; Sukumar, 2008; Karthikeyan, 2011). This indicates that oppressed caste students are at the receiving end and do not have access to institutional assistance and social support to deal with routine discrimination and harassment.

After independence, higher education has become a boon for reinforcing the caste supremacy of the privileged castes over the oppressed castes. In other words, the privileged castes replaced the colonial ruler and occupied the position of a new ruling class, while the marginalized castes remained at the subordinate status. However, the Constitution explicitly acknowledges the “social justice”¹⁴ spirit and mandated the quota policy to serve two main purposes: (1) to provide representation in public institutions, and (2) protection against discrimination and as a compensatory mechanism for historical injustice.¹⁵ I argue that the policy in higher education has been systematically reduced to enrollment of the oppressed caste students and poorly implemented in practice. Access is

¹⁴ A concept of justice grounded in a democratic state, and the Constitution of India explicitly mentions and ensures that all citizens are free and equal. The principles of justice between free and equal individuals must eradicate all social inequalities, which are inherently based on historical, economic, cultural and political realities. John Rawls (1985) discussed the social justice framework to provide critical understanding of social inequalities of the past and it should not influence the ‘fair agreement’ principle of justice that is crucial for basic social institutions of the present and future.

¹⁵ The quota policy is neither aimed to facilitate economic upliftment nor development programs for the oppressed castes; its central purpose is to provide representation to the excluded castes in the democratic decision making process. It also protects the excluded castes against caste-based discrimination, and encourages their participation in higher education and government jobs.

on one side of the spectrum and academic performance, retention, and degree attainment are on the other. Desai and Kulkarni (2008) stated that decline in college completion among Dalit students defeats the purpose of the quota policy. Further, the authors present a substantial argument that the quota policy should expand its impact and dimensions in higher education policy. The existing quota policy has been limited to providing entry into an institution, but it does not further facilitate any kind of support (Pal, 2015) for oppressed caste students against discrimination. The circumstances of Dalit students offer an opportunity to examine issues of social justice and to learn from other experiences pertaining to the institutional framework to support oppressed caste students.

This study explores research frameworks from the U.S. higher education system which are relevant and applicable in Indian contexts. Racial identities are a social construction (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) and do not have biological or genetic bases to justify a racial hierarchy. Similarly, caste identities are social constructions and hierarchies along caste lines have been created by the dominant castes to maintain their supremacy over Dalits and resources. From social identity perspectives, black (e.g. race) and Dalit (e.g. caste) identities have some similarities: 1) Black and Dalit identities are associated with stigma, 2) both identities are experiencing a range of discrimination, 3) historical legacy of marginalization is evident in socioeconomic conditions, 4) Dalits and Blacks both have unequal access to strategic resources and face prejudice and social stratification, 5) affirmative action programs are adapted to provide additional support, and 6) both subordinate identities share common cultures and struggle to support each

other.¹⁶ Despite their similarities, race and caste are distinct identities and caste-race discourse has established its distinctiveness a long time ago.¹⁷

Historically, Indian reformers have tried to build solidarity between Blacks of the U.S. and Dalits in India.¹⁸ Omvedt (1976) studied non-Brahmin movements, and pointed out similarities between Ambedkar led democratic political movements in India and the Civil Rights movements in the U.S. Similarly, Dr. Ambedkar wrote a letter to W. E. B. Dubois in 1946, and expressed his desire to learn from each other's experience:

There is so much similarity between the position of the untouchables in India and of the position of the Blacks in America and that the study of the latter is not only natural but necessary... I was very much interested to read that the Blacks of America have filed a petition to the UNO (United Nation Organization). The untouchables of India are thinking of following suit (Thorat & Umakant, 2004, p. xxix).

Currently, India and the U.S. are the largest and second largest democracy respectively; moreover, the two countries share remarkable similarities such as unprecedented levels of

¹⁶ At the global level, African American civil right activists and Dalit activists have been trying to attain a race status for caste, which could facilitate international recognition that caste is a systemic form of discrimination against Dalits in Indian society. In the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban (South Africa), activists and scholars emphasized race-caste analogies in international policy and law such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) organized by the United Nations. This shows that there is an international solidarity to conceptualize caste as race, so Dalits could attain international protections and create political pressure on the Indian government to protect rights of Dalits.

¹⁷ Scholars from the U.S. have been discussing caste and race identities through diverse lenses; in the first half of the twentieth century, William Thomas and W L Warner had argued that race in the U.S. was similar to the caste system, in which social positions of whites and blacks are hierarchical and systematically ranked like the caste system of India. However, the 'caste school of race studies' did not last long, and in 1948, a renowned sociologist Oliver Cox discussed this in his influential book 'Caste, Class and Race' which has changed the discourse once and for all. In the book, Cox (1948) argued that race could not be studied through a caste framework because the evolution and the nature of caste and race were essentially different. Specifically, racial differences or identities in American society are social constructs to reinforce racial prejudice and discrimination in relation to the capitalist mode of production; whereas, the caste system in India is an ancient cultural creation that gradually become a part of Hindu religion and the foundations of the society.

¹⁸ Jotiba Phule wrote "*Gulamgiri*" (Slavery) in Marathi language in 1885, and, and he dedicated the book to the people of the U.S. for their struggle against Slavery and emancipation of Blacks; further, he wished that the people of Indian subcontinent (before independence) may learn from the anti-slavery movement, and fight against Brahmanical ideology to emancipate Dalits and the oppressed castes.

income inequalities and wealth, socioeconomic deprivation of their vulnerable groups and dominant right wing politics, which are intrinsically aligned against the oppressed groups in both countries.¹⁹ Therefore, comparative analysis of their marginalized communities facilitates a great opportunity to develop new scholarship on a range of issues and also for lessons that the two countries can learn from each other.

Oppressed caste students in India and underrepresented minority students in the U.S. have similarities in terms of their historical oppression, institutionalized racism/casteism and marginalization in higher education.²⁰ However, public and private higher educational institutions in the U.S. have made far better progress than their counterparts in India in terms of research, policy framework, programs and institutional interventions to enhance retention rates and degree attainment, protection against racism and social justice focused support programs (Rathod, 2019).

My study is informed by a comparative dimension with the U.S. higher education contexts where I discuss race and diversity research and examine its relevance for developing an anti-casteist, democratic and inclusive university context in India. Further, the study will discuss effective institutional initiatives, awareness raising initiatives and policies from the U.S. higher education system that would inspire the development of policies and programs to create socially just campus climates in Indian higher education. The research is intended to generate scholarship pertaining to various aspects of the life

¹⁹ In both countries, electoral politics shifted to right wing populism; in India, the Hindu nationalist political party – BJP captured power in 2014 and was reelected in 2019 with majoritarian Hindu votes. Similarly, in the U.S., white evangelical Protestants (81 percent) overwhelmingly supported Trump as the President in 2016 (Cox, 2016).

²⁰ The Underrepresented Minority (URM) term for students refers to the low representation racial and ethnic (e.g. African Americans, Hispanic/Latina/o, and Alaskan) social groups. Underrepresented students experience institutional and racial discrimination in predominantly white institutions (Yosso et al., 2004).

of Dalit students and to recommend policy initiatives to develop an “institutional support”²¹ system for Dalit students in Indian higher education.

Discrimination or bias against Dalit students is an under-researched topic and deserves wider study to illuminate the life of Dalit students on university campuses. Previous studies of Dalit students have reiterated the prevalence of caste-based discrimination (Rao, 2013) , offer simplistic explanations and merely reiterate the pervasiveness of caste-based discrimination. Further, they do not provide a deeper understanding on a range of topics regarding the role of caste and institutional life of Dalit students in higher education. This study also illuminates the deficit discourse in research by demonstrating Dalit students’ academic perseverance and their counter narratives to challenge the dominant narratives. This research is intended to study beyond caste-based discrimination, specifically, to examining educational journeys of Dalit students and analyzing the power dynamics, resilience, and resistance of their academic journeys. Similarly, it is intended to address institutional culture, practices, and contexts that contribute to a negative or exclusionary environment for Dalit students (Ilaiyah, 2008), and what changes would be required to create a positive climate for them. Previous studies on the topic have focused on premier higher education institutions; however, a lack of studies about the state universities raises a question – what is the situation of Dalit students in non-elite higher education institutions (i.e. state universities, where most Dalits are enrolled) across the country? This study focuses on the academic experiences of Dalit students in a state university in Gujarat, India.

²¹ Institutional support in higher education is a commonly used term to explain policies, programs, and initiatives intended to foster student development and specifically focused on vulnerable student groups. Institutional support comprises several auxiliary services/programs such as financial support, academic mentoring, professional development, awareness programs, counseling services, and cultural and advocacy support.

As an international student in the U.S. higher education settings, especially, my doctoral program journey at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, has presented me a wonderful learning opportunity to experience equity and inclusion programs and initiatives. My academic work also facilitated in-depth learning of diversity research from the U.S. higher education contexts. Moreover, I worked as a research assistant in the ‘Inclusive Universities: Linking Diversity, Equity and Excellence for the 21st Century’ research project (2014 – 2017) between University of Massachusetts, Amherst (UMass), and Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, India. The project provided me the theoretical understanding and professional experience to explore the campus climate models, designing a campus climate survey and analyzing the findings in the Indian higher education context. This was an illuminating experience, and inspired me to study Dalit students’ experiences and how casteism should be examined in a comprehensive manner to gather systemic data for better awareness among students, faculty and administrators, as well as to develop more inclusive policies. I bring these insights to bear in my dissertation as well as discuss diversity research, the campus climate framework and institutional support programs from the U.S. which would be adaptable for Indian higher education.

The dissertation is organized into eight chapters. Literature review is the second chapter, and addresses a brief conceptual note on caste, systemic exclusion in Indian higher education, diversity discourse in the context of caste, diversity research in U.S. higher education contexts and the significance of institutional support for vulnerable students in Indian higher education. Chapter 3 explains research methodology, the theoretical framework and the autoethnography of my higher education journey. In

Chapter 4, I provide sociocultural histories of the interlocutors. Chapters 5 and 6 present data on Dalit students' academic journey and recommendations of Dalit students and faculty about improving institutional support. Chapter 7 presents counter narratives and resistance discourses of Dalit students and faculty. The final chapter discusses the main themes of the findings and data, and offers recommendations for researchers, practitioners, policy makers and leaders of higher education in India. The next section discusses why this study is important from policy perspectives to facilitate positive changes in Indian universities.

1.2 Significance of the Study

As indicated above in the introduction section, caste-based discrimination in higher education institutions has long been overlooked by scholars and policymakers. Similarly, Indian higher education institutions have been consistently denying the existence of caste and discrimination along caste lines across institutions. In other words, caste-based discrimination has been treated as isolated incidents and individual misconduct, not accepted as a systemic or institutional problem; moreover, these institutions actively denigrate Dalit caste students as non-meritocratic and miscreants. I argue that current scholarship promotes a narrow understanding of the dynamics of caste on campus. As earlier mentioned, studies have established that premier higher education institutions have been hostile to Dalit students; however, a lack of studies in the state universities raises a question – what is the situation of Dalit students in average state-run higher education institutions across the country? In undertaking this research, I will focus on the academic experiences of Dalit students in a state university in Gujarat, India.

Caste-based discrimination is widespread in elite institutions and in the past decade, several cases of Dalit student suicides have come into the public domain (Girija, 2011; Janyala, 2016; Karthikeyan, 2011), which have been reported in some mainstream media. After Rohith's death, the popular protests on campuses, streets, and electronic media forced the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to announce a new policy that will deal with the issues of discrimination against students from disadvantaged sections of society. However, lack of empirical studies on institutional interventions to support disadvantaged students, and specifically Dalit students, in Indian higher education, facilitates a great opportunity to study the topic through research lenses. This research will discuss a policy framework regarding institutional measures and support structures in higher education.

In the context of higher education, students of color in the U.S. and Dalit students in India both have been facing a range of exclusions from the dominant groups in their respective countries. On an axis of stigma and exclusion, racism in American higher education can be viewed as parallel to casteism in an Indian context; further, historical oppression in both the groups is evident in educational deprivation (Gupta, 2006). I will examine diversity research of the U.S. higher education settings to describe how diverse student groups experience the college campus and the importance of campus climate in supporting the student of color in higher education. In Indian higher education, diversity and campus climate issues are scarcely studied; therefore, the study will explore diversity and campus climate research to illuminate the issues facing Dalit students. The quota policy represents a social justice commitment of the Constitution; however, it does not provide institutional support to disadvantaged students in overcoming discrimination and

institutional injustice. One aim of the proposed research is to study various formal and informal approaches (e.g. equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives) utilized by American higher education to foster diversity and specifically support students of color and other vulnerable student identities. This research is also intended to propose and describe proposed a model of institutional support, which embraces a range of equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives/programs in the context of Indian higher education.

CHAPTER 2

CASTE AND DIVERSITY IN THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review is broadly divided into two parts to support my exploration of Dalit students' academic experiences during their higher education journeys. The first part presents an overview of the literature on two aspects of caste: Conceptual understanding of the caste system in Indian culture and the institutionalization of casteism in Indian higher education. Scholarship on both aspects sets up the background of my study on Dalit students through the lens of caste as a social construct, and the way in which Dalit students are bound by a stigmatized identity. The second part shifts focus to diversity discourse in the context of caste in India and specifically – why caste is not cultural difference. In addition, literature on diversity research in the US higher education contexts illustrates how institutional approaches to diversity address a range of issues of underrepresented students, which are grounded in policy interventions and institutional support to foster their enrollment, retention and degree achievement and to improve the campus climate for all.

2.1 Brief Conceptual Note on Caste:

The caste system is a feudal institution and it has changed its form through different epochs of Indian history. The system is a hierarchical social structure located in the Indian subcontinent. In the system, each individual has a fixed position by birth (hereditary), and caste hierarchies are broadly classified into four categories. In other words, the system has four prominent caste identities/categories (also known as the

*Varna*²² system) in this order: 1) *Brahmin* (priest or teacher) at the top, 2) *Kshatriya* (king or warrior), 3) *Vaishya* (trader or businessman), and 4) *Shudra* (laborer) at the bottom.

An explanation of caste system is grounded in the ancient Hindu scripture the *Rig-Veda*, where God created the castes to maintain a social order (Haslam, 1999). Other social groups outside the system were known as untouchables (they are also known as outcaste groups or the fifth caste).²³ For more than two millennia, the Dalit have been experiencing a range of exclusion and oppression.²⁴ The caste system has evolved throughout this long period of time; therefore, it is extremely complex and dynamic in terms of social relationships between castes, regions, religions, and cultural contexts. Endogamy is one of the central characters preserving the caste system; therefore, the system remains prevalent in the twenty-first century.²⁵

²² *Varna* is the Sanskrit term used in the *Rig Veda* to describe the social group divisions, and further explain the significance of *Varna* to classify the responsibilities among caste categories and to maintain the purity of *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya* caste categories, which are also identified as twice born castes.

²³ The fifth caste is groups of communities which are not part of the four caste categories, therefore, they are called 'out-caste'. Along with the Dalits, Tribals (also known as *Adivasi*) are also recognized as out-caste.

²⁴ Dalit (Sanskrit word) means the oppressed and it is a commonly accepted term by former untouchables of India. Dalit is also a popular term in Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Dalits are the most stigmatized caste groups and are relegated to the bottom of the caste system. The caste system is a social hierarchical structure that perpetuates privilege and stigmatization based on a notion of pollution and purity. A caste identity is hereditary and a permanent social identity of a person. There is no scope for upward mobility in the caste hierarchy and caste identity is entirely different than class identity (Jodhka, 2012).

²⁵ Each caste category has hundreds of sub-caste identities across the country; further, there are numerous variations along regional, religious and linguistic identities within each sub-caste. Over ninety-five percent of Indians marry within the same caste (Desai & Vanneman, 2018, August 8). In the context of endogamy, there is no difference between undereducated, rural and conservative people and highly educated, urban and modern looking people. For an example, caste-based matrimonial advertisements in the English newspapers exhibits the caste fetishism of urban India.

In this paper, the term “oppressed castes” refers to the lower end of the hierarchy of the caste system, which includes the *Shudra*, Dalits and Tribals²⁶ grouped together. In the Constitution of India, *Shudras* are listed as Other Backward Caste (OBC), Dalits are listed as Scheduled Caste (SC), and Tribals are listed as Scheduled Tribe (ST). Two years after independence, in 1949, the government of India outlawed caste-based discrimination and practices, and subsequently formed stringent laws to stop discrimination against the Dalits. The Constitution of India instituted compensatory statutes for the development of the oppressed castes that include the quota policy (known as reservation policy). Among the oppressed castes, Dalits and Tribals have historically experienced socioeconomic, cultural, and economic marginalization; however, discrimination and exclusion faced by Dalits is profoundly different than that faced by the OBCs and Tribals.²⁷ This paper categorizes OBCs as an oppressed caste group because they are situated at the lowest rank in the caste system and can access the quota policy; thus they also confront caste-based discrimination from the privileged caste groups.

The caste system is a 2000 year old institution and therefore deeply embedded in Indian society. The tragedy is that many relics of this ancient history and feudal culture persist to this day as a normal and accepted part of Indian society. Caste is a decisive

²⁶ Tribals (commonly known as *Adivasi*) are native people; most of them still live in remote, rural and hilly regions of India. Historically they are not part of Hindu religion and are not recognized by the caste system; therefore, Tribals are considered as out-caste; however, Tribals do not experience caste stigma and untouchability intensely like Dalits do. Tribals are mainly concentrated in the North East of India and a considerable part of their population dwells in Orissa, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

²⁷ The quota policy builds a solidarity among Dalits, Tribals and OBC groups, which poses a challenge to the caste superiority and cultural hegemony of the privileged castes. This creates a rejuvenated animosity among the privileged castes; therefore, their social cognition persuades them to justify to themselves that the oppressed caste groups are submissive to them, and this serves as a rationalization for caste-based discrimination (Pal, 2015).

identity in social relationships; however, most privileged caste people deny its existence (caste blindness), though they practice it consciously and subconsciously. Caste is one of the most significant identities of all social groups across the country, irrespective of religion and class. Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted that in social identity theory, an individual classifies self and others in different social identities such as caste, gender, religion, language, ethnicity, skin color, class, physical status and others. These identities can be defined by salient characteristics of the members. Social identities facilitate two main purposes; forming cognitive perceptions about self and others, and social classification in the context of identity to locate self and others in a larger social environment. Castes have become prominent social identities over a long period of history and gradually they superseded all other identities of the oppressed caste groups. Over the millennia, hierarchical socialization processes have etched caste identities upon people's bodies which are still evident in village culture, and embodiment of caste is specifically manifested among Dalits (Gorringe & Rafanell, 2007). In India, caste is the single most critical identity that determines human dignity, social status, economic opportunities, and educational outcomes.

The caste system has been justified in Hindu religious doctrine (the *Karma*²⁸ principle of *Rig Veda*) and codified in strict social customs, rituals, and traditions that govern all aspects of life from birth to death as stipulated for each caste. A Dalit identity is a sign of the polluted (stigmatized) status of a person, which validates all kinds of exploitation and subhuman treatment inflicted by the privileged caste groups. In other

²⁸ The "*Karma*" principle justifies the hegemonic status of the privileged castes and privileges in their current lives, which they have earned by righteous actions in their past lives. Similarly, the principle validates the sub-human conditions of the oppressed castes, because of their sinful actions in their past lives.

words, stigma is the differentiator between Dalits and non-Dalits, to be Dalit is to be stigmatized. A social identity or identities collectively inculcate people to play roles in the system of oppression and often people are socialized by hegemonic forces around them. This socialization process facilitates unequal social relationships between various social identities and social groups (Harro, 2013). A person's subordinate social identity has powerful consequences on his/her/their survival, social relationships in society, and confidence in competing with others, specifically with the dominant identities (Smith, 2005). Research on race in the U.S. makes a parallel case about anti-black racism where Blacks are singled out and stigmatized in ways that do not apply to other non-Whites or people of color in general. Identities that are stigmatized create extreme conditions of marginalization in which the exclusion, oppression and denial of access to resources is rationalized and seen as acceptable and justified by the majority of society (Ogbu, 1978).²⁹

Caste identities not only influence social interactions, they also alter cognitive behaviors (Gorringe & Rafanell, 2007). On one side, caste identities facilitate power and privileges to the privileged castes and on the other side, cause exploitation and discrimination against the oppressed castes. The privileged castes believe that it is their divine rights to access privileges and dominate the oppressed castes because they derive ideological justification from scriptures (Ambedkar, 1944). Further, they remain willfully ignorant about their compounded historical advantages as well as their continuing

²⁹ Ogbu (1978) studied the "caste" (caste term is used in a north American context that is quite different than caste as an identity in Indian society) status of African Americans and states that the inferior status (subordinate identity) of black students couples with economic marginalization and social discrimination which leads to academic failure. Ogbu's caste theory is still relevant because the inferior status attributed by the dominant group is evident in contemporary society.

privileges in the existing social system that offers them an unsurmountable edge over the oppressed caste groups. Hoff and Pandey (2006) conducted a study concerning the perceived inferior social identity of a social group (the oppressed caste) and their interaction with higher social identity (privileged castes) groups in rural India. The authors found that when the lower (subordinate) social identity of a group is publicly revealed, their self-esteem goes down, they perceive themselves inferior and their self-confidence drops. In other words, they experience “cognitive dissonance”³⁰, in which they feel a lower desire to succeed and compete against a dominant identity and it causes enormous psychological harm to the oppressed caste groups. Contrarily, the privileged castes highlight their overriding identity and reinforce their caste power through covert and overt messages (Pal, 2015).³¹

One’s caste habitus can be tracked down to one’s social positioning in the caste hierarchy; caste habits transforms into internalization of certain embodied characters, which manifest in hierarchical relationships and social distance between caste identities (Gorringe & Rafanell, 2007). A stigmatized caste identity indicates cultural oppression perpetuated by the dominant castes and strengthens stratification between the Dalits (polluted) and the privileged castes (pure). In 2015, a disturbing news account was published and aired in Indian mainstream media that Dalit brothers faced stone-pelting in

³⁰ Cognitive dissonance is similar to “double consciousness” term coined by DuBois to explain the psychological condition of blacks before the civil rights era. DuBois stated that the identity conflict of blacks as two competing identities in a person; seeing oneself as American and seeing oneself as blacks in white dominated society. Living as black Americans, they experience “twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark boy, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (DuBois, 1903, p. 3). Further, living in white America creates a fracturing sense of identity within the society, and blacks navigate between the dominant reality and their subordinate status in the society, DuBois added.

³¹ Relations of power shape bodily mannerism and body language, specifically in the presence of privileged caste individuals; social conditioning influence bodily shapes, postures, accents, food habits and dressing styles and so on (Gorringe & Rafanell, 2007).

their village because they achieved a milestone by clearing the prestigious Joint Entrance Exam (JEE) to gain admittance to an IIT (Mani, 2015, June 23). This is an example that the privileged caste mindset cannot tolerate the fact that the Dalits can attain an incredible success and join an elite IIT. It indicates the influence of caste on social psychology, in which the progress of Dalits is perceived as a dent in high self-esteem of the privileged castes; therefore, to elevate their self-esteem, the privileged castes exhibit prejudice and discriminate against Dalits (Aberson, Healy & Romero, 2000).³²

One might argue that overt forms of caste-based discrimination have declined; however, expressions of bias, prejudice and discrimination have morphed into subtle and implicit forms, which are invisible and hidden in the modern outlook (Teltumbde, 2018). Most privileged caste individuals believe that they are decent human beings who do not intentionally discriminate on the basis of caste identity. However, caste identities and caste-specific behaviors are profoundly merged into Indian culture and the psyche of society, and it is difficult for an individual to be immune from inherited caste biases (derived from *aversive racism*, Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996). Further, I argue that it is possible that one can claim that he/she/they do not know about their caste identity. It can be interpreted that such an individual is ignorant about caste privileges or unwilling to acknowledge caste privileges, and most likely is from the privileged castes. In contrast, I argue that it is impossible that one could belong to a stigmatized caste without being aware of his/her/their caste identity because society (the privileged castes and

³² In 2019, A Dalit police officer in Gujarat asked for police protection because he wanted to ride on horse in his marriage procession, but the privileged caste people in his village warned him, “not to take out procession on a horse”. According to caste norms, mostly in rural areas, Dalits are not allowed to ride on a horse and if they do, it is perceived as insult of the privileged castes. During the procession, the police provided security cover for the groom and his relatives. This is a unique example of caste culture; if a police officer (as a groom) does not feel safe and does not exercise his fundamental right to access public space (for procession), then what about the poor average Dalit in rural areas (The Times of India, 2019, May 11)?

socialization processes) would constantly reinforce a stigmatized identity upon that individual as part of a social norm.³³

In urban India, casteist bias, prejudice, and discrimination have been transformed in their manifestations, and tend to operate in more implicit, subtle and complex forms. However, despite these changes and stringent anti-discrimination laws, violence against Dalits and untouchability practices occur even in cities.³⁴ I argue that since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-dominated government came into power in 2014, it has rejuvenated the historical dominance of the privileged castes which they feel have been fading due to the empowerment of the oppressed castes. Further, Hindu nationalism promotes Brahmanical ideology in cultural and political realms that openly endorse privileged castes' culture, and reinforce the caste-based power relationships; as a result, atrocities against Dalits have been swiftly amplified.

Tiwari (2017, October 16) stated that official (according to the National Crime Record Bureau) statistics of crimes committed against Dalits show an increase from 38,670 in 2015 to 40,801 in 2016. This is just reported crimes and unreported crimes are likely to be much higher. It is ironic that despite modernization and urbanization, caste-based atrocities have not declined; on the contrary, the statistics reveal escalating violence against Dalits. In most cases of caste atrocities, Dalits do not report crime

³³ “[u]pper caste identity is such that it can be completely overwritten by modern professional identities of choice, whereas lower caste identity is so indelibly engraved that it overwrites all other identities” (Deshpande, 2013, p. 32).

³⁴ In rural areas, untouchability is openly being practiced, yet police and the judiciary system do not intervene to uphold the Constitutional mandates, because the whole community is involved in such type of practices and the political establishments have not shown commitment to enforce the laws and uphold the Constitution. Whereas, in the U.S., explicit segregationist and racist practices do not exist in the society, because the political establishments have upheld the Constitution. For example, in 1963 (educational segregation having been declared unconstitutional in 1954), President J F Kennedy sent the National Guards to remove blockades placed at the entrance of the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa by Governor George Wallace, and allow Black students to enroll. In India, since the untouchability act (1955) and subsequent acts have come into effect, this type of historical moment has never occurred.

against them because of fear of retaliation by privileged castes and a lack of trust and confidence that the police and the judiciary will be fair and deliver justice. In this scenario, the most significant question is why crimes against the Dalits have increased by more than six percent in a single year (2015 – 2016). More ominously, as scholars have shown, the uptick in caste atrocities are a tool to suppress Dalit upward mobility and their political empowerment and reproduce caste hierarchies in the twenty-first century (Teltumbde, 2010; 2018).³⁵

In Marxist and capitalist theory, caste-based hierarchies and division of labor flourished in pre-capitalist rural agrarian societies, and with the advancement of modern economy the feudal structures would dismantle (Jodhka, 2016). However, after decades of economic development the last three decades of staggering progress of capitalism in India have not converted caste-based inequalities into class-based differences at the individual level. In other words, some of the feudal characteristics are morphed into contemporary forms such as economic inequalities between the privileged castes and Dalits and Tribals (Zacharias & Vakulabharanam, 2011). Social mobility is still restricted by caste, especially for those located at the bottom and outside of the caste hierarchy (Thorat & Attewell, 2007; Newman & Thorat, 2010; 2010; Jodhka, 2016).

Caste is not only a cultural phenomenon, but it also has economic significance, and therefore caste discrimination is evident in the so-called neutral sector – the economy. Studies have reported that Dalits face discrimination in the market

³⁵ Caste atrocity is a sociopsychological phenomenon which enables the privileged castes to reinforce caste-based power relations. Over the past few years, the phenomenon has been intensified, and is comparable to the lynching of blacks that occurred until the middle of the twentieth century in the U.S. Further, Jodhka suggests that caste needs to be studied within the ‘framework of prejudice and discrimination’ as a complex sociological process in order to comprehend social reproduction of caste in contemporary India (Jodhka, 2016).

(employment, business, wages); in the production process; in the purchase of raw materials and in the sale of products (Thorat & Newman, 2010; Prakash, 2015; Thorat & Mahdewaran, 2018). Similarly, the role of caste in the employment process is examined by Jodhka and Newman (2007), who point out that hiring managers of big private companies focus more on the ‘social and cultural’ aspects of candidates than their technical skills and educational achievements.³⁶ It indicates that caste is a precursor of merit (Deshpande & Newman, 2007). Since the 1990s, neoliberal reforms have not eradicated caste; even I argue that it reinvented caste by promoting social network-based economic formations. As a result, a significant number of the poor belong to the oppressed castes and in contrast, it is more likely that the privileged castes disproportionately represent the affluent classes of Indian society (Jodhka, 2015).

To study wealth distribution between privileged castes and Dalits in India, Thorat and Mahdewaran (2018) examined the 2013 National Survey (wealth data), and stated that the privileged castes represent around 21 percent of the general population, but they owned 45 percent of the India’s wealth; while Dalits owned 7 percent of the wealth, and their population is around 18.6 percent in the country. In terms of wealth accumulation, the privileged castes possess more than double the percent of their population, while the Dalits own two and a half time less wealth than their population.³⁷ Similarly, regarding ownership of land, again the privileged castes owned 41 percent and Dalits owned 7

³⁶ In another study, Thorat and Attewell (2007) tested their hypothesis by examining the relations between caste identities and hiring practices in domestic and MNCs. In response to advertisements in New Delhi during 2005-2006, the authors submitted identical resumes with applicant names easily recognizable as being from Hindu privileged castes, Dalits and Muslims. The study found significant difference in response rates between the Hindu privileged caste and the other two identities.

³⁷ Within the privileged castes, Brahmins are the most prosperous group, for example, Saraswat brahmin is a tiny sub-caste of Brahmin category surprisingly dominating the banking sector in India (Desai & Dubey, 2012).

percent. There are numerous indicators that unequivocally demonstrated that caste-based inequalities are persistent in the most competitive sectors. I argue that the market is controlled and dominated by the privileged, so the free market economy and neoliberalism have been assisting the historically privileged castes in reinventing and reinforcing caste hierarchies in modern forms.

The perpetuation of caste identities gives a significant advantage to the privileged castes in their endeavor to maintain their historical advantages and contemporary hegemony. Education is a “cultural capital”³⁸ which the privileged castes have dominated for centuries and they are still benefiting from that historical legacy. It is a well-known fact that education is the primary path to social mobility in liberal democracies and the privileged castes have mobilized and accumulated this cultural capital to reinforce their supremacy over society (Subramanian, 2015). In post-independence India, higher education has been promoted as an important factor for promoting technical advancement and institutional modifications, as well as boosting economic and social development by developing human capital in society (Ahir & Joshi, 2013). Higher education has served as a very potent tool for the privileged castes to reinvent their caste power in contemporary India. In the context of a casteist society, the function of higher education is ‘cultural and social reproduction’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990); it reproduces the dominant caste culture and caste and class inequalities in higher education. It is no surprise therefore that caste hierarchies and caste-based discrimination are entrenched in higher education institutions at every level among faculty, staff and students, and in every domain from

³⁸ The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers a concept of cultural capital. He discusses how cultural resources such as formal education can be exploited by the dominant groups (e.g. the privileged castes) to perpetuate their historical position of privilege and power. He noted the social hierarchies (caste system) being reinforced through formal schooling which tends to reproduce the culture of the privileged groups.

admissions practices to teaching, curriculum, student governance and extracurricular activities.

2.2 Systemic Exclusion in Indian Higher Education

The review of literature on systemic exclusion of Dalit students in public higher education institutions in India is divided into two sub-sections: first, access to higher education in the post reform period, and second, stigma and caste in higher education.

2.2.1 Access to Higher Education in the Post-Reform Period

Indian higher education is the third largest system in the world, after the United States and China. India's higher education system encompasses over 47 central universities, 290 state universities, 38 deemed universities, 90 private universities, 37 institutes of national importance, and 33,000 institutions operating as government and private colleges. The trajectory of Indian public higher education can be divided into two parts: Initially, a long period of slow growth; followed by a sudden burst of rapid growth beginning in the 1990s when the government launched economic reforms specifically in the public sectors.³⁹ The reforms have initiated a series of policy changes, which facilitated the privatization of higher education.⁴⁰ Before the reforms, the privileged castes were losing historical advantages and dominance due to the empowerment of

³⁹ The new economic reforms (1990s), popularly known as, *Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization* (LPG model) aimed at making the Indian economy the fastest growing economy and globally competitive. The series of reforms undertaken in the industrial, trade and financial sectors were aimed at making the economy more attractive for global capital and private investment.

⁴⁰ State expenditures on higher education declined from 12.6 percent in the 1980s to 6 percent in the 1990s. The shrinking state funding made it difficult to sustain the same level of higher education; especially given the state's increasing efforts to privatize higher education and encourage private institutions to establish educational programs (Jayaram, 2004).

disadvantaged groups and the oppressed castes; but they soon realized that the reforms offered an opportunity to reclaim historical hegemony and economic control. Since the 1990s. “the traditional upper-caste, middle class elite had made full use of its access to better educational opportunities and acquisition of skills in the professional and technical services to perpetuate its dominant role in the administrative and managerial services” (Verma, 2007, p.124).

In the context of declining state funding of higher education, the increasing cost of higher education has made it less accessible to the poor and the oppressed castes; moreover, privatization of higher education further strengthened historical inequalities (Jayaram, 2004). Access to higher education, and particularly technical skills, are an essential prerequisite to thrive in the knowledge economy. Over the last two decades, aspirants of higher education gravitated to market-oriented education rather than government civil services jobs. This shift further raised demand for technical and professional education, which created a range of private institutions without government funding. The privatization of higher education has reduced the pressure from the public sector and encouraged well-off students to access private education, which enhanced access to higher education among all sectors of the society (Kamat, 2011), despite the private sector’s primary focus on sciences, engineering, medicine, technology, management and professional programs. These private institutions are not required to implement the quota policy, which diminishes the chances for Dalit students to access private education (Kamat, 2007).⁴¹

⁴¹ Gail Omvedt mentioned in her article in *The Hindu*, the University of Pune had trained around 2,400 IT students in the span of six years, but in the absence of affirmative action, not a single Dalit student had been enrolled in the training program (Viczianny, 2005).

The first decade of the 21st century was the most important decade for the growth of higher education since independence in 1947. During this time, the number of public higher education institutions has doubled (254 to 544) and enrollment has increased by 62 percent. Accordingly, access to higher education by the oppressed caste and other marginalized students has been enhanced, but accessibility is limited to public institutions that have been starved of funds and are hampered by hiring freezes and other cuts. A significant study conducted by Desai and Kulkarni (2008), analyzed over 100,000 households' data from the NSS (National Sample Survey) between 1983 to 2000. They found that despite the quota policy, only marginal improvement has occurred in attainment of college level education for Dalits. Moreover, educational inequalities in the era of the neoliberal economy have further widened the economic gap between the Dalits and privileged social classes.⁴² In the context of the modern economy, education and entrepreneurship are two foundations of a better quality of life. But the privileged castes control private educational and financial institutions through which members obtain support and credit for higher education; the oppressed caste students do not have these types of institutional leverage (Desai & Dubey, 2012).

In the 21st century knowledge economy, professional and technical degrees are in great demand in the job market and facilitate financial, political and social control. Studies indicate that Dalit students are far behind in pursuing market-based degrees across disciplines (Basu, 2008; Prakash, 2007). Dalits students lack cultural capital (Velaskar, 1986) due to their historical and contemporary socioeconomic marginalization

⁴² Neoliberalism is defined as a political economy theory that emphasizes that human development can best be attained by free market and free trade through liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and pro-market institutional policy frameworks. The role of the state is to support strong private property rights and create suitable market conditions, and if market does not exist, then it must be created by state action. See Harvey (2007) for an authoritative account of neoliberalism.

(Desai & Dubey, 2012). Weisskopf (2006) found that low cultural capital, lack of proficiency in the English language, less academic preparation, and weaker socioeconomic background collectively reduce their prospects to pursue professional and technical degree programs. It is evident that financial strength and higher cultural capital enable privileged caste students to pursue technical and professional degrees. Therefore, in the post reform period, access to higher education by Dalit students has increased, but educational inequalities between the privileged castes and Dalits also have risen.

2.2.2 Stigma and Caste in Higher Education

Studies have reported that continuous subtle and complex caste-based discrimination in higher education drives oppressed caste students to academic failure, stagnation, lower degree achievement rates, and even suicide due to extremely hostile academic and social conditions (Pal & Arjun, 2013; Desai and Kulkarni, 2008; Sukumar, 2008; Karthikeyan, 2011). In the last decade, a number of Dalit students have committed suicide (Singh 2013; Girija, 2011; Janyala, 2016; Karthikeyan, 2011) due to systemic discrimination and institutional failure to comprehend caste-based discrimination in higher education. Pal and Arjun (2013) studied suicide cases of the oppressed caste students in higher education through psychoanalytical and sociological lenses. They argued that life experiences of exclusionary treatment, discrimination by teachers and peers during schooling, and past struggles exacerbate social and psychological pressure on them. The consequences of the situation manifest in erosion of their academic ability and mental health, which gradually damages their human dignity and future aspirations. Altogether this makes it difficult to survive in an institution where oppressed caste

students do not find adequate institutional supports and social spaces, and creates an environment that can lead to a tragic outcome.

A detailed investigation of suicide cases was reported by Insight Foundation, an NGO that focuses on documenting caste discrimination in higher education (Singh, 2013). The foundation investigated seventeen cases (between 2005 to 2012) of suicides of Dalit students, and presents that in all the cases the students were harassed, discriminated against and intimidated by their privileged caste peers, faculty, and the administration. The NGO pointed out that only in one case was a suicide note found. Further, the note was in the jacket of the deceased student (Jaspreet Singh)⁴³ which he left in the library just before the suicide and thus was recovered by the student's father. It is generally surmised that if it had fallen into the hands of the administration or the police, it would have been suppressed and discrimination as the cause for the suicide would never have come to light. The Insight Foundation report highlights the systemic apathy of law enforcement agencies and institutional administrators, who eliminated vital evidence in most of the cases. To make matters worse, these authorities frequently shift blame to the deceased students, and report the suicide as a mental health problem or that the student could not handle rigorous academic work. Further, they completely reject any institutional responsibility for suicides and deny any type of caste-based institutional harassment.

Despite the constitutional safeguards, oppressed caste students have been facing discrimination (Patwardhan & Palshikar, 1992; Desai & Kulkarni, 2008) and harassment,

⁴³ He was a fifth year student of Government Medical College, Chandigarh. He was intentionally failed by a privileged caste faculty and before that he never failed in four academic years. The faculty threatened to fail him again and again which Jaspreet mentioned in his suicide note. In the inquiry process, Jaspreet's answer sheets were sent to a team of external evaluators who declared him passed in the same subject in which he had been failed. Jaspreet was awarded a medical degree after his death.

even in the most prestigious educational institutions. With regard to high dropout rates, stagnation and suicide cases in elite institutions, IIT campuses are notorious for discriminatory practices, behavior and attitude toward oppressed caste students. A study was conducted to investigate the systemic exclusion in IITs (Rao, 2013). In the article, Rao quoted several statements of Dalit and Tribal students who experienced micro-aggressions at the institution. In IITs, Dalit and Tribal students are known as “PC” (Preparatory Course; another stigmatized identity in IITs that labels them as weak students). Students are also referred to as “CATA” (Common Admission Test Admission); indicating students who enrolled in IIT directly through JEE. A Dalit student shared his first physics class experience: “I asked a question. Then the teacher instead of answering it straight, he asked me another question in return, you don’t know even this? Are you a PC student?” (Rao, 2013, p. 210). The author concluded that due to lack of institutional sensitivity and support systems in IITs, oppressed caste students experience covert and overt discrimination in academic sessions and social relationships. He further added that Caste-based discrimination is institutionalized in these institutions and further, the institutions have been consistently denying such discrimination.⁴⁴

One of the most appalling official reports regarding institutional discrimination was reported by the Thorat Committee (Thorat, Shyamprasad, & Srivastava, 2007). The committee was appointed by the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry of India to investigate allegations of differential treatment of the oppressed caste students at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). The report categorically states that the

⁴⁴ In context of subordinate student identity, Jim Cummins studied a “framework of intervention” to empower minority students in schools. Cummins (1986) pointed out that minority students are disempowered by schools (structural aspects in the organization of schooling), similarly to the way their communities are being marginalized in the society. The *dominant* group controls societal institutions and denied the *subordinate* groups’ access to high-status positions in the institution.

AIIMS did not follow the quota policy as directed in the Constitution and effectively denied a considerable number of opportunities to student of the SC & ST groups. The report clearly noted that discrimination against the oppressed caste students is evident in both subtle and direct manners. The administration harassed students who did not want to participate in anti-quota agitation.⁴⁵ The committee further reported, that around 72 percent of SC and ST students mentioned some forms of discrimination were experienced in the classroom. Similarly, approximately 76 percent of the interlocutors reported that the examiner asked them their caste background and about 88 percent of the students reported experiences of social isolation in various ways by privileged caste peers (pp. 63-70). These staggeringly higher numbers in one of the elite institutions demonstrate the pervasiveness of caste-based discrimination and the very high frequency of ‘caste-based microaggressions’⁴⁶ against oppressed caste students at the institutions.

The report was completely rejected by the eight member AIIMS committee. They claimed that the report was biased and the Thorat Committee used faulty methodology to investigate caste discrimination in the institution. The official stand of AIIMS is quite shocking because it is a complete denial of caste-based discrimination in the institute. Even worse, with the committee report quashed, how does an aggrieved person pursue an individual grievance in this institution? I argue that many elite institutions have become breeding grounds of casteism; therefore, it is an atrocious reality that casteism has been exported outside of India (Guhman, 2015).

⁴⁵ Protests against the quota policy have been led by privileged caste groups to eliminate all forms of the quota policy. Over the past decade, various groups and organizations such as ‘Youth for Equality’, ‘All Indian Anti-Reservation Front’ and recently in 2016, the *Patidar* community, have been protesting against the quota policy in Gujarat State.

⁴⁶ Caste-based microaggressions are “commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative casteist slights and insults” (Rathod, 2017, p.190).

Caste-based discrimination has been investigated by various committees in different institutions. Hyderabad Central University (HCU) is one such premier institution; however, it is infamous for harassing its students from the disadvantaged castes. In 2002, the Anveshi Law Committee investigated the *rustication of ten* Dalit students who were office bearers of the Ambedkar Students' Association (ASA⁴⁷) and reported that the Dalit students in Hyderabad Central University face alienation, segregation, harassment, and exclusion by the privileged caste students, faculty, and administration. The committee also reported that Dalit students experience micro-aggressions in classrooms, hostels and in social relations on campus. Similarly, a Dalit doctoral student, Senthil Kumar committed suicide because he was not assigned an academic advisor for a long time and he was subject to caste-based harassment. A committee was appointed to investigate Senthil's suicide. The committee mentions in the report that the School of Physics was clearly acting against the interest of Dalit and Tribal students (Girija, 2011). These reports identified institutionalized casteism where caste hierarchies are part of the institutional culture and stated that the institution has been practicing casteism both covertly and overtly in the institutional life.

I argue that casteism is rampant where the oppressed caste students are vocal about their rights and protesting against discrimination. For instance, ASA has been calling attention to caste-based discrimination and social justice issues on the HCU campus. As a result, the oppressed caste students are confronting strong institutional retributions from the privileged castes. I have discussed in the Introduction that Rohit

⁴⁷ ASA is a group of the oppressed caste students at higher education institutions across the country. The group endorses the ideology of the Dalit emancipator Dr. B R Ambedkar; it organizes intellectual events, raises issues pertaining to social justice, anti-Brahmanical (against caste hegemonic ideology) discourse, and Dalit rights. Therefore, they are treated as anti-social and problematic students by the casteist administration.

Vemula was systematically ostracized from the institutional settings. He was struggling against the casteist authority on the one hand and fighting against the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) right wing ideology on the other.⁴⁸ Rohit and ASA members were confronting institutional casteism and cultural Brahmanism on campus. Rohit explicitly mentioned discrimination against Dalit students in the university, which he stated in his letter to the Vice Chancellor of the university.⁴⁹

Rohit's suicide triggered numerous protests across the country, and inspired the political classes from oppressed caste groups as well as academicians, public intellectuals, and Dalit activists to join the protests, which created popular pressure on the Indian government. In response, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) announced that a new policy would be prepared to tackle issues of discrimination against students from disadvantaged sections of society. This announcement was applauded; however, the MHRD did not name or recognize it as "caste-based discrimination" and still avoids acknowledging that oppressed caste students are being discriminated against. The MHRD has taken exactly the same stand held by IITs, AIIMS, HCU and other institutions – denial of caste-based discrimination. Here, the point is whether the MHRD wants to seriously deal with caste issues in higher education or merely desires to prepare an impotent reactionary policy response that will maintain the status quo. Four years after the announcement, the MHRD has still not prepared a policy on this issue, and I doubt there will be any in the future, especially under the BJP regime.

⁴⁸ ABVP (*Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad*, can be translated as All India Student Organization) is a dominant student organization on college campuses across India. It is affiliated with RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, can be translated as National Volunteer Organization), a Hindu nationalist organization that is also a parent organization of the current ruling (BJP) party.

⁴⁹ Rohith writes, "first, let me praise your dedicated take on the self-respecting movement of Dalits in Campus. When an ABVP president got questioned about his derogatory remarks on Dalits, your kind personal interference into the issue is historic and exemplary" (Janyala, 2016).

In 2013, the University Grant Commission (UGC) issued an executive order (https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/8541429_English.PDF), and instructed all higher education institutions in the country to take necessary actions to eliminate different types of discrimination and harassment and to create awareness among students to promote equality in the institutions (University Grant Commission, 2013). The order is only a six page document, which defines different terminologies and a set of general instructions that higher education institutions can practice and adapt. Evidently the document seems superficial and does not provide details about a conceptual framework to stop discrimination and promote equality. Similarly, it does not specify how the precautionary measures will be implemented with specific delivery mechanisms. Therefore, this type of executive order does not manifest on the ground, just remains on paper. One of the main reasons is the lack of a comprehensive framework pertaining to diversity in Indian higher education. In addition, the quota and “affirmative policies”⁵⁰ have been considered as diversity policies, because they facilitate entry to the marginalized student groups in higher education. I argue that quota policy cannot and should not be treated as a diversity enhancement mechanism because the quota is not prescribed to foster diversity, it is aimed to enhance access only (discussed in Chapter 6).

The above discussion offers the reader a deeper understanding of how caste actually operates as a rigid division of people and how stigma is an inextricable part of

⁵⁰ The quota policy is different from affirmative action: In India, the quota system reserves a certain number of seats for the listed groups (SC, ST and OBC), is enshrined in the Constitution and ensures lower eligibility criteria (e.g. test score/grade point and age relaxation) in public education and jobs, whereas affirmative action in the U.S. does not reserve seats for intended beneficiaries. Further, the government or private organizations voluntarily implement affirmative actions prescribed by the federal government to enhance the representation of underrepresented minorities and excluded groups (e.g. women, Blacks Native Americans, Latino and Native Americans). In the U.S., affirmative action is not prescribed by the Constitution, therefore, it is not a legal mandate for the states to implement. In this paper, I have interchangeably used the terminology.

the location of Dalits in the caste structure. It also highlights how little progress we have made in recognizing caste discrimination in higher education, let alone eradicating it. The question remains as to what is the way forward to eradicate institutional casteism itself and create a higher education system that repudiates caste and all its manifestations.

2.3 Diversity Discourse in the Context of Caste

The remainder of the chapter explores above question in conjunction with U.S. literature on diversity, inclusion and campus climate to assess in what ways and to what extent frameworks developed in the U.S. to address racial discrimination and inequity are useful to tackle the problem of caste and discrimination in Indian universities. For this, I first examine the discourse about diversity in higher education and argue that it does not have the same resonance or relevance for the Indian context specifically on the question of casteism. Rather than diversity and inclusion, I argue that difference and discrimination are the key constructs for research and intervention in Indian higher education. In the concluding section, I discuss how the framework of campus climate and equity that is generated by U.S. scholars offers a promising pathway to develop a more comprehensive analysis of caste and institutionalized casteism in the university and will be very generative for scholars who are committed to tackling the problem of caste in Indian higher education.

2.3.1 Why Caste is Not Cultural Difference

Current Indian society has many relics of ancient history and feudal culture, which are still evident in the society. The caste system is a feudal institution and it has

changed its form through different epochs in history. The system is a hierarchical social structure that exists in the Indian subcontinent. In the system, each individual has a fixed position by birth (hereditary), and it is strikingly different than the ‘class’ (economic status) concept. Even untouchability is still openly practiced in rural areas, albeit it manifests in subtler ways in urban India.⁵¹ A majority of the nation dwells in rural areas, where untouchability is routinely practiced and caste atrocities are a symbolic tool used to maintain the societal control of privileged castes (Jodhka, 2012).

The dominant narratives and Hindu right wing ideology justify caste identities as “cultural differences” in society. In reality, caste represents graded inequality and the division of laborers (Ambedkar, 1944) in society; further, caste identities themselves signify hierarchy and exclusion. I argue that considering caste as a cultural difference validates the caste system and caste-based social practices and discrimination, which are violations of the Constitution and the human rights of Dalits. As a result, the caste system is neither a cultural difference nor a division of labor, but is rather a division of laborers. Presenting caste as a component of cultural difference is propaganda used to camouflage egregious realities of caste hierarchies and justify systemic oppression of Dalits. The caste system has existed for more than two thousand years; as a result, it has great influence on culture and the social psyche of the society. The higher education institutions are part of the larger society and it is apparent that caste identities manifest in institutional culture and social relations.

⁵¹ In 2011- 2012, the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and the University of Maryland (U.S.) conducted the largest non-governmental survey in India involving 42,000 households across the country; the survey concluded that more than a fourth of Indians admits they continue to practice untouchability in some forms in their homes (Chishti, 2014, November 14).

Caste is a decisive identity in social relationships; however, most privileged caste people do not acknowledge its existence (caste blindness)⁵², and they practice it both consciously and subconsciously. An overwhelming number of the privileged caste believes that caste is insignificant in modern India; therefore, they invalidate the socioeconomic realities of the Dalits. An oppressed caste identity is considered a sign of the polluted (stigmatized) status of a person, which justifies all forms of exploitation and oppression by the privileged caste groups. In other words, caste stigma is both a differentiator and an integral part of Dalit identity. Most privileged caste individuals signify their caste identity through various cultural traits such as first name, last name, dress code, symbols on body, ornaments, language and food habits. In other words, these cultural differences are identifying characteristics of castes, which segregate each caste from others.

2.3.2 Contextualizing the Concept of Diversity

This section discusses the concept of diversity through contemporary narratives and the legal definitions of diversity in the U.S. and India. Diversity as a concept in both countries has been interpreted with reference to their history, constitutional reference, sociopolitical scenario, and demographic composition. In the U.S., the concept of diversity represents racial and cultural differences; specifically, diversity is strongly associated with racial identities. Diversity has been perceived, translated, and practiced as

⁵² This microinvalidation communicates that the privileged caste groups do not see caste; in other words, denial or reluctance to recognize caste as a prominent identity in Indian society. Caste blindness is a commonly expressed notion: “I do not see or believe in caste.” This message conveys that one should not bring up caste issues in conversation and also takes the defensive stance that “I am not casteist, though I belong to the privileged caste.” It shows that privileged caste people consciously and unconsciously receive the privileges of their caste identity, but pretend to be blind toward the disadvantages inflicted upon the oppressed caste students.

“differences” in race/ethnicity and social identities (Ghosh, 2012); further, diversity in the context of social identity emphasizes historically marginalized social groups such as African American, Hispanic, and Native American.

India and the U.S. are two of the most diverse countries in the world. However, I argue that diversity in both countries is staggeringly distinctive. In the case of the U.S., existing diverse demographics have been achieved by immigration policies that came into effect in the beginning of the twentieth century. Further, the U.S has been known as the “land of opportunities” for decades, and attracted millions of well educated, business oriented, and creative individuals across the world. In India, however, contemporary diverse demographics have been shaped over a long period of history. More than two thousand years of Indian culture and demographic have been influenced by successive migrations from different parts of Asia and Europe. In an Indian context, diversity has been interpreted in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, class, and caste differences. In terms of ethnic diversity, India is an “ethnological museum”, where various ethnic groups have some common cultural traits (Sayeed, 2014); however, many cultural traits, such as distinct physical appearances and food habits exist as well. The founding leaders of India recognized cultural differences; thus the preamble of the Constitution has incorporated the term “Unity in Diversity”. These characteristics and differences in Indian demographics indicate that diversity has different meanings in the U.S. and Indian contexts.

I argue that in the Indian context the term “diversity” does not translate well in describing the reality of Indian society. One of the most striking examples is the caste system; caste identities cannot be embraced as “diversity” because they represent

hierarchy, exclusion, and inequalities, not difference of race or culture. The official position of the government of India in UNHRC⁵³ is consistent refusal to acknowledge that caste is an exploitative social character of Indian culture; moreover, caste is incorrectly recognized as “cultural differences” in the society. Natrajan (2012) stated that in the background of national and global discourse of multiculturalism, viewing castes as cultural differences essentially valorizes caste-based inequalities as cultural diversities, which further encourages caste to be expressed, recognized and practiced as Indian culture. In reality, caste represents graded inequalities within the overall culture and the subordinate caste groups such as the Dalits, Tribals, and marginalized castes together constitutes the largest (around 70 percent) demographic of the population. On the other side, the privileged castes are a minority (around 21 percent numerically); nevertheless they have dominated every sphere of Indian society. Thus, instead of “diversity”, the paper coins a new term “difference and inclusion” in the Indian context. This represents that diverse ethnic and caste groups have multiple differences which are not simply variations on a range of characteristics, even though, some differences (e.g. caste hierarchies) are exclusionary and dehumanizing in practice.

Learning from the U.S. experience, the concept of diversity has been adapted by Dalit and Tribal intellectuals in India. For example, in 2002, the “Bhopal Declaration”⁵⁴ document mentioned a diversity rationale for democratizing capital in India, which

⁵³ A special rapporteur, Rita Izsák-Ndiaye of the United Nations Human Right Council’s (UNHRC) on minority issues noted in her report that despite the legislative prohibitions on manual scavenging work, the local civic authorities continue to employ manual scavengers (an institutionalized caste-based practice), which is inhumane and unlawful. She concluded that the council should focus attention on caste-based discrimination and practices in India (Mitra, 2016, March 25).

⁵⁴ The Bhopal Declaration is a document issued after the Bhopal Conference, which was held in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh and organized by the state government under the leadership of the then Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh. The document consisted of twenty-one points intended to improve social, educational and economic condition of Dalits and Tribals in the state.

supports the representation of Dalits and Tribals in the economic realm through ensuring supplier diversity and dealership diversity in the public and the private sector to enhance Dalits' and Tribals' participation in the market economy. I argue that promoting a diversity discourse based on caste is a complex proposition because it problematizes management of diversity, instead of emphasizing caste-based discrimination and monopoly of capital by the privileged castes (Natrajan, 2012). Further, diversity discourse and diversity-based approaches to caste issues have limited applicability to the sociocultural and economic issues of Dalits and Tribals. Embracing a diversity approach as a panacea to resolve the deeply rooted social exclusion and economic marginalization of Dalits and Tribals legitimizes caste as an institution, and it defies the larger anti-caste politics and the annihilation of caste project. In other words, advocates of a diversity approach to caste have to be conscious that diversity discourse in higher education and employment in the US has been predominantly explored as cultural diversity rather than solely focused on ethnic/racial diversity. Therefore, recent scholarship on affirmative action in US higher education has interpreted diversity in the context of cultural heritage, social positions, individual experiences and individual personality including moral and political orientation of an applicant. The next section discusses the literature on diversity discourse and campus climate research in the U.S.

2.4 Diversity Issues in Higher Education in the United States

“Diversity is the great issue of our time (Macdeo, 2000, p.1).”

In the U.S., studies on diversity and discrimination are mainly grounded in race and identity issues. Discrimination of students of color or racism in higher education in the U.S. is parallel to caste-based discrimination in the Indian context. Caste-based and race-

based discrimination are similar at a fundamental level, as both involve disadvantaged groups facing a range of exclusions from the dominant groups in their respective countries (Gupta, 2006). In both groups, students of color and the oppressed caste students are perceived and treated as stigmatized. Further, historical oppression of the disadvantaged groups is evident in contemporary socioeconomic and educational deprivation. In context to affirmative action, black students face a similar kind of stigma and stereotype in U.S. higher education as Dalit students experience in Indian higher education (Cokley et al., 2013).

Despite legal mandates and exceptional economic progress, institutional racism is evident in American society. For instance, the minority population is concentrated in urban areas (Shom, 2006) and still segregation is evident in most of the cities that determines the inferior quality of the K-12 school system. However, majoritarian scholars and policy makers become ‘colorblind’ and do not consider inequalities of K-12 schooling in the minority neighborhoods (Erbenraut, 2014) which restrict underrepresented students’ college access. Studies indicate that underrepresented students are far behind White and Asian students. For example, among 18 to 24 years old student groups enrolled in college in 2017, the highest access was 65 percent in Asian and 41 percent in White; whereas, in the same age group, statistics were depressing in the underrepresented groups: 31 percent in Black and Hispanic, 33 percent in Pacific Islander and the lowest were 20 percent in American Indian/Alaska Natives (The Condition of Education 2017, 2017). Data indicates that from 1964 to 2015, Whites (10 vs. 36 percent) continue to have higher post-graduate college degree attainment rates than Blacks (4 vs.

23 percent), and shows that Blacks are still considerably less likely than Whites to have a college degree (Demographic Trends and Economic Well-brings, 2016, June 21).

Since the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the government of the United States has promoted education and particularly higher education among underrepresented groups across the country. Access to higher education in the country has increased among underrepresented social groups in recent years compared to forty years ago. Nevertheless, policy makers have ignored the equity aspects of higher education, such as hierarchy of higher education institutions and access by diverse social groups in the existing systems (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). For instance, the flagship public universities have become less accessible to underrepresented and lower income group students; specifically, the underrepresented students are concentrated in community colleges or Minority Serving Institutions (Fischer, 2006). A report published in 2006 by the Education Trust, “Engines of Inequality: Diminishing Equity in the Nation’s Premier Public Universities,” stated that these institutions are becoming “whiter and wealthier.”

Similar to Indian society, historical inequalities are evident in contemporary American society, where whites continue to have greater access to higher education, while the underrepresented students are far behind in access and degree attainment compared to white and other well-off minority (e.g. Asian and Pacific Islander) students. In the twenty-first century, this is a critical question - why after fifty years of the Civil Rights Act, is access to a college education among minority students still so low? Affirmative action in the U.S. has been an important instrument to offer representation and protection to underrepresented students in higher education. Advocates of affirmative action argue that race is still a factor in the U.S., which determines socioeconomic status

and access to higher education (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Why then, should race not be a criterion in the college admission process? Despite this, some states' court rulings and referenda banned race-based admission and financial aid to the underrepresented student groups in public universities. These court judgments and majority (white) domination disregard the purpose of affirmative action and social justice spirit, thereby impeding access to a college education by underrepresented students (Newman, 2014).⁵⁵

The affirmative action instrument has been tactically subverted on the ground of class (economic status), colorblindness and the legal framework of the Constitution in the college admission process.⁵⁶ Leonhardt (2014) criticized the attack on affirmative action measures and pointed out that interpretation of affirmative action strictly on the basis of income, without consideration of race could produce less diversity on campuses because many black and Latino students belong to lower income groups. Proponents of affirmative action in higher education have discovered a new ground and meaning in “diversity” to support it.⁵⁷ Affirmative action stands for diversity, not just for racial identity; diversity discourse embraces all kinds of differences, including race, skin color,

⁵⁵ Cortes (2010) pointed out that the change from affirmative action to the “The Texas Ten Percent Plan” decreased both retention and graduation rates of lower ranked minority students. Similarly, other states (Florida and California) also implemented top – X per cent plans that arguably affected the minority students’ enrollment and college success ratio. The author verified that minority students’ enrollment ratios were the highest during affirmative action plans; and, non-minority students’ enrollment ratios were the highest during the top – X percent plan.

⁵⁶ For example, to oppose the affirmative action in Washington State, the colorblind approach was the central argument to maintain white privileges. The use of race-neutral language primarily denies the historical and contemporary structures of oppression and specifically, deny the existence of white privileges and systemic power of whiteness over the people of color (Taylor, 2000).

⁵⁷ Rothman, Lipset and Nivette (2002) surveyed the opinions of college faculty, students, and administrators from 140 universities and colleges. The study indicated that “the state of American campus opinion evinces a relative consensus in regard to some diversity issues, such as the attention that should be given to minority concerns and the desirability of offering” (p. 62).

gender, socioeconomic status, and physical disability. In other words, the need for access and equity in education which leads to diversity (Gupta, 2006).

In 2003, advocates of affirmative action from the University of Michigan filed seventy-four “*amici curiae*” (friend of the court) briefs in the Supreme Court of the United States. They supported affirmative action on the grounds of diversity enhancement and affirmed that the University requires diverse student groups to improve the learning environment of the institution. The court stated that diversity is a compelling governmental interest which supports contextual considerations of race in college admissions (Nagda et al., 2009).⁵⁸ Affirmative action is no longer associated with minorities; rather it stands for diversity, which embraces all kind of differences and social identities. In short, affirmative action relates to affirming diversity on campuses and equality of opportunity for all (Gupta, 2006). In contrast, the quota policy and other affirmative policies in India have been perceived and practiced as diversity enhancement mechanisms; however, there is a lack of an institutional policy and initiatives to foster diversity in public higher education. In other words, diversity is just reduced to a conglomeration of student identities, without institutional policy, awareness and efforts to embrace that diversity. As a result, instead of benefiting from the diversity to enhance learning outcomes and enrich the campus climate of higher education institutions, the current student diversity consistently generates social tension and intergroup conflicts among the students.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ “We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today.” - Justice Sandra O’Connor in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 123 S. Ct. at 2347. Justice Sandra O’Connor pointed out that higher education has to do more than in the past and make additional efforts to use “racial preferences” in admission process (Schmidt, 2010, January 14).

⁵⁹ Over the past few years, Indian universities have been continuously in the news for social conflicts and unrest on the campuses; worrisome concerns appear from all the incidents have happened including conflict

In the current era of globalization, employment and economic growth largely depends upon business and trade in the domestic and global arena. Therefore, private sector employers and large corporations increasingly seek out a diverse workforce that has the ability to adapt to different international settings and work cultures. Research on diversity has demonstrated that diversity (diverse perspectives and difference of opinions) fosters creativity, innovation, and problem solving ability (Smith & Schonfeld, 2000). Therefore, diversity enhancement measures have acquired a strategic importance for both public and private educational institutions in the U.S. The U.S. government also recognizes a strategic significance and population dividend to foster institutional diversity; hence diversity research has gained momentum in American higher education institutions.

2.5 Diversity Research in the United States Higher Education Contexts

The quota policy in India and affirmative action policies in the U.S. both support excluded social groups in accessing higher education. Over the last three decades, diversity discourse and measures to promote diversity in North America ensure respect and tolerance for the underrepresented minorities (Chandhoke, 2008). Diversity has become a cornerstone of American democracy that has created grounds to raise issues pertaining to access, equity and social climate issues in higher education. Similarly, in Indian higher education, access, equity and social climate issues are fundamental concerns of higher education and oppressed caste students, but hardly any progress has

between various student identities such as, caste, gender, political ideology, religion and ethnicity. As a result, it is high time for the leaders of higher education and policy makers to study and take initiatives to introduce civic learning and engagement courses and diversity focused curriculum and pedagogy (Thorat, 2013).

been made in decades. Therefore, diversity research facilitates a deeper understanding of the needs of Dalit students and approaches to managing the diverse student body on Indian campuses.

In contemporary American society, the language of diversity is one the most celebrated topics in business, politics, policy, court judgments and education. Furthermore, diversity concerns have become a cornerstone of American democracy. Over the last two decades, ethnic and cultural diversity has been consistently rising in the U.S. Thus, diversity and multicultural awareness are crucial to embrace minority social groups in American society and integrate diverse cultures of the world. Several research studies on diversity suggest that diverse identities and individuals in higher education serve four beneficial purposes: higher educational access and success of underrepresented students, enrichment of educational outcomes, enhancement of institutional viability and improvement of the campus climate. Apart from educational advantages, diversity in higher education is a significant component of a vibrant democracy. Students educated in diverse learning settings obtain democratic skills, which are essential for citizenship training and enhancing the multicultural society. During college, students are at a critical developmental stage that prepares them to participate in a heterogeneous and modern democratic society. Further, diversity facilitates democratic outcomes such as active citizenship, embracing differences, community participation and racial and cultural sensitivity (Gurin et al., 2002).

Smith & Schonfeld (2000) have done a meta-analysis of diversity research, and concluded that diverse identities and individuals in higher education serve four main purposes: higher access and success of the underrepresented students, enriching

educational outcomes, enhancing institutional viability, and improving campus climate. Diverse student groups enhance institutional viability and produce beneficial results for higher education institutions (Sorensen et al., 2009). Student diversity certainly increases racial diversity, which could increase cross-racial interactions between student groups, and diversity could be a catalyst to enhance intellectual engagement and educational outcomes of students. Different student groups bring diverse perspectives and life experiences that could enrich the learning experience for all students. Diversity experiences on the college campuses foster students' awareness regarding their differences, inequalities and biases (Bowman, 2011).

Diversity initiatives in higher education have been focused on improving academic experience and institutional environments for diverse student groups; specifically underrepresented students. The focus on access and equity in higher education has created a range of issues relating to campus climate. In the past two decades, campus climate has been a significant aspect of diversity initiatives in public and private higher education. During the 1990s and 2010s, research on campus climate has produced a significant body of quality scholarship. Several such research projects focused on the 'campus climate for diversity' and present several informative models (Hurtado et al. 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2008) to evaluate the campus climate in different institutional settings.

2.5.1 Campus Climate for Diversity in Higher Education

The "campus climate for diversity" concept has become a central component of diversity measures in U.S higher education. Diversity initiatives have been focused on

improving academic experience and institutional environment for diverse student groups; and specifically aimed to make the environment inclusive for the underrepresented students. The focus on access and equity in higher education has created a range of issues on campus. Research on campus climate has been synthesized by several scholars (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Milem et al., 2005; Hurtado, Clayton-Pederson, Allen & Millen, 1999; Hurtado, Carter & Kardia, 1998). Campus climate literature encompasses various social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, and religion. The climate is an important aspect of the academic experience of students because the environments both inside and outside of the classroom affect students' perceptions and academic performance.

In the context of student diversity, a compositional diversity (critical mass) represents population demographics which reduce the negative effects of token representation of the underrepresented groups. However, compositional diversity without institutional commitments to diversity might encourage racial and ethnic clusters on campus that could challenge the purpose of diversity initiatives (Smith & Schonfeld, 2000).⁶⁰ In Indian higher education, diversity has been reduced to compositional diversity at the student level, and the campus climate topic has been overlooked by scholars and leaders of higher education. Student compositional diversity has been considerably increased through the quota policy and various affirmative action initiatives. However, faculty compositional diversity is still deficient; therefore, there is still a significant power imbalance between Dalit students and privileged caste faculty on campuses.

⁶⁰ The goals of diversity cannot be met by simply admitting more students of color to Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), but rather requires attention to many dimensions of the campus climate including curriculum, pedagogy, activities, support systems, percent of faculty and students of color and so on (Hurtado, 2001; Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999).

Similarly, enhancing student diversity amid a lack of institutional understanding for managing that diversity has created social tensions between identity-based student groups across campuses.⁶¹ In this context, the role of campus climate for diversity has a paramount significance on diverse campuses, particularly for creating a positive environment.

Research on campus climate illustrates that until the 1990s, few empirical studies had been conducted; as a result, race issues on campus did not receive scholarly attention and focus in the policy arena. In the subsequent period, the majority of research on campus racial climate has focused on students' experiences and perceptions of discrimination on campus. Studies have found that students from various racial and ethnic identities experience campus environments in distinct ways.⁶² In other words, students of color perceive their campus as hostile and racist and reported more encounters with racism than white peers (Pewewardy & Frey, 2002; Rankin & Reason, 2005).⁶³ In Indian universities, Dalit students assert their rights, raising voices against caste-based discrimination and challenging the dominant caste narratives which are widespread across the country (discussed in Chapter 7). In this scenario, campus climate studies could facilitate a robust collection of data pertaining to issues of Dalit and marginalized students, the nature of discrimination and the types of institutional support which could

⁶¹ A critical mass of oppressed caste students on campuses has initiated a new phenomenon, the mushrooming of oppressed caste student groups that assert their oppressed (caste) identities, challenge the dominance of privileged castes and propose counter narratives to Brahmanical ideology and caste hierarchies.

⁶² With regard to cross-racial interaction, D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) stated that in their study White interlocutors thought Black students were less likely to encounter negative experience than were actually reported by the Black students.

⁶³ There is a lack of institutional mechanisms in Indian higher education to assess campus environment; therefore, the institutions deny existence of any kind of caste-based discrimination or bias. However, studies on caste-based discrimination have clearly reported that Dalit students have been experiencing hostility and discrimination by privileged caste individuals.

be helpful to vulnerable student groups. However, research suggests that underrepresentation of students of color or oppressed caste students in the climate assessment exercise could produce misleading results; if students of color or oppressed caste students feel more marginalized, they less likely to respond to assessments (Hurtado et al., 2008).

Climate for diversity is a critical aspect of student assessment activities in higher education institutions. It has also become crucial in an era of “evidence-based” practices which focus on improving the educational experiences of a diverse student body; especially those of underrepresented students in postsecondary institutions. Diversity initiatives in higher education have been focused on improving academic experience and institutional environments for diverse student groups; they are aimed at making the environment inclusive for underrepresented students. Hurtado et al. (2012) pointed out that an important relation between educational outcomes and diverse student groups on campus is overlooked in the scholarship. Therefore, Hurtado et al. (2012) developed a holistic model, the Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (MMDLE or DLE).

In the DLE model, the concept of ‘campus climate for diversity’ is further developed by Hurtado and her colleagues, and transformed into an inclusive model that connects five dimensions (historical, organizational, compositional, behavioral and psychological) of the campus climate. Furthermore, each dimension of the climate has various actors, processes, and functions that collectively influence the environment at both micro and macro levels of the institution. This model suggests that higher education institutions have ability to challenge the power dynamics between the dominant and

subordinate groups; further, as an institution, it enhances its efficiency to serve diverse students and promote social transformation. All five dimensions focus on achieving three core outcomes: Habits of mind for lifelong learning, skills and knowledge of multicultural values, and student retention and achievement, which collectively foster social equity, democratic values and economic outcomes (Hurtado et al., 2012). The model facilitates a comprehensive understanding regarding campus climate for diversity and its impact on educational outcomes; hence, the DLE model has been translated into an assessment instrument to assess the diverse learning environments of an institution.⁶⁴

The assessment models discuss a series of topics to evaluate the perception, perspective, and experience of students and the entire campus community, it also proposes institutional interventions such as policy initiatives, pedagogical strategies, redressal mechanisms, awareness building trainings, affirmative action and fostering inclusiveness across the institutions. One of the most pragmatic frameworks, commonly known as ‘Equity, Diversity and Inclusion’, offer numerous innovative and valuable initiatives/programs to enhance the benefits of diversity, improve campus climate and provide support services, specifically to vulnerable students. In the Indian context, access to higher education by the oppressed caste students has been increasing, but retention and degree attainment rates are still low (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). This indicates that oppressed caste students have been experiencing a range of issues in institutional life, and

⁶⁴ In 2007, the Ford Foundation supported a Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) project that focused on designing a new assessment instrument to evaluate campus climate, educational practices, multicultural skills, retention and achievement outcomes, and other assessments on campus. A pilot DLE survey was administered at 14 campuses in 2010. The results of the project have been shared with several national and international institutions. Overall, the DLE project is critical in assisting institutions in evaluating the campus climates in context of diversity and educational practices, which improve learning environments for all students. The DLE survey instrument has been widely adopted to assess diverse learning environments and the campus climate across higher education institutions in the U.S as well as internationally (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013).

thus are not able to perform well and complete their studies. They do not receive any kind of institutional support, which would provide an opportunity to gain inspiration from the U.S. higher education experience and “diversity research”⁶⁵, and further; to develop a support framework to assist the oppressed castes and vulnerable students and contextual policy measures to transform Indian university campuses as inclusive spaces.

2.6 Institutional Support for Vulnerable Students in Higher Education

Critical race theorists have explored the ‘interest convergence’ of civil rights gains such as access, equity and social justice interventions in higher education (Bell, 1980; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). This ‘interest convergence’ term explains that the objectives of racial equity and social justice are attainable when these objectives converge with the interests of whites or white policy makers. This convergence is more important for the white establishments and their political gains than the suffering and injustice of people of color.⁶⁶ Currently, in Indian higher education, the uprising of oppressed caste students against institutional injustice and the political interests of the government, as well as agitating for them to prepare a policy to support socially disadvantaged students, have created a viable ground for interest convergence. Therefore,

⁶⁵ An impactful paper “Making diversity work on campus: A research-based perspective” published by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, stated that diversity is interpreted as a holistic framework that encompasses four core aspects: Institutional commitments, measures against all types of discrimination, co-curricular programs for the underrepresented students, and improving the campus environment toward inclusiveness (Milem et al., 2005).

⁶⁶ In the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement intensified in the U.S. and during the same era the cold war was at the peak. Therefore, both the superpowers explored propaganda techniques to defame each other on international platforms. On one side, the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic) projected their country as an egalitarian society and fair with all citizens and on the other, exploiting the civil right movement to tarnish the image of the U.S. government as oppressive and discriminatory against their citizens, and blacks struggling for equal rights.

this is an opportunity to bring institutional interventions in support of the Dalit and other vulnerable students in Indian higher education.

The federal government of the U.S. issued an “Executive Order 13583”⁶⁷ in 2011 to encourage equity, diversity and inclusion in public institutions. The order is explicit about eliminating all forms of discrimination, fostering institutional diversity, enhancing the representation of underrepresented groups, developing awareness programs, and enforcing accountability to implement the order. Higher education in the U.S. is one of the domains which have interpreted the order in a larger diversity discourse and presented diversity programs and initiatives in institutional settings. It is important to note that higher education in the U.S. has identified, acknowledged and studied the phenomenon of explicit and implicit discrimination on campuses suffered by students from the various subordinate identities. Therefore, there is a wealth of research available to guide the design of institutional interventions to address social justice issues.

In recent years, campuses have become quite compositionally diverse; higher education institutions in the U.S. experience new challenges of increasing first generation, low income, and racial/ethnic minority students (The Condition of Education 2010, 2010). Similarly, Indian public higher education institutions have been witnessing an increase in enrollment of disadvantaged groups such as first generation, female, rural and the oppressed caste students. It is undeniable that the quota policy and other affirmative action programs have played a significant role in enhancing student diversity across university campuses. This has changed student demographics across academic disciplines which were previously dominated by the privileged caste students.

⁶⁷ President Barack Obama issued an Executive Order 13583 to establishing a coordinated government-wide initiative to promote diversity and inclusion in the federal workforce.

The increasing diversity of college campuses has created a range of issues pertaining to difference and inclusion (diversity) and influenced the campus climate in various ways. I argue that the increasing diversity of student populations in the U.S. higher education system is a “positive development”, which enhances excellence and learning experiences.⁶⁸ In other words, student diversity is an asset, not a problem; rather the inequalities and stigma associated with identities are the real problems (Hurtado, et al., 2008). However, in the Indian context, the growth of the population of oppressed caste students is perceived as weakening the quality of higher education and specifically, Dalit and Tribal students are treated as a problem. In the current political discourse, the dominant right wing ideology blames Dalit students for campus conflicts across the nation. This is the significant contrast between the U.S. and Indian higher education contexts in terms of equity and inclusion.

It is a well-known fact that higher education in the U.S. is a pioneer in innovative initiatives and research across disciplines. Higher education institutions in the U.S. have explored a range of topics pertaining to diversity and diverse social groups. Public and private higher education institutions have embraced a range of approaches to encourage diversity. In other words, diversity is not reduced to enrollment of diverse student groups on college campuses (diversity approaches intersect with an affirmative action plan at an institutional level). In the Indian context, having diverse student groups on campuses have been celebrated as diversity as an end itself, when in fact diversity is merely a tool to an end. Moreover, student diversity or difference and inclusion (diversity) topics have

⁶⁸ Ghosh (2012) states that the privileged groups have perceived diversity in higher education as a compromise with excellence; however, diversity and excellence reinforce one another. Further, numerous studies on the topic suggest that the two are complementary. Diversity itself does not represent excellence, however, excellence can be advanced and enriched by diversity.

been scarcely examined; therefore, issues regarding the campus climate have presented great challenges in Indian higher education. I argue that diversity and the inclusion discourse must move beyond diverse students, employee groups, and programs as final goals. In fact, effective discourses are multilayered processes and initiatives that influence institutional life to achieve the benefits of diversity and enrich learning experiences (Milem et al., 2005).

In the U.S. higher education context, research on campus climate demonstrates that race is one of the most significant factors on campuses. Harper and Hurtado (2007) stated that it is an institutional (e.g. administration, faculty, and researchers) responsibility to make a regular assessment of the campus climate, and take needful actions to change it. The DLE model explains the climate for diversity in which intentional curricular and co-curricular practices serve to educate all college/university students and enhance the climate for diversity. In other words, improving the campus climate means “institutional transformation”; a positive change that effectively influences institutional culture, values, staff, policy, and routine operations. The next section discusses the conceptual framework of the study, which explains critical race theory and social reproduction theory to comprehend institutional life of caste in Indian higher education.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

As mentioned earlier, this research explores scholarship on race issues from the U.S. higher education contexts; Critical Race Theory (CRT)⁶⁹ was developed by legal

⁶⁹ CRT is “the work of progressive legal scholars of color attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of domination, as well as all forms of subordination” (Matsuda, 1991, p.1331).

scholars in the 1970s when they found that research did not comprehend various aspects of racism and everyday experiences of the people of color which manifested in the slow development of civil rights laws in the judicial system (Yosso, 2006). Over the last four decades, numerous scholars and theorists have contributed to develop CRT in different disciplines. Delgado and Stefancic (2000) suggested four themes for CRT research that laid the foundation for CRT scholarship: (1) race and racism are social constructions; (2) white supremacy is a social norm in U.S. society, and prevailing social consciousness believes in “white-over-color ascendancy”, which perpetuates racism to maintain power and privileges of white Americans; (3) racism is normal in the society and oppressive; (4) deconstructing the dominant narratives through storytelling and analyzing racist experiences to understand legal racism in the system. CRT provides an analytical framework to examine the existing power structures that are based on white privilege and subordination of people of color. In other words, CRT facilitates tools to theorize the lived experiences of people of color and theorizes the politics of race through politicizing whiteness (Bell, 1980).

I use CRT in an educational framework and examine lived experiences of Dalit students in Indian higher education contexts. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) pioneered the application of CRT in education, and explained the role of race and racism in educational inequalities among black and Latino students. CRT in education challenges traditional frameworks, methods and discourse; further, it seeks to transform those cultural and institutional structures of education that oppress the people of color in and out of the classroom. CRT challenges dominant ideologies such as meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity in higher education (Delgado, 1995;

Solórzano 1998; Taylor, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano (1997) have identified four dimensions of racism; (1) racism has macro and micro components; (2) racism has unconscious and conscious features; (3) racism takes on individual and institutional forms and (4) racism has a cumulative impact on both individuals and groups. Therefore, this research uses the CRT framework to study lived experiences of Dalit students and social justice-focused interventions to support Dalit students in Indian higher education.

Research indicates that critical race theory and methodology in education have five tenets which shape its perspectives, methodology, insights and pedagogy:

1. The inter-centricity of race and racism: CRT in education proposes that race and racism are continuing and rampant; in other words, race is a central factor for the students of color and on the other side, white privilege and dominance are maintained through institutional power and structures. CRT lenses highlight concealed forms of racism and racist behaviors which are generally difficult to recognize and explain due to their complexity and insidiousness, which allows them to constantly manifest themselves, despite embraced institutional objectives such as equity and social justice (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). Critical race theorists place race in the center of critical race analysis, and they examine it in relation to other identities such as class and gender subordination (Barnes, 1990).

2. The challenge to the dominant narratives: Critical race scholars question the dominant narratives and argue against educational agents such as teachers, administrators and policy makers who justify social hierarchies and privileges of dominant groups (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Critical race methodology in research emphasizes lived

experiences, and constructs counter narratives as a way to challenge the master narratives. CRT confronts the idea of colorblindness in the institutional contexts which hide implicit forms of racism; “instead of tackling colorblind ideologies... it creates a lens through which the existence of race can be denied and the privileges of whiteness can be maintained without any personal accountability” (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009, p.3).

3. The focus on experiential knowledge: CRT offers voice to lived experiences and perspectives of people of color. Critical race theorists highlight that the experiential realities of people of color are appropriate, legitimate and essential for analyzing and teaching about their racial subordination. Critical race methodology adopts non-traditional research methods such as storytelling, biographies, chronicles, autobiographies and narratives which challenge traditional research paradigms and theories that study racism and issues of people of color based on simplistic understandings. Further, it reveals the deficient discourse of research and theories that misrepresent and mute perspectives of oppressed groups (Valencia & Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).

4. The commitment to social justice: Research on CRT suggests that social justice is one of the most essential elements of the framework. The social justice agenda of CRT research basically focuses on two aspects; first, to eradicate racism, sexism, and classism and second, to empower the marginalized groups (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Critical race scholars recognize that racism is institutionalized in education; therefore, institutional practices, culture and policies oppress the students of color. However, education could be a political tool (Freire, 1996) to offer a transformative and consciousness raising experience to disempowered students. Similarly, critical race

methodology proposes that different types of oppression can be dealt with through diverse forms of resistance.

5. The interdisciplinary approaches: Critical race theorists have incorporated a variety of disciplines and theoretical frameworks to explain oppressive phenomena. In this study, I explore scholarship from sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, racism and education. CRT critiques unidisciplinary and ahistorical approaches to scholarship and analysis of race and racism (Harris, 1994; Sólorzano, 1998) that fail to acknowledge the historical and contemporary realities of people of color.

The significance of CRT in caste contexts is discussed in '*Critical race theory in India: Theory translation and the analysis of social identities and discrimination in Indian schooling*', where Goodnight (2017) explains that in the U.S. context, dominant racial identities uphold unequal power relations through reinvention of their historical privileges. CRT has demonstrated that racism influences social realities and how white privilege exists beyond the dominant discourse of class and meritocracy. The author suggests that CRT has theoretical relevance in India, studying the social life of caste and the current socioeconomic realities that are justified as the outcomes of merit; despite being results of historical oppression and existing caste privileges. CRT facilitates a broader theoretical foundation to study caste issues, which are complex and dynamic in nature. Further, the concept of transformational resistance (Sólorzano & Bernal 2001) in CRT could be translated to examine the agency and resilience of Dalit students in discriminatory environments of Indian higher education. Therefore, the research applies critical race theory to analysis of issues relating to the prevalence of caste identities and

casteism with specific attention to the subject position and experience of Dalit students on campus.

The CRT framework in the research focuses on two areas of inquiry; (1) educational journeys of Dalit students and analyzing power dynamics, resilience, and resistance of their academic journeys, and (2) institutional culture, practices, and contexts that contribute to a negative or exclusionary environment for Dalit students, and what changes (e.g. policies, programs, & practices) would be required to create a positive and supportive climate for them. Further, the study discusses effective institutional initiatives/programs and policies from the U.S. higher education system that would inspire development of policies and programs for an anti-casteist, and socially just campus climate in Indian higher education.

This research also draws theoretical perspectives from social reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1986) that will broaden the conceptual foundation of the inquiry. Bourdieu (1986) states that different forms of capital (e.g. social, cultural and financial) are instruments of power, privilege and domination in society that are entrenched in educational institutions as part of the everyday normative functioning of these institutions. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and "*habitus*"⁷⁰ in the education field explain that each social class comprises social, economic and cultural capitals that parents and school passes to children as behaviors, attitudes and preferences which are transformed into social profit. Schools and educators reward students from high status cultural capital and disregard students from low status cultural capital as 'at risk' for lower achievement rates in schools.

⁷⁰ Habitus is a network of perceptions about taking an appropriate action in different settings to attain specific objectives; these perceptions are influenced by the cultural capital and social class of a person (Walpole, 2008).

Social reproduction is the process by which relations of inequality and stratification (e.g. class and caste) are reproduced across generations. The historical legacy of caste culture is still evident in the twenty-first century; however, a traditional hierarchical structure has been dwindling, but new networks based on caste affiliation happen to be flourishing. These new networks reinvent and reinforce caste to establish domination over economic, social and cultural capital, and reproduce caste in more sophisticated forms (Jodhka, 2016). In the context of higher education, Bourdieu showed how social reproduction takes place in a modern university, despite it being projected as a site of social mobility, knowledge creation, innovation and social transformation.⁷¹ Through empirical research, Bourdieu argued that the culture of the dominant social groups is continuously validated and legitimized, and the subordinate social groups (in Bourdieu's case, lower social class, rural and first-generation students) are compelled to be alienated from the "cultural capital"⁷² (education). According to social identity perspectives, the concept of "class" (as an identity) in Bourdieu's theory can be translated with the "caste" identity in my study. It indicates that caste inequity through education is perpetuated with the value system of the privileged castes in higher education institutions. The social reproduction theory facilitates theoretical lenses to analyze caste-based capital and how this is reproduced and replicated in Indian higher education.

In the last two decades, a considerable number of women, Dalit, Tribal and lower social class students have been enrolling in public higher education institutions, which

⁷¹ Swartz (2008) theorized Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "Habitus" (habits) and stated that habitus are predominantly unconscious cultural processes. It starts during early childhood and gradually group members internalize their group specific habits/behaviors. Therefore, the caste specific habits are naturally a part of higher education institutions.

⁷² Cultural capital refers to specialized or insider knowledge which is not taught in schools, such as knowledge of high culture and educational credentials (Walpole, 2003).

has substantially changed the student population. The presence of these marginalized students and their student politics on campuses are challenging the historical dominance of cultural capital by the privileged castes. Further, student demographics have changed, but faculty demographics (which have been dominated by the privileged castes) have not; in other words, the privilege caste faculty are feeling a decline in their cultural capital hegemony and the loss of their control over higher education. Therefore, caste hierarchies, feudal mindsets, and exclusionary cultural representations (Hall, 1997) are infused into the institutional life. This leads to them taking various actions to maintain their hegemony and dominant position in the academic society, at the expense of the aspirations of the disadvantaged students who are fighting to gain their rightful place in that society.

CHAPTER 3

NAVIGATING THE CAMPUS CASTE MINEFIELD: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the questions that guided my research and experience as I navigated through the higher education system in India. The chapter discusses my positionality as a researcher exploring questions of caste with my Dalit interlocutors as a first generation Dalit myself. My autobiographical account illuminates the ways in which the stories of my interlocutors were interwoven with my own life history and academic experiences and for the reader to understand how my situatedness and positionality informed and enriched my methodological approach. I employ a form of narrative inquiry to examine the narratives of interlocutors. This chapter also elaborates on the data analysis process, which describes coding and analysis techniques used to systematize the data. There are appendices to the dissertation which provide detailed information about the research process.

3.1 Research Questions

Discrimination or bias against Dalit students is an under-researched topic and deserves wider study to illuminate the institutional life of Dalit students on university campuses. Previous studies of Dalit students have reiterated the prevalence of caste-based discrimination (Rao, 2013) and offer simplistic explanations, which do not provide a deeper understanding on a range of topics regarding the role of caste and institutional life of Dalit students in higher education. This research examines two such topics: First, it investigates the lived experience of Dalit students in their academic journeys, and

secondly, it studies the existence of institutional measures to support Dalit students and their recommendations pertaining to such measures.

What are the experiences of Dalit students in their higher education journey in India?

More specifically:

1. What are the experiences of discrimination or bias told by Dalit students themselves?
2. What is the level of interaction of Dalit students with peers, faculty, and the administration?
3. What type of counter narratives do Dalit students narrate to describe their resilience and resistance experiences?
4. How would Dalit students like to see the institution respond to their concerns?

This research is intended to study beyond caste-based discrimination, specifically, to examine educational journeys of Dalit students and analyzing the power dynamics, resilience, and resistance of their academic journeys. Similarly, it aims to examine institutional culture, practices and contexts that contribute to negative or exclusionary environments for Dalit students, and what changes would be required to create a positive climate for them. Previous studies on the topic have focused on elite (central university) higher education institutions, but not the larger number of students joining state universities and colleges. There is a lack of studies pertaining to Dalit students in state universities; therefore, I pursue this study to understand the academic journeys of Dalit students in a public university in Gujarat, India.

Being a researcher, this research is not confined to an academic and intellectual discourse. My interest in the topic derives from personal experiences of discrimination during my undergraduate and graduate journey in India and the influence of critical thinking in challenging the status quo, and a passion to transform social and institutional

injustice along caste lines. I also found that studies on Dalit students lack coverage of personal narratives and life experiences in their higher education journeys, and thereby do not offer a deeper understanding of their institutional life.

In this study, I used an autoethnography approach to narrate my positionality in the research process. I present my life stories as layered accounts (Ellis & Berger, 2003), to explain my historical background and education journey as a Dalit student in the context of the study. The interpretation of my stories I leave to the readers, so the stories are not analyzed through theoretical and research lenses (Hilbert, 1990).

3.2 Positionality: Personal Narrative

As a researcher, I would like to share my higher education journey, which is relevant to the research and offers a context to the inquiry. This is a personal narrative of my lived experiences, struggles and resilience to survive in a privileged caste dominated institution. Before I narrate my higher education journey, I narrate my social background. I was born into a Dalit family, and my parents were working in textile mills in Ahmedabad. I have two older siblings; my sister was ten years older than me, and my brother was eight. I was never a healthy child because of poverty and a lack of proper care. I was told by my mom that when I was a young child, she would leave me with my elder sister to go to work. Due to the social conditions, neither of my siblings could do well in studies and they faced a longer harsh time than me.

My neighborhood was situated amid textile mills, and overwhelmed by pollution from the mills. I still remember that the life of my family and most of the others' lives were revolving around their work shifts at the mills. For example, every day at 7:00 am,

3.30 pm and 12.00 am, one after another of the sirens of the mills would go off, and give us an idea of time and social life in the neighborhood. We had a small house in a slum, and our neighborhood was deprived of basic civic amenities. Moreover, my neighborhood, *Bansi Chall*, was notorious for illegal country-made liquor selling and violent incidents. During my childhood, I saw many incidents of physical violence and police raids to arrest people involved in this illicit trade. Selling of country made liquor was so omnipresent in the neighborhood that I and my friends would play next to the liquor selling booth; it was a part of my social life. Similarly, in the 1980s and 1990s, I witnessed several incidents of sectarian violence between Hindus and Muslims. Despite the adversities, I was able to pursue higher education and never got involved in any undesirable acts, because my father was very strict, and he had high expectations for me.

My father was just functionally literate, but he was involved in leftist politics and anti-caste movements, and as a result, he was aware of the importance of education for social mobility and diverse radical ideas. I strongly believe that exposure to those diverse radical ideologies and social conditions around me built my critical world views. I am the youngest of three siblings, so my parents focused more on my education than my siblings. As a boy child in a patriarchal society, I had many advantages over my sister and that reflected in my educational achievements. However, my brother could not do well in school, and one of the major reasons for his educational failure was caste-based discrimination in the middle school. His school was located in a privileged caste neighborhood. The decade of the 1980s is known for anti-reservation protests in Gujarat, and the epicenter of the protests was Ahmedabad. As a result, anti-Dalit sentiments were common among privileged castes which my brother experienced in the school

environment, and he lost interest in studies. My sister told me the story of how he was harassed by teachers in the school.

After my siblings' poor educational outcomes, my parents put extra efforts into my education and enrolled me in a better school when I was in fifth grade. Throughout my schooling, I experienced mental stress and pressure to do well in education because I was carrying the aspirations of my family. My father had high expectations and he wanted me to become a 'Doctor' for social mobility and respect. When I graduated from high school, I did not know how to pursue the college admission process, what sort of documents were required, and other related issues. I am a first generation college student; therefore, no one close to me in my neighborhood nor my family, had the knowledge or experience to provide me with assistance or advice. My parents had not finished their elementary schooling, therefore, there was a lack of academic cultural capital in the family.

Without any information about various undergraduate programs, I applied to a couple of institutions. After a few weeks of nervousness and anxiety, I received an offer from Agricultural University to enroll in their Bachelor of Science in Agriculture program, at their North Gujarat campus. Without waiting for other opportunities, I accepted their offer and informed my parents that I would join the program and live in a hostel. It was a tough decision to live in a hostel far from my family. However, I was happy that I would leave my violent neighborhood, which was not conducive for education; now I could focus on my studies and I would have a quiet space to study. In my house there was not enough space and it was very difficult to focus on studies.

To confirm my enrollment in the program, I went alone, and did not know the place and how to get there in time and come back before night. The university was 140 kms from the city, and I was nervous about whether I could get it done within one day and come back home. Fortunately, I finished the admission process at the college, but I had to choose my hostel accommodation on the same day because I could not afford to make another trip just to get housing. Therefore, without lunch or food, I went to check hostels and pick a room. I was joined by other enrolled students and their parents; among them one student was a fellow Dalit, whose status I discovered during the admissions process.

My caste identity has always been a significant factor in my education journey since childhood; therefore, when I realized that this student was also Dalit, I introduced myself as a Dalit. When we were going toward the hostel, my Dalit friend and his parent asked me about my background. With my Dalit friend and his parent, I was feeling comfortable and I decided to share a hostel room with this friend. During our conversation on the way, it was confirmed that we both would be living at the same hostel, and my friend's parent formally asked both of us to share a room. I was happy that I enrolled myself in a college and I would stay in a hostel with a Dalit roommate. While returning home, my friend's father helped me to catch a convenient bus so I could arrive at home before night.

Several weeks later, I joined the college and settled in at the hostel. In the beginning, I explored the college, campus community and other offices on the campus. I also came to know about other Dalit students in my class and a few Dalit senior students. My caste identity became more salient when I had noticed that many of our faculty were

“Patel” (a dominant caste in Gujarat) and other dominant castes. I did not find a single faculty from the Dalit or Adivasi categories, which made me conscious about hiding my caste identity. We had to walk through different departments for classes and lab work, and on the way, we had to pass by faculty offices which had big name tags with a last name. Generally, a last name signifies a caste identity and a first name with a last name makes easy to identify a caste of an individual in a region. There was not a single faculty from Dalit, Adivasi or minority communities in the college and this conveyed a clear message that the institution was dominated by the privileged castes. At that time, I did not understand how that was impacting our social relationships and subconsciously reinforcing the caste culture. Now when I revisit those experiences of my college journey, I can understand that the last names of privileged caste faculties conveyed micro-aggressions and subtle messages about who has the power in the college. Moreover, environmental micro-aggressions subconsciously influenced me to accept the supremacy of the privileged caste in the college. I also noticed that students and faculties from the Patel community had cordial relationships and kinship. In the first semester, there were not any caste issues or discrimination along the caste lines. We were four Dalit students in the first semester, and all were aware of our Dalit identities. We were not close friends however; we just had sympathy on the grounds of our Dalit identity.

In the first semester, I experienced hardships in my academic work because it was in English and my K–12 education was in Gujarati. I had a great burden placed on me to do well because my father was working in a textile mill and sending money for my studies. It was a big financial liability on the family to send me to college and pay for residential facilities. I was born and raised in a slum, so many times I hid the fact that I

lived in a slum. Most of my friends were from middle class families and I thought they did not have sensitivity to my background and awareness of the struggle I overcome to be accepted into college. Therefore, I did not invite them to my house, despite the fact that some wished to visit and sleep over. I also had in my mind that if my friends were to visit me, they would recognize my caste identity, and my other friends would discover my lower caste status. My house was very small; it had two tiny rooms and guests would sit in a front room, where a big picture of Dr. B R Ambedkar hangs. In Indian society, a picture of Dr. B R Ambedkar in a house means the family belongs to a Dalit or Adivasi community.

I was raised in a city and in a community where privileged castes and Dalits lived side by side. All privileged caste people in my neighborhood were non-Gujarati, who migrated from north and south India to Ahmedabad to work in textile mills; therefore, caste culture was not pervasive. However, caste hierarchy existed in our community, mostly in subtle forms and sometimes openly manifested in social relations, expressions, and conflicts. I still remember some instances where I experienced casteist slurs and humiliating comments about Dalit identity.

The 1980s was a troublesome period for Dalits in Gujarat, specifically, in old Ahmedabad; anti-reservation protests and incidents of mob violence against Dalits were fanatic. In 1987, as a child, I witnessed privileged caste attacks on Dalits. This was the period when caste-based electoral politics and anti-reservation (anti-affirmative action) protests have divided Gujarati society along caste lines. My neighborhood was relatively safe, but on the periphery where the privileged caste and Dalits were close to each other, Dalit's houses were attacked by stone pelting and hurling of firebombs. I had visited a

burnt house close to my neighborhood; the house belonged to a family friend, so I went with my father to see the ruins. It was a shocking experience for me because it was my first direct experience with caste violence. I also heard stories about privileged caste attacks and revenge sentiments among Dalits and so on. As I was growing up, I understood the position of Dalits in the casteist society, and I also internalized passing strategies to avoid any kind of conflict with privileged caste individuals and groups.

Our campus was isolated and located in a remote place, so the campus community was important for social relations. I was eager to find Dalit individuals in the community because I was conscious about caste identity and the privileged caste culture was pervasive on the campus. Gradually, I developed relations with a few Dalit families and individuals. Those Dalit families and individuals provided great comfort and guidance to me. They provided moral support and confidence that there were people out there to help me. Through these relationships, I came to learn how casteism exists in the institution and also in the wider community.

Fortunately, I had developed a good relationship with a Dalit family, a member of whom was an officer at the institution, and he told me how casteism had restricted his promotion. He also informed me how reserved seats for Dalit and Adivasi candidates were eliminated and general candidates were appointed on the same reserved seats. As a Dalit, he was alone in his rank so there were a lack of support and people to protest against the injustice of these violations of the reservation policy. At that time, I came to realize how casteism existed in complex and hidden forms. It was a frightening reality of the campus which made me vigilant, and my strategies for 'passing' become a norm in any caste related issue or conversation. In the context of the dominance of the privileged

castes, I did not raise any caste-related issues with the authorities and avoided any caste conflicts at the campus or hostel; otherwise, the privileged caste people would harass us, and it would become impossible for us to complete our degrees. I came to know that a few years before I joined the program, a large, violent casteist incident occurred on campus. The main reason for the violence was caste pride, with both sides being privileged caste groups. If a privileged caste attacks another privileged caste simply because of a casteist mentality, then how can Dalits raise their voice about their rights or dare to challenge the privileged caste in any context?

The campus was dominated by Hindu right wing ideology; and the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) (in English, National Volunteer Organization) had a strong presence. The prevalence of RSS endorsed casteism and specifically the supremacy of privileged castes on campus were intimidating factors for me because I have been a non-believer in practice and a critic of Hinduism, which indoctrinates caste hierarchies and justifies sub-human treatment of Dalits. Some students were part of the RSS organization, which brought a right wing ideology and casteist mindsets to hostel life. After my first year, I observed caste issues emerging among the students; some privileged caste seniors encouraged and provoked privileged caste students of our class to dominate student representative elections. There was not a single Dalit or Adivasi student representative in all four classes of the degree program. Because of subtle messages and a caste culture we also accepted that Dalit or Adivasi students would not be student representatives in the institution. In other words, Dalit students accepted their subordinate position which was a self-disciplinary tactic to survive on campus. Even our college administration never appeared to care, or even notice that all the student representatives were from the

dominant castes. Moreover, I would say that the administration was deeply casteist and willfully ignorant about the presence of subordinate caste students at the college.

However, I had good friendships with some privileged caste peers; at the surface level, caste identities were not important in our social relations. One of the biggest reasons for not experiencing explicit caste-based discrimination was the absence of affirmative action (the quota policy) stigma associated with Dalit students. In our university, admission was open for anyone with required criteria; there was no entrance exam, nor any merit list to secure enrollment. Therefore, the privileged caste students did not experience any positive discrimination and caste identities were not a factor in the admission process. However, I heard derogatory comments and casteist slurs about Dalit and Adivasi identities. Most of the time, those comments were not directed to any particular individuals, they were mentioned as phrases or expressions in conversation, but it was certainly an insulting experience whenever I heard caste-based comments or slurs.

The quota policy was the most discussed topic among the students; however, the policy was always condemned by privileged caste peers, and Dalit students never shared their point of views or argued on the topic. In other words, Dalit students accepted that they had to tolerate casteist remarks and could not argue against them. As earlier mentioned, our institution was located in a rural area, and the influence of rural conservative culture was evident in the institutional life of the students. For example, we had two maintenance staff members whose job was to clean bathrooms, halls, and open space around the hostel buildings. In Indian culture, it is called ‘manual scavenging’, which is a menial job and disgraceful employment. Further, it is a Dalits’ job, especially confined to the ‘Valmiki’ community. The two maintenance employees belonged to the

Valmiki community; moreover, their identity as “*Bhangi*” (manual scavengers) is the most stigmatized caste identity in India. The maintenance people used to drink tea in separate cups, which the tea-stall owner used to keep down on the ground to make sure that they remained segregated. All the students had noticed that many times, but none of us challenged the practice of discrimination and differential treatment. Even I never dared to talk about this with peers or the tea-stall owner. I remember that most of the student would not talk with them and the two guys also kept themselves segregated so no one would feel offended. I admit that there was a “culture of silence” on my part, to conceal my identity.

When I look back and revisit my institutional life and social relations on campus, I feel like I conditioned my mind and behavior to tolerate casteism during my higher education journey in India. I am not sure how those experiences and micro-aggressions impacted my self-confidence and potential to perform. I completed my undergraduate and graduate programs, but during the six years of my stay on the campus, I never saw any kind of celebration of Dalit festivals. In my life, April 14th has a great significance because this day is the birthday of Dr. B R Ambedkar. The significance of Ambedkar in the Indian context is equivalent to Dr. Martin Luther King in the United States; in the last few decades, Ambedkar has become a cult figure and a symbol of social justice for the oppressed people of India. It is evident that Ambedkar is a messiah for millions of Dalits; similarly, he has been my role model and I have been celebrating April 14th since my childhood. However, while on campus, I never celebrated or saw any activity on this date.

From my third year onward, caste became an important factor in social relations between the students. Dalit junior and senior students had very good relations and senior Dalit students guided the juniors in every possible way. I also had very cordial relations with junior Dalit students and that changed the social environment in the hostel. Although caste was not evident on the surface, it was hidden and implicit in terms of caste-based fraternity. Dalit students used to call ourselves “*Holly*”, from the word Hollywood. It was our private nickname; no one else knew our meaning of “*Holly*”. I don’t know how this term came to exist, but I remember one of our Dalit seniors coined the term and then we all embraced it. I remember an event when almost all Dalit students decided to put on an unusual dress code in a hostel-day celebration. Interestingly, we also had a few non-Gujarati privileged caste friends and they were very good friends and far from caste politics. In the same hostel-day celebration, we had a general knowledge competition and I participated with another junior Dalit student. First, we both cleared the qualifying round and the final competition took place between four teams in a public event. I am not sure about privileged caste students, but all Dalit students knew that two “*Holly*” were in a team. We won the competition with a huge margin and when the result was announced all Dalit students were cheered up. It was really a special day for me; we had subtly confronted the privileged caste mentality that Dalit students are not meritocratic.

Starting with the third year, student representative elections became more divisive and there were three main factions among students: (1) The privileged caste student group, (2) out-of-state students and (3) Dalit and other students. These three factions were not strictly divided on caste lines; however, the privileged caste group has almost all privileged caste students. Out-of-state students knew that they did not have any chance to

actively participate in the student election, so the competition was between the privileged caste students and the rest. Before the third year student election, the hostel environment was a bit tense and some lower caste students were warned by privileged caste students regarding the election. I remember that day, it was evening - many lower caste students, a few privileged caste students and some out of the state students rushed to a hostel dorm to find the main gate was locked before we reached there; however, we all entered through a small open window and knocked on a door that belonged to a privileged caste student representative. He was alone in the room, but he did not open it because he knew that the situation was very tense. Some lower caste students were extremely angry, so they broke the door and attacked the student, but some students in the group controlled the situation and protected him otherwise anything could have happened. After about an hour the news reached to the hostel-director and he came at the hostel and took the student to hospital. We were all expecting disciplinary action against a few and some were ready to face consequences.

On the second day, the hostel environment was tense, and the news of hostel violence was spreading around campus; however, there was no action or meeting from the hostel-director on the day. It was a frightening silent night, and we worried about possible privileged caste' reaction or retaliatory violence. We all expected police involvement in the case, but there was no visible action against any student. That is still surprising and mysterious to me, I think the college administration did not want to call the police because it would have appeared in the news and cast the university in a bad light. The violence was a very clear and direct message to the privileged caste students, specifically, a few privileged caste seniors who were provoking juniors. It was the first

open rift between the privileged caste and Dalit students. I was worried that Dalit students would be targeted after some time; however, the administration suppressed the matter and it did not reach the faculty. I do not know how and why that happened, but it saved our academic careers. At that point in time, I was more concerned about degree attainment than caste issues in student politics because there was tremendous pressure on me to do well.

I would like to share a very interesting event that happened right after that incident. A Dalit student who was a leading figure in student politics, was part of a large group who attacked a privileged caste student. He was in a relationship with a privileged caste girl from another college on the campus; the girl was 'Patel'. His last name was similar to 'Patel'; a sub-caste in the 'Patel' community so anyone could easily perceive him as 'Patel'. After the incident, the girl came to know that my friend is not 'Patel', but he is a Dalit, and she then broke up with him and returned his gifts and cards. My friend was very upset and felt insulted. It was unbelievable that someone would make such a relationship decision on the basis of caste. Still I do not know how his caste identity was disclosed to the girl, but it indicates that caste is a complex and dynamic identity in social relationships. As long as you hide your Dalit identity, you are equal with other privileged castes, but once your Dalit identity becomes public, then you become inferior or subordinate irrespective of your achievements and intellect.

When I was in my last year of the program, we went for a three-week field trip. I was happy because for the first time I got an opportunity to visit places outside of my state. We had two faculty members with us, one of them was 'Patel' and the other was non-Gujarati. All the students were happy that both of these faculty members joined the

trip, and we had a friendly relations with them from day one. However, I remember an incident happened on the bus. We visited a place and were talking about it. One of my Dalit friends was hilarious, and he made fun of the ‘Patel’ faculty while we were chatting. The faculty member suddenly got angry and made a casteist remark, “*do not show off your caste*”; in other words, you belong to a stigmatized caste and you are making fun of a privileged caste. His comment shocked all the students, including me. After the comment, our conversation abruptly ended, and all Dalit students were silent. Since that day, I stopped any kind of conversation with this faculty member. It was a subtle message that your caste could be used against you in any possible way; you are not equal with others.

Despite my previous fears, I finally completed my degree comfortably. After my undergraduate degree, I wanted to join a master’s degree on the same campus. I did not have a particular ambition to pursue a master’s degree, but joined because of better career prospects. All of the students in my class had the same goal, to obtain a better job or profession. After two months, I applied to a master’s degree program and received a call letter to participate in an entrance exam in Anand city, which is close to my home city, Ahmedabad. The university had four campuses in the state and the entrance exam was conducted at the Anand campus, so all the students had to go there. I did not have a clear idea about the admission process, but I was confident that I would do well. I passed the exam and anxiously waited for the admission process. All the students were waiting outside the admission office and I heard that first the quota students would be enrolled. I was embarrassed because the results were publicly announced; we were a small group of

students from Dalit and Adivasi communities, even though I did not hear about or meet any Adivasi student during the entire admission process.

There was a separate list of the quota students, which was not posted there. I came to know this when the clerk started calling our names, and I was second on the list. I was nervous because I did not know what the admission committee would be asking and thinking about. When my name was called, I went inside the room where a couple of people were present. It was a very uncomfortable setting and environment; a committee member asked my name and GPA. A second member asked my choice of a major subject and campus. I asked for Horticulture as a major and north Gujarat campus. This was denied; they told me that there was no advisor for that subject. They asked me for my second choice; I did not have time to think about and argue for the first choice, so I chose Agriculture Economics at north Gujarat campus and the committee accepted this. Before and during the admission process, my caste identity was a major factor in choosing Agriculture Economics at north Gujarat campus. I was unsure about the state of caste relations on other campuses; therefore, I did not want to risk going there. However, I had some knowledge about the Agriculture Economics department at north Gujarat campus. Moreover, I did my undergraduate degree at that campus and I knew two Dalit students who enrolled in the Agriculture Economics major there because we felt that there was no caste discrimination in that department. It was our perception that other departments were casteist; however, we never experienced explicit caste-based discrimination there during our undergraduate degree. This was the foremost reason for me and other Dalit students to select a safe department over any other subject; the subject or major was not important

for us because we wanted to have a master's degree without any harassment or caste issues.

I received a government scholarship every year in my higher education journey; the scholarship is one-time financial assistance in a year to promote higher education among Dalit students. I remember that I had to collect a scholarship application from the administrative office and submit it back with necessary documents such as caste certificate and an academic evaluation of the last year. It was not a pleasant experience at all because the clerk was non-Dalit and I had to deal with him for the application process. Further, the office had three other clerks in a small space, so everyone in the office could easily hear what people were saying. I always tried to visit the office when few people were in, to avoid any kind of interaction with others. Once the application was approved, I had to go to the next door, which was the cashier's office. Here also the cashier was non-Dalit and the same office settings, and I had to request a cashier to pay my scholarship money. Overall, it was an uncomfortable experience because my caste identity could easily have exposed to other people in the offices.

I joined the program with the same old peers and some new students from outside of Gujarat. During the two years of the program, I never experienced any caste issues and it was a relatively smooth journey. Some were Dalit students and I had good relations with them. I tried my best to help the Dalit students in every possible way because I had experienced the role of caste discrimination in student politics and learned how to deal with academic issues. As I expected, I finished the degree within two years without suffering direct caste-based discrimination. My family was proud of me, especially my father who was so happy that I completed a master's degree. When I look back and

evaluate my higher education journey, I can understand that how my (with family) academic achievement defied the caste norms and provided hope to youth in my community to pursue higher education.

Being an “insider” in the study, my subjective judgments and biases might have influenced the data collection as well as the data analysis processes. Although in conventional research this may be perceived as biased, in the CRT framework it can be seen as a strength. Since the beginning of my field work, I maintained a field note diary that assisted in my “subjectivity audit” (Peshkin, 1988) to determine my personal influences during the entire research process and analysis of outcomes. During interviews, I was conscious about my role as a researcher, and did not intervene or counter interlocutors with facts and arguments. However, I tried to ask clarifying questions to elaborate their perspectives and arguments. In the data analysis and writing process, I constantly checked my subjectivity, interpretation of texts and sincerely maintained the intended meanings of the interlocutors’ narratives.

3.3 Methodological Stance

The study is designed to examine the lived experiences of Dalit students in higher education settings, which profoundly rely on the personal narratives/stories of graduate Dalit students. Therefore, the research used narrative inquiry to analyze and encompass various aspects of Dalit students and their academic journeys. Narrative inquiry is a widely explored research methodology in the field of education, and it is an interdisciplinary and flexible design to study multifaceted research topics (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) such as Dalit students in Indian higher education. Narratives or stories

are central to human lives and we make sense of the world through stories; moreover, narratives are lived experience (Chase, 2005). In various academic disciplines, narrative is used to portray a life or identity (e.g., Dalit) of a specific group of people in society.

Narrative research mainly focuses on examining a narrative account of the interlocutors through the collection of stories, and analysis to reiterate the stories and highlight the interlocutors' experiences and the meanings attributed to their narratives (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). Riessman (1990) pointed out that people tell stories to share their experiences, feelings, and perspectives about their identity, culture and society. The stories illuminate personal and social experiences that connect an individual with the larger society and cultural context. In other words, "narratives are retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experiences" (Chase, 2005, p. 656). I had noticed that for some interlocutors storytelling emerged as essential narratives to be told and be heard of because it was a healing experience to release their pain, feelings, frustration and give voice to their buried untold stories.

Narrative research facilitates multidisciplinary tools to describe narrative (story) as a phenomenon and a method in which researcher collect, examine and (re)tell stories through narratives of experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The study is intended to analyze experiences and stories of the interlocutors that complement critical race theory framework of the research. Through critical race theory lenses, it is imperative to ask, "whose stories are privileged in educational contexts and whose stories are distorted and silenced" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36). In the context of caste culture in Indian higher education, dominant narratives explicitly exist in the institutional discourse and casteist narratives are pervasive in the social consciousness of Indian society, and have

rarely been challenged or studied through counter narrative discourse. Narrative research in the study reflected the social realities of Dalit students through excerpts of their stories; moreover, it confronted the dominant culture and casteist narratives by examining the narratives of the interlocutors (Riessman, 1990; Lieblich et al., 1998). In the study, narrative inquiry was employed with a constructivist approach, and focused on the relationship between narratives and social change (Chase, 2005). Thus, this study emphasized narratives that critiqued oppressive social paradigms by critically analyzing and representing interlocutors' counterstories to foster social justice and democratic processes in Indian higher education.

Narrative inquiry has evolved as an interpretive research in which developing meanings is a central focus (Lieblich et al., 1998). Narrative analysis reveals how individuals make sense of their lives through narratives in relation to social identities. As a researcher, I studied narratives as lived experiences, and stories (narratives) were treated as a verbal action in which narrators explained, defended, asserted, articulated, criticized and challenged the status quo (Chase, 2005). Narrative inquiry in the study was a collaborative endeavor between me and the interlocutors; I emphasized the significance of learning from my interlocutors in their settings and the interlocutors assisted me to rewrite and reinterpret stories with the intended meanings. Further, I analyzed the narrator's voice in the contexts of the larger socio-cultural contexts and subjectivity of a narrator.

In general, a story contains elements of novels such as plot, scene, place, time and dialogue. Similarly, in narrative analysis, the researcher retells the story in the form of themes or categories that address research questions and unfold the meanings of the

narratives (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). In this research, narratives of the interlocutors were analyzed and organized in the form of categories, and further discussed in themes to re-story the original narratives. Dalit identity of the interlocutors was a central focus of the study and it reflected in the stories and in their responses as a weaving thread (McAdams, 1997). As a researcher and an interpreter, I listened to and reflected upon interlocutors' stories, and reinterpreted their narratives with the help of the interlocutors, then analyzed the narratives to comprehend how the interlocutors as a group narrated their academic journeys in the context of their Dalit identity. I did not know my interlocutors personally, so I could rely on their stories which they narrated to me in response to interview questions. Most of the responses of the interlocutors were situated in the past; therefore, those experiences are not completely recreated as occurred (Spence, 1991). Nonetheless, while sharing memories (past experiences), the interlocutors often created deeper meaning and gained new insights about their lived experiences which they acknowledged during the interview process.

Qualitative research offers great flexibility in combining research designs; in this study, case study and narrative inquiry both complemented each other in the development of the conceptual framework of the research (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). This research used the case study method to collect stories (narratives) of Dalit students as individual interlocutors. This case study approach highlighted caste discrimination as a phenomenon through multiple evidences and its impact on the real life contexts of the interlocutors (Gall et al., 1996). I treated the interlocutors as "cases" and these cases held a central position in the data analysis. This research used multiple case studies (also known as the collective case study approach), in which several interlocutors were subjects of the study,

in order to comprehend their lived experiences and multiple realities as Dalit students in Indian higher education. Case studies facilitated a robust description of the interlocutors and each case was the basis of data analysis, which preserved the peculiarities of each interlocutor with his/her/their history and perspectives. In this study, case study assisted me to enhance generalization of theoretical propositions (Riessman, 2008). More than one source of data enriches the validity of stories and triangulates the data collection method; therefore, this study collected data through detailed interviews and observations.

3.4 Research Site

For data collection, Gandhi University (pseudonym) was selected as a research site. The university is one of the largest public universities of the state and located in a city of Gujarat, and enrolls students from across the state into different academic programs at the main campus of the university. Conducting this research in Gujarat and specifically, Ahmedabad was a natural choice for me as I am familiar with the language here and being from this city had personal contacts that made it easier to gain access to speak to faculty and students and establish rapport with the interlocutors of my study.

I selected Gujarat for several reasons: (1) caste identities fluctuates marginally by regions in India; therefore, the research focused on a state university, (2) Gujarat, as a state is politically instrumental and economically affluent in India, (3) for more than two decades, Gujarat has been a role model of Hindu nationalism and a stronghold of right wing ideology, (4) since 2014, the “Gujarat model of development” has been a dominant economic model in the country which is ardently endorsed by the current Prime Minister of India, who was a Chief Minister of Gujarat (2001 – 2014) and a staunch Hindu

nationalist himself. (5) I was born and studied in Gujarat, so I am familiar with the culture and local language and dialects (e.g. Gujarati and Hindi), (6) I am familiar with the university, and the city where it is located, and (7) logistically it was convenient to visit the university campus and reach out to the research participants.

3.5 Interlocutors

All the interlocutors of the study are Dalit graduate students from the main campus of Gandhi University, which is located in one of the biggest cities of Gujarat. The main campus of the university offers graduate programs only and is considered a reputed campus for graduate programs among the public universities in the state. Before my field work, I started contacting people to find potential “gatekeepers”⁷³ who could help me to connect with my research participants. As an insider, the trust building process with gatekeepers was quick. When I was contacting the gatekeepers to reach out to potential interlocutors, a few gatekeepers objected to the use of “Dalit” (discussed in the Introduction) in the study. I tried to explain the meaning of “Dalit” in the context of my study; however, they insisted on using “Scheduled Castes” (SC) because it is an administrative category and non-political, recognized by the state. As a result, I interchangeably used Dalit and SC terms during the field work. My regular conversation with gatekeepers offered me some initial information about the campus and how to reach out to potential interlocutors. In the summer of 2018, I started field work, and I had meetings with gatekeepers to explain my study. It was summer break, so graduate students did not return to the campus until the middle of June and first semester students

⁷³ A gatekeeper is a mediator between interlocutors and a researcher, who assists the researcher in reaching out to the potential interlocutors. In relation to gatekeepers, the researcher’s positionality (insider or outsider) and power dynamics are important where gatekeepers have access to interlocutors (McAreavey & Das, 2013).

did not join the campus. However, with the help of a gatekeeper I was able to meet some Dalit faculty and Dalit staff members who assisted to me in finding a sufficient number of interlocutors for the study.

I used the “snowball or chain sampling”⁷⁴ method because as an insider, I found that snowball sampling was a quick, reliable and safe method in the given situation to reach out to interlocutors. As am from Ahmedabad where the campus is located, it was convenient for me to use my social network to find interlocutors and gatekeepers. I contacted most interlocutors by phone and in some cases in person. I employed a stratified sampling method to divide the sample into gender and academic departments to represent the population of the study. Apart from gender and departmental considerations, I did not apply any other criteria to select my interlocutors. I conducted twenty-six interviews with graduate Dalit students and five interviews with Dalit faculty.

All the interlocutors of the study belonged to Gujarati ethnic identity and their first language was Gujarati. My mother tongue is Gujarati, but I knew that my Gujarati was rusty, so I started my field work early, and spent around two weeks to acclimatize in the larger cultural contexts. During those two weeks, I especially focused on minimizing the use of English words in my Gujarati conversation because I was aware that a considerable use of English in Gujarati could intimidate my potential interlocutors, and they might not participate in my study and might consider me elite, as an outlier of the group (Dalits). For the field work, I had changed my appearance (e.g. colored my hair

⁷⁴ In the snowball or chain sampling method, a researcher obtains information from key interlocutors about other interlocutors in the field. “The chain of recommended informants would typically diverge initially as many possible sources are recommended, then converge as a few key names get mentioned over and over” (Patton, 2002, p. 237).

and changed my attire) to connect with the interlocutors and I hung out with the interlocutors at the campus, and built friendly relationships with them.

Social demographics of interlocutors provide their personal, familial and educational background which plays a critical role in their educational journey and lived experiences. Out of twenty-six student interlocutors, twelve were from social science disciplines, eight were from science disciplines and six were from professional programs. Similarly, twelve interlocutors belonged to first-generation college aspirants and fourteen interlocutors belonged to a family in which at least one parent had a college education. Regarding residential locations, fifteen interlocutors belonged to urban areas and eleven belonged to rural/small town areas. Gender representation of the interlocutors indicates that intersectionality of caste and gender is evident in female participation in higher education; despite my extra efforts to find more female interlocutors, only ten female interviewees participated in the study compared to sixteen male interviewees. Similarly, in the faculty category, all five faculty were male interlocutors and they represented science and social science disciplines.

I conducted thirty-one interviews which appear to be a relatively a small sample size compared to the population of the interlocutors under study. However, in narrative research, comprehensiveness of the study and description of the interviews is more important than the number of interviews (Lieblich et al., 1998). The topic of my research was political in nature and self-explanatory (Dalit students) which might have discouraged a few interlocutors from participating in the study. Moreover, I avoided seeking institutional permission to conduct the study at the campus, as that might have reduced my opportunities to reach out to potential interlocutors and I was conscious that

my research might have restricted my presence on campus. Researchers have raised concerns about the positionality of the researcher in narrative analysis; as a researcher, I was a narrator (of interlocutors' stories) which raises concerns such as voice of interlocutors, representation of narratives and most importantly, interpretive authority (Tierney, 2002).

Observation was one of the data collection methods. During the field work, most of my time I spent on the campus; everyday around noon, I would arrive at campus, and park my motor bike in a specific place, which is located in the center of the campus but slightly isolated and covered with trees where many students socialize. I liked the place because it provided me anonymity among students, a place to hang out on the campus during the summer months and a perfect location for observation, and write my field notes. Due to my frequent visibility on the place, most of my gate keepers and interlocutors knew that if I am not reachable by phone, they could probably find me there. Finally, the study discussed the experiences and life histories of a small group of graduate Dalit interlocutors who were able to navigate through the education system, to successfully reach graduate programs. Despite the fact that personal narratives of Dalit students can inspire future Dalit students who want to pursue higher education, this study does not offer strategies and solutions for overcoming caste discrimination. I believe that the readers could learn from the discourse of the study, and develop their own understanding and strategies to complete their higher education journeys.

3.6 Interview Protocol

I used interviews as the main source of data collection. To interview the interlocutors, I focused on a detailed interview protocol, which is similar to an intensive interviewing method. The intensive interviewing method facilitated “an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and, thus, is a useful method for interpretive inquiry” (Charmaz, 2006, p.5). The protocol was designed to ask questions in a chronological order to maintain a natural flow of narration (Chase, 2003), so interviewees could maintain a sequence of events, experiences and a cognitive order (Dillman et al., 2014) to narrate their responses and stories. Further, the protocol was cautiously articulated to ask narrative-specific questions and I used socio-linguistic communication (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) which might have stimulated the interlocutors to narrate their personal stories. The protocol consisted of discrete open ended questions and closed questions; the protocol was designed to generate detailed narratives of each interlocutor (Riessman, 2008).

All the interviews were conducted in Gujarati because all interlocutors were comfortable in Gujarati; in other words, they were not fluent and confident in speaking English. I noticed frequently that my association with a U.S. university had created a hierarchical relation with my potential interlocutors; therefore, before each interview I tried to build a personal rapport with potential interlocutors to break the ice between us and stimulate them to participate in the study. Even before and during the interview, I made conscious efforts such as not emphasizing my U.S. affiliation, casual conversation in the beginning of the interview, encouraging the interlocutors by empathic and active listening, and encouraging the interlocutors to speak in their own way (Riessman, 2008).

As a researcher, I went undercover in the field because the topic of study is considered political; since the sociopolitical environment in India and specifically in Gujarat is sensitive around Dalit issues. In the IRB process, I explained distinctly why I did not obtain institutional permission from the university. The university campus is notorious for right wing politics (discussed in Chapter 5), and the university authority is loyal to its political masters in the state government. As a result, I chose not to disclose my identity as a researcher and evaded the institutional process to conduct the research on campus. Moreover, I was aware that I might face intimidation and violence in extreme case by right wing fringe elements.⁷⁵

After the Institutional Review Board process, I conducted a pilot study to test the interview protocol with two graduate Dalit students in India. Both the interlocutors were situated in Gujarat, so telephone interviews were conducted. Although the interview protocol was followed, the discussion sometimes diverged into other topics. As an interviewer, my goal was to obtain an elaborated explanation pertaining to a question or their specific experience. After the pilot experiment, I made some minor changes in the wording of a few questions; the original questionnaire is in English, but with the interlocutors of the pilot study I followed the interview protocol in Gujarati.

The protocols were developed on the basis of the literature review and theoretical framework of the research. Research on the topic informed me what the significance of socioeconomic backgrounds is in Dalit identity formation and in accessing education. I

⁷⁵ Once during my field work when I entered in the campus I saw saffron color flags (representation of Hindu Nationalism and the right wing groups) on the main street of the campus, and I became nervous and my first reaction was to leave the campus immediately before someone recognized me or asked my identity, but I stayed there to know why the flags are up there. I asked my friend, and came to know that there was an event to celebrate 'Sanskrit Day' on campus, thus saffron flags were installed. Despite this, it was a worrisome matter for me because saffron flags are a sign of fringe elements, who are extremists sometimes violent.

used the CRT and diversity frameworks to examine the interlocutors' experiences, perspectives and social lives on campus. The final interview protocol for students (Appendix A) consisted of questions pertaining to four aspects: (1) history and biography of the students, (2) experiences, (3) introspection about their journey in higher education, and (4) perspectives about the campus climate and institutional support. Similarly, the final interview protocol for faculty consisted of the same four aspects (Appendix B).

3.7 Consent Form

Consent forms for both students (Appendix C) and faculty (Appendix D) included the purpose of study, eligibility of the interlocutor, benefits of the study, protection of personal information of the interlocutor and details of institutional affiliation of the study. Two names (pseudo names) of universities are mentioned in the form, but the study was conducted at the main campus of Gandhi University (pseudo name). Before an interview I obtained a signed consent form from each interlocutor. As a researcher, I also explained their rights to skip a question and quit the interview at any point of time. While obtaining a signature on the consent form, I noticed that most of the interlocutors did not ask questions about the form or the study, because all the interlocutors participated through the snowball process and I believe that they trusted me – being an insider. Moreover, after the interviews, some interlocutors maintained interaction with me to support my study and regularly interacted with me on campus.

3.8 Interview Transcriptions

I audio recorded all interviews for transcription purpose. After each interview I noted down my reflections of the interview process which offered me additional information about the interviews and in some cases, it led to clarifying questions and inspired me to broaden my perspectives on the study. I successfully completed all interviews in one schedule. All the interviews were conducted on the campus; many were conducted in the open space under tree, three were conducted in academic departments (as requested by the interlocutors) and one was conducted in a residential dorm. I used an audio recording device to record thirty interviews and only one interlocutor denied permission to record, so I did not record it and took notes of the interview. Most interviews lasted approximately one hour. Among the recorded interviews, three interviews lasted around thirty minutes and five interviews lasted around seventy-five minutes or more.

Thirty one interviews had produced a bounty of qualitative data which offered comprehensive descriptions of interlocutors' life histories. Because all the interviews were conducted in Gujarati, I hired an external transcription service to transcribe the recordings. A transcriber was my friend who was aware of my research project and fluent in both Gujarati and English. After transcription of each audio recording, I reviewed the transcribed file to ensure the accuracy of the transcription process. There were instances where transcription appeared inconsistent with the overall conversation of an interlocutor; therefore, I used the "peer debriefing"⁷⁶ technique to double check by comparing a

⁷⁶ A technique in qualitative research to review and assess transcripts and emerging themes from those transcripts. Further, a peer critically analyses the transcripts as a detective or auditor, and tries to determine whether or not a researcher has maintained the originality of the data such as intended meanings of

transcribed file with an audio recording, and in some places, I corrected or rephrased the transcribed texts, as revealed by the interlocutor. In a few places in transcribed files, the transcriber had made comments or questions pertaining to specific topics and also suggested probing questions for me to follow up with the interlocutor. Moreover, I maintained a continuous communication with the transcriber for any query and conversation about the transcription process. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the interlocutors' identities, I gave code names to each transcribed file. After transcription of the interviews, I sent the transcribed file to each interlocutor, but I did not receive any feedback on their transcribed files because of limited knowledge of the English language.

3.9 Coding Process

The data analysis process was approached through a narrative analysis framework. A key feature of narrative inquiry is the dynamics of the relationship between the interlocutors and the researcher. I observed that in the interview process, many times the interviewees were emotionally charged, and narrated their stories – what they wanted to share, irrespective of questions I asked (Chase, 2005). My focus was to analyze and uncover how the interlocutors narrated their experiences in the context of Dalit identity. Specifically, the role of early childhood experiences in their neighborhood, influence of parents/guardians on their life, their school experiences, and their higher education

interlocutors, over or under stressed points and personal biases in transcription. It is widely acknowledged that peer debriefing enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of research (Janesick, (2007).

journeys. I used NVivo (a qualitative data analysis computer application) for coding⁷⁷ the interviews, which retained the meanings, views and expressions of the interlocutors in the coding process (Charmaz, 2006). I uploaded all transcribed files (with code names) to the software. I had huge qualitative data sets, and it was an overwhelming task - how to manage the data and where to start the data analysis process? After rereading and rethinking the data over a long period of time, I prepared schematic diagrams to comprehend the data in relation to the research framework, and emphasized the thematic analysis method (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). To develop a data analysis outline, I focused on the research questions and the interview protocol, and created a hierarchical coding framework, which consisted of coding categories and coding themes.

Thematic analysis illuminates the significance of (coding) themes; how frequently a theme appears, or how much data is contained within the theme. It also focuses on capturing data that highlights the connections between the coded texts and research questions (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). To begin the coding process, I first created a preliminary list of code categories and code themes (under the code categories) to develop a comprehensive codebook in NVivo. The first version of the codebook had seven code categories and thirty-seven code themes, and then I had a dry run to test the codebook with a transcribed file. The codebook worked well in the dry run; however, I made some minor changes in terms of wording of a few code themes and shifting some code themes between the categories. After the dry run, I realized that coding was a dynamic process and the codebook would change as I proceed with the coding process; therefore, I prepared a final version of the codebook (Appendix E), which had seven code

⁷⁷ Coding is the most significant task and the complex process and in qualitative data analysis methods it converts raw data into workable data through developing themes, patterns and concepts that indicate a range of relations with each other (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

categories and forty-five code themes (including an additional eight themes) to analyze the transcribed files.

First, I completed coding of students' interviews to maintain a consistency in the data analysis and to comprehend the similarities and the differences of narratives along demographic characteristics, and then I finished coding of the faculty interviews. I maintained a journal of the data analysis process and noted down my interpretations, reflections, questions and analytical points after coding each transcribed interview. During the coding process, I also referred to audio recordings, field observation notes, and my reflection notes after each interview after which I prepared to capture complex responses. Many times, I felt that a text could be coded in more than one code theme; sometimes coded text (narrative) overlapped (Riessman, 2008) into more than one code theme, so I moved in a relevant code category and code theme to streamline the coding procedure.

As earlier mentioned, coding the narratives was a dynamic and interpretive process; therefore, I continuously moved coded text between code categories and often between code themes. For instance, after coding half of the interviews, I added the "Passing" code theme into the codebook; as a result, I shifted some coded narratives into the newly created code theme. Similarly, I added the "Role of Dalit faculty" code theme into the codebook while coding the faculty narratives.

3.10 Analytical Framework

After coding around 10-12 interviews, my dissertation chair suggested I develop an outline for the analytical framework to present the findings. On the basis of the coding

process, initial patterns of findings, theoretical ground and research questions, I prepared a first draft of the analytical framework. While in the process of coding the rest of the transcribed files, I made necessary changes in the codebook, shifting a few coded texts from one code theme to another, and concurrently refining the analytical framework until I completed the coding process. The final analytical framework and a sketch of the finding chapters were presented to the dissertation committee for their feedback, and I incorporated feedback from the committee to finalize the analytical framework (Appendix F), and organized the findings chapters.

I had the coded texts and the analytical framework, but eight hundred and sixty coded texts posed a daunting question to me - how to reduce the data and manage the coded texts in the writing process? However, NVivo software assisted me in organizing and managing the data; I imported the codebook (Appendix G) from NVivo, which offered me a list of code categories and code themes with a number of coded texts by rows. I thoroughly studied the codebook in the light of my theoretical framework, research questions, interview protocol, transcribed files, observations, field notes and analytical framework to comprehend the analyzed data and how to translate it into the meaningful findings chapters. The codebook in a tabular form presented an overview of distribution of coded texts and also generated ideas to organize the texts in the context of the final analytical framework.

The codebook of NVivo had seven main code categories and forty code themes, and the analytical framework had twenty-one topics. I wrote an analytical topic number in front of each code theme. During the numbering process, a few code themes did not match with any of the analytical topics and there were some coded texts which

overlapped with more than one code theme. Therefore, to minimize code themes I merged some code themes and moved some coded texts (from code themes) into other themes. In some code themes, there were few (less than ten) coded texts and the texts were overlapped with more than one code them, so I moved them into other relevant code themes. For example, I deleted the “Influence of Siblings” code theme from the “Family Background” code category because the code theme had only two coded texts which I moved to “Role of Parents-Guardians”.

Through the above process, I reduced the number of code themes, and organized the codebook in response to the analytical framework. Further, to connect the codebook with the analytical framework’s topics, I added a column (e.g., analytical topic number) into the codebook, which clearly indicates a relation between a topic number in the analytical framework and a code theme (Appendix H). The codebook-analytical topic matrix assisted me in connecting the coded texts with an analytical topic. In other words, the original source of a coded text (a quote of an interlocutor) and its precise location in a transcribed file could be followed. To simplify the data analysis process and present it in a summary form, I developed a procedural graph to represent the relationship between the research questions and analytical topics of the findings chapters (Appendix I).

3.11 Summary

Based on my academic journey, I approached the study through constructivist perspectives. developed a narrative research method, and focused on the narratives of thirty-one Dalit graduate students who were pursuing their graduate degrees in one of the largest public universities in a city of Gujarat. To address the main research question -

what are the experiences of Dalit students in their higher education journey - I conducted semi-structured interviews and observed the interlocutors in their natural settings at Gandhi University. The interview protocol focused on interlocutors' family backgrounds, experiences during their school and higher education journeys, influence of caste on their academic experiences and accounting for the intersection of class, gender, location and caste. I analyzed the narratives through the lens of narrative analysis and CRT, which helped me to (re)present the findings based on sociocultural histories, academic experiences, counter narrative stories and perspectives about the campus climate and institutional support.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS ON CONTEXTUALIZING DALIT IDENTITY

This chapter discusses the sociocultural histories of Dalit students in relation to their Dalit identities. Socioeconomic and cultural stories of the interlocutors facilitate critical information for understanding their childhood lives and the process of formation of Dalit identity. In this section, I have foregrounded Dalit students' childhood experiences, and how their lived experiences influenced their world views, cultural socialization and specifically, their academic journeys. In terms of caste cultures, there are significant differences between rural areas and the urban towns and cities of India in the social relations between privileged castes and Dalits. In other words, rural Dalit students have experienced caste differently from urban Dalit students, and therefore responded differently to caste in the university campus. The chapter starts by narrating two stories – a Dalit student who grew up and completed their schooling in a rural area and another from an urban area.

4.1 Be Tolerant, as a Dalit Girl in the Village

Jigisha was born and raised in a small village close to Ahmedabad city. Her parents are both educated; her father has a college degree and works as a security supervisor for a private company. Her mother completed tenth grade, and is a home maker. Despite their middle class status, they lived in the village because they had their ancestral house there. Jigisha was unhappy living in the village, because caste hierarchies are deeply rooted in village life and privileged castes consider Dalits inferior and treat them as polluted. Her house is located in a Dalit neighborhood where only Dalits dwell.

In the village, each neighborhood is recognized by its caste identity, so whenever friends ask Jigisha about her residential address, she feels embarrassed and tries to avoid the issue. In the village, each neighborhood is segregated along caste identities, and the Dalit neighborhood is situated at the periphery of the village, and as a result, Dalits do not have access to civic facilities available to other castes. Jigisha does not like to pass through privileged caste neighborhoods, especially when she is well dressed; privileged caste people do not like it and sometimes direct casteist slurs against her. Before joining primary school, she had only Dalit friends from her neighborhood.

Jigisha completed primary education in the village public school. She was brilliant in studies because her parents would teach her at home. Jigisha's teacher would pointedly make casteist remarks like: "she is a Dalit girl, but despite that, she is good in her studies." In these not so subtle ways, Jigisha was put down because of her caste in front of the class and was humiliated. She felt that whatever her accomplishments, caste followed her like a 'shadow'. Jigisha had two groups of friends; one in the neighborhood where all her close friends were Dalits, and second in the school where her friends were from non-Dalit privileged castes and her friendship was superficial with regulated social interaction. Since childhood, caste culture and social norms are a part of the socialization process; therefore, all kids internalized caste-based social relations. Jigisha had two kinds of discriminatory experiences in the school; in the ordinary conflicts that take place between children, privileged caste kids would express themselves by making casteist remarks/slurs and second, privileged caste kids never shared their food. For example, when Jigisha was in seventh grade, she went to a public event in the school, and Jigisha and her Dalit friends would join in a queue to get food. Jigisha and her friends did not

know that there were separate and unequal arrangements for Dalits at the event, so someone in the queue said, “why are you here? Your line is there.” Because of such discriminatory and demeaning treatment which was publicly humiliating, Jigisha immediately left the event without eating. She returned home and shared the experience with her mother, who told her, “be tolerant, as a Dalit girl in the village.”

4.2 I Grew up in a Dalit Neighborhood Amid Textile Mills

Sunil Parmar lives in the old city of Ahmedabad in a neighborhood located in the industrial area of the city. The area has many small factories, which continuously emit smoke in the air. Many times in the evening, smoke covers the sky and the entire neighborhood look like an open gas chamber. Sunil’s neighborhood is known as a Dalit ghetto where hundreds of Dalit families live in slums known as “*Chali*” (a Gujarati word for clusters of shanty houses). Sunil’s family dwells in a shanty house, in which his younger brother and parents share two tiny rooms and there is hardly any space outside of the house to park a bike. Until recently, they did not have a toilet in the house, so they would go to the public toilet, which was extremely dirty and malodorous. In rainy seasons, sometimes the leaking roof kept them awake at night, due to the water and the noise.

Sunil’s father worked as a laborer in a textile mill but it closed in 2008, and his mother is a homemaker. The old city of Ahmedabad was known as the Manchester of India, because until the 1990s, there were more than seventy textile mills in operation. An overwhelming number of Dalits worked in the textile mills, specifically, Sunil’s neighborhood and adjacent neighborhoods had eight textile mills in a densely populated

area, so the textile belts of Ahmedabad were synonymous with Dalit settlements of the city. As a child, Sunil would participate in celebrations of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's birthday each year, and was exposed to Dalit literature during his childhood. Until his teenage years, Sunil did not have knowledge about his Dalit identity, but gradually he started reading literature about Ambedkar, and he gained some awareness about it. Sunil acknowledged that he never experienced caste-based discrimination during childhood, because he was born and raised in a Dalit neighborhood.

Sunil's father wanted to provide a private school education for his kids, but his low economic status forced him to enroll Sunil in a public school, which is free and also provides mid-day meals for students. Despite the poor quality of education in the public school, Sunil was good in academics and graduated to middle school. There he interacted with privileged caste students and recognized some cultural differences, such as language differences and association with different neighborhoods, which were known as privileged caste vicinities. Sunil also learned the meaning of a last name in the casteist society; his last name is "*Parmar*." He became aware of how his last name was being perceived in the context of his neighborhood, because it is known to be Dalit. Therefore, some of his friends have changed their last names, which is a common strategy to avoid Dalit stigma (discussed in Chapter 2). In middle school, when a teacher would announce Sunil's name for the scholarship application approval in the class, he felt offended because other students would recognize his caste identity. While studying in the middle and high school, Sunil gradually acquired knowledge and experiences pertaining to differences along caste lines, and the meaning of his last name and Dalit identity in the urban social contexts.

Childhood experiences of Jigisha and Sahil indicate that their Dalit identity played a profound role in their realization of their social position in a hierarchical society. These stories also portray that caste culture in urban areas is subtle, complex and implicit in nature; whereas, in rural areas, explicit caste culture is a part of the socialization process, and stigma is inseparable from Dalit identity. As a result, Dalit children in rural areas experience differential treatments in their everyday social life, but in urban areas Dalit children do not experience caste intensely and mostly they live in Dalit neighborhoods where they learn that their ‘Dalit’ identity is a matter of assertion.

To contextualize Dalit identity, the chapter is organized in three sections. I will first discuss the role of neighborhoods in Dalit identity formation to show the implications of rural versus urban cultures that I signal in the above stories and how these shape Dalit identity differently. The second section focuses on the family histories and the role of parents/guardians in shaping the aspirations of the interlocutors and their drive for education. In the final section, I offer some insights into how Dalit college youth develop a critical mindset that reflects a combination of their childhood and family histories but goes beyond it as well.

4.3 The Role of Neighborhoods in Dalit Identity Formation

Identity Process Theory (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010, Jaspal, 2011) indicates that the identity of a person is situated in psychological processes, and it is exhibited by actions, thoughts and feelings. Similarly, members of privileged castes are most likely to essentialize their caste identity, as it is acquired at birth and naturally connects with the past generation of one’s caste category. It allows them to stigmatize Dalits irrespective of

their high social mobility, Dalit children learn about their caste identity through social learning (Jaspal, 2011).⁷⁸ Socialization processes during childhood have been observed as significant factors in social stratification, specifically the role of parents, siblings, schools and friends as influential agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). I asked the interlocutors about their neighborhood and childhood experiences, and how their neighborhoods played a role in their Dalit identity formation process. The interlocutors of the study belong to rural and urban areas, and the sociocultural environment is different in these settings. Dalit students from rural (village) settings described their caste experiences in detail based on extensive experience; whereas, Dalit students from urban (cities) settings have limited caste related experiences. To illustrate the role of neighborhood in identity formation, the section is divided into two sub-sections: first, Dalit identity formation in rural contexts and second, Dalit identity formation in urban contexts.

4.3.1 Dalit Identity Formation in Rural Contexts

Caste is fundamentally a social relation around mode of production (Gupta 1980; Meillassoux 1973). In the production processes, caste essentially performs some essential functions; regulating social forms of access to and controlling productive resources, managing labor and allocating work as per caste norms and regulating distribution of the social products of labor. In the course of history, the caste-based mode of production has gone through changes, but the significant transformation commenced with the dawn of the industrial revolution (Gupta, 1980), and since then social relations around mode of

⁷⁸ “A person who is stigmatized is a person whose social identity, or membership in some social category, calls into question his or her full humanity-the person is devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others” (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998, p.508). Similarly, Dalits are perceived and treated with disrespect by the privileged castes because of their Dalit identity which is devalued, and considered spoiled or flawed.

production has been considerably transformed. However, caste as an institution has maintained its utility and ability to modernize and transformed itself (Dirks, 2001; Still, 2014).

Caste is an omnipresent socio-psychological phenomenon in Indian social life and especially evident in village contexts. Psychologically, members of a caste position themselves as per their social position, in relation to the caste-based social relations. Segregated neighborhoods along caste lines are a characteristic of the feudal social system used by privileged members of communities to maintain a distance from ‘other’ castes, and particularly, from so-called ‘polluted’ Dalit castes. Since there are no distinguishable physical characteristics associated with Dalits, spatial segregation is imposed on them to maintain social and physical distance from the privileged caste groups (Jaspal, 2011). Spatial distance reinforces that social representation of Dalits remains outcaste. In villages where more than one caste dwells, each caste has a specific location with clearly marked or simply known boundaries; thus each neighborhood is referred to by its caste name. Saying where one lives marks which caste group one belongs to and it is impossible to hide or make it invisible. As multiple studies have shown, this situation of segregated living persists in villages all over India, despite seventy years of independence and the prohibition of caste discrimination by the Indian constitution (Shah et al., 2006; Jodhka, 2012; Lum, 2019).

In villages, privileged castes maintain their hegemony and control over village resources through segregation. Caste-based residential segregation patterns in villages are

identical across the state (Gujarat⁷⁹). For an example, in Suresh's (MCom, second year student) narrative, he explained how his village was stratified along caste lines:

[I]n the beginning (outskirts) of my village, there are houses of the Valmiki (Dalit) community... Then moving further ahead there are houses of Dalit community... After moving further ahead by another 100 meters, there is a temple of *Bapa Sitaram*... Moving ahead from this place, there are houses of Darbar (*Kshatriya*), Raval (*Brahmin*), Prajapati (OBC), Bharvad (OBC) and Kodi Patel (*Patidar*) communities respectively.

Almost as an iron clad rule that is meant to geographically represent the caste hierarchy, Dalit neighborhoods are located on the farthestmost periphery of a village, and privileged caste communities reside in the center of the village. This is a part of traditional village organization, designed to ensure that Dalits do not cross through the village center, and Dalits and privileged castes have separate pathways in and out of the village. Within the privileged castes, segregation is also clear, and a privileged caste does not allow another privileged caste to live with them if their caste status is designated as 'lower' in the ranks of the caste system. In other words, caste itself is divisive in nature and discriminatory in social relations. In this narrative, Suresh describes how the Valmiki community resides at the periphery of the village, because the Valmiki community is considered the most polluted caste.⁸⁰ A colloquial name of Valmiki is '*Bhangi*' in Gujarat and in North India, which is an extremely derogatory word commonly used in the society, and they are also called as 'Dalits within Dalits'. In the village setting, the control over resources and

⁷⁹ M. K. Gandhi and the current Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) of India (twice he was the Chief Minister, which is equivalent to the Governor of the state) belong to Gujarat and the same ethnic group - Gujarati; nonetheless, all the successive governments since the formation of Gujarat state (1960) have failed to uphold the Constitution and to abolish untouchability and caste-based discrimination from society. Moreover, Gujarat is one of the leading states with regard to incidents of caste-based violence in the country; in the last 15 years, a 70 percent increase in atrocity against Dalits has been reported, but the conviction rate is below 5 percent (Kellogg, 2019, June 15).

⁸⁰ As the caste system offers clear distinctions between all caste categories of the system; similarly, there are clear hierarchies between the sub castes of Dalit category. For instance, Valmiki is the lowest caste rank in sub-caste of Dalits.

access to essential civic services and places of worship are greater in the center compared to the periphery or outside of the village.⁸¹

The notion of ‘pollution’ or ‘impurity’ structures the demarcation/divide between Dalits and privileged castes. A village is a small social unit where most of the people know each other, and so their caste too; therefore, social relations follow caste norms and caste-specific behaviors. Since childhood, Dalit children are told that some places are not accessible for them, or they should not try to access them in the first place. According to Hindu religious doctrine, religious places are sacred and any kind of impurity (dirty according to Hindu religious beliefs and values) are not allowed in the premises of religious places such as temples and holy sites.⁸² Ashish (MPhil, second year in Education, first-generation student) who is an atheist, revealed that:

The main issue was a temple. Dalits were not permitted inside the temple. Apart from that we never visited others (privileged caste) houses. I have not encountered anything personally... But yes, my friends who would have visited the temple did confront some backlash because of their (Dalit) caste.

Numerous temples in the state forbid entry to Dalits, or they are limited to certain areas within the temple. Moreover, some temples have posted explicit signs such as “Dalits are not allowed”. Any attempt by a Dalit to enter a temple or access a Hindu religious place is perceived as an attack on the sanctity of the religious place. Therefore, the privileged castes feel offended, and in many cases, they either resort to violence or “social

⁸¹ Water connection, roads, streetlights, drainage system, village council office, school, health center and other infrastructural facilities. These services are easily accessible for the privileged caste neighborhood, especially where the Brahmin community resides.

⁸² *Manusmriti* (laws of God Manu) is an ancient Hindu religious scripture, which proposes moral, ethical and legal justifications of the subhuman treatments for Dalits.

ostracism”⁸³ against Dalits. Moreover, to set an example, the privileged castes do not hesitate to resort to violence or kill Dalits who dare to access a place of worship (Sathish, 2016, April 2; Qazi. 2017, August 24; Gettleman & Raj, 2018, November 17; Times of India, 2009, March 8). In most cases, Dalits do not go to temples or religious places where they are not welcomed. It is an internalized oppression and more a type of a self-disciplinary behavior they develop over a long period of time in the socialization process. Further, Dalits know that they are in a subordinate position in a village context, therefore, they avoid confrontation with privileged castes. However, some courageous Dalit individuals or Dalit groups will attempt to access the temple or holy site irrespective of social taboos, and they might face serious consequences for their action.

Untouchability is still prevalent in Gujarat, and to echo this reality in rural areas, in 2010, the Robert F Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights (RFK Center) and Navsarjan Trust (work for Dalit rights in Gujarat) have published a report, “Understanding Untouchability: A Comprehensive Study of Practices and Conditions in 1589 Village” in Gujarat. For four years they examined the current state of untouchability and collected a range of data from 5462 interlocutors. The report identified 98 distinct caste-based discriminatory practices in rural areas; untouchability practices associated with “touch” were the highest scoring in the list. For example, the most widespread practice: 98 percent of non-Dalit households were not willing to serve tea to Dalits, or served a tea in a separate cup (allotted for Dalits which is called *Rampatar*⁸⁴). Similarly,

⁸³ Social ostracism is a community weapon of the privileged castes; once a social boycott is announced, they refuse to sell daily use commodities to Dalits, do not allow Dalits to fetch water from community wells and water reservoir and stop employment of Dalits.

⁸⁴ A vessel for lord Ram; this is an example that epitomizes religious justification to legitimize untouchability in the name of God. The term “*Rampatar*” signifies hypocrisy of the privileged castes; on one side it pretends a holy status of a vessel, but it actually represents humiliation of Dalits.

the study found that around 96 percent of the privileged caste households do not allow Dalits to enter into their houses (Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights & Navsarjan Trust, 2010).

The practice of untouchability is grounded in the “purity” principle of Hindu religion; as a result, entry of Dalits has been prohibited in places of worship or their presence near the temple premises is not tolerated by the privileged castes or a priest. For instance, Suresh shared that “the Darbar community in my village has a strong hold on *Bapa Sitaram* temple; therefore, the Dalit community is forbidden to enter there... and cannot lead any type of procession in the front of the temple.” Interestingly, the local administration is aware of these untouchability practices and that Dalit are not allowed to access many public places; however, they rarely take action to remediate these situations; despite the fact, such discriminatory practices are clearly unconstitutional (earlier discussed in Chapter 1).

The privileged caste individuals dominating public services perpetuate the same caste relations, and are also loyal to their own caste; therefore, they reinforce the caste hierarchies with the support of bureaucratic and state power. For example, in 1993, the government of India enacted the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (prohibition) Act to stop manual scavenging practices in the country. The act is intended to be implemented at all levels, from the Parliament to village councils, but the reality is extremely egregious. In 2019, the Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment revealed that since 1993, 620 manual scavengers have died, but not a single person has been convicted for employing manual scavengers. Further, the minister stated that 53,398 manual scavengers have been identified in the country (Wire, 2019,

July 10). However, these are official data which are considerably lower than the actual number of deaths and the actual population of manual scavengers in the country.

Identity formation processes influence children the most; when children socialize in a casteist culture, they learn about the significance of caste identities when interacting with ‘other’ community members. In rural areas, children learn about caste identities from an early age and family also reinforces caste culture in children. Generally, Dalit children are aware of their caste identity because the consequences of being a Dalit are imposed on them. Similarly, privileged caste children are also familiar with their caste identities, because privileged caste identities are a matter of pride, from which one can consciously and unconsciously extract privileges and power. To share a childhood experience, Dipak (MPhil, first-generation, second year student) said, “since childhood, it is conditioned into privileged caste children’s minds by their families to maintain a certain distance from Dalit or Valmiki children. Consequently, there was always that level of discrimination that I have observed since my childhood.” Dipak’s narrative indicates that he remembered those childhood humiliations and casteist remarks hurled at him by privileged caste schoolmates. On one hand, Dalit children are humiliated due to their caste and are expected to accept it as a part of their identity; while on the other, privileged caste children internalize their caste as a privilege and the source of their salient identity which they are proud of.

4.3.2 Dalit Identity Formation in Urban Contexts

Urban areas seem cosmopolitan and desegregated along castes lines, but if we look at it carefully, the feudal social apartheid of villages has been transformed into very

subtle and insidious social divides in cities. In towns and cities, Dalit identity formation processes are more subtle and concealed due to modern features of urban/city society. From my interviews, it is apparent that urban/city areas have experienced caste differently than those from rural areas. Even urban interlocutors are aware caste culture is rampant and more discriminatory in rural settings than urban/city areas, which is reflected by Sahil (Second year Political Science, first-generation student) who said, “if I was living in the rural areas, then there were higher chances for me to experience caste-based discrimination, but in the cities that aspect is much less prevalent.” Sahil’s reflection indicates that in cities, Dalits experience less caste-based discrimination; however, even in cities Dalits know that their identities have a subordinate social position.

In Ahmedabad (the biggest city of Gujarat) and other major Indian cities, studies have shown that caste-based neighborhoods are a reality and a considerable number of neighborhoods are segregated along caste lines (Jodhka, 2015; Vithayathil & Singh, 2012, Bharathi, Malghan & Rahman, 2018). Segregation is more noticeable in the older parts of Ahmedabad compared to neighborhoods developed in the past twenty years⁸⁵ (Banerjee & Mehta, 2017). Neha who lives in the old city of Ahmedabad, said:

The place where we live most families are Dalit (and other marginalized castes). And in the adjacent society, there are other communities such as Jain (*Vaishya*), Patel (*Patidar*) and Shah (*Vaishya*). In their flats and apartments, they do not allow any family from the Dalit background to lease or even purchase a house.

⁸⁵ Ahmedabad city is divided by the Sabarmati River into two parts; old Ahmedabad is known as eastern part where most industrial sites are located and the Dalit population mainly dwells in this part of the city. And so-called ‘new Ahmedabad’ is the western part, which has modern infrastructures, educational institutions, middle and upper class residential complexes and commercial centers. The population of Ahmedabad is around six million; it is seventh largest city in India.

Neha's neighborhood is located in the old city of Ahmedabad where the layout of caste-based neighborhoods is known to the residents of the vicinity. In cities, segregation along caste lines is not fortified like in the villages; though, in many urban areas, caste-based neighborhoods are an undeniable fact. Dalit students who grew up in the old cities of Gujarat, are aware of caste-based segregation in their vicinity and caste dynamics in relation with privileged caste neighborhoods. I was born and raised in such a type of neighborhood where Gujarati privileged caste neighborhoods are segregated from Dalit and mixed neighborhoods (non-Gujarati privileged castes and Dalits together).⁸⁶ It is a general perception among higher-caste individuals that caste does not exist in urban spaces; however, as a Dalit, one cannot rent or buy a house in a privileged caste neighborhood (Banerjee & Mehta, 2017; Thorat et al., 2015). In cities, growing up as a child in a Dalit neighborhood creates awareness about one's caste identity and the hierarchical relations with privileged castes in the societal contexts.

Caste-based segregation and separate residential neighborhoods in the villages clearly reveal that Indian society is not governed by the Constitution, but ruled by the traditional hierarchies of caste. Dalit students socializing in village culture innately learn about their subordinate status and gradually they internalize the meaning of Dalit identity and social representation of stigma (Jaspal, 2011). Further, lived experiences of untouchability are an integral part of the social life of the interlocutors; as a result, they recognized from a young age what the culture permits and essentially, what not. In

⁸⁶ In the 1960 and 1970s, when Ahmedabad was known as the Manchester of India (a textile hub), a larger number of laborers migrated from different parts of India to Ahmedabad. Similarly, since the first half of the twenty-first a sizable portion of the Dalit community started leaving villages and settled in Ahmedabad city, specifically to find work in the textile industry, and a mixed neighborhood came to exist around textile mills where non-Gujarati OBCs and privileged castes and Gujarati Dalits reside side by side; however, caste culture is not salient in these *Chali* because of regional and caste variations between non-Gujarati privileged castes and Gujarati Dalits.

contrast, untouchability is camouflaged and less frequent in urban areas and cities. The next section discusses how parents or guardians have motivated and supported the interlocutors to pursue higher education.

4.4 The Role of Parents/Guardians to Inspire for Education

To understand early childhood educational experiences and family involvement in education, I asked the interlocutors about the role of their parents/guardians in education. In other words, how their families supported and motivated them to pursue education and excel academically. Most of the interlocutors shared that their parents/guardians emphasized providing better education and also contributed to teaching at home. A few interlocutors from urban settings, who are pursuing highly professional degrees, described that their parents/guardians have played a significant role to build a strong academic foundation. Ashok (MS, first year student, Surgery) described that:

They (parents) have played a very critical role in my education. Although my mother is not very highly educated, she would still make me sit down with her to study... She would want to ensure that she puts an equal effort to ensure that I learn well. And my father would illustrate the broader examples of life to build a better career prospect.

Being a Dalit graduate student in medical sciences is certainly an accomplishment for the parents, and Ashok acknowledged that his parents facilitated the way to upward social mobility. Ashok's father completed college and is working as a government employee, so economically the family is stable and the higher education experience of his father, collectively created a condition to join the respected graduate program. Similarly, Zeena (PhD, second year student in Botany) said, "my family is highly educated, thus there has been an educational environment in the house. My parents always motivated us to do

well in education, and particularly, my mother was a teacher... So she educated us well.” This suggests that when economic status and educational level of a Dalit family is decent, parents are more likely to focus on education of their children and motivate them to study well and pursue higher education. Further, urban or city culture and especially, economic activities also offer motivation for social mobility and better education opportunities.

A number of first-generation Dalit students described their parents’ struggle to obtain education, which has been a great inspiration for them. Further, parents also share their life stories and resilience to encourage their children; as a result, some high achiever Dalit students cherished the role of their parents in their academic achievements. For example, Jayesh (MD, second year student in Social Medicine, first-generation student) explained:

When my father wanted to appear for PTC (teacher’s training), his uncle had to sell one of his buffalo to ensure that my father would be able to join. And thus after a lot of struggle, my father was able to excel. That was the reason wherein my father felt that his children should get a better learning environment and thus we shifted to the city.

Jayesh remembers his father’s educational journey, and he sees his father as a role model to pursue higher education and move upward in the economic ladder. Jayesh’s father is a teacher, so he was aware of two critical factors that would restrict the growth of his children: caste and poor education in their village. Therefore, Jayesh’s father decided to move to the city where caste is not pervasive like in the village settings and they would have more educational options to excel in academics.

For some Dalit families, their caste identity is the biggest obstacle to accessing education in a village culture. As earlier discussed, the Valmiki community is the most stigmatized group in a village. In this kind of a sociocultural environment, education for

Valmiki children is a humiliating process and it does not allow them to live with human dignity. The only Valmiki interlocutor of the study shared the similar sociocultural reality in his village, and his family moved out of their village to Ahmedabad. Pravin (PhD, second year students in Zoology, first-generation) who is Valmiki, revealed that:

They (parents) have played a major role in it. The very reason my father decided to shift from XXX to Ahmedabad was to ensure that we get good education. There is not much of importance given to education in XXX, and hence to be in an encouraging and supportive environment we shifted here (Ahmedabad).

Pravin's father realized that to escape the caste stigma and to provide better education to his children, they had to move to Ahmedabad city.⁸⁷ The decision is reflected in Pravin's educational success, which is exemplary in their community. For educated or economically stable families from rural areas easily adapt to city culture which helps them to look modern. It is a well-known fact that Valmiki students face the worst forms of discrimination in schools; specifically, in some village schools, Valmiki students have to clean classrooms and toilets. A stigma in social life and egregious everyday humiliating experiences by peers and teachers in public schools, this causes a high dropout rate for Valmiki students before they reach middle school (Bajoria, 2014, April 22).

Despite the socioeconomic subordinate position of Dalits in villages/rural areas, Dalit parents inspire their children to pursue education, and break the cycle of poverty and caste nexus. In a village economy, Dalits are dependent on privileged castes for subsistence; therefore, a considerable number of Dalits are trapped in the feudal social structure. Dalit parents do not want their children to stay in the nexus; consequently, they encourage them to study well and also give them examples of their distress. Vinod

⁸⁷ Long ago, Dr. Ambedkar urged Dalits to flee villages and move to the cities to escape the chains of caste culture. Henceforth, a considerable number of Dalits left villages and settled in urban areas or cities.

(MSW, second year, first-generation student) reiterated some advice shared by elders that:

In our neighborhood most of the families at that time were farm laborers and did not have any awareness. They used to send their kids to school from the money they earn. They used to tell us, “we do not want you to suffer from the condition, and you cannot do the labor intensive work. And thus it is important to focus on studies more.”

As Vinod mentioned in his neighborhood, most Dalit families are agricultural laborers.

Around 71 percent of Dalits are agricultural laborers; they do not have their own land to cultivate, and they work as daily wage laborers in farms of big farmers or landlords (Thorat & Mahdeswaran, 2018; Yengde, 2019, July 1). In other words, Dalits are dependent on privileged castes for their livelihood; as a result, caste-based relations are reinforced through a rural economy centered around agricultural activities and allied small industries. In spite of the oppressive social conditions, Dalit parents are aware that education is indispensable to break the cycle of poverty and caste stigma. The influence of Dr. Ambedkar is also inspiring Dalit parents to encourage their children to pursue higher education (discussed in the next section). I think making an example of one’s own suffering is a powerful motivation for Dalit children to acquire higher education, and break the shackles of dependency.

In the study, most rural first-generation interlocutors revealed similar narratives that regardless of the poverty and a lack of cultural capital in the families, Dalit parents encouraged their children to pursue higher education. For a first-generation Dalit student, pursuing a higher education and attaining a prestigious degree is an inspirational example for their neighborhood and the community. An identical story is narrated by Dipak (MPhil, second year in Languages, first-generation) that he is about to finish his MPhil

degree and that his elder brother is a doctor, because “my parents would always encourage us to pursue our studies. For them, education is the most important thing. Even today my family is a role model to everyone in the neighborhood of our village.”

My research also revealed that elder siblings play a significant role in the academic journey of younger siblings. Generally, when an elder sibling is educated, he/she make sure that younger siblings do well in education. In the study, some interlocutors echoed that their elder siblings have been influential in their education journeys, even more than their parents who are not educated and do not have experience with academic issues. Ronak (Dalit faculty in History, first-generation) said, “My brother got a job, but he did not have a very high salary... Later on, just to ensure that my education does not suffer, he took me along with him instead of his wife.” Similarly, Hemangi (MA, second year student, History) acknowledged that her sister supported her to pursue higher education, and she explained:

Since the very beginning she (elder sister) would be recommending me to pursue my studies, as she did not get that opportunity to continue her education. And that was the reason, she would push me to ensure that I study well, as it will be eventually beneficial to me in the future.

Hemangi explained that her elder sister could not continue her study because their parents were struggling financially and as a young couple they did not have parenting experience to focus on education of a first child. Hemangi’s sister is married now and understands the importance of higher education for self-reliance and gender equality, thus she encourages Hemangi to focus on studies.

Interviews show that Dalit parents focused on the education of their children and inspired them to pursue higher education to have a better life in the future and also recognized education as a tool for their liberation. The academic success of some

interlocutors shows that economic and cultural capital of the family are the most critical factors for providing resources and essential guidance for successful higher educational outcomes. In some cases, elder siblings acted as mentors and played a significant role to inspire the interlocutors to pursue higher education. The next section discusses how the interlocutors developed critical consciousness regarding caste and what types of ideologies influenced their world views.

4.5 Exposure to Critical Ideas

When the interlocutors were asked about exposure to critical thinking or a source of anti-caste perspectives, an overwhelming number of Dalit students stated that the ideology of Dr. Ambedkar has been influential in their striving for higher education and engaging in anti-caste politics. As earlier discussed (in Chapters 1 and 3), Dr. Ambedkar has been a great inspiration and a role model for Dalits and other marginalized groups in India. Dr. Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891, so each year April 14th is a festival for Dalits and oppressed social groups. It is an undeniable fact that in the twenty-first century, Dr. Ambedkar has become the most celebrated political icon in the country (Kumar, 2016b), specifically, for the oppressed castes. He has become a beacon of resistance against oppression and for social justice.

In rural and urban areas, Dalits organize various types of events and activities on April 14th to pay homage to Dr. Ambedkar, and also distribute literature on anti-caste scholarship, social justice, and excerpts from his books. In the last two decades, the relevance of Dr. Ambedkar has been mounting and increasingly influencing the social and political domains of the country. Ashok (MS, first year student, Surgery department)

said, “since my childhood, my father would take me to an event in the neighborhood on every April 14th.” These types of exposure and involvement since childhood help Dalits develop critical thinking and aspirations for attaining higher education. Prabhat (PhD, fourth year in History, first-generation) described how his childhood experiences are associated with the celebration of April 14th, and said:

[M]any times it so used to happen that on the day of 14th April, my father along with his other friends, including me would participate in the procession... There are idols of Ambedkar... In this entire celebration we realize somewhere that this person (Ambedkar) was our leader. That is it. That was the only thing that I would realize. He is one of our leaders who struggled for the betterment of us.

On April 14th, Dalits and social activists organize a procession with Dr. Ambedkar’s picture, and people join the procession with joy and shout slogans to praise Dr.

Ambedkar. Generally, the procession ends with a public meeting or garlanding a statue or bust of Dr. Ambedkar in a public place. Prabhat said that he used to join his father in the procession; this indicates that since childhood, his father has exposed him to the ideas of Dr. Ambedkar and anti-caste perspectives. The legacy of Dr. Ambedkar has been a great inspiration for generations of Dalits. Jigar (Dalit faculty in Biotechnology) reiterated the fact that “my father would keep the pictures of Ambedkar along with him in the house. So he was greatly inspired by him and was able to get that level of higher education during that time.”

Those who have read the literature of Dr. Ambedkar and believe in his ideology, educate others through Ambedkar’s books and life stories. Generally, Dalit children learn about him through parents, family members and in the neighborhood. A few interlocutors said that their distant relatives educated them about Dr. Ambedkar and provided literature on him. Neha said, “My cousin uncle follows Ambedkar quite a lot. He would always ask

me to read more books on Ambedkar. There are many other videos and books on him.” For millions of Dalits, Dr. Ambedkar is not just a Dalit emancipator and social reformer who transformed their lives; he attained the status of an idol for his followers. Many non-believer or atheist Dalits do consider Dr. Ambedkar a ‘prophetic’ figure; Ravi (MCom, second year student) who is an atheist, said:

My father is a big disciple of Ambedkar and he believes more in Buddha... There is no real gain by doing the religious practices. Right from the day since I was a child and until today at 21 years of age, my father has never tried to educate me about God. Most of the things that he talked about was Ambedkar. He considers him as a God.

In the above quote, Ravi indicates that his father did not teach about religion or God; further, he was exposed to Dr. Ambedkar’s ideology and revolutionary ideas, such as rational thinking and critique of the Hindu religious doctrines that justify social exclusion of Dalits.⁸⁸ Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism to denounce Hinduism, and proclaimed that “I was born as Hindu, but will not die as Hindu”.

In the current sociopolitical context of Indian society, the influence of Dr. Ambedkar’s ideology and social transformation is still relevant six decades after his death. Unfortunately, over the past few years, his political ideas and ideology have been appropriated and misappropriated by both left and right wing politics. It shows that his social and political significance will likely increase in the future, and it might turn into people worshipping him as a deity.⁸⁹ Numerous quotes of Dr. Ambedkar became

⁸⁸ In 1927, Dr. Ambedkar with his supporters burnt a copy of *Manusmriti* (a Hindu religious book) as a symbol to condemn Brahmanical religious ideology and challenge the caste system. Similarly, in 1930, he led a Kalaram temple movement, to have a right to enter religious places/temples; it was aimed to gain equal rights for Dalits rather than just entry into the temple. Still Dalits draw inspiration from the events, and organize such events to assert their civil rights and anti-caste politics.

⁸⁹ One of the most celebrated speeches in India is the final speech delivered by Dr. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly while submitting the Constitution to the Parliament of India on November 25, 1949;

commandments for Dalits. For an example, Pratik reiterated one of the famous quotes, “My father taught us Ambedkar’s famous message – “Educate, Organize and Agitate.” My father believed that once we get educated, then we will eventually stay united.” The quote is short, but it contains a profound message for all the oppressed people. Some interlocutors also reiterate the quote in different forms and expressed their emotional attachment with the message.

The life journey of Dr. Ambedkar itself is a great example to protest against injustice and caste-based discrimination. Some interlocutors mentioned that their parents or guardians have been a role model to gain inspiration from, and moreover, they carry forward their teachings of anti-caste politics and social change in their lives. Hemendra (Dalit faculty in the Sociology department, first-generation) narrated how his father exhibited an exemplary behavior; he said:

If I speak about my father - he was a revolutionary. And he was equally a hardcore atheist. There was one incident that in our village, Dalits were not allowed to fetch water from one of the wells. My father started a movement for the same; there should not be any dominant caste who would have the exclusive rights to fetch water from the well... My father took my older sister along with him... They both went to the village well and fetched water. That created a huge chaos in the village.

Hemendra is highly influenced by his father; he called him a radical in the context of village culture. In the interview, Hemendra mentioned that his father was a dedicated Ambedkarite; therefore, he dared to challenge the caste norms in the village, and fetched water from a so-called privileged caste well. Still in many villages, Dalits have separate wells and the privileged castes have wells for their exclusive use. In 1927, Dr. Ambedkar

in which he said, “in politics, Bhakti (devotion) or hero worshiping is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship.”

led Mahad Satyagraha⁹⁰ to access a public water tank for Dalits. Hemendra confirmed that his father was inspired by Mahad Satyagraha and initiated a radical step; further, he engaged his daughter to motivate Dalit women of the village to access the well. It shows that as a child, Hemendra witnessed actions of his father to protest against caste culture and untouchability which shaped him as a critical thinker and anti-caste scholar.

4.6 Summary

It is an irony of Indian society that on one hand, India has sent a spacecraft to Mars, and on the other hand, its villages openly practice feudal culture to segregate citizens along caste lines, and enforce an ironclad village rule that Dalits cannot not dwell in or own a house in privileged caste neighborhoods irrespective of their class status and intellectual achievements. Caste is an institution deeply entrenched into social consciousness; therefore, it is apparent in cosmopolitan cities, albeit transformed into more sophisticated and insidious forms. The impact of untouchability and Dalit identity is repressive in rural areas more than cities, and especially, for Dalit children who socialize in orthodox caste culture. Dalit families in villages and cities have experienced the historical legacy of caste oppression; however, since the second half of the twentieth century, the influence of Dr. Ambedkar has steadily created an awareness pertaining to education and anti-caste ideology that has inspired Dalit parents to realize that education is an instrument for social mobility and overcoming caste stigma. I found that the interlocutors' perspectives emphasize that the legacy and ideology of Dr. Ambedkar have

⁹⁰ Mahad Satyagraha holds a position of great significance in the history of Dalit movements because it was the first Dalit uprising against the Brahmanical order and a proclamation of civil rights for Dalits. The Satyagraha was the first movement organized under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar, which proved his brilliance as a Dalit leader and social reformer. For a detailed historical account of Mahad Satyagraha, see Teltumbde, A. (2016). *Mahad: The Making of First Dalit Revolt*. Delhi: Aakar books.

radicalized Dalit students and scholars to carry forward his unfinished project – the annihilation of caste.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS ON ACADEMIC JOURNEY

In this chapter, I discuss the academic journeys of Dalit students, which consists of their school and higher education experiences. The previous chapter discussed how caste identity influences Dalit students' everyday sociopsychological experiences in their neighborhoods and schools. Studies have reported that caste-based discrimination is pervasive across the education system in India; however, they do not offer an in-depth explanation about their academic journeys and the role of caste in educational outcomes. This chapter analyzes Dalit students' narratives about their school and higher education experiences, which are organized into three parts: (1) aspirations to pursue education, (2) struggle and challenges in academics and (3) caste experiences in the academic journey.

5.1 Aspirations to Pursue Education

Aspirations to pursue education are discussed in chronological order to explore various aspects that influenced Dalit students' ambitions and motivations during the evolution of their academic journeys. Therefore, educational aspirations of Dalit students are discussed in two topics: aspirations during schooling and aspirations before pursuing higher education.

5.1.1 Aspirations During Schooling

Socioeconomic conditions and cultural capital are two critical factors to provide a quality education for a child, and they also reflect in future aspirations as a student. In the interviews, after discussing the sociocultural histories of the interlocutors, I asked them

about their childhood aspirations to pursue education. The question was about their childhood memories, therefore, most of the interlocutors could not describe lucidly their aspirations during schooling. However, a few interlocutors elucidated their aspirations while they were in school. Hemant (Master in Journalism, second year student) said, “I was very clear since my grade tenth that I wanted to become an engineer.” Hemant is one of the few interlocutors who belonged to an urban middle class and second generation college attendee family; therefore, he had benefited from his middle class status and cultural capital to aspire for a clear career path.

However, when a Dalit child dreams about an exceptional career choice, (as Jayesh said, “I actually wanted to study physics, since I wished to go to NASA. But there was not adequate guidance available to me, neither did my father knew much about it.”), they are frequently in for a rude awakening. Jayesh as a child was certainly an ambitious student who aspired for NASA; however, due to a lack of cultural capital in the family, he could not pursue his dream and instead pursued a MBBS degree. Jayesh’s father is a school teacher so there was a basic level of cultural capital to understand the significance of education in life. However, to join a world renowned organization such as NASA requires an advanced level of cultural capital as well as an extensive social network for guidance and support for the student. Moreover, Dalits lack accumulated cultural capital as a community because historically Dalits have lagged far behind the privileged castes. For example, since the commencement of Western education, privileged castes and specifically, Brahmins have acquired Western science and English language without compromising their culture and religious beliefs, and their historical privileges are evident in the scientific disciplines in India (Thomas, 2020).

The data shows that most of the interlocutors wanted to join a government job or public service employment, and their parents also directed them to attain a higher level of education that would facilitate a government job. As discussed above, a basic level of cultural capital in a Dalit family and a lack of accumulated cultural capital within the community both conspire to reduce career opportunities in the private sector. Therefore, government employment is an obvious option for Dalit youth. Jaya (MSW, second year student) echoed the same desire: “I was more focused for BRS, as both my brother and sister had pursued for it and have been successfully able to get the government job. Thus, my parents also recommended for the same thing.” In Jaya’s family, her older siblings paved the career path for her to follow and her parents’ guidance to pursue higher education in the development sector shaped her aspiration to join public service in the future. Dalit students who have government employees in their extended families or living in their community or neighborhoods, are able to look to them as role models and see government careers as a realistic and attainable goal to strive for a government job. For most Dalit youth, such representations or role models are not available in their community and Dalit achievers are scarcely evident in the larger society. Moreover, they hear plentiful stories of caste discrimination in government and even more so, in private sector employment. Neha narrated one such story, saying:

“My uncle said that in the college, while we are having friends this (caste) issues might not be very visible. But once we start to work in the corporate, it would become more visible... In his office, he is the only one from SC caste. He works at XXXX center here in XXXX. When all of them sit together for their lunch break, others comment quite much about SC caste.”

In cities, explicit casteism is not acceptable, so most privileged caste individuals practice casteism without being casteist. Neha’s uncle experiences implicit and subtle casteism,

which conveys micro-aggressions at the workplace. I would like to point out that a conscious microaggressor might cause less harm than an unconscious microaggressor because a bigger harm to Dalits and Tribals is conveyed by well-meaning people (Rathod, 2017). In other words, educated privileged caste people often convey unconscious caste-based micro-aggressions, which are anti-Dalit and anti-Tribal opinions. It is most likely that those who make casteist comments in the presence of her uncle perceive him as privileged caste. Moreover, Neha's uncle also passes as a privileged caste, so his colleagues make casteist comments, and he cannot resist with his colleague or lodge a complaint about it, because the private sector is dominated by privileged castes. Passing is the most common response and strategy of Dalits to avoid any confrontation and hide one's identity; I can recall many passing experiences in different contexts, even in the U.S.

Caste-based discrimination in employment, and more so in the private sector, has been documented by a number of studies (Thorat & Mahdewaran, 2018; Thorat & Newman, 2010; Prakash, 2015). Dalits employed in the government sector feel more secure about their jobs given the legal protections available to employee in the public sector and also organizations such as BAMCEF⁹¹ provide political and moral support against any kind of discrimination. Overall, the cultural encounters, lived experiences of family members and stories of caste-based discrimination and atrocities reported by the

⁹¹ In 1978, All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees' Federation (BAMCEF) is formed by Kanshi Ram, who was a social reformer and political wizard. He believed that emancipation of Dalits and marginalized only can be achieved through electoral politics, to consolidate Dalit and marginalized groups' vote, he formed the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP, can be translate as majority groups' party) in 1984. In the 1990s and 2000s, BSP became a major political force and four times formed government in the biggest state – Uttar Pradesh.

media and talked about in the community shape the aspirations of Dalit students and orient them in favor of public sector employment.

Along with stable economic status and cultural capital, active involvement of parents in education is also essential for a child to aspire for an ambitious goal during school life. Hemendra (Dalit faculty member in the Sociology, first generation) revealed his childhood desire, “I had a goal to become an IAS officer (the Collector). My uncle studied in Maharaja Sayajirao (popularly known as M. S.) university in Baroda, so he had given me encouragement for further studies. I aspired to become a Collector while I was still in school.” In Chapter 1, I had shown that for Hemendra his father was a revolutionary and a role model; in addition, his uncle was also a role model and encouraged him to pursue higher education. Having multiple role models had a cumulative effect and explains why Hemendra was able to aspire for a coveted and very competitive position in the state sector; namely the IAS (Indian Administrative Services).

Among all the interlocutors I interviewed, very few belonged to a rural, economically weaker and educationally marginalized family. Manan (Master in Journalism, second year, first generation student) was an exceptional interlocutor, who did not have any role model or inspiration during his childhood. However, as a rule, role models play a crucial role to derive inspiration, and aspire for higher education. Despite the adverse social conditions, Manan thought of attaining the highest academic degree, when he revealed:

When I was introduced to psychology as a subject... I really got interested into it. There were some information pertaining to career building also available in it about clinical psychology and how to pursue it further. That captured my mind and I decided to pursue clinical psychology... In grade 11th itself, and from that point of time I would prefix my name with Doctor (Dr.). Even today I have that book with me in which I had mentioned it then.

Manan was born and raised in poverty and he is the first student in his neighborhood to attend college. He is a self-motivated person and learned from life experiences; further, Manan is rebellious in nature, so he confronts the barriers head-on and also challenges others to prove his point (discussed later in this chapter). As Manan vowed in 11th grade, he earned a doctoral degree in psychology from the university. Currently, he is doing journalism on the campus to learn about mass media, and wants to join electoral politics to push for social change. Apart from the interview, my interactions with Manan were interesting and we discussed various topics which indicate that Manan is an intelligent, articulate and well-read person. As a researcher and an insider, I was impressed by Manan's achievements and intellectual ability, and I saw my life journey in Manan's stories and struggles. The only significant difference between my childhood and Manan's was family support and role models; my worldviews have been greatly influenced by Dr. Ambedkar, Karl Marx, Kabir⁹² and Buddha; in some way I am more privileged than Manan because I was exposed to such a diverse and radical ideas and literature at an early age.

5.1.2 Aspirations Before Pursuing Higher Education

To examine aspirations of Dalit students, I asked interlocutors about their ambitions before joining higher education. Higher education is an important instrument for any marginalized group to participate in the development process and provides essential training for moving out of poverty and attaining upward social mobility. Not

⁹² Kabir is considered as one of the greatest mystic poets and saints of Indian subcontinent who critiqued religious dogmas and the caste system in the fifteen century. Kabir's poetry and couplets are still famous among scholars and marginalized groups; Dr. Ambedkar's father was Kabir-panthis (believes in Kabir's legacy) which left a great influence upon young Bhimrao (Ambedkar).

surprisingly, an overwhelming number of interlocutors reiterated that social mobility through a good career was a major reason for pursuing a higher education degree. Sahil (Master in Political Science, second year, first generation student) clearly explained: “I would ensure that I will complete my academics first, and only then go for work. My first priority was always an education, as it is the only key to my economic stability in the future.” Sahil’s sole focus on social mobility is obvious, because his father works as a textile laborer and they dwell in a city slum. Thus, Sahil perceives higher education as a vehicle to break the cycle of poverty. Another interlocutor, with identical background, explained his aspirations differently. Pravin (PhD, second year student in Zoology, first generation) described that:

Teaching as a profession is quite inspiring... And there is equally quite a lot of benefits being in the teaching field... I did a survey that if I want to become a teacher, then what are the minimum qualification requirement? I came to know that pursuing MSc and PhD is a must and bare minimum requirement. Thus accordingly I planned that I would complete my MSc and then pursue PhD.

Pravin belongs to an economically weaker and culturally relegated community (Valmiki); therefore, social mobility is not just an aspiration, but is essential for providing for his family and ensuring a more comfortable life for the future. Pravin explained that as a professor, he would be in a position to support students like himself.⁹³ It is an undeniable fact that Pravin is a great role model for the most oppressed communities such as Valmiki; moreover, faculty like him are the most desirable for any higher education institution in India where the representation of Valmiki faculty is extremely dismal.

⁹³ Pravin is pursuing a doctoral program for teaching, and did not indicate any research intention, I believe it is a reflection of state universities’ academic environment which do not focus on research activities. Therefore, students also perceive the role of professor as limited to teaching. The higher education system in India is broadly divided into two parts: First, elite institutions, which are known for research and high quality of education. The second, state universities, are considered mediocre and designed for teaching the masses, not for research (Kanhare, Arjunwadkar & Vichare, 2009).

In the larger socioeconomic and cultural context, Dalit parents influence their children to pursue a certain type of career path for social mobility. Jyoti (PhD, second year students in Biotechnology, first generation) said, “my grandfather... had a government job, but after him, neither my father nor my uncle could get a government job. So he was expecting that I should study for a government job.” Jyoti is very close to his grandfather and also influenced by him; therefore, she follows his dream to obtain a public sector job. She also said that as a Dalit female pursuing a doctoral degree in sciences, she had a greater prospect for obtaining a faculty position in a public higher education institution. Similarly, Ashok (MS, first year student in Surgery) revealed that “since I passed with good grades (in grade 12), I was very clear to pursue my MBBS. My father insisted to me to join for MBBS, thus I came to Ahmedabad.” Any medical and professional science degree is highly respected across the class and caste groups in the society; in fact, it is coveted by the privileged castes and is a guarantee of high economic rewards and social mobility.

When parents are well educated, they also influence the decision of children to select a discipline and degree program. In other words, parents directly or indirectly impose their aspirations on students. Dipali (MSc in Chemistry, second year student) describes her father’s influence in her choice of a degree program:

I was sure that I did not want to be a Doctor. On the request of my father, I did try to apply in the field of medicine like for pharmacy. As he thought that if there is no other job, then at any point of time we can open a medicine shop as a qualified pharmacist.

Dipali said that she did not want to join a medical science, because her father is a veterinarian and for some reason she does not like that profession. Then, Dipali’s father

tried to enroll her in a pharmacy degree, but she could not secure a seat, and instead joined a chemistry discipline in an undergraduate program.

Within Dalits, a tiny fraction of the population has been successful in moving to the middle class. This fraction knows the significance of higher education and specifically, which professional and market oriented degree programs are available in various disciplines. Kiran (MCom, second year) who belongs to an urban middle class family, reiterated that “my father recommended that first I should complete my BCom in English medium, and based upon that I would know if I will be able to study Chartered Accountancy in the future.” Kiran and Dipali both are female, yet their parents encourage them to pursue professional higher education; it indicates that educated middle class Dalit families promote higher education among girls like the privileged caste families do. The middle class and second-generation urban Dalit students are significantly different than economically precarious and first-generation Dalit students. Therefore, the influence of financial and cultural capital is apparent in Kiran and Dipali’s open ended planning and confidence in pursuing an ambitious career path.

A range of factors influences students’ aspirations about their future career choices. In the case of Dalit students, socioeconomic status, cultural capital, exposure to critical ideas, caste experiences, and others all collectively or in combination of a few, impacts their aspirations. Neha, who was born and raised in Ahmedabad and the only interlocutor who studied in an English medium school, stated that “I wanted to go abroad for an experience, and thus I thought that if I am working in an MNC (Multinational National Corporation) there is a lot of scope for personal growth... There is no growth in a government job.” Earlier in this section, Neha described through her uncle’s personal

experience that caste exists in private jobs. But she is confident she can be successful in an MNC (private sector) and it is also a pathway to visit abroad, which she sees as important for her personal growth. These reasons signify that students like Neha that are from the middle class backgrounds have aspirations akin to privileged caste peers, which is more than a social mobility goal for them and their family. This contrasts with Prabhat (PhD, fourth year in History, first generation) who was raised in a village/rural setting, attended Gujarati medium schools, has more modest aspirations is more modest and lacks the confidence that Neha and other middle class Dalits appear to have in abundance:

I had a thought that I need to do my B.Ed. after my B.A. Once I have a B.Ed. degree, I can get a good teaching job. Since my father was also a teacher, I liked that profession. But when I got to learn from professors at the university, I realized that there was a huge difference in terms of teaching and knowledge of the professors at the college than school level.

Prabhat was inspired by his father, and he wanted to become a school teacher. When he studied in college in Ahmedabad, he realized the difference between a school teacher and a college professor. Therefore, Prabhat decided to get an MA and currently, he is writing his dissertation for a doctoral program with a focus on “the role of Tribals of north Gujarat in the national freedom struggle”. His research interests regarding excluded communities and caste issues indicate that his caste experiences in the village and exposure to critical ideas (discussed in Chapter 4) motivated him to study the topic.

5.2 Struggles and Challenges in the Academic Journeys

Struggles and challenges of Dalit students are organized into two chapters; academic issues are discussed in this section and two more aspects - financial and sociocultural issues are discussed in Chapter 7. This section is divided into two sub-

sections: first, academic struggles and challenges in higher education and second, the role of academic advisors.

5.2.1 Academic Struggles and Challenges in Higher Education

In response to my question about academic issues in their higher education journeys, an overwhelming number of interlocutors reiterated that lack of proficiency in the English language is their biggest obstacle to academic progress. Even academically outstanding students, such as Jayesh struggled, as he explained:

In the first month, I did not understand anything as the medium of instructions here is English, and I had done my studies so far in the Gujarati medium (schools). Not just one week or month, but it continued for the first six months.

Despite the fact that Jayesh had been a brilliant student, he struggled in the beginning of his academic work because of a lack of proficiency in English. Studies show that Dalit students lack adequate fluency in English to deal with academic work, which is one of the chief reasons for their lower academic performance at the post-secondary level and being perceived then as not competent students (Lum, 2019). Dharmendra (Dalit faculty in Surgery) reiterated that “one of the main concerns is the English language in the first year. These students (Dalits) do not even come and seek any kind of support for it” (This is discussed in Findings on Campus Climate and Institutional Support chapter).

The lack of English language proficiency among Dalit students is a pervasive problem in higher education institutions across the country. Among my interlocutors, only one from a central university who completed his doctoral degree is currently pursuing a master’s program in languages to improve his English language competencies. Raj (MA, first year in Languages, first generation student), said:

Our very first lecture was by xxx from xxx university. That entire lecture was in English. I did not understand the entire lecture, then I had a thought that I have completed my master's degree, and yet I do not know basic English.

After completing a doctoral degree in social sciences from a central university, Raj feels that he still lacks English language skills. This begs a question: what is the situation regarding English language proficiency among students in a state university? I interviewed Dalit students across disciplines in the university, and almost all interlocutors directly or indirectly echoed that English language competency is the single most serious constraint in their academic work. Pravin (PhD, second year in Zoology, first generation student) described his struggle regarding English, and said:

I did enjoy Zoology as a subject, but there was another major concern with the language (English). As Zoology can only be studied and pursued in English language, thus there is a language change that I had to transit through. In the semester exams, I was able to secure second class. I personally felt very bad looking through my academic performance. Then I met some of the other classmates who supported me to help me learn English.

Pravin, like many other interlocutors, struggled in the beginning to deal with academics due to the language transition from Gujarati to English. Therefore, the first semester and the whole year is quite challenging for them to manage academic work and the mental stress that they experience because of it. As Pravin mentioned, he was able to handle English language challenges with the help of friends; it indicates that his peers are good in English and probably belong to affluent socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

Pursuing higher education in sciences positively correlates with the socioeconomic status and cultural capital of the family; therefore, an astonishing number of privileged caste students enroll in sciences compared to Dalit students (Thomas, 2020). Pravin is fortunate in that he received support from peers who helped him to survive in the program, but many Dalit students are not fortunate enough to receive such support

from their peers. Raj (MA in Languages, first year, first generation student) narrates how his Dalit friends and others from marginalized communities could not continue their programs and dropped out:

Yes, in the beginning I did have a thought of dropping and discontinuing... There was another SC girl student by the name of Meena. She was in MPhil with me. Since we had a paper to present in English and other writings to be drafted in English, Meena was unable to cope up with English and she also dropped. There was Anil who was OBC and Arvind Bhai from ST community, both of them also dropped. So basically there were quite a few friends who were there until MPhil, but couldn't continue with their PhD.

Raj's testimony and the interlocutors' experiences show that a considerable number of Dalit and other marginalized students experience English language difficulty in higher education institutions, and sadly drop their studies. It indicates that neither in state universities nor in central universities, do marginalized students receive support regarding remedial classes/courses for English and academic subjects, or adequate mental health support. Similarly, studies reported that due to a lack of institutional support (discussed in Chapter 6) and availability of mental health services, a number of students cannot perform up to their potential, and some drop out of their programs (Pal & Arjun, 2013; Pal, 2015). Moreover, in the case of a few Dalit students, the academic situation along with other issues (such as economic struggle, cultural differences and caste stigma) create a devastating scenario, which leads some to mental breakdown, and even suicide (Pal & Arjun, 2013).

5.2.2 The Role of Academic Advisors

Another important academic aspect in higher education is the role of academic advisors examined through the interlocutors' experiences. All of the interlocutors are

graduate students, so most of the Dalit students have experienced social relations with their academic advisors. Specifically, Dalit graduate students are conscious of their caste identities; their last names (generally) represent a caste and previous caste experiences in educational settings makes them mindful and apprehensive. Therefore, they are concerned about the perceptions of their academic advisors, and fear caste-based discrimination. Manan explained that:

Even I had a terrible experience with my guide (advisor). The guide that I got was *Savarna* (privileged caste). Eventually I got the admission (in PhD), but the guide would never be supportive. He would keep on demanding one thing or the other, and will never give any form of guidance. I had expectation that he might actually guide someday... My guide never tried to look deeper into the subject, and instead he would misdirect me.

Manan's PhD advisor belonged to a privileged caste, and from the beginning of his doctoral program Manan was conscious about this. Manan did not have explicit or direct experiences of discrimination, but his advisor did not guide him appropriately. Further, the advisor indirectly harassed him, which confirmed his fear that he had been facing caste-based discrimination. Studies have reported that caste-based discrimination against Dalit students by privileged caste academic advisors is rampant across all higher education institutions in the country (Patwardhan & Palsikar, 1992; Girija, 2011; Anveshi Law Committee Report, 2002; Singh 2013). A similar experience was shared by Raj (MA in Languages, first year, first generation student):

I got my new guide (advisor) as xxx who was a *Brahmin*. Once or twice in every two months I would meet my guide and discuss the progress reports and presentation. I was already sure that if I change my guide, then new guide might not be as supportive as the current one. I was aware that since I am from SC background there would be some discrimination that would happen with me.

In the interview, Raj said that his first academic advisor was a Dalit and he was supportive and patient with Raj. In the second year, due to some professional reason, the

advisor was shifted to another department in the university, and Raj was assigned a new advisor who was *Brahmin*. He was not happy with his new advisor and also was afraid about caste biases. I argue that many Dalit students have the same fear of privileged caste advisors in their graduate programs; my experience was similar to Raj, I had fear of caste biases in my graduate program, therefore, I chose a so-called safe department during the enrollment process, where the chances of differential treatment based on caste were fewer, over my choice of subject/department (discussed in chapter 3). Similarly, another Dalit student with me also enrolled in the safe department.

Raj was thinking about changing his advisor, but he had a dilemma - the new advisor might be even less supportive than the current one, and moreover, if the new advisor is casteist, then he could face even more caste-based discrimination. As earlier mentioned, Raj had been facing a linguistic challenge. Raj's advisor was not supportive, and he also had a fear of caste-based discrimination. These circumstances created grueling mental stress that further eroded his academic outcomes and self-confidence to continue his studies. This shows that the image of the privileged caste faculty/advisor is casteist in the minds of Dalit students, even if some of them are progressive and sympathetic towards the students. From the subordinate social identity perspectives, Dalit students tend to be conscious about their marginality; and hence, the burden lies with the privileged caste faculty and the administration to create an inclusive environment and convey positive vibes/messages to these students.

Literature on Dalit students in higher education has reported that Dalit students face two type of stigma (Deshpande, 2019): One due to their caste identity and the second due to the constitutionally guaranteed quota that cause disadvantaged students to be seen

as ‘unfairly benefiting’ from admission quotas and scholarships. Together this creates a stigma for those who are successful despite the extraordinary hurdles and challenges they faced in accessing higher education. Leena (MPhil, second year in Sociology, first generation student) narrated her appalling experience:

The reason I came to know very lately, it was because of the fact that I belonged to Schedule Caste background. Therefore, she tried to trouble me unnecessarily... She (advisor) had asked me to visit several places for my research... I would have made several visits and yet nothing was there in my hand. Yet she would try to blame me for being lazy and not using her knowledge appropriately. She harassed me with abusive words; however, I never took anything personally as I focused on meeting the deadlines for submission.

Leena’s advisor harassed her for a long time, and she did not understand the reasons behind the troublesome behavior. But when the advisor directly called her “lazy” and used abusive words, then she realized that she was the subject of caste biases. It also indicates that in the beginning, Leena did not recognize implicit biases against her, but when she experienced explicit insults, only then did she understand the intention of her advisor. As a female student, Leena’s vulnerability was amplified in the contexts of Dalit identity and quota stigma. She was fortunate that her father is a Dalit activist, so he complained to the university and the situation received media attention. Not all Dalit students are as fortunate as Leena.

Another Dalit student, who was from a south Indian state, experienced caste distinction along with cultural and linguistic challenges. Mohan (MS in Surgery, third year, first generation student) reiterated some of the abusive things said to him:

A faculty, Dr. Patel (Head of unit) always said in any case: “are you willing to continue your degree? When will you leave your degree? Are you a psychiatric patient? Do you want any psychiatric treatment?”

The above quotes from the head of unit are unequivocally humiliating and depressing for any student; even though caste is not mentioned and the statement does not appear casteist. However, a Dalit student who is at the receiving end would rightly interpret these quotes in the context of previous discriminatory experience and the larger societal context. Mohan was repeatedly harassed by faculty and senior peers, hence he was extremely depressed and attempted suicide, but fortunately survived. His story was subsequently published in newspapers and the news media; however, his institutional experiences did not change; due to grudges held by privileged castes peers and faculty, he faced punitive actions on academic grounds (discussed below in this chapter). Caste is part of the culture of modern secular institutions in India and higher education is no exception; in this context, caste-based discrimination becomes subtle and complex in nature, and rarely explicit and ferocious. In medical colleges, caste discrimination is especially pervasive and rampant across the country (Thorat, Shyamprasad, & Srivastava, 2007).⁹⁴

5.3 Caste Experiences in the Academic Journeys

Examination of the academic journeys of Dalit students would be incomplete without discussing their caste experiences. In educational contexts, differential treatments and stereotypes against Dalit students can be understood by the “in-group bias” (also known as in-group favoritism) phenomenon. Social psychology explains in-group bias as

⁹⁴ A blatant example of caste-based discrimination reported in Vardhman Mahavir Medical College (VMMC), in the capital city- New Delhi. A privileged caste faculty in the college repetitively failed twenty-five Dalit students in a physiology exam; therefore, Dalit students reached to Delhi high court for justice, and the court ordered the college to conduct an exam of the same subject outside of the college. Shockingly, twenty-four out of twenty-five students passed the exam. This is one of the very few cases in which caste-based discrimination was established in court (Chandra, 2012).

a sociopsychological phenomenon, in which, if people with high self-esteem are afraid to lose their self-esteem, they tend to exhibit more in-group bias compared to people with low self-esteem (Aberson, Healy & Romero, 2000). In other words, people of privileged castes are more likely to favor members of their castes than Dalits or other oppressed castes people; further, in the context of caste culture and stigma, privileged castes are more likely to exclude Dalits. This sub-section focuses on two topics: experiences related to caste in school and experiences related to caste in the university. In each setting I have analyzed the data as representing three distinct aspects of the caste experience: First, institutional experiences, second, relationships with peers, and third, role of teachers as mentors in their school and higher education journeys.

5.3.1 Caste Experiences in School Journey

As earlier discussed in “Contextualizing Dalit Identity”, caste identities are stronger for those who grew up in rural areas and caste stigma is much more of an everyday reality for Dalits in villages. Therefore, it is not surprising that the interlocutors who went to school in the village had clear recollections of caste bias and prejudice as part of their school experience. On the other hand, none of the interlocutors from city/urban areas related any instances of explicit caste experiences in their school years. An implicit experience was narrated by Dharmendra when he was in the middle school in a city school, and he said:

I used to write my name on all notebooks, without last name because my last name was Parmar. On one of my notebooks my brother wrote Parmar after my name which I did not know it, and when my notebook went to a teacher to check my homework, she saw my last name with first name, then her expression changed. Since that day her behavior towards me was different and I lost her admiration as a bright student of the class.

I like to point out that Dharmendra was in the middle school around 45 years ago and in those days, caste culture was more prevalent even in cities. Therefore, privileged castes were more adhered to caste culture compared to the current time, and Dharmendra was aware of and conscious about his caste (last name). In the interview, Dharmendra mentioned that his father was a high ranking public servant, so socioeconomically they were similar to privileged castes and moreover, he was a bright student in his class which further established his image as a privileged caste kid. However, when a teacher came to know his caste through a last name, her caste prejudice came into play, and she felt that her high status (privileged caste) caste identity was threatened by a Dalit (stigmatized status) boy. Therefore, as a member of the privileged castes, she defended her positive social identity through invalidating his status as a bright student (Sankaran, Sekerdej & Von Hecker, 2017).

None of the interlocutors from the recent times shared any such kind of explicit or implicit experience in city schools. Sahil, who went to school in a Dalit neighborhood in the city said, “I didn’t really face any of such (caste) issues, as there were many other students from the same (Dalit) caste.” Sahil’s school was located in his neighborhood, so most of his classmates were also Dalits and any non-Dalits belonged to other marginalized groups. In other words, a public school located in a Dalit neighborhood is likely to be quite homogeneous in its caste composition. Furthermore, while neighborhoods in cities are quite ghettoized (certainly in Ahmedabad), the city itself is quite diverse and caste identities are not omnipresent in terms of public transport, shopping, eating out and such. Zeena (Second year PhD student in Zoology) went so far

as to say, “I never experienced caste issues in school. While in school we did not know about caste.”

The casteist culture is more prevalent in village schools where one school serves the entire village and therefore the composition of the school is more heterogeneous.

While heterogeneous, it is not inclusive in any way at all, and instead caste identities of students and teachers are underscored and highlighted in various ways, for instance, by remarking on the father’s occupation or naming the area where one lives which are regimented by caste. How school reproduces the casteist culture was described by Raj (First year MA in Languages, first generation student):

As soon as we enter the school, we had to clean the school premises...Most of such work was done by the Dalit children. Since most of the children from the poor economic background would also belong to the Dalit families. And that could be made out from the kind of clothes they wear and a long bag they carry with them.

In village schools, teachers can easily distinguish Dalit and other marginalized caste students from the privileged caste students on the basis of their dress, comportment and last names. It is quite common that teachers assign tasks to students that are seen as appropriate to their caste identities, so Dalit students are expected to do menial or polluted tasks, such as cleaning the school premises and in some cases even cleaning the toilets in the school. In the cultural context, when Dalit students are expected to clean, it publicizes their caste identity to all the students and other teachers in the school. To share the lived experience of untouchability in school, Ronak (Dalit faculty in History, first generation student) said:

Since the first grade... I personally had been experiencing untouchability in my primary school. The utensils for the other students would be kept separate than the ones used by Dalit students. They would ask all the Dalit students to sit separately for the mid-day meals. Once I had touched a saucer by mistake, then that saucer

was given away to me for my personal use, as they would not be able to use the same henceforth.

Ronak explained an untouchability practice that is evident across the country. The mid-day meal is a social program initiated by the government of India in 1995 to enhance efficacy of primary education through enhancing nutrition. The biggest beneficiaries of the program are Dalit and other marginalized students, but it has also become a site for perpetuating caste discrimination and segregation. Suresh (Second year MCom student) described another aspect of the mid-day meal program:

[I] did face some difficulty in the mid-day meal program. We had a lady - Ashaben Rathod and she was from SC caste. She used to cook the meal along with a helper who was also a SC, and because of that students from privileged castes, such as *Darbar*, *Koli*, *Patel* or even *Lohana*, all had a problem that she was the cook. They did not eat the food.

According to caste norms, food cooked by a Dalit is regarded as ‘polluted’ by other castes; in the village schools, privileged caste parents make sure that their kids do not eat food cooked by Dalits. Interestingly, often Dalit cooks and helpers are part of the mid-day meal program, because the Supreme Court of India (2004) issued an interim order to give priority to Dalit cooks in the program (Food and Agriculture Office of the United Nations, 2005). It shows that there is a conflict between the Constitutional values that outlaw untouchability and social practices and attitudes that remain deeply casteist. I argue that India is governed by two sets of laws; first, the Constitutional laws and provisions in executive orders (which are rarely reflected in practice), and second, customary practices and feudal norms in every sphere of social and public life that often supersede the Constitution.

Even government financial support, such as the Schedule Caste scholarship scheme to promote education among Dalits, does not reach many Dalit students due to

corrupt practices at various levels. In many cases, Dalit students and their parents do not know about the scheme, and schools do not inform students or parents about it. Manan (Second year Master's in Journalism, first generation student) narrates his scholarship experience:

If there were any benefits or scholarship that were offered, then nobody would inform us. During that time in the school they would make us fill out a separate form, which was actually meant for the OBC category. I don't know if there was any scholarship attached with it... I have never received any form of scholarship despite applying through the forms.

Manan's narrative indicates that neither he nor his parents were aware of the scheme. Moreover, the school administration misled Manan and other Dalit students by making them apply for the OBC category, so they never received the scholarships. This is another form of institutionalization of caste, which Manan recognized much later after completing school. Manan's school was located in a semi-urban area in which caste culture is not rigid like the village schools; however, caste subtly influences Dalit students.⁹⁵

At another semi-urban school where Ashok (First year MS in Surgery) experienced caste covertly, "once, one of the Swami (religious teacher/preacher) was trying to know about my caste background. And then he mentioned to me that I should be careful in eating; this means I should not eat non-vegetarian food."⁹⁶ Ashok was studying in a school which was managed by a religious organization and his last name is Parmar,

⁹⁵ A semi-urban area consists characteristics of village and city together; it has educational institutions, a marketplace and local government offices at a block/district level where people from nearby villages come for education, shopping and administrative purposes. Therefore, semi-urban areas exhibit dynamics of caste and some aspects of city culture, where both coexist side by side and its display depends on the contexts and individuals.

⁹⁶ In Gujarat, vegetarianism is associated with privileged castes, meat with lower castes; hence one way to pass as a privileged caste is to become vegetarian or eat meat only at known places where non-vegetarianism is not associated with a stigma.

so the Swami had a doubt about his caste identity because Parmar as a family name (also called surname) mainly represents two castes in Gujarat: a privileged caste (Kshatriya) and a scheduled caste (Dalit). After confirming Ashok's caste, the Swami advised him to stay away from non-vegetarian food without asking him – Are you vegetarian or non-vegetarian? One can imagine that it would have been a frightening journey for Ashok in the school if his caste identity was disclosed.

5.3.1.1 Interpersonal Relations with Peers

The second aspect of the caste experience in schools described by interlocutors concerns their interpersonal relations with peers. What types of intergroup relations exist between students from different caste backgrounds? As discussed earlier, few Dalit students experienced overt casteism in city schools. However, caste identities do exist in interpersonal relationships between peers, as described by Jayant (Second year Master's in Journalism):

[Y]es, most of them knew about my background. If I share one small incident, there was a friend who came to know about my caste background. Once he said to me that since I was different from them, I should go and be friends with others who are on 'my level' (caste).

Jayant's privileged caste friends knew that he was a Dalit (lower caste), and in his class most of the students knew each other's caste identities. Jayant lives in the old part of Ahmedabad and his neighborhood adjoins a privileged caste neighborhood, so a neighborhood does not always reveal one's caste in the city. Therefore, interpersonal relationships and friendships become the site of differentiation and policing of caste segregation. Caste can be concealed in urban/city spaces that gives the appearance of being modernized and open to diversity. However, caste tensions exist just below the

surface and can be triggered and unexpectedly surface. For example, Jigar (Dalit faculty in Computer Science) described a violent anti-reservation protest:

I remember when I was in grade 8th in 1984, there was a protest movement against reservation (the quota) throughout the state of Gujarat... because of that not specifically in the school, but in the neighborhoods and residences we had to be very careful. Many people were constantly protesting against Dalits. At that time, a few school friends made casteist remarks against us (Dalit students).

Jigar still remembered the casteist remarks made by privileged caste peers in the context of the anti-quota protests. Reports show that the anti-quota agitation was not confined to rallies and protests against the quota policy, but extended to violent attacks against Dalits and destruction of property in their neighborhoods (Shani, 2005; Yagnik & Bhatt, 1984). Such incidences of violence created fear and panic among Dalits, as Jigar mentioned that “in the neighborhoods and residences we had to be very careful.”

In contrast to city schools, caste-based micro-aggressions and discrimination are far more evident in the village schools, and privileged caste peers frequently engage in such type of behaviors. Any small incident or conflict between peers turns into a caste pride issue, privileged caste students casually use derogatory casteist remarks or casteist slurs against Dalit students. Pravin (Second year PhD in Zoology, first generation) described that “In the 7th grade, I faced an incident wherein one of my classmates started to tease me on the basis of my caste... He was constantly poking me and referring to me as *Bhangi*.” For Pravin, it was an appalling experience to be called a *Bhangi*; further, it is a public humiliation that psychologically shattered his self-esteem and competitive spirit in school. A similar experience was narrated by Suresh (Second year MCom):

Since I was new in the class, she (teacher) made me stand up and asked me for the reason I was late. I replied that my admission had just got confirmed. She asked my name, and I said Suresh Rathod... In recess, while I was going to drink water at the tank, most of them were also going together to drink water at the same time.

Someone shouted that nobody should drink water with me, since I am a Dalit. So this is how the other students reacted and began to humiliate me.

When Suresh replied to the teacher that his name is Suresh Rathod, at the same moment other (privileged caste) students recognized his caste, and he experienced a terrible humiliation on the first day in the school (8th grade). Suresh's experience shows that even in 8th grade, privileged caste students are conscious of their caste identities, and they figured out Suresh's caste by his last name, Rathod. In this scenario, caste identity becomes central to relationships with peers in the village schools. Similarly, Dipak (Second year MPhil, first generation) described that "most of our friendships (in schools) are made based upon caste... Yes, one's circle of friends depended on one's caste identity until 10th grade."

A few of my interlocutors were educated in rural residential schools, and there they encountered the caste menace. In rural areas, residential schools at district level are known for better education and they are publicly funded; therefore, some educated Dalit parents from villages enroll their children in these residential schools. Ravi (Second year MCom student) who attended such a residential school described his experience:

[I] used to stay there (Amreli) in the hostel, and there were equally many other students from the Dalit community. But the majority of them were from... *Kshatriya* community. More than fifty percent of the students from that community still believed and practiced untouchability with us. When they didn't know about our background they would behave normally, but the moment they came to know about our caste background they would remove themselves from us. And there are specific abusive words which they would use to refer to people from the Dalit community.

Ravi mentioned that students from Dalit and privileged caste communities (*Kshatriya*) were living together in the hostel. Ravi confirmed that caste-based kinship existed. In other words, students make friends only within their caste groups and *Kshatriya* students

would tend to not mingle with Dalit students. It is a routine experience of Dalit students to hear abusive words or casteist slurs, such as *Dhed*, *Dhedo*, *Dhedhi*, *Chamar* and *Bhangi* in Gujarat and numerous other derogatory nouns and expressions across the country.

While the caste experiences of Dalit students were overwhelmingly negative, one interlocutor revealed a mixed experience with her privileged caste peers from school. Jaya (Second year MSW student) said they would befriend her but would ask her to hide her caste identity from their family members: “I would frequently visit their (privileged caste) houses and also had meals with them, but there was one clause to it. Some of my friends would generally warn me, not to reveal my caste while visiting their house.” Not only Dalit students but privileged caste students also know when to pass if a caste identity could create a problem. Jaya’s privileged caste friends knew that she was a Dalit, but for them friendship was more valuable than caste. It indicates that Dalit students find some privileged caste allies, which weakens the caste culture, and fosters inter-caste friendships.

5.3.1.2 The Role of Teachers

The third aspect of caste experience in schools that came up in my interviews with Dalit students is the role of teachers in academics and interpersonal relations with them. The interlocutors from city schools did not speak of caste discrimination from their teachers. Rather some of them shared positive experiences about their schools and teachers. Zeena (Second year PhD, in Zoology) who studied in a city public school said,

“I never experienced caste discrimination by teachers, and my school teachers were caring and put great efforts to teach us.”

Dalit students in semi-urban schools had experienced biases and discrimination from privileged caste teachers. Generally, caste-based stereotypes are deeply reflected in the vernacular language with negative stereotypes used to describe Dalits and positive ascriptions reserved for privileged castes. Ashok (First year MS in Surgery) who studied in a semi-urban school in South Gujarat explained that,

One of my teachers had to convince students to take a field trip. While sharing about the travel comfort, she said that local buses are not so good, and one feels like vomiting as many *Harijan*⁹⁷ (Dalit) community people sit beside you. But for the school trip, all the good people will be sitting beside you and no one will encounter the problem of vomiting.

Another stereotype frequently heard is that Dalit students are poor in academics and have a timid outlook. However, Ashok was a brilliant student in the school, and teachers assumed that he belonged to a privileged caste. By making an offensive comment about the entire community, Ashok’s teacher reinforced the negative perception of Dalits among students. These types of experiences prompt Dalit students to hide their caste identity and ignore the negative comments and slurs. Moreover, Dalit students have to face discrimination in academics because of the perception of Dalits and their neighborhoods. Generally, Dalit neighborhoods are denigrated by privileged castes and identified as notorious places. Manan (Second year Master’s in Journalism, first generation student) described that:

[M]y neighborhood is called xxxx. it has been very prominent for many years for all the wrong reasons... Thus, when one knows that this person belongs to this place, then nobody would even talk to them out of fear. This also impacts the

⁹⁷ *Harijan*, meaning children of God, term coined by M K Gandhi for Dalits in 1932. Gandhi wanted to give a dignified name to Dalits who would identify by numerous derogatory terms.

internal grading at the school level, once they know that this child belongs to this neighborhood, then he will always be looked upon negatively.

Manan lives in a slum of a semi-urban area that is not only seen as poor but people living there are also criminalized and seen as lumpen. Manan mentioned that his neighborhood is infamous in the school for two reasons; first, as a Dalit neighborhood and second, its negative image. Consequently, teachers discriminate against Dalit students in academics and in social interaction at the school.

In the village schools, some teachers are evidently biased and discriminatory against Dalit students. Whether a teacher subscribes to casteist practices or not, the village culture certainly influences the school environment. This is reflected in some teachers who institutionalize the casteist culture in the classroom and the school. As Prabhat (Fourth year PhD student in History, first generation student) describes:

One of our mathematics teachers, when he wanted to check our math homework, he would always call the students from the *Brahmin* caste first, then *Vaniyas* or Patels. And accordingly there would be a couple of other SC/ST students, and we would be quite fearful. When the teacher calls us as Dalit students, it doesn't leave a good impression in the classroom... He would just call us in the end rather than explicitly mentioning about the caste.

Prabhat's teacher followed the caste hierarchies in the classroom that persist in the village society. It was a message to Dalit and Tribal students that you are last everywhere and was a way to humiliate them in front of privileged caste students. As Prabhat expressed, such differential treatment of Dalit students is exclusionary and humiliating and leaves deep psychological scars. In many villages, privileged castes enforce caste norms in schools to maintain segregation along the pollution and purity lines. Further, some privileged caste teachers are openly hostile to Dalit students, and one such unpleasant experience was revealed by Ravi (Second year MCom student):

[O]ne of my friends was from the SC caste; his name was Ajay... Whenever we used to arrive late, most of the students would climb the gate and jump inside the school premise. He also did the same thing, there were other students from privileged castes along with him... When the teacher noticed that, it was only Ajay and other boys from the SC community that were badly beaten up by the sir. The other students from his community were not punished at all. There have been several such experiences.

Ajay and other Dalit students were punished by a privileged caste teacher, but for the same mistake their privileged caste peers went unpunished. This is an explicit message to Dalit students that the school runs as per caste norms where some are privileged and Dalits are punished. Ravi mentioned that they had many such casteist experiences in the school. It raises a significant question: How have these experiences influenced Ravi and other Dalit students? In the following section, I describe how these experiences carry over into higher education settings and ways in which the university setting is both similar to and different from the school context.

5.3.2 Caste Experiences in Higher Education

This section is organized along three themes: institutional experiences in the higher education journey, peer relationships and, the role of faculty in their higher education journeys.

5.3.2.1 Institutional Experiences

In higher education, caste exists in subtle, hidden and complex forms. The interlocutors are graduate students in higher education; therefore, their experiences pertaining to caste are recent and reflective. A few interlocutors from villages and semi-urban areas studied in local colleges; consequently, they experienced a rural casteist

culture in their colleges. Ashish (Second year MPhil in Education, first generation student) who studied in a rural cum semi-urban college, related that “there was a great deal of caste discrimination; people from the Darbar (*Kshatriya*) community would try to dominate Dalits... They used to bully anyone, and thus students from Dalit community used to face quite a lot of trouble.” In another such college in a different part of the state, the manifestation of caste discrimination was more subtle. To narrate an emotional experience, Manan (Second year Master’s in Journalism, first generation student) said:

When the results were declared I couldn’t believe that I stood first in the entire college... Professor Leua was not very happy with it. Every year the person who stands first in the college, is awarded a gold medal. In the annual function the student is honored with a gold medal tied with a red ribbon. When it was my turn to receive it... It was given to me in a sealed envelope. Because they didn’t like that I (Dalit) stood first in the college (Manan broke down while relating this).

Manan’s professor was not happy because Manan publicly challenged him to score sixty percent marks in the final year exam. Further, the professor unfairly deducted Manan’s internal marks; however, in the external exam, he scored highest marks in the college and stood first. Manan was very happy that he would be honored with the gold medal at a public event; however, the college administration handed the medal to him in an envelope. While sharing the incident, Manan broke down and could not speak for a few moments. As Manan mentioned, the medal was not given to him in the usual ceremonious way. It was clear the privileged castes did not like it that a Dalit student from a notorious neighborhood surpassed all privileged caste students in the college. They did not want to celebrate his achievement and wanted to put him down.

Generally, Dalit, Tribal and OBC students are unaware of the administrative tactics used by privileged castes to subvert the policy; therefore, the reserved seats are either converted into the general category or go unfilled. Ronak (Dalit faculty in History,

first generation) explained how the affirmative action policy was ignored by his institution:

There was only one seat available for a batch of twenty-five students (in MSW)... I confirmed my admission through the general seat as I was in the first merit list. There was another SC student who was then eligible to occupy the SC seat, but the college tried to hide his name... I said to him, “Manoj support me and I will ensure your admission... You must come along with me, and let us file a petition for clarification”.⁹⁸ After that the college had to admit Manoj. And because of that, the college was not happy with me, and they troubled me for the next two years.

Ronak was aware that there was one reserved seat for SC, and he was enrolled on a general seat. On one hand, Ronak fought for the reserved seat and helped Manoj to confirm his admission, but on the other, Ronak challenged the authority and forced them to apply the quota policy, this resulted in privileged caste faculty giving him a lot of trouble during his program, but Ronak was a bright student and excellent in athletic skills so he successfully completed the program. As a student, Ronak confronted the administration for a Dalit student’s right, despite the fact that the privileged caste faculty and administration could have ruined his career. Now Ronak is a faculty and his students reiterated that he has been a great teacher and mentor for them.

It is a common cultural behavior in India to ask a last name of a person, to know the caste identity of a person.⁹⁹ This casteist practice is also prevalent in higher education. Asking for one’s last name is a micro-aggression against Dalit students. Prabhat (Fourth year PhD in History, first generation student) who studied in the city college describes:

⁹⁸ Ronak obtained admission in an MSW program in the general category, not in SC quota; therefore, one seat reserved for a SC student was still vacant, but the administration put Ronak in SC quota, so Manoj did not get admission in the program. Ronak came to know about this wrongdoing, and he persuaded Manoj to file a complaint against the malpractice in the admission process. At last the administration had to follow the quota policy as per norms in the program, and enrolled Manoj under the SC quota.

⁹⁹ In the U.S. , the Gujarati community is one of the biggest ethnic groups of Indian origin, and twice I was asked my caste in the U.S. because I am from Gujarat.

I wanted to become a General Secretary (GS) of students, and for the same the college had appointed a committee to select a GS. In the interview, one of the professors from the B.Ed., faculty asked me my full name, I responded - Prabhat Sonkar. Then they asked me, which caste group does Sonkar belong?

Prabhat's ancestral last name was Parmar, it is a very common last name of Dalits. To escape the caste stigma and discrimination, his father, who was a teacher, changed it to Sonkar, the name of their village. In the interview, the committee was curious to know his caste background because Sonkar is a unique last name in Gujarati society. Thus, a faculty asked an inappropriate question, and Prabhat replied, "Scheduled Caste".

Interestingly, none of the committee members objected to the question, it validates that it is a socially acceptable practice to ask about another's caste identity. Further, it highlights the prevalence of privileged caste culture in higher education.

Most of the interlocutors who studied in the city colleges reiterated that they rarely encountered explicit caste-based discrimination. However, some institutional practices are not sensitive enough to accommodate the concerns and dignity of Dalit and other marginalized caste groups. Hemant (Second year Master's in Journalism) describes an administrative practice that "it was very openly written there (on the notice board) and everybody knew about it. In the declared list, it is clearly mentioned that these many students are from the Schedule Caste." It is a general administrative practice in the state to announce the enrollment list, which has student names and their enrollment categories as per the quota policy. In other words, the list reveals the caste identities of students to each other, and the reserved category students' identities are thereby made known to general category students. Some Dalit students mentioned that they feel embarrassed when their caste identities are disclosed to other students. A similar type of practice was explained by Suresh (Second year MCom student), who said:

[D]uring the time of filling up the scholarship forms... The sir (faculty) would ask all the SC students to submit the form, in front of the entire classroom, and now everyone would know that I am a SC. I would think that all of them from other categories know my caste. Despite that incident, during the break all of us would share the meal and lunchboxes. There was no such (caste) discrimination in the college.

Suresh mentioned that the faculty collected the Scheduled Caste scholarship applications in the classroom, and that was an uncomfortable situation for the Dalit students in front of their peers. These types of practices in higher education are not explicit caste biases or a deliberate attempt to reveal their caste identity. However, it is insensitive to reveal students' subordinate caste identity in the context of caste stigma and stereotypes.

Historically higher education has been dominated by privileged castes; thus, institutional practices and procedures represent the elements of exclusion. Suresh mentioned that he did not experience any caste discrimination in the college; similarly, a considerable number of interlocutors reiterated that they did not experience discrimination as a result of their Dalit identity. I argue that it does not mean caste-based discrimination and casteist practices do not exist in the university. Dalit students perceive, interpret and experience caste differently. It also depends on rural-urban location, class background, political awareness and previous caste experiences.

5.3.2.2 Interpersonal Relations with Peers

The second aspect of the caste experience in higher education discusses interpersonal relations with peers; specifically, interpersonal relations among Dalit students and intergroup interactions between Dalit and privileged caste students. In the context of previous experiences of caste discrimination, a few Dalit interlocutors narrated

that they are closer to Dalit friends than privileged caste friends. Ashish (Second year MPhil, in Education, first generation student) described that:

Yes, I share a stronger relationship with SC students than open category students. We can relate to each other in a better way. I never used to ask for things from anyone from open category... Because I don't want them to criticize me for my caste background. It was the same in the village as well.

Ashish experienced the caste hierarchies routinely in the village as well as in his school; therefore, he feels comfortable and respected by Dalit friends. On the other hand, Ashish does not share a strong relation with privileged caste students, because he thinks that privileged caste friends might convey a casteist slur or stereotype. Moreover, Dalit students share essential similarities to connect with each other, such as cultural connections, socioeconomic status and caste identities; thus, they easily develop friendships. Jyoti (Second year PhD in Biotechnology, first generation) who belong to a semi-urban area, explained that “Initially we became friends, then we got to know that all of us are from the SC background, and that happened perhaps after a month once there was a closer bond.” Jyoti and other Dalit peers in the college did not know that they are Dalits, and first they became good friends, then all realized that they were all Dalits. It indicates that they had remarkable socioeconomic and cultural similarities, which were the foundation of their friendships.

As earlier discussed, urban/city Dalit students have limited caste experiences; thus, their caste experiences are not closely associated with their lived experiences. Dalit students from urban areas also share good friendships between them; and this confirms that the social characteristics of Dalit students are crucial to connecting with each other. Neha belongs to an urban middle class background and never experienced caste in school life, and she said that “since my admission at the campus, she (Kiran) has been my close

friend. Most of the other friends in the group, all are from the same caste (Dalits).” Apart from the social characteristics, Dalit peers experience a sense of comfort to speak with, eat with and visit each other’s home; for example, Dalit communities have different linguistic speaking styles, they enjoy non-vegetarian foods and have no anxiety about caste stigma when visiting Dalit friends. They also find academic support to pursue studies, which is described by Suresh (Second year MCom student):

“[W]e had a group of all Dalit friends, and we used to study together (in undergrad)... In fact, I was not serious with my academics in the past, but my Dalit friends helped and pushed me to study well for higher education.”

As earlier discussed in the sociocultural histories, many interlocutors are inspired by Dr. Ambedkar’s ideology and his educational achievements; therefore, some Dalit students are highly motivated to pursue higher education and also help other Dalit friends to study well. During my higher education journey, I had a good friendship with some Dalit friends because of the similarities of our social characteristics and we helped each other in troubles and education, especially to pursue graduate program.

Interpersonal relations between Dalit and privileged caste peers in higher education are complex and mostly caste does not appear explicitly in caste-based discrimination. However, in any conflict between Dalit and privileged caste peers, caste identities act as catalysts, and Dalit students are at receiving end. Mohan (MS in Surgery, third year, first generation student) had a couple of abusive experiences with his peers; he revealed that:

On 2/9/15, I had an emergency day in OPD at around 9:15 am, Dr. Shah and Dr. Parimal third year surgery residents (seniors), did not allow me to treat any patient and told me, "get out of the Out Patient Department." Though, I did not make any mistake; moreover, Dr. Shah said, "if you don’t leave the OPD, I will slap you in front of everyone," then they forcefully sent me out from the OPD with the help of security.

In Mohan's revelation, no casteist slurs appeared nor did he mention caste-based discrimination. I argue that in higher education, caste implicitly interplays in social relationships, therefore, it does not appear at prima facie in a conflict between Dalits and privileged castes, but it aggravates the conflict. Further, caste stigma and affirmative action sentiments of privileged castes blend with this conflict, such as Mohan encountering an egregious behavior by his privileged caste peers. It was certainly a humiliating and subhuman experience for Mohan; and an example of how privileged caste peers exercise caste power to demonstrate their hegemony in the institution. More recently, in May 2019, a second year MD student, Payal Tadvī ended her life after agonizing harassment and casteist abuses by three privileged caste peers. I argue that probably Payal would have been the first female from her community who had reached to a graduate program in medical sciences, but she met with a tragic end.

Once again after Rohith's institutional murder in 2016, Payal's story widely published in the news and social media, and protests broke out across the country against institutional casteism in higher education. I like to point out that Payal's case is a unique example of the intersectionality of multiple marginalities such as Tribal (*Bhil* community known as notorious community), Muslim, female and first-generation student. Further, she experienced casteist slurs, abusive comments and excruciating humiliation by three senior privileged caste peers which aggravated her vulnerability. Although she filed a complaint to the head of department against the peers, no action was taken to discipline the three perpetrators. Moreover, Payal was not allowed to participate in the operating theatre for six to seven months and as an ultimate assault on her human dignity, she was publicly humiliated by the seniors, and she ended her life as the final protest. This is one

of the rare cases in which police booked the three seniors, and arrested them for abetting her suicide (Satheesh, 2019, June 7). However, institutional culpability was overlooked in the criminal investigation and as usual it was treated as an isolated incident between individuals, not recognized as systemic casteism in higher education.

In the study, a few interlocutors reported experiencing caste-based discrimination by their privileged caste peers. From Dalit students' perspectives, the campus is located in a posh area of the city, so they are far from caste experiences. However, Leena (Second year MPhil in Sociology, first generation student) narrated her mixed experiences with privileged caste classmates:

I did encounter caste discrimination here (on campus) during my MA, me and a friend of mine both of us are from the SC background. There was a classmate from the open category, and she would be of the opinion that since we belong to a lower caste, nobody should interact or go around with us... I was made aware about the same by a good friend who was also from the open category... and a respectful person.

Leena's privileged caste friend had an opinion that other privileged caste peers should not interact with Dalit peers; though, another privileged caste peer, and friend of Leena conveyed this casteist opinion to her. Leena also indicated that she had a very good friendship with the privileged caste peer, and she has high regard for her. All the interlocutors mentioned that they have been friends of privileged caste peers in their higher education journey. Ravi (MCom, second year student) summarized interpersonal relations between Dalit and privileged caste peers, and he explained that:

I do interact with everyone, but there are a few students who feel awkward interacting with us (Dalit). I mostly share and interact with Suresh, and another friend from other castes; one friend is a ... there are a couple of female friends who are Patels and *Rajputs*.

Ravi reiterated that he is more comfortable with Dalit friends than other friends who are non-Dalits; further, he specifically mentioned caste identities of his friends which also indicates that despite friendship, caste identities are somewhat salient in social relationships. The above narratives of Dalit students resonate with narratives of Black students in Beverly Tatum's seminal book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* To explain the behavior of Black students, Beverly says, connecting with others who share alike characteristics and experiences as your own offers a protective layer and acts as a buffer. Further, it is a way to affirming identity, building community and cultivating leadership (Tatum, 1997).

5.3.2.3 The Role of Faculty

The third aspect of caste experience in higher education examines the role of faculty in academics and social relations with Dalit students. I asked the interlocutors about their experiences with faculty, and they narrated a range of perspectives on it. The privileged-caste faculty discriminate against Dalit students in various ways such as failing them in exams, assigning lower grades, not supporting as advisor, harassing and misleading in advising, creating barriers to progress, invalidating ideas and academic growth, insulting students in the classroom and casteist comments or slurs. In most cases, the discrimination or biases are so complex and subtle that Dalit students are not able to recognize them, or they do not have evidence to prove the discrimination. Ashish explained his experience with a privileged caste faculty:

When I asked for his guidance (faculty), what should I do further after my MA? He gave a bizarre advice, and said that either "I should open a Tea stall or a Pan shop"... He didn't specifically comment on the caste, but neither did he speak in an encouraging way. Another thing is something very personal.

Ashish was expecting career guidance, but he received an insulting response from a faculty member, telling him to open a tea stall or pan shop meaning there he should not expect to have a professional career after MA. How come a faculty can give such inappropriate advice to a student? In other words, higher studies are worthless for you; instead you should be a street vendor. Arts degrees are generally seen as not having a career pathway. Ashish mentioned that the advice was not explicitly casteist; but, he felt it hurtful; however, I argue that it was a subtle casteist micro-aggression because it is unlikely the faculty would be so dismissive and callous towards a privileged-caste student. The privileged-caste male students are more likely to join sciences and professional degrees than Arts (Thomas, 2020). That is how privileges are reproduced through higher education.

For many Dalit students, financial assistance such as scholarships and fellowships, are crucial for continuing their studies and also supporting their families. To address the financial needs of Dalit students, the central government started the Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship (RGNF) for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students in MPhil and PhD programs. Manan narrated that:

For the first two years I couldn't qualify for it (fellowship), thus I didn't receive it. But from the third year, I received approval for it... Then my guide (advisor) would start to give me excuses that the principal might not verify and sign for the approval, and clearances of the fellowship amount. It is very obvious that I come from a schedule caste background, so they do not want people from the Dalit community to succeed. They don't even like when we get into higher education.

Manan did not receive the RGNF award for the first two years, so, he inquired about it, and found that his advisor did not complete the paperwork on time. For the third year fellowship, he proactively talked with his advisor, and led the process to be completed

before the due date. Manan belongs to a humble background and the fellowship amount was significant for him and also supported his family. He accused his advisor of deliberately missing the application deadline, and Manan explicitly mentioned that it was a casteist act. Privileged caste faculty and administrators use the fellowship as a potent tool to obstruct academic progress and expel Dalit students from academia. A similar experience with privileged caste faculty is described by Kiran: “I think is also true that especially, the Dalit students do not receive a positive and deserving feedback from their respective faculties. They don’t get the same opportunities as other students.” This type of differential treatment is impossible to prove, or to file a complaint against. And this is just a one aspect noticed by Dalit students, but many such type of biases and discrimination occur which they are not able to recognize.

It is a widespread stereotype among privileged caste faculty that Dalit students are weak students because they are beneficiaries of quota. I discussed earlier that Dalit students face some difficulties with the English language at the start of higher education; thus, despite academic competencies, they are not able to deliver to their best potential.

Ashok explained his first semester experience:

During my first oral exams, I had gotten very nervous and was unable to respond to the questions raised by a faculty. The faculty immediately asked me about my caste background, then suggested me to focus more on academics. So this was something that I didn’t really appreciate. I was the only one to whom caste was asked, despite there being several other students who were also not able to respond appropriately.

Ashok was raised and studied in a semi-urban area; then he joined a medical college in the city. It was a cultural shift to a new place and both that and English language anxiety, had impacted his ability to perform well in the exams. Ashok pointed out that other students also were not able respond properly; why had the faculty asked about his caste

identity in the middle of the exam? Ashok's last name is Solanki, and the faculty member was unsure about his caste; therefore, he directly asked his caste identity. Then the faculty uttered a casteist stereotype, and advised him to study more because he was perceived as a weak student. In another example from the same college, Mohan revealed that:

[B]oth my professors (Dr. Parekh & Dr. Doshi) were punishing and discriminating me without any reason or junior doctors' mistakes. They were treating me like a slave and forced me to stand outside the ward and the operation theatre like a security guard... They were threatening me that this will continue until I write an apology letter to my complaint... They were even threatening me that they will not allow me to obtain the MS degree. Because of the intolerable discrimination, I was having a suicidal tendency... During those days also, Dr. Parekh called and forced me to stand in front of the operation theatre, and purposefully marked me absent and reduced my stipend.

Mohan was a meritocratic student who passed the NEET (National Eligibility Exam cum Entrance Test) and enrolled in the medical college. He is an example of the intersection of marginalities, as he was from South India, did not speak Hindi, was culturally very different and most importantly was Dalit. I found that neither Mohan nor other Dalit students in sciences are able to see the role of Dalit identity in shaping the behaviors of privileged-caste peers and faculty (discussed in Chapter 8).

To further examine the role of caste in medical college, I asked to my interlocutors about Mohan's case, and two out of three said, he was aggressive, lazy, rebellious (against seniors and faculty), and most importantly, they did not accept that caste was one of the reasons for the conflict. I argue that in the context of Mohan's marginalities, his Dalit identity acted as the trigger to intensify the ferocity of privileged caste faculty and peers toward him. Moreover, to conceal the caste discrimination, privileged caste faculty and peers have defamed Mohan in the college, and tagged him

“aggressive”, “lazy” and “psycho” (because he tried to commit suicide), so even Dalit students accused Mohan. Though it is not surprising to me that students and especially, Dalit students uncritically accepted the narratives that blamed Mohan, who is a so-called meritorious student (passed the NEET test), and not obedient or subservient to the hierarchical system.

It is also a stereotype to believe that all privileged caste faculty are biased and casteist. During my field visit, I met with some radical Dalit individuals, who do not trust privileged castes and specifically, Brahmins. I argue that considering all Brahmins are mistrustful is a stereotype, and it emphasizes caste-based behavior and attitude, people forgets that opposing Brahmins, and not just Brahmanical ideology defies the anti-caste project. To explain the point, Dr. Ambedkar writes, “It must be recognized that the Hindus (privileged castes) observe Caste not because they are inhuman or wrong-headed. They observe Caste because they are deeply religious... In my view, what is wrong is their religion (Brahmanical ideology), which has inculcated this notion of Caste” (Ambedkar, 1944, p. 58). A few interlocutors shared positive opinions about their faculty. Jayesh said: “I have never experienced caste discrimination here. We do not have any internal exams and for the oral exams, we have a serial number... Nobody has ever tried to enquire for my last name.” A similar positive experience was narrated by Pravin, “I never experienced a caste issue in the department and the staff is very supportive here. The entire panel of professors are all very supportive. I never had to face any form of discrimination.”

5.4 Summary

Findings indicate that urban Dalit students are more aspirational than rural because more Dalit students from cities belong to a middle class background and are more likely to be second-generation students. Most importantly, urban students' caste experiences are not repressive compared to village students and specifically; village school experiences are detrimental to their aspirations, self-confidence, academic outcomes and gradually inculcate them to internalize some aspects of hierarchical relationships. Throughout their academic journey, Dalit students are routinely confronted with one question – what is your last name, or what is your caste? For most Dalit students, access to higher education is a key to social mobility and a tool to obtain a public service employment. In higher education, privileged caste faculty, peers and the administration are practicing casteism without being casteist. Therefore, discrimination often is not expressed in direct terms, but through indirect and subtle ways, which are arduous for Dalit students to understand. Some Dalit students make the links and recognize it as caste discrimination; though there is rarely any way to prove this. This indicates that on one hand higher education offers opportunities and hopes and on the other, it is depressing and potentially life threatening for Dalit youth, especially in highly competitive disciplines.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS ON CAMPUS CLIMATE AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

This chapter presents my findings about Dalit students' experiences and perceptions of campus climate and access to institutional support. Interlocutors' perspectives explain the overall environment and availability of support and awareness programs on campus; specifically, in the context of the larger sociopolitical environment and the needs of Dalit students. The chapter comprises three sections: first, an overview of the campus climate from the perspective of Dalit students, which explains the influence of sociopolitical contexts on campus climate, and its manifestation on campus and in the lives of Dalit students. Next, importance of institutional support for Dalit students; it discusses experiences of Dalit students regarding sociocultural, economic and grievance redressal on the campus. Lastly, recommendations for institutional support, which present expectations of Dalit students and faculty about support programs and awareness building trainings from the university authority.

6.1 An Overview of the Campus Climate Through Dalit Students' Perspectives

Over the past few years, university campuses have become visible sites of caste and gender conflict, and sociopolitical activism has captured the attention of the public and mainstream media. 'Campus climate' (discussed in Chapter 2) as an academic issue in Indian higher education is a relatively unknown concept, thus awareness among the various stakeholders and scholarly literature on the topic is scarce. In India, public higher education institutions do not collect data or conduct any assessment pertaining to institutional demographic and perceptions and experiences of students and staff vis-à-vis

campus climate. This section is divided into two parts: implications of the sociopolitical contexts on campus climate and perspectives of Dalit students of campus climate.

6.1.1 Implications of the Sociopolitical Contexts on Campus Climate

Research on campus climate frameworks suggests that historical and sociopolitical contexts impact the overall environment of a campus as well as institutional commitment to social justice issues (Hurtado et al., 2012). In India, state higher education institutions are run by state governments, so the ruling party has significant control in their functioning. For example, it is the governor of the state who appoints the university Vice-chancellors to universities in the state.¹⁰⁰ Gujarat is no exception, and public universities in the state have witnessed endured interferences from whichever party is in power. In the context of the political influence of the government, Raj said that “state is playing a key role in merging the higher education and politics... The appointment of the Vice-chancellor by the state government itself is problematic, this will never allow the university to grow and will destroy the education system.” Raj’s critique points a finger at the ruling Hindu nationalist state government; for over two decades, the current right-wing BJP government has been in power, which has increased their control over higher education. To reflect upon the current scenario at the university, Hemendra reiterated that:

Appointment of the vice-chancellor is also through a political process, any selected person is generally the ones who are very well inclined with their (*Hindutva*) ideology. Because of that, the overall development of the university is neglected, but it is more about fulfilling their political agenda. As an offshoot,

¹⁰⁰ The Governor in India is a state’s head whose primary function is to defend, protect and preserve the Constitution, does not have executive powers to intervene in state affairs. The real power lies with the Chief Minister post (equivalent to the Governor’s post in the U.S.), a chief minister is the elected head of a state government.

they would also promote some social work, but at the core it is about spreading the political ideology in the campus.

Hemendra, as a faculty, pointed out that the Vice-chancellor acts according to the ideological lines of the state government. It is a well-known fact that the ruling state government is ideologically committed to Hindu nationalism, and for the last two decades the government has appointed loyal people in several decision making positions. Hemendra claimed that the university is an offshoot of the government; as a result, the university does not have autonomy and the faculty do not have intellectual and academic freedom. In 2014, the right wing Union government came to power, any kind of dissent is being dealt with through sedition (anti-national) laws, and this has become the new norm on campuses. College/university and law enforcement authorities have been targeting students and student groups who are critical about the right wing propaganda and their policy. Specifically, Dalit and Muslim students face strict punishment and criminal charges for their dissenting protests or opinions (People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space, 2019, p. 43). Similarly, the state government dictates what types of topic should be studied at doctoral level research to endorse and glorify government's development programs and schemes (Gupta, 2016).¹⁰¹

In Gujarat, the state government is a puppet of RSS; it is an open secret that RSS is a parallel/shadow government in the state. The current Chief Minister (equivalent to the Governor in the US) is an RSS ideologue (Shah, 2016). RSS recognizes that schools and universities are ideal and influential places to disseminate their ideology¹⁰² among

¹⁰¹ Gujarat government issued a list of eighty-two topics, and ordered to all universities in the state that each doctoral student must select minimum five topics from the list.

¹⁰² In 2000, the state government directed all school to subscribe to *Sadhana* (translated as devotion), an RSS magazine; similarly, in the same year, all schools were dictated to send their teachers for Sanskrit

young people and access public resources to propagate their ideology in society (Sundar, 2004; The Times of India, 2014, July 29; Puniyani, 2017, August 21). For instance, in 2019, RSS organized a three-day conference with five thousand college students to teach nationalism (Hindu nationalism) to youth, and to increase their footprint in Gujarat (Patadiya, 2019). Ashish confirmed that RSS appropriates the university space to propagate its ideology, for instance, “the festival of *Ganesh* (a Hindu god) was celebrated here (on university grounds) for thirteen days and RSS programs are being held on university grounds.” Similar to the U.S. constitution, there is separation of religion and state in the Indian constitution, and public institutions including universities are legally obligated to be secular and not display or represent any religion or religious sentiments. Despite the legal mandate, the university allowed RSS to hold a Hindu religious event for thirteen continuous days on university premises. It is evident that the university authority is more loyal to RSS than the Constitution. The dominance of RSS on the university campus is so overt (Rana, 2018, September 26) that it intimidates students and faculty to not oppose events organized by the RSS and its allied organizations such as ABVP.¹⁰³

Another blatant instance of RSS hegemony in university administration that was pointed out to me is the appropriation of the position of the Ambedkar Chair to propagate their Hindu right wing ideology. The Ambedkar Chair is a distinguished position at the university instituted to advance Dr. B R Ambedkar’s philosophy and literature in academia, to support scholarship, publishing and dissemination of Dr. Ambedkar’s vast

training sessions because the government wanted to make Sanskrit a compulsory subject for all school students (Setalvad, 2016).

¹⁰³ Hemant Kumar Shah, a notable faculty in Gujarat University said, “across the state there is an atmosphere of fear; schools, colleges, school teachers and university/college professors are all sensing it. The present State doesn’t allow anyone to speak or write” (People’s Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space, 2019, p. 78).

and influential body of work on nationalism, caste, gender, minority rights, and statecraft (Mitra, 2018). However, several of my interlocutors bemoaned the misuse of the Chair to advance the RSS agenda, their feelings of one's powerlessness to question the blatant subversion of this high profile position by right wing forces on campus. With great frustration, Hemendra related one example of how this subversion takes place:

[T]he chair had organized an event, "One Nation, One Election." I feel hurt and sad to share this that the funds which were allotted for the Ambedkar chair should have been utilized for promoting the ideology of Ambedkar, and not to promote the ongoing (Hindu) political agendas. There is no relation between "One Nation, One Election" with the discourse of Ambedkar and his ideologies. I specifically went to the program to know exactly what they are trying to do. I got to know that there are people being invited from the RSS think tank.

As an "Ambedkarite"¹⁰⁴ faculty, Hemendra pointed out that "One Nation, One Election" is political propaganda of the RSS, which is implemented by the ruling government of BJP to subvert the democratic structures into an authoritarian presidential style government. In other words, weakening the democratic principles of the Constitution to fulfil their "Hindu vision"¹⁰⁵ to convert India into a Hindu nation. Hemendra mentioned that he was disappointed that behind Dr. Ambedkar's name, the RSS promotes their ideology and he feels helpless.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the reservation policy is undermined and not practiced in spirit as intended in the Constitution. Numerous cases have appeared in

¹⁰⁴ A broad term being used for people and organizations who call themselves followers of Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy and teachings. Dr. Ambedkar left behind the legacy of social movement, political activism, religious revolution and his writings and speeches which inspire millions of people to struggle against injustice and oppression.

¹⁰⁵ In a public event organized by *Brahman Yuva Parishad*, Anant Kumar Hegde (a member of Parliament from BJP) said that they were here to change the Constitution and they do not believe in secularism, in other words, they want to make India a Hindu nation (India Today, 2017, December 27). Similarly, Before the Parliamentary election in 2019, Sakshi Maharaj (a member of Parliament from BJP) said, "there will be no election in 2024." Similarly, Union Law Minister (Ravi Shankar Prasad) and the president (Amit Shah) of BJP both reiterated that BJP will rule for the next five decades. These BJP leaders pointed to their intention to change the Constitution, which is secular, democratic, socialist and progressive (The Economic Times, 2019, March 16).

the public domain that expose the *Brahmanical* mindset of the state, and it is evident in the implementation of development policies related to Dalit communities. According to the Constitutional provision, the government of India and every state has to allocate funds for SC and ST welfare programs (known as SC-ST sub-plans) as per their population in that respective state. Despite the legal mandate, over the years, the government of Gujarat has been lowering the budget allocations for the sub-plans to significantly less than the mandated amount. The 2011 census data shows that SCs make up 7.09 percent and STs 14.75 percent of the population in Gujarat; in contrast so far the maximum budget allocation for SC sub-plan has been 4.98 percent and for ST sub-plan has been 13.7 percent (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India (n.d.)). The higher level bureaucrats in the state admitted that except for the Social Justice and Empowerment and Tribal Development departments, other departments do not bother to spend the allocated funds for the welfare of the SCs and STs (Dave, 2020, February 3).

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India reported that the reservation policy for SCs is not implemented as per the norms in higher education institutions in the state. As a result, there are a larger number of SC posts remaining unfilled in universities (Wire, 2019, December 17). For example, in the name of educational development of marginalized students, the government has built *Samras* (translated as harmony) hostels in six big cities with a special focus to provide accommodation to the students from SC, ST, OBC and economically weaker sections (Times of India, 2012, October 1).¹⁰⁶ Allegedly the funds are committed to the

¹⁰⁶ The term is coined by RSS to propagate a false image that RSS embraces the oppressed castes, specifically, Dalits and Tribals, to unite Hindus across the castes under a Hindu (religious) identity. In reality, RSS preserves the caste structure as an integral part of Hinduism or Hindu culture, which is Brahmanical propaganda.

development of SC students, but are being appropriated for the general student population.¹⁰⁷ The reality of the hostels is explained by Suresh:

I am also aware of the fact that despite the reservation, SC students are not able to have its benefits... For example, the *Samras* hostels, it was earlier aimed for Dalit students only... So the plan was to create a dedicated hostel for the Dalit students. Now they have constructed ten floor tall hostel blocks. As per the original plan, all SC students from the other hostels would be shifted to *Samras* hostels. But the people from other communities protested against it... They allotted rooms as per social categories - SC, ST, OBC and Open.

Suresh commutes every day from his village to the campus, and he spends a couple of hours in traveling. He had a plan to move into the hostel, but due to limited occupancy for SC students, he could not get a room in the hostel and is forced to commute long distances from home on a daily basis. It is a widespread perception among Dalit students that the *Samras* hostels were intended to cater to Dalit students only, so Dalit students from different hostels in cities can stay together next to university campuses with decent facilities. But instead the *Samras* hostels were opened up to everyone, limiting the spaces available to Dalit students. Information about funds to construct the hostels is still ambiguous and has not been released by the government. I found ironic that the hostels buildings are huge and seem luxurious compared to academic departments and other buildings on the campus.

The state government has been wrongly allocating the SC-ST sub-plan development funds to other purposes (Sabrang, 2018, June 14).¹⁰⁸ In case of the *Samras*

¹⁰⁷ In the press release about the *Samras* in Baroda, it was mentioned that the concept of *Samras* hostel is developed by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment which suggests that the funds to construct the hostels most likely derived from the SC-ST sub-plan. Therefore, many Dalit students and faculty accuse the government of misusing the funds which had been allocated for the development of SC-ST students only (Times of India, 2012, October 1).

¹⁰⁸ Valjibhai Patel, a dedicated social activist and the secretary of Council for Social Justice filed a Right to Information (RTI) petition, and he revealed that the Gujarat government used the SC-ST sub-plan budget to

hostels, the benefits of Dalit students were deliberately shifted to the other privileged group of students. Jigar, as a senior faculty reiterated that “the hostels (*Samras*) were commissioned through the SC development funds, but somehow with the name of *Samras* the current government manipulated the facts which led to the injustice to the community.” This is a reality that many development programs and funds that are supposed to be utilized for Dalits, have been used for other purposes (Das, 2018, January 29).¹⁰⁹ It also shows the casteist nature of the state and the level of privileged caste dominance that prevails in the bureaucracy. This is the situation across the country; therefore, states such as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have passed additional laws to ensure appropriate SC-ST sub-plan expenditure. In other words, it is an irony that the states have to enact special laws to implement the Constitutional provision (SC-ST sub-plan) in their states.

In recent years, students from the oppressed castes have started forming identity-based student groups to counter privileged castes’ dominance and Brahmanical culture in higher education. Though marginalized student groups are mobilizing themselves in elite public institutions and central universities, in the state university that was my research site, such types of groups did not exist in any organized form. Student politics in public universities in Gujarat appear to be driven largely by mainstream electoral politics. Historically, the privileged castes have maintained a hegemonic position in the bureaucracy and electoral politics since the founding of Gujarat in 1961 (Shah, 1987).

prepare a film on Vadnagar (Prime Minister’s hometown), to advertise the ‘Statue of Unity’ and welcome the Prime Minister to Gujarat. These expenses are not related to SC-ST development programs/efforts.

¹⁰⁹ The scenario is similar at the national level; in 2020, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment pointed out that in the absence of a comprehensive database of SC beneficiaries, the fund has been underutilized. (Mitra, 2020, February 23).

There are two main student groups on the university campus; NSUI (National Students' Union of India) that is supported by the Congress Party and second, ABVP which is supported by the BJP and the RSS. Since BJP is in power, ABVP is dominant across most campuses in the state, including in the state university where I conducted my research. Manan narrated his observation regarding the role of Dalit students in student groups on campus:

[B]y giving them (Dalit students) some small role and responsibility they generally waive them away from their academic profile to an altogether different side. If you closely observe, then in ABVP and NSUI there are quite a lot of SC and OBC students in it. They are being used in favor of pity positions, but at a higher level, they don't have any real power with them.

Manan said that ABVP and NSUI both use Dalit and OBC students for their political objectives. He also claimed that many marginalized castes' students are active in the groups, but their representation in leadership positions is negligible. In other words, the widespread perception is that students from marginalized castes act as 'foot soldiers'¹¹⁰ for the political elites. Historically, Dalits and Tribals have been foot soldiers of political parties, including both left and right wing parties and organizations where they are exploited for ground work, and dragged into dirty jobs such as violence, rioting and confrontations against the state (Teltumbde, 2005; Mountain, 2011).¹¹¹ The impact of this history and politics is evident at the state and national levels and forms the climate for Dalit and other marginalized caste groups on campus. The next section presents Dalit students' responses regarding their perceptions and experiences of climate on campus.

¹¹⁰ An egregious fact brought to light by Raju Solanki, a Dalit activist in Gujarat, stated that in the 2002 Gujarat Pogrom, 2,945 people were arrested in Ahmedabad. Among these, 1,368 Muslims and 1,577 Hindus; further, among the Hindus, 797 were OBCs, 747 Dalits, 19 Patels, 9 other privileged castes and only 2 Baniyas and 2 Brahmins (Solanki, 2013, July 23).

¹¹¹ In 'Gujarat Pogrom' (2002), BJP and RSS misguided and provoked Dalits to attacks Muslims and rioting in Muslim neighborhoods, and exploited them as foot soldiers of the Hindu nation (Setalvad, 2016).

6.1.2 Perspectives of Dalit Students on Campus Climate

As I elaborated in this and previous chapters; privileged caste dominance is institutionalized in the university administration all the way from the highest levels to the level of student organizations. As a result, Dalit students experience subtle and implicit caste biases in social relationships with peers and faculty on campus. In response to my question regarding campus climate assessment or surveys to evaluate students' perceptions and experiences on campus, Prabhat said, "the university or college has not conducted any type of student survey. I think the university is not bothered to know what the problems and concerns of students are." Prabhat's response was echoed by all the interlocutors in various ways, confirming that the university has not conducted any kind of survey or platform to know students' perspective about the campus climate or any other concerns, nor shown any interest to do so. In other words, the university does not have any kind of data regarding students' institutional life, social relationships across student groups and perceptions about the learning environment on campus.

The previous section discussed the influence of the broader historical and sociopolitical contexts on university culture and practices. Reema (PhD, First-generation doctoral student in Languages) adopted a stance that was shared by many - that "internally the university is greatly influenced by the ruling party's political ideologies, but as students, we keep a distance from it. We are students and do not want to fall prey to politics." Like Reema, other students also presented a negative image of ABVP and NSUI groups, therefore, most interlocutors are not associated with these student groups of the Center or the Right, and the Left is absent on the campus. During my field work, I observed that some faculty members were allied with the student groups, and they

avored students who are active in these groups. So the student-faculty political nexus might intimidate some students who prefer to keep a safe distance.

I asked the interlocutors about their perception and experience of campus climate, and they interpreted ‘campus climate’ differently, so narrated diverse responses.

Regarding student politics on campus, Pravin said, “We see some form of physical violence that happens between the student leaders; student groups like ABVP end up physically fighting with others on the campus.” In the current political context, ABVP has a dominant position at the campus. Therefore, students from ABVP have been associated with indecent and hostile behaviors on and outside of the college/university campuses (Times of India, 2012, October 1).¹¹² According to the campus climate literature, physical violence on a campus is the single largest adversarial factor which degrades the quality of the campus climate, and creates barriers in the path of academic success for marginalized students (Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). I argue that campus climate reinforces and perpetuates the caste divide between Dalits and non-Dalits (Ovichegan, 2015).

Due to limited understanding of campus climate frameworks, a considerable number of students interpreted campus climate to mean ‘academic environment’ which is one of the crucial dimensions of campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2012). The experiences of the academic environment varied among my interlocutors and differed depending on which department they were from. For example, Zeena said, “in the department, we have nice environment to study; faculties are very helpful and encourage us for studies.” Zeena interpreted the campus climate in the context of her department. however, I asked about

¹¹² For instance, ABVP affiliated students threw black color on the face of a faculty, and they paraded the faculty on the campus of *Krantiguru Shyamji Krishna Verma Kachchh* University for almost an hour (The Indian Express, 2018, June 27).

‘the campus climate’ and translated in Gujarati (which was not as precise as it is in English), but most interlocutors could not elucidate their perspectives about the climate on campus. Another dimension of the framework is ‘intergroup relations’; regular and sociable interaction between students and among various institutional stakeholders has paramount significance to improve the campus climate (Tinto, 1997; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). In the context of social interactions between students and faculties on campus, Raj narrated his experience:

I always had a fear to openly interact with a faculty... There is also a hierarchical distance, and this system existed until MA We had to internalize this way of functioning and many students would have to greet and also touch the feet of the faculty... Once the distance between the student and the faculty breaks, then students will be able to share their experiences openly. And for a faculty, unless they come closer to the students, they would never know their students.

Raj experienced a hierarchical relationship with his faculties, which inhibited a healthy conversation between them. Further, greeting a faculty means students have to call a sir/madam suffix after a name, otherwise, the faculty will feel offended and culturally inappropriate, which is harmful for a student in the hierarchical system. In some colleges/universities, to show deference to a faculty member, students bow down and touch their feet (Maurya, 2018). Raj pointed out that the hierarchy creates an interpersonal distance with the faculty, and it does not allow a frank conversation between them. Therefore, students are afraid to interact with them and the faculty do not know their students well. Research in the U.S. context shows that faculty can foster intergroup relations across racial and ethnic boundaries which reflects in higher levels of academic performance by black students and faculty as well (Gregory, 2000). I argue that casteist culture, sociopolitical environments and the hierarchical attitude by faculty

further strengthens the sense of pessimism about campus climate for Dalit students on Indian campuses.

In medical college, hierarchy is a part of an educational experience and junior students cannot escape it. To describe the mentality of new students, Jayesh explained, “Most of the students come with specific mindset and preparation to bear some amount of pain and hardships (ragging)... If they are asked to do the sit ups, then they will do it.” “Ragging”¹¹³ is an inappropriate social behavior by senior students with their juniors. In 2009, University Grant Commission introduced a stringent and punishable anti-ragging policy to curb the menace. During my field work, I have noticed anti-ragging posters (Appendix J) in departments at the campus. Despite it being banned, ragging exists in subtle and implicit forms. Further, Jayesh added:

It (ragging) is banned, but still it does continue. The faculty is not bothered by it, they are interested to see that their work is done. For example, if I want this work to be done, then I am going to pass it up on my junior to do the same, he will further trickle it down to his juniors. At the bottom are the first year students.

Jayesh is pursuing a graduate program in the department of community medicine, which is less prestigious in medical sciences; therefore, he claimed that the level of ragging is less and he does not face stern action from his department compared to other departments (Avasthi, 2013 & 2015). He revealed that the faculty is aware of the ragging menace, but they are not concerned about it. The above experiences of interlocutors indicate that sensitization and awareness programs for faculty are extremely important to improve the

¹¹³ “Any act of physical or mental abuse (including bullying and exclusion) targeted at another student (freshman or otherwise) on the ground of color, race, religion, caste, ethnicity, gender (including transgender), sexual orientation, appearance, nationality, regional origins, linguistic identity, place of birth, place of residence or economic background” (The Gazette of India: University Grant Commission, 2016, June 29, p.2).

overall campus climate, and to facilitate a positive climate experience for marginalized students (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003).

The hierarchy runs through the institution, and the senior students also perpetuate it. It is evident that routine incidents of bullying are serious issues in higher education, especially in esteemed and elite institutions. Mariraj reflected on the hierarchy in the medical college; “the climate is not good here... I have seen mass failing because juniors do not respect (the hierarchy) to seniors.” Earlier I discussed (in Chapter 5) that Mariraj experienced the worst form of hierarchy and caste-based discrimination in the college. Mariraj claimed that when junior students do not obey the orders of senior students, they face serious consequences such as being failed in exams. For instance, in practical exams, senior students supervise and grade junior students’ performances in the exams; as a result, they have an authority to assign grades to junior students. Jayesh and Mariraj revealed several serious concerns in the college: A rampant hierarchy among the students, casualness of authority, lower academic integrity and an inimical climate on the college campus. This situation prevails on many campuses across the country; a study conducted by a committee appointed by the Supreme Court of India reported that 84 percent of students do not report ragging incidents (Koshy, 2018). In most colleges and universities, the authority remains ignorant and denies the existence of ragging on the campus. Therefore, ragging is undeniably a serious concern of the campus climate across the country.

It is a well-known fact that most state universities in India are recognized for their mediocre academic standards. Academic integrity is shown to be a serious concern in the interlocutor responses. A considerable number of interlocutors have described academic

issues at the campus; it is not limited to Dalit students only. Academic environment is a central aspect of the diverse learning environment (Hurtado et al., 2012) for all students, and impacts the marginalized students the most in terms of their academic success.

Ashish described his personal experience regarding academic malpractice and dishonesty:

I went to evaluate my final papers of statistics (answer sheets) in MA; it was not evaluated by my professor, instead it was done by me as a student. He could not cope-up with the workload, thus he asked to four students to do evaluation; we checked our own final papers of university exam. We already had these experiences with him, what else do we expect in MPhil program? He asked us to copy (plagiarize the dissertation) and we did so (in MPhil.).

Ashish mentioned that he and his other three friends evaluated their own answer sheets of statistics exams. Further, Ashish acknowledged that he plagiarized in thesis writing and claimed that the same faculty was an academic advisor in his MPhil program, who suggested that Ashish copy from another thesis. This appears to not be an isolated instance and functions as an open secret among students. Similarly, Vaishali narrated another academic issue in her department:

During my university exam, a student next to me knew the supervisor... Thus the supervisor was informed that once I submit my answer sheet, he should hand over it to the girl next to me, I overheard this conversation. Then, the supervisor asked my answer sheet, not hers. I denied submitting, and said, "first collect it from her, then I will submit mine." As soon as the exam completed, I called my father, he directly came here and talked to the principal. I had an advantage that knowing people here would be of great help, otherwise, nobody listens an ordinary student.

Vaishali's father is a professor in one of the colleges associated with the university; moreover, he is a prominent senate member in the university leadership. Therefore, she dared to confront the faculty who was complicit in academic dishonesty. Vaishali also acknowledged that because of her privileges, she was able to complain to the principal

without fear or repercussions; however, most students do not have the power to raise their voice and in any case, the administration is unlikely to entertain such complaints.

Caste is subtly present in the campus climate (Lum, 2019), and it does not openly appear in social relationships. Jayesh explained caste-based social gatherings in his medical college, “every community (caste) organizes their gathering; i.e., Patels organize an event called “*Spandan*”, Chaudharys’ event called “*Sparsh*”; similarly, other different communities organize events in the medical field... SC students organize the “*Paramita*” event.” Each community organizes their separate gathering, in other words, caste-based kinship is evident in intergroup relations between students. Faculty also participate in these gatherings, thereby legitimizing caste-based groups. Jayesh specified that the gatherings occur outside of the campus, therefore, the university and college administration can refute any institutional involvement. However, the point is, they are promoting and strengthening caste identities within a caste group and propagating caste culture in institutional life. This kind of event itself is evidence of a casteist environment¹¹⁴ at the college campus, and narratives of Jayesh, Ashok, Pratik and Mariraj confirm that the campus climate is not conducive for Dalit and marginalized students. Specific to the campus climate, Manan described his experience:

When I look at it in an overall way (environment), then for sure, students from the SC background are treated differently than the others. If I mention my example, despite securing the top position, they didn’t give me the seat. Caste intersects everywhere either in internal exams or in sport issues. They are basically interested to distribute a degree for the namesake; there isn’t much to reflect about the quality of education.

¹¹⁴ Institutional structures, practices, and culture create a campus racial climate which conveys aggressive messages to people of color. These kinds of hostility are collectively permitted and encouraged by the university administration (Yosso et al., 2009).

Manan's reflection highlights the centrality of caste on campus climate; he experienced both covert and overt caste incidents on campus (discussed in Chapter 2); as a result, his "sense of belonging"¹¹⁵ (Walton & Cohen, 2011) with the institution is low. Scholarship on campus climate suggests that hostile experiences on campus, aggression in the climate and a lower sense of belonging to the institution, are afflictions which are especially detrimental to minority or marginalized student groups and their academic outcomes (Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993; Gregory, 2000). Despite numerous incidents of social tension around caste identity, studies have reported caste-based discrimination across the country, yet there is a virtual absence of discourse on academic and social climates on campuses (Lum, 2019).

The interlocutors' perspectives and experiences indicate that the campus climate is supposed to be a major concern for the university administration; despite this, there is a serious lack of institutional policies and measures to improve the climate and to deal with the issues of marginalized and Dalit students (Lum, 2019). Some elite institutions do provide academic support to the quota students to help them catch up; however, "what goes by the name of remedial programs and support are frankly a joke and often infantilize students who go to them" (Mehta, 2008, p.365).¹¹⁶ Research on campus climate suggests that to transform the climate into a positive one, four essential features need to be incorporated into the institutional setting; 1) the representation of students, faculty and administrators of the oppressed castes, 2) inclusive pedagogy and curriculum

¹¹⁵ In a simplistic explanation, sense of belonging is perceptions and feelings of welcomed, respected, included and a part of the campus community (Strayhorn, 2012).

¹¹⁶ Elite institutions such as IITs do provide remedial courses to so-called under prepared students (mostly Dalit and Tribal students), but they are superficial and not sincerely designed to educate these students; moreover, the tag of remedial courses further stigmatize them as "PC students" by the faculty and peers.

that reflects the experiences of the oppressed castes, 3) institutional programs to support students from oppressed castes for their enrollment, retention and graduation and 4) institutional commitment to embrace diversity and deliver social justice (Hurtado, 1992; Jackson & Swan, 1991). In Indian higher education, none of these features exist, and institutional responses to issues about campus climate and student diversity on campus are negligible. As a result, this provides a great opportunity to initiate a diversity discourse and conduct research on a range of topics related to diversity in higher education. The next section discusses why institutional support for Dalit students is essential for their wellbeing and academic success.

6.2 Importance of Institutional Support for Dalit Students

As discussed earlier, reservations and related affirmative action policies are great catalysts for enhancing higher education access among marginalized castes and socially disadvantaged groups. In the context of the current reservation policy, higher education institutions do not respond to the (equity) issues of reserved category students. Even in premier institutions no efforts are being made to assist the students; contrary, these institutions pretend to be inclusive because they have been enrolling socially marginalized students, which is legally mandated (Mehta, 2008). Hence, their superficial implementation of the quota policy does not address the fundamental problems (discrimination, poverty and poor quality of school education) facing Dalit students, which cause dropouts and lower academic outcomes (Weisskopf 2004; Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). The quota policy should expand its impact and dimensions in the higher education policy framework. I argue that the existing policy has been limited to merely providing

an entry into an institution without facilitating institutional support (Pal, 2015) for oppressed caste students.¹¹⁷

India's affirmative action policies highlight two fundamental aspects: access and equity in higher education. The admission quotas for excluded caste groups facilitate access to higher education. However, access by itself does not bring equity or inclusion for the oppressed caste students. Equity issues have been overlooked by the policy makers either intentionally or due to ignorance. Thus, despite the higher enrollment rate of Dalit students, their retention and degree attainment rates remain lower than that of privileged groups. (Tilak, 2015).

In the US context, PWIs have a legacy of institutionalized racism, and provide limited access for students of color; however, some PWIs have demonstrated institutional change by accepting responsibility for providing access and an inclusive climate to students of color (Gregory, 2000). Whereas, in the case of Indian higher education, the privileged caste dominated institutions must first acknowledge in the first place that casteism on campuses is rampant; only then can solutions be created. This section will focus on the importance of institutional support for Dalit students. Based on my data, I have delineated three areas that students have been raised as concerns that preclude their inclusion, achievement and success in the university; first, issues of social adjustment in the new institutional environment, second, overcoming socioeconomic challenges, and third, severe shortcomings with the university's grievance redressal mechanisms.

¹¹⁷ Access is on one side of the spectrum and degree attainment is on the other; Desai and Kulkarni (2008) states that decline in college completion among the Dalit students defeats the purpose of the quota policy.

6.2.1 Issues of Social Adjustment in the New Institutional Environment

Responses of the interlocutors regarding social adjustment in a new academic institutional setting can be divided into two distinct categories: rural and urban. Interestingly, only rural students reported any significant social adjustment issues. All the urban students of my study belong to the same city where the campus is located. Therefore, they are familiar with city culture and have friends from their neighborhood who assist and commute with them which provide essential information on various topics and certainly social support. Second, urban students speak city colloquial Gujarati and some students frequently use English words in conversation that assist them in adjusting to a new academic setting. Lastly, as discussed in previous chapters, urban students did not explicitly experience caste-based discrimination or caste stigma during their childhood and schooling; as a result, they do not carry psychological anxiety regarding their caste identity. By contrast, a considerable number of rural students narrated a range of experiences regarding their social adjustment issues.

I asked the interlocutors about their concerns and anxieties when they joined higher education institutions. Ashok described his experience when he joined a medical college from a small town: “The first six months (in medical college) was very difficult for me in xxxx (city). In the beginning, all the people and friends around me were unknown, and I also had inferiority feelings.” Ashok was born and raised in a town in south Gujarat, so joining a medical college in a big city was a major cultural shock. In Chapter 5, I discussed Ashok’s childhood caste experiences during schooling, where his lived experience in a small town both brought down his self-confidence, and caused

social adjustment issues in the beginning of his higher education journey. Similarly, Jyoti narrated her first day experience in a science college:

[E]veryone seemed high class (elite) in the classroom. Whereas, I was looking quite simple... On the very first day of the college, I rode my bicycle (bike) and reached there. Everyone was parking their scooters, while I was trying to park my bicycle there (laughing...). I didn't know about my classroom, so I went to the office for the enquiry. They helped me with the navigation, the moment I entered the classroom, I saw all the new faces and didn't really feel like sitting beside anyone. Hence, I ended up sitting on the last bench.

While narrating her first day college experience, she laughed because she did not know that riding a bicycle to the college was a naive act according to college culture in India. Further, Jyoti added that when she entered of the classroom, at first sight, her peers appeared elite compared to her, and reminded her of her lower class status. It indicates her low self-confidence and feeling of being atypical in the classroom; therefore, she could not sit with other peers, and sat on the last bench. Jyoti's experience illuminates the intersectionality of many Dalit students; she is a female student, first-generation college aspirant, belongs to a low-income family has a semi-urban background and a Dalit identity which both sub-consciously interplay with other identities, and create social anxiety during interaction with perceived high status peers. From an intersectionality perspective, Jyoti's identities interplay to shape her distinctive experiences and the unique challenges which Jyoti and students like her encounter during their higher education journeys (Museus & Griffin, 2011).

I now present a few more narratives from Dalit students and discuss how converging subordinate identities contribute to their social adjustment challenges. My interlocutors from village backgrounds narrated similar stories about the beginning of

their higher education journeys. For instance, Vinod explained his anxiety while joining a college in Ahmedabad city:

In the first week (of xxx college), I was nervous that how will I manage in a new place, new environment and with new people. In consideration of my rural background, it was not very easy to mix-up with everyone... I shifted from a village to the city. I didn't understand anything at first and everything looks new and different. The first six months were quite tough, but after that I mixed with other students.

Vinod knew that he has joined one of the so-called best colleges in the city. He was anxious about the college, peers and urban environment, because he thought that his cultural and village background were inconsistent with a city college culture. He belonged to a humble rural family, so financial limitation also reflects in dressing and social interaction with peers. Vinod confessed his first semester was difficult and an overwhelming experience. Similarly, Suresh described that “first day was intimidating, as we were in the English medium college and we also got late on the first day as we were traveling from *Bavla*... The entire class was full, so we got the last bench to sit.” As discussed in Chapter 2, most interlocutors acknowledged that they do not feel confident about their English competencies, and they feel anxiety about academic work in English. Before joining the college, Suresh had English language anxiety and both he and Vinod commuted every day from their respective villages to Ahmedabad during their undergrad degree, which restricted their movement, social interaction and participation in events on campus.

These experiences show that Dalit students from rural areas are more likely to face social adjustment issues than urban students in higher education. However, the university does not provide any kind of support to assist Dalit and Tribal students when they are vulnerable and dealing with a range of problems in the beginning of their higher

education journeys. Mehul, as a Dalit faculty who observed and assisted Dalit students reiterated the sociocultural issues of Dalit students, and he described:

As per my observation, I believe that there is no such difference in terms of intellect between the SC-ST and other category students. But culturally and socially there are big gaps, especially, for the students who are coming from rural areas. Even today in rural areas, caste-based discrimination is being openly practiced. The students would have faced the discrimination, then come here. When they come here the environment is completely different, this would feel overwhelming to them. If we extend the social support here to overcome this fear, it would be a great help to them.

Mehul acknowledged that there is a lack of institutional support for rural SC-ST students; further, he added, these students face cultural issues in urban higher education institutions. Mehul recommended “social support”¹¹⁸ for the students, so their transition into the academic life could be easy and welcoming.

6.2.2 Socioeconomic Challenges

In addition to not fitting in, Dalit students face serious economic hurdles in their higher education journeys. Studies reported that students from lower income families experience impediments in their higher education journey, and therefore, their economic background is a crucial predictor of higher education outcomes (Allen, 1992; Stephens, Hamedani & Destin, 2014). I discussed earlier that the economic status of a family plays a vital role in accessing higher education and attaining a degree. Sahil narrated his financial struggles:

I would attend the college regularly, but whenever there was work available then I would go to work... Yes, the financial constraints are there. I have been mostly working during the vacation time. I have a friend xxx, who has furniture business, thus wherever there is work available as a carpenter, I would go and earn the daily

¹¹⁸ Bourdieu elaborated that social capital is an instrument to access privileges and resources which are essentially embedded in hierarchical and reproductive social structures.

wage. I have to do the screw fittings and assemble tables and other furniture items.

Sahil comes from a humble background; to support his studies he works as a daily wage labor in a furniture manufacturing unit; whenever he had to work, he sacrificed studies at in return for a daily wage. This is a reality facing many Dalit students; that with ongoing studies they have to support their families or themselves, which adds additional pressure along with the existing issues. Pravin also described financial challenges but had a different strategy to deal with these:

When the fee payment date would be near, I didn't have enough money to pay the fees. Then I would borrow money from a friend or family relative. Once I would receive my yearly scholarship, I would return back that money borrowed. So every semester I had to face a financial anxiety.

It indicates that Pravin's education depends on the SC student scholarship that is provided by the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, a state government agency. If Pravin does not receive his scholarship money on time, which is often the case, then he has to borrow and also try and repay by the promised deadline. Every year there are numerous Dalit students who do not receive scholarships in a timely manner. I heard this from my interlocutors but it also appears widespread across institutions and other states (People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space, 2019).

It is a well-known fact that Dalit and Tribal students are more likely to belong to low income families (Velaskar, 1986; Desai & Dubey, 2012); yet there is a lack of institutional financial support for them. To explain his personal struggle dealing with these financial challenges, Ronak said:

[I] was leading in sports like Football, Athletics, Volleyball, Kabaddi and Cricket. I was also an inter-university youth champion. There was only one target for me, which game would have the maximum award money. As that would help me support financially and I would not want to ask for additional money from home.

As a faculty member, Ronak understands the economic anxiety of Dalit students (e.g. Sahil and Pravin) because he had gone through a similar struggle himself. Ronak employed his athletic skills to support his studies; he worked hard in sports, so he would receive financial awards and reduce economic pressures on his family. Ronak's story indicates that since his student days the scenario has not changed for Dalit and Tribal students.

As discussed in Chapter 2, financial challenges create obstacles in the academic journey of Dalit students. Scholarship just covers tuition and the rest of the students have to pay from their pockets, which aggravates the financial struggle of the students and their families. Other expenses such as transport, food, books, clothes, eating out and other comforts which other students routinely do, are unaffordable to them. Vinod described, "funding was a huge problem in my educational journey. Even today sometimes I don't have the money to buy the bus pass, so I have to stay home for 6 -7 days." Similarly, Manan and Dipak also expressed that throughout his education journey they experienced financial hardships and still managed to continue their studies.

In the context of the socioeconomic conditions of Dalits and to promote higher education for them, the government of India offers the National Fellowship for Scheduled Caste Students to provide financial support to pursue MPhil and PhD programs. To highlight the significance of the fellowship, Raj said:

I was selected as the Rajiv Gandhi Fellow (old name) from 2011- 2016. If I had not received this fellowship, then it would have been very difficult for me to continue with my higher education. The fellowship money was a great support to me and my family. Or else I would have dropped out like many other students due to financial constraints.

As Raj mentioned, the fellowship has been a great support to continue his MPhil and PhD programs; moreover, he was able to support his family from the fellowship funds.

Despite the significance of the fellowship, the current Union government does not disburse the fellowship money on time; according to research scholars, during the 2016-17 and 2017-18 academic years, many students did not receive their fellowships for two whole years (Kunju, 2018, November 20)! Surviving two years without financial support would have been extremely difficult for most Dalit students. I argue that due to irregularity in scholarship disbursement and deliberate denial of scholarship funds, each year many Dalit and Tribal students could not continue their studies. This indicates the apathy¹¹⁹ of the bureaucracy and the political class towards Dalit students, and exposes the casteist attitude that is widespread in the Union government¹²⁰ (People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space, 2019).

6.2.3 Experiences with the University's Grievance Redressal Mechanism

The primary mechanism for grievance redressal on most campuses, including my research site, is the SC/ST grievance redressal office (it is known as "SC/ST cell") on campus that typically has a faculty member in charge of managing the office and its responsibilities in addition to managing his regular faculty duties of teaching and advising and other obligations. In 2013, the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India issued a directive to form a SC/ST cell in each public university, to ensure the

¹¹⁹ The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment repeatedly (in 2017 & 2018) requested to the Financial Minister to release SC-ST scholarship amount; however, the minister neither replied nor released the money, and held on to scholarships of around 5.6 million SC-ST students.

¹²⁰ Abhay Flavian Xaxa, a Dalit activist, stated that the current BJP/RSS government advances 'intellectual lynching' of the quota students. Further, he added that "this is happening in three ways – physical discrimination, fiscal discrimination and barriers put up against the policies meant for the development of ST, SC and OBC students" (People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space, 2019, p. 27).

reservation policy is implemented as per their quotas and also assist the SC/ST category students in resolving issues that they experience on campus.

I asked the interlocutors about their perceptions and experiences with the cell, and a considerable number of Dalit students did not even know of its existence! For example, Hemangi said, “I don’t think there is any kind of system (SC/ST cell) exists here.” Similarly, Sahil echoed that “yes, I have heard about it, but I don’t know anything.” It shows that information about the cell has not reached its beneficiaries, even though it is formed to assist and provide them safeguards against caste discrimination. Further, Vinod described that “I have heard the name, but I am not aware that it exists on the campus. If you can give me some information about it that would be so helpful.” I argue that the above responses of Dalit students defeat the purpose it was created for in the first place. Moreover, it is a responsibility of the office to educate the SC-ST students and staff members about its objectives and services being offered at the campus. This is another example of progressive policies and protective measures to promote higher education among the Dalits and Tribals that are being systematically weakened and inadequately implemented by privileged caste officials and the administration.

To inquire further, I asked the interlocutors how they would handle a case/incident of caste discrimination on campus. Despite the existence of the SC/ST cell, Jaya said, “if the incident (discrimination) occurs on the college premises, then I would go and speak to the professors, and if it happens on the campus, then I would go and meet the Vice-Chancellor.” Most students do not know how to react or where to register a grievance in a case of caste-based discrimination or how to seek support pertaining to their issues. Further, Ashok described his vulnerability, “I don’t think I can go anywhere.

At the most, I can share about it with my friends. I don't think there is any space (mechanism) to share such concerns in the (medical) college." The above narratives clearly indicate that the SC/ST cell does not effectively assist students, which has been confirmed by Leena, who did not know about the cell. Leena was harassed by her advisor (discussed in chapter 2), and she used personal contacts to seek justice:

Firstly, I had shared about these things with my father, then my father spoke to xxx (a senate member) for the same. He (a senate member) called me to share the details, and assisted me to write a letter to explain how I was harassed by my advisor.

Leena lives in a city and her father is a local Dalit activist, so she was able to approach a senate member to seek support and protest against the advisor. Leena received assistance and guidance to register a complaint pertaining to caste-based discrimination against her advisor; further, she was able to reach the university authority and dare to protest against the injustice. The senate member is a Dalit, but he also did not contact the SC/ST cell; instead he directly contacted the higher authority of the university.

When the minority or marginalized groups do not have faith in the grievance mechanism it creates a grave concern pertaining to the campus climate (Gregory, 2000). It is evident that neither students nor staff from the Dalit community, are accessing the services of the SC/ST cell. I argue that the purpose of the office is being deliberately undermined by the casteist administration and the political class of the state.¹²¹ In my

¹²¹ In response to an RTI petition filed by Amnesty International India, to seek information about the grievance mechanism (e.g. webpages, complaint register and SC/ST cell) to address caste-based discrimination in Indian universities, the UGC reported that only 155 out of 800 universities across the country responded and only around half of those have a webpage to register caste-based discrimination complaints. Similarly, only around half (47 percent) of the universities had a SC/ST cell or a committee to look into the complaints of SC/ST students. Shockingly, 87 percent of universities reported zero caste discrimination complaints (Sitlhou, 2017).

interviews, I asked whether students had faith (confidence) in the office, and Manan replied:

No. Internally all of it is one and the same (casteist). If I complain my name will be known to the authority, and once they know the identity of the student, then you are in trouble. In the progress report, we need signatures and acknowledgements of a guide (advisor). Thus, I didn't want to get into those complications, instead focus and get my degree first.

Manan claimed that the office is casteist and he does not have faith in it. Further, he raises a serious concern about the transparency of the office; there is no guarantee of anonymity or confidentiality, so students' names get disclosed easily, which deters them from registering a complaint in the office. Manan also mentioned that a complaint against a faculty or advisor is counterproductive for students, and they might face consequences for their action.

A similar opinion was expressed by Ashish, "if I bring an issue to the office, then I will only face troubles. They will create hinderance in any work, hence everyone is afraid." The impression is that the office is not doing its job of seeking justice and complaining to the office against any individual or administrative process will merely lead to retaliation and humiliation. It is an irony that the objectives of the office are to provide justice and protect the SC-ST students from any kind of discrimination on campus, yet the students fear very real consequences and harm should they seek the office's assistance. Similarly, the Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC)¹²² also exists on paper, but not on the ground; during my field visit to the campus, I repeatedly observed that the EOC office was closed, and when I inquired about it, no one knows about it, just a big

¹²² The University Grant Commission issued guidelines in which the purpose of EOC is "to oversee the effective implementation of policies and programs for disadvantaged groups, to provide guidance and counselling with respect to academic, financial, social and other matters and to enhance the diversity within the campus" (University Grant Commission, 2012, p.2).

board is posted on the wall of an academic building. I argue that the above narratives of Dalit students are the most egregious example of institutionalized casteism and also indicate the epitome of hostile climate at the campus. The last section presents suggestions pertaining to institutional support that are envisioned by Dalit students and faculty.

6.3 Recommendations of Dalit Students and Faculty for Institutional Support

Discussion in the previous sections leads me to reflect on the kind of institutional and policy changes required to improve the campus climate and support framework for Dalit students. I draw insights from equity and diversity research in the US that could be usefully applied to the Indian higher education contexts and significantly improve the situation for Dalit and other marginalized student groups. Campus climate research proposes that ‘institutional support’¹²³ (Gonzalez, 2006) and awareness programs are a proactive strategy to provide assistance for vulnerable student groups and will sensitize the campus community about democratic values and inclusiveness that impact positively on the campus climate. I asked interlocutors, what type of institutional support would you seek from the university/department? Most interlocutors struggled to answer the question, because there is a lack of institutional support at the campus with policy documents virtually impossible to obtain. I acknowledge that while asking these kinds of questions, I had to provide some specific examples which might have influenced the responses.

In response to the question, an overwhelming number of Dalit students reiterated that the admission quota and SC scholarships are important institutional supports. I

¹²³ In other words, facilitates crucial resources and different types of social support which ensure active participation of students in institutional domains that manage resources and network paths linked to empowerment (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

explained the meaning of institutional supports that are also common in the literature on diversity and equity. These typically include professional, academic, financial, cultural and psychological support. My interlocutors interpreted and responded as per their understanding, not specifically about the question. For instance, Dipak highlighted professional support, and he suggested, “according to me most of the SC students lack proper guidance from the career perspectives. Financial help would be secondary thing, but appropriate career guidance should be made available to all of SC students.” As a faculty, Jigar narrated a similar suggestion, “the university should establish a center which can give them guidance on career and other professional matters. This will help them in their academic goals and for the future.” I discussed in Chapter 4 that a considerable number of interlocutors belong to first-generation college families, so they lack familial support to pursue their higher education journey. Research also indicates that first-generation students may not receive appropriate familial emotional support because their families lack higher education experience (Terenzini et al., 1996). As a result, they struggle to receive professional and career guidance, which are auxiliary training for their academic growth and career options.

A considerable number of the interlocutors seek professional development support; though, they articulated professional development in different ways. In response to my question about availability of professional development support on campus, Dipali explained:

No. There aren't any of these (professional development) programs being conducted. In fact, I feel that there should be more programs about English language and career guidance related issues. I think personality development is also one of the very important skills. Whenever we go for an interview or representing the university outside the campus, we feel lack of language skills and self-confidence.

Dipali belongs to a middle class and well educated family; even then she felt the need for professional development support on campus. What then for students from more modest, working class or rural backgrounds? She was able to express the need for professional skills such as personality development, communication skills and self-improvement programs for student development. Dipali's specific suggestions indicate that her middle class status and second-generation college background both assisted her to articulate what kind of support she seeks from the university or department. To emphasize the need for professional support at the campus, Prabhat explained that:

I believe that there should certainly be some programs for skill (professional) development, and this should not be restricted to the SC/ST students. In fact, it should be made available to all the students. Even the students from open category are lacking these skills.

According to Dipali and Prabhat, the university does not offer professional support to students. Prabhat is a doctoral candidate and an educator in a coaching institute where he teaches history to students studying for competitive exams. Therefore, he understands the need for skill development to ensure student success, and he recommends skill development support or training for all students. Studies on campus climate suggest different types of support creating a platform to foster interaction between students and improve intergroup relationships, which would enrich learning environments at the campus (Tinto, 1997; Hurtado et al., 2012).

As discussed in "Academic Struggles and Challenges in Higher Education" in Chapter 5, most interlocutors expressed that they did not feel competent in the English language. As a result, the need for English language support was commonly expressed. Ashok struggled in the beginning of his undergrad degree in medical science, and said,

“English language support is necessary in the beginning of the degree, because students who were born and brought up in Ahmedabad, they would excel in English due to exposure. But students from rural backgrounds find it more challenging.” Similarly, Dipali expressed a personal regret, confessing that, “despite learning English as a subject for twelve years, we are not even able to speak basic English fluently.” She too agreed that English language support is necessary for all students.

Campus facilitated awareness programs and sensitization trainings play a significant role in creating a positive environment at the campus (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003); especially, for subordinate identities and vulnerable students. I asked the interlocutors if they had participated in any awareness programs in the last semester/year on campus. Many interlocutors took time to think, and were not able to respond to the question because they had never attended any such program/event. I probed further by offering examples of awareness programs on social issues such as gender awareness, sexual harassment, and talks on anti-caste and sociopolitical issues. In response to my question with examples, Jyoti said, “no, I haven’t participated in any of it (awareness programs) as per my knowledge. I personally am quite interested in it.” Similarly, many interlocutors never participated in any awareness programs/events; moreover, a few students like Raj described, “in this last two years, I haven’t seen even a single program/event on linguistics, so if there is nothing on the same field, then we cannot think about seminars on other (social issues) subjects.” Raj is one of the very few interlocutors who actively participate in sociopolitical issues and academic activities, yet he did not attend any awareness programs/events in two years. It reinforces the point that there is a virtual absence of such programs at the campus. This situation is

pervasive across campuses, and students belonging to subordinate and stigmatized identities do not have access to support programs and psychological assistance to deal with mental stress (Pathania & Tierney, 2018).

Similar to the above question, I asked the interlocutors about the types of awareness/sensitization programs they would like to participate in. In response, a considerable number of interlocutors demanded awareness programs pertaining to caste issues. In the Gujarati language, “social justice” (translated as *samajik nyay*) is generally interpreted in the context of the oppressed castes. Through a critical reflection, Manan explained:

There are no specific events being organized about social justice (*samajik nyay*) issues. May be once in a while, just for their reporting purposes to the higher authorities. But in reality, there isn’t anything like it. They would talk more about gender, but they never talk about caste discrimination. There is never a discussion or debate on this (caste) subject.

Manan highlighted a reality of Indian higher education where discussion of caste issues is perceived as an offensive act against the authority, especially discourse critiquing the privileged castes’ dominance. The authority is hostile to Dalit students and their student groups because of their anti-caste and anti-Brahmanical perspectives on campus (Kumar, 2016a). Further, Manan pointed out that the authority is more interested in gender discussion, which is acceptable to all, but not caste issues.¹²⁴ Generally, discussion or awareness programs on caste issues are interpreted as challenging the status quo and raising sociopolitical issues. To emphasize the need to discuss caste issues on campus,

¹²⁴ On the basis of my field work and observations, I found that gender discussion is limited to celebration of a specific day (e.g. women’s day); moreover, gender discourse occur within a male-female binary, not embraced as ‘gender spectrum’. At least in higher education, gender discourse should go beyond the binary and cultural taboos, to challenge the pervasive dominant narratives about gender.

Jasmin echoed, “to bring more awareness to the issue of caste, it is important to organize such (social justice) programs on campus.”

The university rarely endorses progressive and inclusive perspectives; instead it promotes Hindu nationalism by various means. As I discussed earlier in the case of the Ambedkar Chair, these opportunities for education and awareness building on social justice issues are being subverted by the right wing supporters. Vinod expressed his discontent about the functioning of the Chair:

Let me tell you something - the Chair is named as Ambedkar Chair, so they should give some information about him, not just the contribution in the Constitution as even the 10th grade student knows about that. As this is an MSW, I expected that I would get to know a lot more about him. It is like a breaking news headline which comes and goes, but there is no comprehensive information about his works.

Dr. Ambedkar has become a part of the syllabus for his seminal role in nation building, but here he is reduced to a Dalit icon or the architect of the Constitution, not as social thinker, social reformer, political leader, educationalist and nation builder (Kumar, 2016b). I argue that most non-Dalits would identify Dr. Ambedkar as a Dalit leader or a Constitution maker, not as a national and prolific leader who transformed the lives of the oppressed groups.

There are laws to stop caste-based discrimination in India; however, caste is intricately linked with culture, so laws have certain limitations in curbing crimes related to caste discrimination. Laws themselves do not modify peoples’ behaviors and attitudes; therefore, they need to be supplemented with education and sensitization about caste issues and other pertinent issues of Indian society. And I believe that educational institutions are the most influential sites to bring positive changes among children and

youth. Ashok described why caste sensitization programs are necessary to deal with the prejudice and ignorance of privileged caste students:

[T]hey (privileged caste students) need to be made aware that they should not criticize a person based upon a caste background. Since the SC students are now your batchmates and colleagues, thus they should treat them as colleagues, and not as a (caste) category.

Ashok highlighted the need to organize sensitization programs/trainings for privileged caste peers, to educate them about caste biases and casteist slurs which they consciously and unconsciously communicate to Dalit students. Similarly, Neha expressed an opinion, “whenever such (“social justice”) lectures are organized, then not just the SC students but, in fact, all students should be invited so general public would know the problems that are being faced by Dalit students.” Neha has made a crucial point that the privileged groups of students, staff and faculty need to be educated about the social realities of the oppressed sections of society and also made aware of their privileges and the dominant narratives. Therefore, sensitization and awareness programs about caste issues are essential (Pathania & Tierney, 2018) to enhance inclusiveness on campus through extending institutional support for underrepresented groups (Bensimon, 2004).

6.4 Summary

Over the last two decades, the government of Gujarat has introduced Hindu nationalist and Brahmanical ideologies into the higher education system which are evidently pervasive on the campus. Most interlocutors described the campus climate as negative, hostile and casteist; moreover, they narrated that the university administration facilitates the RSS agenda in every sphere of institutional life. Therefore, Dalit students experience systemic discrimination and exclusion; for instance, anomalies with and

denial of SC scholarships, administrative disregard of the quota, deliberate undermining of the SC/ST grievance mechanism, and more. These adversities exacerbate the narrated social adjustment and economic challenges they face during their higher education journey and ultimately impede their academic growth and achievements. Despite the dire condition of Dalit students in higher education, there is a virtual absence of support for them. As a result, Dalit students experience academic anxiety, financial barriers and fear of caste biases, and this is especially prevalent among rural students. Data and my observations unequivocally indicate that the administration does not have any effective policy to deal with student diversity, nor cares to.

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS ON COUNTER NARRATIVES AND RESILIENCE

In this chapter, I present my findings on interlocutors' experiences and perspectives regarding quota policy, counter narratives and resilience in their higher education journeys. The data demonstrate connections between 'caste culture' and sociopolitical environments, and their impact on Dalit students in higher education. I discuss the narratives, counter narratives and resilience of Dalit students, focusing on their higher education experiences, as opposed to school experiences. In critical race theory (CRT) counter narratives are also known as 'counterstories' or 'counterstorytelling'; basically narratives/stories of belonging with historical and personal experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race scholars examine and emphasize the voices and stories of the oppressed groups that function to counteract the stories of the historically dominant group. Further, stories of the dominant group are pervasive and designed to "remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups and provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412). Therefore, one of the focuses of 'voice scholarship'¹²⁵ is to (re)tell them as 'counterstories' to deconstruct the dominant narratives and stories of the privileged groups and highlight the stories of the oppressed groups.

The CRT scholars explore counter narratives as a method and an analytical tool in the research process to deconstruct the narratives/stories of the dominant castes and (re)construct them as counter storylines with the help of Dalit students and faculty.

¹²⁵ The study of narratives is also known as voice scholarship (Tate, 1994) in the CRT scholarship, which is an important source of data to study experiential knowledge of oppressed groups that are shaped by oppression and exclusion.

Through the counterstorytelling method, Dalit activists and scholars have elucidated their caste-inscribed world, social realities and experiences of exclusion, and asserted their Dalit identity to resist, not to project as victimhood (Goodnight, 2017). In this chapter, narratives or counter narratives are discussed as transformational and educational stories and arguments of the interlocutors (McVee, 2004). Dalits are situated at the peripheries of society, and as a researcher as well as an observant insider of this group, I argue that the periphery does not exemplify only marginalization, but it is in fact “more than a site of deprivation.... it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (Hooks, 1990, p.149). In other words, counter-stories can build solidarity among those at the peripheries of society through theorizing their unexamined experiences, and it also presents their realities to others who are at the bottom of society so they can construct their counter-stories which combine the elements of personal story and current reality.

The dominant narrative can be referred to as “empowered groups [that] long ago established a host of stories, narratives, conventions and understandings that today, through repetition, seem natural and true” (Delgado, 1993, p. 666). The dominant narratives are constructed by the privileged groups to delegitimize the subordinate groups. In the CRT literature, the dominant narratives are also known as master narratives; a master narrative is a singular script that represents social reality and specifies and controls processes/practices related to family, gender and work; in sum it rationalizes the totality of life (Stanley, 2007, p.14). Counter narratives are inherently critical of the master narrative and generally emerge from individual or group experiences that do not resonate with the master narrative. In addition, counter narratives signify the voices of the margin that do not find representation in the dominant discourse

of society (Stanley, 2007). In the context of this dissertation, the master narrative represents a desired social reality designed to not only reflect the dominant's group values, but also to reinforce and protect its hegemony and dominance from counter-narratives that highlight the social realities of the subordinated groups.

The purpose of counter narratives is to deconstruct the hegemonic ideologies and their narratives and reconstruct the critical narratives that unveil the social realities of marginalized groups that are hidden behind the dominant groups' culture and narratives. In this chapter, I present counter narratives as consciousness raising (Freire, 1996) discourses to challenge the casteist meritocratic and anti-reservation narratives. The purpose of counter narratives is not restricted to describing the prevalence of caste and caste-based discrimination in society; its intent is to combat and deconstruct the dominant narratives that perpetuate casteism, institutional discrimination and justification of privileged castes' hegemony over the higher learning centers. In my research, I show that Dalit students and faculty have not represented their victimhood; in contrast, they articulate their resistance through counter narratives, and they present their "confidence and skills to act on one's behalf" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, pp. 315-316).

To represent and re(tell) narratives of the interlocutors, I chose to construct composite portraits that are representative of the range of counter-narratives that emerged from the data. The counter narratives interpret lived experiences - actual empirical data that are contextualized within the social realities of my protagonists (Solórzano, 1997). The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section explains the nature of the conflict and contestation about the quota policy in India, and specifically the tensions and conflicts as they have played out in Gujarat. This history sets the stage to understand

how the dominant narratives related to reservation policy shape caste politics on campus. The second section elaborates on the counter narratives and resistances of Dalit students, which illustrate the anti-caste discourse of Dalit students and their counterstories that critique institutionalized casteism at the campus. In the last section, I explain how the representation of Dalit faculty in higher education provides a countervailing force to the institutionalized casteism and how their presence on campus enables Dalit students to challenge discourses of merit and anti-reservationism that are key components of the dominant narrative.

7.1 Conflict and Contestation About Affirmative Action

Affirmative action policy (popularly known as quota policy or reservations) has been a significant part of mainstream electoral politics for more than three decades, making it the most debated and contentious policy. Quota has become a bigger stigma than Dalit identity in higher education, as reiterated by Jayesh: “I didn’t have any problem with the caste, but it is more to do with reservations.” This section is organized into two sub-sections: affirmative action in the sociopolitical context of Gujarat and dominant narratives about affirmative action.

7.1.1 Affirmative Action in the Sociopolitical Context of Gujarat

The stigma and discourse on affirmative action is most rife in competitive academic disciplines, like sciences, professional degree programs and elite (public) institutions. Medical and engineering sciences are two of the most prestigious disciplines in the university and society; however, these disciplines have been infamous for subtle,

implicit and explicit caste-based discrimination against reserved category students (discussed in Chapter 2). The first large scale anti-reservation protests occurred in 1981 and continued intermittently until 1987 in Gujarat. During the span of six years, numerous incidents of violence, killings and rioting happened. Anti-reservation protests were one of the main causes of the violence, but there were other reasons such as a major shift in electoral politics, Hindu-Muslim sectarian clashes, local gang wars and brutality by police (in favor of privileged castes), all playing out concurrently (Shani, 2005).¹²⁶ Anti-reservation riots intensified in 1985, and around two hundred and seventy-five people died that year; the situation appeared uncontrollable, and the Indian army was called in to restore law and order in the city of Ahmedabad (Wood, 1987). The privileged castes joined together to fiercely resist the state's redistributive measures that utilized reservations as prescribed by the Constitution.

The epicenter of the protests in Ahmedabad was B. J. Medical College where privileged caste students in postgraduate programs went on indefinite protests to end reservations at the college. The protests were supported by all higher education institutions, and eventually supported by doctors, advocates and industrialists, which predominantly belonged to the privileged castes. On the third day of the protests, a skirmish between anti-reservationist privileged castes and pro-reservationist Dalit students at the college escalated into caste conflict around the college. Then the anti-reservation movement quickly spun into anti-Dalit violence, especially in Ahmedabad

¹²⁶ In 1980, Congress(I), a major political party, secured 141 out of the 182 seats in the state assembly elections, and Madhavsingh Solanki became the Chief Minister of the state. To win the elections, Congress(I) invented the KHAM (Kshatriyas, Harijans (Dalits), Adivasis and Muslims) strategy which appealed to around 55 percent of the population of the state. On the other side, the electoral success of the KHAM annoyed the privileged castes, and also expelled them from the power centers, particularly the Patel community.

where Dalits and *Patidars* (landholding cultivators) lived in close proximity to one another. The protests were led by *Patidars* and supported by other privileged castes; Dalit neighborhoods were attacked in the old city and in villages, Dalits faced social ostracism by *Patidars* in north and central Gujarat (Yagnik & Bhatt, 1984).

The second wave of protests against reservations started in 1990 when an additional reservation was introduced for the representation of other marginalized castes (OBCs). Again, Gujarat was one of the leading states in the protests, but this time the sociopolitical landscape was changed because OBC was supporting the reservation. In terms of numbers, OBC is the largest caste category, a conglomeration of several so-called lower castes. Sharing their experience of this phase of anti-affirmative action politics, Mehul, a Dalit faculty in the Department of Medicine who at the time was a student at the university recalled that:

[T]here was one reform at the national level, the Mandal Commission in 1990, because of it again anti-reservation movement was started. So, there was an atmosphere for anti-reservation sentiments, and this was not just faced by me alone but an entire group of SC friends. We could make out from the behavior of other category students towards us. They would comment to us in a specific way, like getting the seats despite securing less percentage... There were people who would think and comment negatively against us.

The Mandal Commission (discussed in Chapter 1) recommended 27 percent reservation for OBC in public services, in addition to the SC-ST reservation.¹²⁷ In 1990, V. P. Singh was the Prime Minister of India, and he tried to implement the recommended 27 percent quota, which sparked nationwide protests. The protests were led and joined by privileged castes, because the additional 27 percent quota would further erode their historical

¹²⁷ The Mandal commission was formed in 1979 by the Janata Party government to identify the socially and educationally backward classes of India. The commission was headed by B P Mandal, to consider the special quotas for the marginalized social groups to redress caste discrimination on the grounds of eleven socioeconomic and educational criteria. In 1980, the commission recommended 27 a percent quota in central government and public sector jobs for the Other Backward Classes.

domination in higher education. Educational institutions became sites of protests and an anti-reservation environment existed on campuses for a long period of time. Mehul, a student at that time, now faculty, experienced an anti-Dalit atmosphere in the college and his privileged caste peers conveyed casteist comments to Dalits and called them non-deserving. Mehul mentioned that after 1984 when as a student he had lived through anti-reservation protests, here he was once again a faculty witnessing the same. He pointed out that although it was non-Dalits who were the beneficiaries of the reservation policy reforms of 1990, the hostility and aggression continued to be directed against Dalits.

In 2015, another set of protests was started by the *Patidars* (peasant caste and a very dominant social group in the state) in Gujarat, and their demand was to be included in the constitutional category of OBC to be able to take advantage of affirmative action. In 2017, due to the state assembly elections, the protests suddenly intensified across the state and reached a peak before the election in December 2017. The lingering effect of the protests was evident during my field research; many interlocutors brought up the *Patidar* protests and their experiences and perspectives on it. Ashok, a Dalit student in the same college where Professor Mehul had studied two decades prior, shares how these protests put them in a delicate position:

[T]hat has happened several times wherein I had to debate (defend reservations) *and* protect my identity (emphasis mine). It was more prominent during the *Patidar* protest... It created a huge wave of questioning the reservation policy amongst many students. One of my friends from the open category debated with me that there shouldn't be any reservation. I had to explain to him that reservation is a ladder for the backward community.

In the context of the protests, debate over affirmative action mushroomed between Dalit and privileged caste students on the campus. Among the privileged castes (non-Patidar), students critiqued the affirmative action policy and suggested it be eliminated. Moreover,

Dalit students were at the receiving end, defending and illuminating the necessity of the policy. Prabhat explained one of the myths pertaining to affirmative action policy that “it was during the VP Singh government, the OBC reservation (27 percent) was given. Currently, it is 15 percent for the Tribals and 7.5 percent for Dalits (in Gujarat), despite the fact, many people continue to equate ‘reservation’ with ‘Dalits’.” Similarly, other historical and social realities reinforce this myth, such as affirmative action being initiated for Dalit and Tribal communities by a Dalit (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar), Dalits leading anti-caste protests, as well as passionately defending the affirmative action policy in public service.

Quota remains one of the most divisive topics of discussion and debate between Dalit and privileged caste students. The medical college is located in a *Patidar* dominated neighborhood; therefore, during my research, the effects of the protest were evident in the academic life as well as the social life of the institution. Jayesh described the impact of the protest in their residential complexes: “during the *Patidar* movement for the reservation, in our hostels, groups (caste-based) were formed... So during that time the scenario had gotten a bit awkward due to differences among the students in the hostel.” In other words, caste-based student groups became evident in the dorms; this type of phenomenon exposed the veiled caste identities and reduced the intergroup interaction between students, and encouraged students’ interaction within a caste identity or caste category. In the context of the *Patidar* protests, sociopolitical discourse and the campus climate, both conveyed caste-based environmental microaggressions (Rathod, 2017) to Dalit students. A similar experience was expressed by Dipali:

Especially during the *Patidar* agitation, whenever there are such outrageous times, many students blame SC students. There was an incident in the past, in

which some of the SC students tried to beat someone, and because of that event, the entire SC community was defamed and criticized. There were such debates with friends at times. Even I try to raise my voice, but we don't want to extend it, to avoid any further conflict.

Dipali hesitated to raise her voice because she did not want to ruin her relations with her friends, and engage in what she saw as a futile discussion with her privileged caste friends who were biased and casteist. Dipali as a woman in a gender unequal society further marginalizes her social position in the context of her caste identity and as an affirmative action proponent. Therefore, she chose to avoid the discussion and not respond at all, but all the same felt humiliated listening to her 'friends' make casteist remarks and oppose reservation. The next section discusses privileged castes' narratives pertaining to the quota policy.

7.1.2 Dominant Narratives About Affirmative Action

Dominant narratives exist at both societal and institutional levels, which can be termed as macro-level; whereas resistance happens at the micro-level (individually) through counter narratives that signify alternative discourses to disrupt the dominant social reproduction process (Cuadraz, 1997). My interlocutors narrated their experiences pertaining to the dominant narratives of affirmative action and stereotypes about the beneficiaries, and how they contested through counterstory. Some of the dominant narratives are: Dalits are non-meritocratic, they are dull or weak students, they do not want to compete, they can access admission with passing marks (low grades), reservation compromises quality by providing admission to undeserving candidates. Why should we (privileged castes) pay for historical injustice? Why is caste identity a criterion for the reservation? Why not a reservation for economic status? It is reverse discrimination

against general category students. Caste is a matter of the past (no caste discrimination exists anymore), why is the reservation being provided to Dalits? And on and on...

In this sub-section, I discuss the responses of the interlocutors; for example, that Dalit students are not meritocratic (Sukumar, 2008), and they need the support of affirmative action in education and employment. Dipak narrated a conversation with his privileged caste friend:

There is a student belong to Patel (*Patidar*) caste who met me when I came here to complete my thesis for MPhil. He randomly told me that it is very easy for you to secure a job, admission or even scholarship... I told him that no doubt we get the facilities from the government, but we have to face many challenges to get here. It isn't that we have been spoon fed. We too struggle, work hard, study and then we get a job. A merit is equally prepared for Dalit students also.

Dipak's privileged caste friend randomly commented that due to affirmative action, it is very easy for him to get admission, a scholarship and a job. This is the most widespread stereotype; that Dalit students and candidates do not work hard and rely on affirmative action. However, as Dipak stresses, Dalit students have to overcome numerous challenges to reach higher education. As was previously mentioned, Dipak experienced caste-based discrimination in his village and school, and he is a first-generation student from a humble background. Despite the impediments, he has been pursuing an MPhil degree, which demonstrates his persistence and dedication to higher education. On the other side, Dipak's privileged caste friend is unaware of Dipak's social realities, the historical legacy of caste and his own caste privileges as a privileged caste member.¹²⁸ Moreover, I argue that due to deep rooted caste culture in the society, privileged castes people tend to

¹²⁸ In general, privileged caste students are ignorant about their caste privileges such as, cultural capital of a family, social network of their communities, better financial situation, supportive family environment, private English-medium schooling and expensive coaching for better academic preparations. White privileges and privileged caste privileges are similar, and both the groups deny their unearned and historical advantages.

believe that Dalits are genetically inferior. In an ethnographic study with fifty interlocutors in an Indian university, in general, privileged caste students indicated that they value the ‘purity and pollution’ principle. In the study, most privileged caste interlocutors narrated that genetic traits such as smartness, intelligence and humbleness are determined by caste (Pathania & Tierney, 2018).

In another example, Pratik (who passed the entrance examination for a graduate program in medical sciences) was having a casual conversation with a privileged class friend who uttered a casteist comment which Pratik narrated:

I had a friend and he told me that you guys (quota students) get your admissions with just 50 percentage of marks. So, I asked him that how did he know that we have secured admissions here with just 50 percentage?... I showed him my aggregate marks of 82.45 percentages, and told him, this is the mentality against SC and ST students.

Pratik’s encounter with his privileged caste friend is an example of explicit caste-based discrimination. The privileged caste friend expressed his casteist stereotype in a sweeping statement that all Dalit students are non-meritocratic (The Probe Team, 1999; Deshpande, 2013; Lum, 2019), and they obtain admissions by meeting the minimum cut off of 50 percent marks in medical sciences. Pratik silenced him by showing his transcript with 82.45 percent. The stereotype is also pervasive among the privileged caste faculty, Ashok witnessed a casteist comment in the classroom, and he said, “The professor was asking everyone about irregularity in their attendance. When the sir (professor) was speaking to my friend, he said ‘I don’t have expectation from you, as you belong to xxxx (tribal) community’ ... I didn’t like that comment.” In other words, the faculty covertly communicated that he was a non-meritocratic and he does not expect him to do well academically as a result. Ashok mentioned that he did not like the comment made by the

faculty, because it was directed at a caste identity and to a quota student. Does the professor even realize that he/she/they communicated a casteist remark to a ST student, in front of his peers, and it might have been felt by all the SC-ST students in the classroom? Studies have reported that Dalit students face a range of discriminatory behaviors and attitudes from their privileged caste supervisors/teachers (Kumar, 2016a; Singh 2013; Anveshi Law Committee Report, 2002).

A dominant narrative of affirmative action discourse in the public domain is articulated as injustice to the privileged caste and facilitating undue advantages to certain lower castes. Most of the privileged caste students do not know the details of the affirmative action policies and they are driven by the dominant discourse, which has been anti-affirmative action and casteist in nature. During the *Patidar* protest, discussion on affirmative action policy was dominated by privileged caste perspectives in the print and electronic media and the tone was hysterical on social networking sites. For instance, Hemant pointed out that: “Those who have been vehemently criticizing the policy, but how many of them know “what is the reservation policy?” While they are talking on the topic, most of them don’t even know about its history or the reason for it being provided... Unless the opposite person knows about it there is no point to respond.” Hemant is a political activist and associated with electoral politics; moreover, he is a journalism student, thus he is well informed of policy and caste issues in general. Hemant reiterated that a majority of the people are unfamiliar with the basics of the reservation policy and associated historical contexts, and despite their ignorance, they discuss the policy abrasively. Ashok had a similar perspective:

[T]hey (privileged caste students) are absolutely unaware of the actual reasons for the existence of the reservation. In fact, if I state two personal examples, my

cousin and a friend both of them who didn't have a high score in their grade 12th, and they got admissions in SC quota. Eventually they outperformed open category students in the college. So I believe that there should be sincere attempts to ensure that students are given an opportunity to excel, rather than excluding and demotivating them.

Ashok echoed that most privileged caste students are ignorant about the implications of affirmative action for the excluded castes. Ashok also countered the merit argument in the context of affirmative action; in his example, he mentioned that his cousin and a friend enrolled in higher education with the support of the SC quota, and both of them outperformed open category students. Further, Ashok argued in favor of the policy, and he highlighted that if given the opportunity, quota students showed through their performances that the merit argument is false and validated the need for affirmative action in education. Regarding academic performance of Dalit students in elite higher education institutions, two longitudinal studies have reported that the academic achievement of Dalit students have been consistently rising over the years (Patwardhan & Palshikar, 1992; Kirpal & Gupta, 1999). Similarly, entrance exam and standardized tests scores' gap between Dalit and non-Dalits have been declining and Dalit students have started to compete in the open category, defying the stigma of merit (Deshpande, 2013).

The arguments about merit and affirmative action by privileged castes reinforce each other. I discussed how Dalit students are tagged with the stigma of affirmative action, whether they enrolled through the quota or not; moreover, the argument of merit has been conveniently used against them. Jayesh narrated his experience while discussing with his privileged caste friends that "I got my admission in the open category, but many people tell me that I should have taken the admission through a SC seat... Some friends would say that "we are enjoying the meal from both the plates." Jayesh who dreamt for

NASA (US) and ended up in medical sciences, was confident that he would secure an enrollment in an open category seat. Jayesh's privileged caste friends came to know that he is an SC student, who secured admission in the open category seat. Therefore, they have not only advised Jayesh that he should have enrolled in the SC quota, but sarcastically commented that he can access both open and quota categories for enrollment. Caste psyche of privileged caste students is manifested through giving unsolicited advice to Dalit students about what should they do and also implicitly acknowledging that open category is reserved for the privileged castes. It shows that privileged caste students perceive open category as their quota, thus other (stigmatized) quota students should not be enrolled in it; further, their quota represents meritocracy and pride.

The anti-affirmative perspective is beset by many contradictions: some opponents are completely against any form of affirmative action for anyone. Another dominant narrative states that the quota should be provided on economic grounds, not on caste identities. Neha exemplified her privileged caste friends' opinion about the narrative:

A few months ago, a news agency came to the college and asked our opinions. Most of the students who were here on the campus suggested that there should not be a reservation policy based on caste preference... It should be for poor students. Actually, they are not aware about the real situation of Dalits.

It is a fundamental position of privileged caste students to oppose any form of reservation for the oppressed castes, although some of them recognize that poverty is an obstacle to accessing higher education, and will accept affirmative action for that reason. This indicates that most privileged caste students do not know the fundamental objectives of affirmative action policy that is reiterated by Manan, who argues that "the foundation of affirmative action in the Constitution is caste and a representation of the excluded castes,

there is no clause which addresses the economic aspect... Rather it (affirmative action) is based on a social justice principle.” In other words, the quota policy is not a poverty alleviation program; it is grounded in three vital principles: representation of excluded castes, safeguarding against caste discrimination and providing additional support as a compensatory mechanism.

The significance of the affirmative action policy is defined by Prabhat:

[A]s an example, if there are two horses which are of the same type, but one of the horses is always tied up and not fed enough. This horse doesn't even get any form of training, and the other horse regularly gets healthy food along with the training. This continues for a year or two, and then one day you bring both of them together for a race. There is no doubt that the second horse is going to win the race. If you want to ensure that the first horse acquires the capacity to win the race, then it should be given the equal quality of new treatments.

In the above example, Prabhat raised critical aspects, such as historical, cultural and socioeconomic exclusion of Dalits. The two-horse analogy represents the caste hierarchies of Indian society; the first horse indicates Dalits and second, the privileged castes.¹²⁹ According to the feudal caste norms, Dalits were not allowed to obtain education for more than two millennia, and if any Dalit tried to learn read and write, they were cruelly punished for it. On the other side, the privileged castes had every right and authority to get an education and control over cultural capital. Similarly, Dalits did not have property rights until the beginning of the twentieth century; therefore, they lived in absolute poverty, whereas the privileged castes had control over resources and economic activities which is still evident in the modern economy. For example, a study of one

¹²⁹ This is a similar metaphor used by the U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson at a commencement address for Howard University in 1965, he said, “Freedom is not enough. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, “You are free to compete with all the others,” and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates.” (Black Past, 2010, May 27, para. 12-14).

thousand Indian private corporations shows that around 92.6 percent of corporate board members belong to two privileged caste groups; Brahmins (44.6 percent) and Vaishyas (46.0 percent), and their population is around 15 percent of the general population. In contrast, the representation of Dalit and Tribal board members is a mere 3.5 percent, and both the groups together constitute approximately 25 percent of the population (Ajit, Donker & Saxena, 2012).

In the context of the caste system, Dalits have experienced one of the worst forms of stigma, exclusion, and humiliation in the history of human civilization, it can be understood by a simple example that a dog or cow could drink water from a water reservoir, but a Dalit could not, and this situation lasted for two millennia. According to Brahmanical ideology, even a shadow of Dalit, their footprints and spit on the ground were considered polluting. After independence, Dalits obtained human rights as citizens and protection from caste-based discrimination, and the Constitution facilitates affirmative action as an instrumental support for acquiring education and to provide representation (discussed in the next section) in decision making processes in the public services.

Despite the affirmative action in effect since the 1950s, the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of Dalits have only marginally improved, and the much of the Dalit population is still far from able to take advantage of the policy. For the same reason, the opponents¹³⁰ of the reservation policy argue that the benefits of the policy have been

¹³⁰ Higham and Shah (2013) described the reservation system in India thus: Creamy layer taking advantage of the system and weaker sections of the community still remaining out of the purview of the system. Similarly, Syed et al., (2013) expressed doubts about the efficacy of the system in the context of persistent inequalities among Dalits.

garnered by the elites or a “creamy layer”¹³¹ of the targeted group. However, it is a prejudiced fact to undermine the larger positive outcomes of the policy. For instance, among Dalits around 6 percent of Dalit families been benefited from the policy; however, the impact of this 6 percent on their society is significant compared to the pre-reservation period. The same elites are role models and facilitate leadership for the larger interest of the community (Ilaiah, 2008). Therefore, Prabhat’s story supports affirmative action as a compensatory mechanism for the historical injustices and contemporary inequalities among Dalits.

From the policy perspective, the quota policy has been perceived as a progressive policy to support the marginalized castes in Indian contexts; on the other hand, the policy has been seen as unfair to the privileged castes. A privileged caste student’s reaction to the policy is narrated by Suresh:

Most of them (privileged caste students) say that reservation should be eliminated. Last year we had journalists from XXX news here, they asked us questions, then one of the Brahmin girls XXX from our class responded that there shouldn’t be any form of reservation. Because she personally experienced the impact of the policy during her graduation and masters that the other students with less a percentage compared to her, got prior admission than her.

Most privileged caste students are not aware of the historical legacy of caste oppression and modern caste hierarchies in the society. Therefore, when they experience any form of positive discrimination (affirmative action), they oppose it and protest to eliminate it.

Suresh’s friend opposed the policy because of her personal experience in the admission

¹³¹ The government of India introduced the so-called ‘creamy layer’ concept in 1992, and stated that the relatively better-off (i.e. 1,500,000 Rupees per year) members of the ST/SC and OBC castes are not entitled to government supported educational and professional benefit programs. However, this restriction of benefits might only be consequential for the recipients, but not for the aim itself, since there is no evidence that the ‘creamy layer’ disproportionately benefits from the affirmative action programs at the cost of their disadvantaged group members. (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). Therefore, I argue that some opponents are hypocritical, for instance, if this ‘creamy layer’ is getting in through quotas, the solution is to award them open seats that they likely qualify for, yet the opponents object to them getting admission through open seats because their ‘open category quota’ is reserved for privileged castes only.

process. An overwhelming number of privileged caste students want to eradicate the policy because it facilitates preferential treatment in the enrollment process to the oppressed caste students over them. In other words, privileged caste students do not get admission despite having higher grades or ranks compared to the quota candidates. It is an obvious reaction from privileged caste students to challenge the policy; however, the problem is not affirmative action in education. The fundamental problem is lack of sufficient seats and not enough educational institutions, which create an artificial scarcity of accessible educational opportunities (Deshpande, 2013). This fundamental problem has never been discussed in the public discourse, because the discourse on affirmative action is casteist to its core.¹³² Despite the dominant discourse, a few privileged caste students acknowledged the importance of the policy, which is described by Suresh that “when again asked to other students from open category some of them were actually in support of the reservation policy; they did mention that the people from the SC community are still downtrodden and to uplift them, reservation is required.”

Along with the representational objectives, quota essentially offers protection against caste discrimination in education and public service. Due to the influence of caste-based culture, well-educated privileged caste people discriminate, and practice biased tactics to stop Dalit students from entering into higher education. Affirmative action policy provides safeguards against such practices and ensures Dalit students’ place in the higher education domain. This key aspect of the policy, however, is unknown to

¹³² Since the colonial regime, the privileged castes have always been dictating the bureaucracy, politics and political economy, then why not built more institutions to accommodate all students? I argue that this exposes their (privileged castes) longstanding failure and non-meritocratic performance, and now they want to conveniently shift blame to Dalits which indicates their casteist mindset in the language of merit and efficiency. Moreover, the same Dalits who worked for privileged castes as laborers are now sitting next to them and challenging their power and privileges which causes them great pain and discomfort.

the privileged caste students; moreover, they make negative remarks about the policy that are intrinsically casteist in nature. In a conversation regarding the policy, a privileged caste friend of Pratik condemned the policy, and Pratik contested the master narratives that are entrenched in casteist stereotypes and perpetuate distortions of Dalit narratives (Goodnight, 2017). Further, Pratik replied that “the day attitude and perception of the people (privileged castes) changes toward Dalits, the reservation will also automatically end. As long as the current mindset of the people toward the Dalits continues, there are few reasons to remove the reservation.” The privileged castes perceive the reservation as a potent instrument that would topple their historical supremacy (Basu, 2008). As a result, reservation has been systematically undermined by privileged castes who have been occupying decision making positions in all spheres of society.

7.2 Counter Narratives and Resistance of Dalit Students

It is an undeniable fact that the effect of quotas in education and employment has created a miniscule middle class within Dalits; it has also generated aspirations among first-generation Dalit students to pursue higher education (Thorat, Tagade & Naik, 2016). On the other hand, privatization of higher education has reduced some pressures on the public higher education system. Thus, some affluent, urban and privileged caste students moved to the elite private institutions (Kamat, 2011). In 2006, the quota (27 percent) for OBC communities came into effect in higher education, and since then the student demographic has been changed. Now marginalized caste students (including Dalits) are almost half of the student population in the public higher education institutions; therefore, despite their presence and their anti-caste discourse as counter narratives (Stanley, 2007)

both are challenging the status quo on the campuses (Hooks, 1990). The enrollment of marginalized students in public higher education has been growing across the campuses, including premier institutions of the country; specifically, enrollment of Dalit students has increased considerably, which has radically influenced the campus climate and student politics in the last decade (Thorat, Shyamprasad, & Srivastava, 2007).

In this section, I present perspectives and reflections of the interlocutors pertaining to the dominant narratives and their lived experiences. This section is divided into two sub-sections: (1) caste discourse and counter narratives and (2) counter narratives and academic issues.

7.2.1 Caste Discourse and Counter Narratives

The interlocutors narrated a range of experiences and perspectives regarding their resistance and anti-caste politics during their higher education journeys. Some Dalit youth neither hide nor feel embarrassed about their so-called subordinate identity, instead they assert their Dalit identity, and feel dignified. Hemant is an office bearer of a political party who described his experience thus:

[M]y last name is Banker... Anybody who would ask me, which quota did you get the admission in? I would (confidently) respond them back as Schedule Caste. First, I became the CR of the class and in the second semester, I was the General Secretary (GS) of the college. Under my leadership there were 1100 students of the entire college, and there were seven GS candidates whom I defeated when I was elected.

Hemant's last name was Parmar, but his family has changed it to Banker because a couple of family members were associated with banking jobs. Earlier I discussed that certain last names unequivocally indicate Dalit identities, and to avoid caste stigma and differential treatments, some educated Dalits have changed their last names. Banker as a

last name generates curiosity in a casteist mind to identify a caste identity, therefore, Hemant was asked a few times about his caste identity.¹³³ It is important to note that Hemant is a second generation university student and belongs to an urban middle class family that gave him the confidence to pronounce his caste without hesitation. Moreover, he actively participated in student politics and was elected GS of the college, which was certainly a major accomplishment for a Dalit student whose identity was known to many people on campus. However, Hemant also reported that he never experienced caste discrimination in college, which definitely provided a positive environment for him to attain a milestone.

In Hemant's case, assertion of Dalit identity and political ambition both indicate his aspirations to challenge the dominant narrative of caste identities and the leadership of campus politics. His social background also raises another dominant narrative of the creamy layer discourse in higher education. I argue that without his social advantages, he would not have been able to gain the confidence to reveal that he is a quota student and develop the ambition to acquire the GS position in the college. Further, although a middle class status or the higher class status do not protect Dalit students from biases or discrimination, it definitely provides them certain socioeconomic, academic and psychological advantages which could go beyond themselves, and translate into generational impact achieving higher socioeconomic status and confidence for future children. It indicates that accumulated capital (Subramanian, 2015) is an essential condition to acquire a leadership position and enter into the elite institutions, which have been a bastion of the privileged castes for decades (Deshpande 2016; Lum, 2019).

¹³³ Banker is not a typical last name in Gujarat, so some privileged caste individuals know that Banker is a pseudo last name, and they treat them as Dalit. Interestingly, changing the last names is more common among educated and middle class Dalits compared to under-educated and lower class.

Higher education offers a voice to the voiceless and avenues to reflect upon critical issues of the society.¹³⁴ I have observed that some interlocutors gained critical understanding only after joining higher education where they were exposed to progressive and radical literature; further, interactions with some faculty and friends also motivate them to engage with sociopolitical and cultural issues. Therefore, student groups based on social identities are omnipresent across the country. I argue that the oppressed caste students' politics and social activism on campuses enrich the diverse learning environments, which was previously limited to academic work and dominated by Brahmanical discourse where caste was not recognized. Over the last decade, due to counter hegemonic discourse created by the students, caste, class, gender and sexual orientation topics are now being discussed. This phenomenon has fostered critical thinking and civic engagement among the students.

Ashish described the influence of his Dalit friends who motivated him to think critically, and he said, “now (in higher education), it is completely opposite, there is definitely transformation in the thought process. I don't believe in God, neither do I spend money on donations to temples or to buy incense sticks for worship.” Earlier I discussed that Ashish shares a strong bond with his Dalit friends and he experienced caste discrimination in his village and school. Ashish acknowledged that his views have been radically transformed, and he became an atheist and does not spend money for religious activities. In other words, he denounced the Hindu religion and associated religious practices that are fundamental blocks of privileged caste culture. The oppressed student groups across campuses have been presenting counter hegemonic discourse through

¹³⁴ The university campus provides a platform for Dalits to speak their minds, and breaks the ‘culture of silence’ and the caste prejudices that have been imposed on them for more than two millennia (Deshpande, 2013).

critiquing Hindu religious festivals and privileged caste culture within the democratic and secular space of university campuses (Pathania, 2016; Gundimeda, 2009).¹³⁵

As earlier discussed, a considerable number of Dalit students reiterated they have not experienced caste discrimination in their higher education journeys. However, they perceived caste discrimination as explicit and personal experiences. On the other side, a few Dalit students are critical about caste issues in the higher education domain and explain specifically that they perceived and interpreted issues inversely and critically, as explained by Manan:

[D]espite being a meritorious student from SC category, he/she will get admission only in the SC reserved seat. This type of experience can be widely seen in higher education; specifically, in MPhil and PhD programs these practices are very common compared to master's and the bachelor's programs. Other people (privileged castes) do not wish that the people from SC background get into higher education.

Manan pointed out that Dalit meritorious students are supposed to enroll in open category, but in numerous higher education institutions, they are being enrolled in the SC quota. There is a lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to check this violation of affirmative action; therefore, casteist authorities practice arbitrary enrollment processes to benefit privileged groups (Weisskopf, 2004 ; Ilaiyah, 2008). Specifically, caste-based discrimination is rampant in advanced graduate programs where it is complex and subtle (Lum, 2019).¹³⁶ Most of the times these types of corrupt practices are concealed, and

¹³⁵ For example, opposing Onam (festival of harvest in South India), by arguing that we (Dalits and Tribals) produce food and you (privileged castes) collect our harvest. As a result, for centuries, we remained landless, laborers and exploited. Similarly, the groups organize events which critique Hindu religious festivals that propagate Brahmanical culture and ritual purity.

¹³⁶ For example, one of the most progressive and elite institutions is JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University), despite the fact that caste discrimination persists there. In 2016, an internal committee headed by Professor Abdul Nafey examined admission statistics from the 2012 to 2015 academic years. The committee stated that there is an evident pattern of disparity in the written and oral exam points

Dalit students do not recognize the discrimination; in case of Manan, he is critical, well-informed and assertive also, therefore, he was able to discover this institutionalized discrimination. Manan also mentioned that privileged castes do not want Dalit students to compete with them and challenge the status quo in higher education, which has been increasingly happening over the past few years. I argue that in most cases, it is difficult to identify discrimination against Dalit and Tribal students, and if they recognize it, then it is a daunting task to prove it and complain against the authority. Because of their vulnerability, if someone registers a complaint of wrongdoing or discrimination along caste lines, it would be almost impossible to survive in an institution. Therefore, in an overwhelming number of cases, members of the Dalit and Tribal communities do not protest against discrimination, and institutionalized casteism is reinforced through caste-based practices and the supremacy of the privileged castes.

Some Dalit students, like Manan and others possess a higher level of critical consciousness, so they can recognize casteist practices and behaviors better than others, and they are able to analyze a subtle and complex casteist message. Raj explained his experience that:

One of the professors had raised this question in the classroom, who eats non-veg? I didn't bother to raise my hand along with another Muslim student, since we knew the real thought of the professor. They want to indirectly pass on the message amongst other students, which was very disturbing... It was nothing else but a pure Hindu mindset propaganda which got reflected at that point.

Raj was aware of casteist practices associated with Dalit identity, and their previous experiences also educate them how to react to the question asked by a casteist faculty.

Raj claimed that the faculty wanted to know and disclose the Dalit identity of students in

across the social categories of students; it indicates discrimination in oral exams for socially disadvantaged students (The Indian Express, 2017, January 5).

the classroom, but Raj did not respond to the question. Food habits are a precursor of caste identities, and food is an epitomic expression of untouchability practices in the society. On the principle of ‘pollution and purity’, non-vegetarian food is considered as pollution and against Brahmanical religious values. In contrast, Dalits enjoy meat and it is part of their culture, which has been a demarcation between Dalit and privileged caste students. In several higher learning centers, to maintain the ‘pollution and purity’ principle, vegetarian and non-vegetarian food is prepared and served separately, to prioritize the socioreligious values of the privileged caste students and segregate non-vegetarian students in the dining hall. I argue that higher education is supposed to foster inclusive behaviors among students, build bridges and connect students through institutional efforts. However, segregation based on food habits creates and further widens existing social differences between Dalit and privileged caste students.

7.2.2 Counter Narratives and Academic Issues

University and college campuses provide a platform for Dalit students to interact with other Dalit and marginalized students, which facilitates opportunities to discuss sociocultural and political issues of society. On the campus, Dalit students do not have active student organizations, but informally, groups of Dalit students discuss various issues such as religious practices and symbols on the university campus. The dominance of privileged castes in higher education is evident on campus, and therefore, they represent and impose their culture and religion both inside and outside of public office.

Manan expressed his reflective views about the campus that:

[T]he first thing that happens here is, prayer at the campus... There is no need to have prayers, and there are pictures of *Saraswati* (a goddess) and other deities

posted in all departments. However, it is clearly mentioned in the Constitution that educational institutions shouldn't practice or project any religious sentiments... From all the campuses, all these religious activities and projections should be removed.

Manan identifies himself as an atheist, and a staunch critique of Hindu religious doctrine and casteism. On campus, Hindu prayer is a routine ritual before any public event; similarly, in many places, there are pictures of gods/goddesses in offices and hallways across campus. I have observed that there are representations of Hindu religion and display of deities throughout campus. Also, there is a small Hindu temple next to the main administrative building on the campus. Manan pointed out that according to Article 28 (1) of the Constitution, "no religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds." Manan suggested that the secular ethos of the Constitution should be strengthened in the state-owned educational institutions through preventing any religious instructions, rituals, practices and symbols.

In the previous section, I presented how the campus climate issues are associated with a sense of belonging; similarly, academic experiences also impact the sense of belonging of students (Strayhorn, 2012). In response to my questions about the syllabus and representation of Dalits in it, some Dalit students elaborated through various examples. Dipak discussed his interpretation of some academic texts in his MA program:

I have never studied anything about Dalits; in fact for my subject Sanskrit, few things that are mentioned in the books are against the lower castes that we belong to, such as it is our duty to eat the leftover food and the reason of our birth has been to invariably serve God... I felt like that reading the texts. Those (*Brahmins*) who have composed these texts had the command over education and the authority to write, so they had written anything that they felt was appropriate to them.

Sanskrit is an ancient language and during ancient times, only *Brahmins* had the right to create texts; therefore, social relations and cultural representation in the texts are casteist

and valorize the caste system. Dipak interpreted some academic texts (not explicit in the syllabus) as casteist because he felt the representation of Dalits in the texts was subservient and justified their servitude to a caste system created by God. Dipak claimed that he never studied any representation of Dalits in the texts (Lum, 2019), and on the other side, he argued that the Brahmins had exclusive authority over the cultural capital, so Dalits had been excluded in the knowledge creation processes. Dipak's experience and perception are not unusual; studies also reported that the way casteist notions are inbuilt in curriculum, pedagogy and syllabus and are reflected in the teaching and academic environments in classrooms. It is more visible and experiential in Social Sciences and Humanities than the Sciences; as a result, the domination of privileged caste culture, values and history is evident (Kumar, 2016b); Reisz, 2018). Therefore, the representation of Dalit icons in textbooks and in classroom discussions are essential for providing an inclusive academic experience to Dalit students, which makes them confident and comfortable about their educational journeys (Maurya, 2018).

I earlier discussed in 'Exposure to Critical Ideas' (in Chapter 4) that those who engaged in critical thinking, Ambedkarite literature and anti-caste movements, reflected on their experiences with sociocultural and political perspectives, specifically, about caste in academia. Raj explained how caste discourse is overlooked from the academic syllabus, and he said, "as a Dalit student who has earned an MPhil degree, I have seen none of my personal experiences (like temple entry or other basic (caste) discrimination practices) highlighted in any of the text books." Raj's reflection reiterates a lack of Dalit representation; specifically, his lived experiences and accounts of the realities of caste are omitted in syllabi and textbooks. I argue that this is the effect of the privileged castes'

supremacy over the cultural capital and their world views which are master narratives where Dalits do not exist, or they are not worthy to be mentioned in literature and scholarship. In an identical reflection, Vinod reflected upon representations of the Dalit community in the academic syllabus:

[W]e are in the field of social work. Don't you think that my community or some activists from my community have contributed to some social causes. That history was never taught to us, and whenever we try to ask there is no answer. I eagerly came here to know what kind of contribution my community has made or was there any great leader of my community who has contributed in the field of social work... So, I feel a little sad about it. I always had this question of how is it possible that there was no one from my community?

Vinod did not see representation of his community in the syllabus; in contrast, he studied social reformers from privileged castes and representations of their culture and individuals in the syllabus. Vinod was disappointed because he did not study any Dalit icons, their history, social movements, political assertions or the representation of their culture in his program. For example, Dr. Ambedkar is reduced to either a Dalit leader or a chairman of the Constitutional drafting committee. Earlier Dipak also mentioned that since ancient times, the privileged castes have dominated the education field, thus the historical privileges are reflected, reinvented and reinforced in the contemporary higher education domain. Vinod's counterstory illustrates a grave concern in higher education; despite the modern education system, historical casteist attitudes and mindsets persist in most education settings of the society (Rao, 2013; Singh, 2013; Desai & Kulkarni, 2008).

Contrary to the above responses that claimed a lack of Dalit representation in the syllabus, Vaishali (second year student in History) mentioned that "we have a chapter on subaltern studies, which includes Dalits, Adivasi and women. We don't know much yet as the semester just started ten days ago." During my field visits, I visited the History

department frequently to interact with Dalit faculty, and the current head of department is a Dalit; as a result, I think the representation of Dalits in the syllabus is evident and inclusive compared to other departments. This fact is verified by Hemendra, who is a Dalit faculty in the department, and he said:

In an MA program, there is an entire paper on subaltern history, which documents the history of neglected castes like Tribals, Dalits, Dalit women and artisans etc. This addition was done by the last chair of the department, who was a Dalit and a critical scholar.

The representation of Dalits and other marginalized communities are evident in History department academic programs, and the main reason is the presence of two Dalit faculty (one is the chair) and the last chair of the department was also a Dalit. This indicates that appointment of Dalit faculty in any department is essential for various reasons. The next sub-section discusses why the representation of Dalit faculty in higher education is crucial for Dalit and other marginalized students.

7.3 Representation of Dalit faculty in Higher Education

Dalit faculty representation in higher education is crucial for several reasons; Dalit faculty can provide substantial support to Dalit students, represent marginalized castes, democratize higher education, facilitate counter hegemonic discourse, enhance inclusiveness in academics and enrich the overall institutional diversity. The hierarchy of caste also manifests in public services; all the low level jobs are dominated by Dalits. For instance, in all 'D category' (low-paid and menial) government jobs, the representation of Dalits has been higher than their population in the country (Deshpande & Weisskopf, 2014). Interestingly, the opponents of the quota never oppose the over representation of Dalits in the category. In other words, as long as Dalits are confined to menial and low-

status jobs, the privileged castes do not mind and merit does not matter. However, when Dalits compete with them in their traditional bastions (e.g., higher education), it is considered problematic and obviously a non-meritocratic claim. Studies and government data validate that the representation of Dalit faculty in higher education is dismal (Rao, 2013 & AISHE Final Report 2012-13). In the AISHE Final Report 2017-18, the ‘State-wise Number of Teachers among various social categories’ table shows that in Gujarat, Dalit faculty represent 5.6 percent of the faculty population, which is lower than their population of 6.7 percent.

I asked the interlocutors about the presence of Dalit faculty in their departments, and most of the responses indicate a complex picture about policy implementation in the university. A considerable number of the interlocutors were not sure about the representation of Dalit faculty in their departments or colleges, because they were not aware of their caste identities, although some interlocutors were conscious of Dalit identity of their faculty. For example, Dipak responded that “there was no one from our department; there were no SC faculty in the Languages department.” By reiterating the same opinion, Raj said, “we had only one xxx professor who was SC. Apart from it, I don’t know if there was any other SC faculty (in Sociology).” However, in the History department (earlier discussed), representation of Dalit faculty was evident, which was confirmed by Vaishali, “I think there are two SC faculty in our department; xxxx sir and xxxx sir (Head of Department), and both are very supportive.”

There is a lack of data pertaining to social categories of faculty distribution in Gujarat higher education. Some data is available from elite institutions such as IITs; according to the report submitted by the MHRD in parliament in 2018; it shows that in

twenty-three IITs, faculty from SC and ST communities represent just 1.9 percent of the total faculty population, whereas, their actual quota is 21.5 percent. In other words, out of a total 8856 faculty population, 4876 belong to the general category, 3481 belong to non-permanent and vacant positions, 329 belong to OBCs, 149 belong to SCs and 21 belong to STs (Sharma, 2019). In other words, only 9 percent of the faculty belongs to SCs, STs and OBCs combined, instead of 49.5 percent of their quota. The representation of Dalits and Tribals are similar in most of the premier institutions and in some state universities/colleges.¹³⁷ Scholarship on Dalit issues in higher education reiterates that the quota policy is undermined and inadequately implemented in higher education; as a result, the representation of Dalit (7 percent) and Tribal (2 percent) faculty is dismal in colleges and universities across the country (Mohanty, 2016, February 16).

In the science departments of the campus, the scenario is similar to IITs as confirmed by Jyoti, “there was no one as SC faculty, there is only one faculty from the ST background.” In another science department, Zeena described the same situation:

I don’t know any Dalit faculty in the department. I think there are not well educated Dalit candidates, so we don’t have any Dalit faculty. When I reflect on it, I feel, why general category faculties are high in numbers in the department?

Zeena is a doctoral student in the Zoology department, and she reiterated that there were no Dalit faculty in the department. She thinks that there is a lack of qualified Dalit candidates in the disciplines; hence, no representation of Dalit faculty in her department. On the other hand, Zeena raises an important question – why is the representation of general category (privileged castes) faculty so high in the department? Zeena’s reflection indicates two sides of the institutionalization of the caste problem in Indian higher

¹³⁷ According to RTI, out of the 642 faculty members, seventeen belong to OBC, four belong to SC, and only one belongs to ST category in thirteen IIMs across the country (Joshi and Malghan, 2018, January 18).

education: first, over representation of the privileged castes reinforces their group dominance and second, because of the dominance, they discriminate against Dalits and other quota members who pose a threat to their supremacy. Zeena's question signifies that diversity issues in Indian higher education are under-researched topics and deserve attention from policy makers and researchers (discussed in Chapter 8).¹³⁸

Literature on institutional change indicates that when institutional agents from privileged identities tend to act to maintain the privileges of their group members who share similar social characteristics, it perpetuates the same social conditions (e.g. social stratification and socioeconomic inequalities) which prevail in the larger society. This kind of social networking primarily operates in the domain of institutional and social forms of inclusion and exclusion (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). A part of Zeena's question is answered by Jigar who was a senate member in the university:

[A]s a senate member, I realized the backlog of SC/ST members was not updated. Thus, I asked for the backlog numbers to check how many seats have been filled up at the campus... The other members realized that a candidate of the SC community is aware and informed. By monitoring the admission process and seeking accountability, they realized that the appointment should be done as per the reservation norms. Even for employees, the vacant positions for SC/ ST were advertised to fill up.

As a senate member (a representative of the faculty of the campus), Jigar took the initiative and compelled the university leadership to fulfill the backlog of SC/ST positions (including faculty). This shows that the university administration did not take any initiative to implement the reservation policy until compelled to do so. Quotes from students and a faculty member suggest that the implementation of reservation at the

¹³⁸ Diversity research shows that in the context of the representation of the minority staff in an institution, there are critical questions: Do new hires at the college/university foster diversity of the excluded castes and marginalized groups among faculty, administrators and staff? And does the representation of the faculty correspond to caste and excluded group composition of the student body (Bensimon, 2004)?

campus is ambiguous and questionable. Further, the National Commission for Scheduled Caste issued a notice to one of the public universities in the state for not having any reservation in the senate and syndicate positions (The Times of India, 2012, January 29). As the quota policy suggests, the concerned authority has to make sincere attempts to find suitable SC/ST candidates, and if they do not find any, then they can appoint open category candidates. However, there are numerous court cases where, despite the availability of eligible SC/ST candidates, the reserved positions were filled with open category candidates.

In some highly professional and respected disciplines, representation of Dalit faculty in the department or college is influential, because their presence could deter wrongdoing and prevents discrimination against Dalit students. In the context of the implementation of reservation policy in the medical science college, Jitendra who is a senior professor described:

Since xxx college was governed by xxxx, the SC/ST reservation was considered as combined, which means 15+7 (ST+SC) percent. Indirectly they had reduced the percentage from 22 to 20 percent so they would allot 20 reserved seats for students from the total admission of 100 students. The interchangeability is beneficial to the SC students, as less ST students used to apply. Nobody knew about it; even I came to know recently for the interchangeability, but by the time the interchangeability rule was removed.

The OBC reservation (27 percent) came into effect in 2009, and before it, there was a quota only for SC (7.5 percent) and ST (15 percent) candidates in Gujarat. As Jitendra mentioned, the interchangeability rule would allow SC students to occupy ST vacant quota seats in the absence of ST students. In other words, there were a total of 20 reserved seats, due to a lack of sufficient ST applicants. As per the interchangeability rule in the admissions process, the vacant ST seats could be filled with SC applicants for the

undergraduate medical science degree. But despite the interchangeability rule, unoccupied ST seats would instead go to open category students, because the reservation rules were intentionally subverted by privileged caste officials in favor of privileged caste students and Dalit students were thereby prevented from taking advantage of the policy (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). Similarly, Jigar narrated an identical example:

The admission process was not centralized until five years ago (before online admission), and heads of department would not abide by the reservation rules completely. Therefore, the benefits of the SC/ST students to pursue their respective college and subject choices were not available to them in a transparent way.

Jigar pointed out that an online admission system started five years ago, which has produced crucial analytical statistics and Jigar, as a Computer Science professor; documented some discrepancies in the implementation of reservation policy in the admission process. Currently, Jigar is in charge of online admission, so he makes sure that no such discrepancies occur in the process. Further, the online admission process updates the enrollment list in real time, and applicants could see their enrollment status across the university, which includes degree programs, departments and colleges, to take an advantage of empty quota seats and enroll in a suitable degree program. As a result, more and more empty quota seats are being occupied by the targeted students and administrative discrepancies have been significantly reduced. The quotes from Jigar and Jitendra, however, reveal it is unlikely a student such as Zeena, would be able to expose the administrative delinquencies and force implementation of the reservation policy.

Research pointed out that an institutional agent who occupies one or more high status positions could influence institutional policy and decisions in favor of marginalized students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Therefore, even a small representation of Dalit faculty

and administrative officials could extend institutional and social support to Dalit students. Similarly, without the representation of Dalit faculty at various levels, it is almost impossible to keep abuse of the policy in check. I argue that these types of discrepancies and misconduct are intentional and are examples of institutionalized casteism, which prevent Dalit candidates from obtain faculty positions, and further reinforce the dominant narratives about Dalit candidates/students being non-meritocratic.

In general, upper middle class Dalits still prefer traditional valued disciplines such as medical sciences or engineering, which are traditional high paid and respected professions. Therefore, over the last decade, representation of Dalit faculty has considerably increased in the medical science college, and their presence is evident in the institutional decision making process. Mehul, an associate professor, said: “let me tell you that I myself am a member of the admission committee in the college, and am fairly involved in admission activities. If someone has any perceptions of discrimination, it is not the reality.” It indicates that appropriate representation of Dalit faculty provides group strength, which reflects in defending their Constitutional rights and protecting against injustice and discrimination. Jayesh has confirmed the reality of Dalit faculty representation in the college:

I have never felt any sort of thing (caste discrimination) in MBBS here in this particular college, and mainly, over here almost half of the staff (including lower level) belongs to SC group. Even the head of the hospital is SC, xxxx xxx, and the department heads in Surgery and Pediatric departments are SC.

Jayesh claimed almost half of the staff are SC, though that is more an expression than a numerical reality. In other words, he was trying to say that a considerable number of staff members belong to the Dalit community. From Dalit students’ perspectives, the representative presence of Dalit faculty and staff members make them feel comfortable

and also provide sociocultural and academic support. On the other hand, it curtails the group power of the privileged castes, and reduces the chances of caste-based discrimination in the institution.

In the context of the pervasiveness of caste in higher education, it is obvious that Dalit students feel comfortable when they see Dalit faculty in their department or college. Similarly, Dalit faculty are aware of the issues faced by Dalit students due to the caste dynamics of their department or college; therefore, they have ingroup sympathy toward the students.¹³⁹ The significance of Dalit faculty in academia is lucidly described by Vinod:

If you are getting a chance, to teach a subject which has been personally experienced so closely. Thus, you can teach the subject very well compared to other faculty who never experienced any form of discrimination... For example, a person suffering from HIV will be counseled attentively by another person who experienced it, but the person who never experienced HIV, won't be able to do sensitively... So in the case of faculty, if they recruit more SC/ST professors, we would definitely have high sensitivity towards them (students).

Vinod's analogy of HIV represents caste experiences of Dalit faculty, and he argues that the representation of Dalits and Tribals in teaching positions would enhance inclusiveness and consideration toward Dalit students. Vinod's perspective has been integrated into classroom teaching by Ronak, and he said:

I have found many students in the class sharing that there shouldn't be any form of reservation, it is one of the highly debated topics. I dialogued with them to identify the reasons for having it (reservation). I gave them an example that having a fever or TB (Tuberculosis) wouldn't qualify for the same medication, but in both the cases the patient is definitely sick. However, a type of sickness is different for both of them, as a result, TB patient needs a long term medication, whereas the fever patient needs a short term medication.

¹³⁹ A study conducted to measure the impact of social distance between students and teachers in primary schools has concluded that the representation of teachers from the same caste, gender and religion enhanced academic performance of students those belonging to the identities. (Rawal & Kingdon, 2010).

Ronak, as a Dalit faculty in a Social Work program facilitated reservation discussion in his classroom. Discussed earlier in the first section, a large number of privileged caste students oppose the reservation, due to lack of comprehensive knowledge of the policy and their views are based on the dominant narratives. To simplify the discussion, Ronak equates poverty as a fever and likens the historical legacy of caste discrimination to Tuberculosis (TB) disease in the society, and he defends the reservation policy by generating sufficient awareness among privileged caste students. In the interview, Ronak mentioned why it was essential for him to initiate a discussion on the reservation policy; this shows that as a Dalit faculty, Ronak has tried to counter some of the dominant narratives and also attempted to generate awareness among the students pertaining to the policy. Research also indicates that diverse faculty members enrich the learning environment through exposure to diverse curriculum and pedagogy (Hurtado, 1992).

Recruitment and retention of Dalit faculty is an imperative for Indian higher education as research demonstrates in the U.S. context.¹⁴⁰ However, having Dalit faculty itself does not necessarily facilitate support for Dalit students. The Dalit faculty is not a homogenous group that is automatically concerned about Dalit students. There are Dalit bourgeois faculties who have aligned their vested interest with the dominant groups in higher education; specifically, with the privileged castes in higher education. Manan narrated a personal experience of a Dalit faculty member:

[T]he HOD was from SC community, but he always helped students from the Patel community. Since he was doing a job, he had good relations with all of them. Despite the position, he didn't extend any support for SC students. He also supported Patel students applying for a job at the campus, but none of the student from SC community was on that list. Meaning that despite having a faculty from the SC community, they are helpless.

¹⁴⁰ In the US higher education context, scholarship and research indicates that the recruitment and retention of faculty of color is indispensable for the future of the country (Rudenstine, 1996; Stanley, 2007).

Manan claimed that the HOD was helpless; in other words, sometimes a token presence of Dalit faculty is not useful for Dalit students and they might have to cooperate with the dominant caste groups. During my field work, I interacted with a few Dalit faculty who were either non-critical and non-political about caste issues or aligned with the authority for their personal gains. I have repeatedly observed that this type of attitude is more evident among the middle class Dalits who acquired traits of “respectability politics”¹⁴¹ to avoid a caste stigma and to uphold their social networks based on a middle class identity, which is closely associated with privileged caste backgrounds. I also believe that it is also due to the lack of critical thinking and overt and subtle caste experiences, especially in childhood resulting in “internalized casteism” (derived from “internalized racism”¹⁴², Speight, 2007), which may cause psychological harm to most Dalits.

Since the conception of higher education in India, privileged castes have been in a dominant position and still the status quo is maintained; therefore, it is difficult for Dalit faculty to survive, and resist against institutional casteism and confront their privileged caste peers. Not only Dalit students but Dalit faculty also face antagonism from the privileged castes in higher education (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008; The Probe Team, 1999). Hemendra explained the nature of power relations among the faculty in the 1990s, when he was a graduate student, “there were SC faculty in the college. They had some soft

¹⁴¹ Respectability politics is grounded in cautious impression management or self-presentation tactics in which individuals with subordinate identities manipulate their impression in social relations with each other to imitate dominant-class normative behaviors and attitudes. Behind the tactics it is the belief of subordinated individuals that respectability politics allows them to attain upward social mobility, however, it also restricts their consciousness to counter the oppressive system (Pitcan, Marwick, & Boyd, 2018).

¹⁴² Internalized racism is the acceptance of the negative stereotypes and beliefs by subordinate racial groups about themselves. Internalized racism is cultural imperialism, which involves normalizing the race relations through discounts, and misrepresents, denigrates and ignores the subordinate groups' history, values, language and culture. (Speight, 2007).

spots for the student, but since the majority of the professors belonged to privileged castes, the SC faculty were not really able to have any strong influence.”

7.4 Summary

Historically, Gujarati society is not influenced by the anti-caste movements, and M. K. Gandhi was not able to make any dent in the caste culture of the state. Therefore, master narratives of caste have been pervasive in the society, and since the 1980s, the privileged castes have found a new avenue in the form of reservation policy to perpetuate casteism and to maintain their historical superiority. The interlocutors reported that the reservation policy is systematically undermined by the administration, and as a result, the representation of Dalit students and faculty is lower than the quota. I argue that Dalit faculty not only democratize higher education but also provide support and social comfort to the Dalit and other marginalized students. The responses of the interlocutors indicate that dominant narratives about the policy and Dalit students are widespread at the campus, and they mostly go uncontested because Dalit students experience psychological stress about when to reveal their identity and when not to, and fear the potential recriminations and consequences of doing so. However, some Dalit students have started challenging casteist narratives, and by presenting their counter narratives through anti-caste discourse and raising the critical consciousness of the marginalized students, they are able to wage effective campaigns against Brahmanical ideology.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to understand and uncover the narratives of graduate Dalit students. Despite the disintegration of feudal structures and hierarchies, the cultural and social prejudice survives which reinforce material and cultural inequalities; therefore, caste continued to be valued and reproduced in both subtle and complex forms. Higher education is a classic example where caste is institutionalized by the privileged castes and previous studies have reported that caste-based discrimination is one of the biggest causes of Dalit students' lower academic outcomes. This study offers a different approach to understanding Dalit students' entire academic journeys through examining their education experiences connected with their cultural and political orientation on one side, and on the other side, their rejection, discouragement and negative experiences in the context of Dalit identity. This chapter is organized into three sections: first, discussion on Dalit students' academic journeys; second, recommendations; and third, implications.

8.1 Discussion on Dalit Students' Academic Journeys

In this section, I discuss the key findings of the study which are divided into four themes: (1) rural-urban differences, (2) quota conflicts and contestation, (3) equity and inclusion interventions: a road map to an inclusive campus and (4) counter narratives and anti-caste politics of Dalit students.

8.1.1 Rural-Urban Differences

In the interviews, what comes across clearly is that in rural areas, caste hierarchies and untouchability practices have remained rigid even when there is a change in the socioeconomic condition/status of the Dalit community in the village. Therefore, caste identity plays a central role in the socialization process, which imposes the consequences of stigmatized identity on Dalit communities. In villages, caste-based segregation and hierarchies are palpably evident compared to urban settings and cities. In the “Contextualizing Dalit Identity” chapter, I presented Dalit students’ childhood experiences which show that the caste-identity formation process starts at an early age, and its implications are different for Dalit and privileged caste children. My findings suggest that more or less caste is a foundation of village society, and it manifest in village schools. Instead of rejecting caste culture and oppressive practices, teachers and school administrators institutionalize these and make them part of normal school practice. As a result, these experiences and socializations impact students’ self-confidence and weaken their spirit to compete with privileged caste children (Hoff & Pandey, 2006; Vasavi, 2006; Nambissan, 2009, Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016).

Some rural Dalit parents realize the consequences of caste culture on their children, and therefore, they choose to move to cities where caste is not as salient as in villages and they can have better educational opportunities. A considerable number of rural interlocutors reiterated that their parents relocated to cities for these reasons. I argue that leaving villages and moving to cities also impacted Dalit students’ identity formation processes which translated into better educational outcomes. In contrast to the rural interlocutors, city interlocutors narrated that caste does reflect in residential segregation,

specifically in Dalit and non-Dalit neighborhoods. Findings suggest that in urban towns or cities, Dalit students mostly dwelled in their neighborhood where they did not encounter caste the way their counterparts did in villages. However, they understood the caste hierarchies and caste dynamics in relation to the privileged castes in the larger social contexts. In a city, caste-based identities are confined to a neighborhood, and outside of the neighborhood the identities fade and they are protected by a cloak of anonymity (Desai & Dubey, 2012). Despite this, city students are still aware of their caste identity because of caste-based conflicts with the privileged caste neighborhoods and anti-quota protests. Moreover, they usually awaken to the significance of caste identity in middle school, and some Dalit students experience caste bias in school and with peers. I argue that these types of routine experiences with Dalit students in schools gradually become a part of social relations, and it is obvious that some Dalit children internalize certain caste norms (Vasavi, 2006), develop strategies to hide their caste and anticipate the roles of privileged caste individuals in educational settings.

When Dalit students enter colleges, (which are mostly located in urban centers or cities), they experience social adjustment issues in a new academic institutional setting. My findings indicate that only rural students reported significant social adjustment issues because more Dalit students from the village background belong to the marginalized socioeconomic class, their families have little academic cultural capital and their accumulated caste experiences create critical sociocultural concerns at the beginning of their higher education journey. Therefore, a considerable number of rural students narrated a range of experiences regarding their socio-cultural, financial and academic issues. In contrast, all urban students of my study belong to Ahmedabad city where the

campus is located. Therefore, they are familiar with the city culture and have friends from their neighborhoods who assist and commute with them and provide essential information on various topics and social support. Urban students speak city colloquial Gujarati and some students frequently use English words in conversation which assist them in adjusting to a new academic setting. Dalit students from cities are more aware about caste dynamics in different social spheres and interpersonal relationships; as a result, they can easily adapt to elements of so-called privileged caste culture such as modification in Gujarati language, attire, food habits and spiritual etiquettes, and pass as privileged caste in different settings. For instance, my spoken Gujarati in house and outside of house (specifically in so-called high culture), is different and I know where to speak sophisticated Gujarati to pass as high culture/privileged caste. Further, I discussed in Chapter 4 that most city students did not explicitly experience caste-based discrimination or caste stigma during their childhood and schooling, as a result, they do not carry psychological anxiety of their caste identity.

Regarding aspirations of the interlocutors, differences between rural and urban students' are evident in the "Findings on Academic Journey" chapter. I found that more students from city backgrounds are either from middle class families or are second-generation college students and in some cases, are both. Throughout my field visit, I observed that urban middle class Dalit students had more ambitious and specific education aspirations, which reflects in their presence in sciences and other professional degree programs on campus. For example, twice I interacted with some Dalit students at a management school at the campus, and I observed that most students belonged to middle class families with city background. Further, none of the management students

showed interest in participating in my study, and I believe that middle class Dalit students from city backgrounds are more influenced by class culture than caste and they are more likely not exposed to critical ideas or anti-caste politics either in home or their neighborhoods. The middle class culture resonates with privileged caste culture, which is high status and respected, so middle class Dalit parents/students shy away from their Dalit identity to avoid caste stigma.

In contrast, most rural students belong to the lower social classes and are first-generation college aspirants; therefore, there was a lack of academic cultural capital in their families and inadequate resources to invest in academic preparation and the overall development of the students, and it reflects in their aspirations. As a researcher and insider, I would say that it is a giant leap for rural students to leave their villages and join a college or university campus in a big city, this is a monumental aspiration; it is similar to my academic journey from Ahmedabad to the U.S. for higher education. In other words, a location and the class status of students are important determinants to envision a career path or educational goals.

One of the most significant differences between rural and urban students is their politics on caste issues on campus. In the previous chapters, I discussed that humiliation and differential treatments are an everyday experience for rural students; therefore, they have an intent to challenge the status quo and desire to bring positive change in society. This reflects in their critical perspectives pertaining to their caste experiences and Dalit identity which are significantly different than city students. As I presented in chapters 4 and 5, students from cities have experienced caste implicitly and infrequently; in most cases their middle class background and a lack of exposure to critical ideas, all make

them less critical than students from villages. I argue that either the lived experience of caste (in most rural students) or critical consciousness (and in some cases both) are the driving forces for engaging in anti-caste politics and social justice struggle.

In the “Counter Narratives and Resilience” chapter, the most engaging arguments for deconstructing casteism and critiquing privileged castes’ narratives are presented by the village students. For example, most interlocutors in sciences on campus (except for medical college interlocutors), did not experience any discrimination due to their Dalit identity and also narrated that they did not hear any incidents of caste-based discrimination in their department/college. My observations corroborate the analysis that students in sciences and other professional courses do not get enough exposure to sociopolitical and cultural realities of the society, therefore, their understanding is superficial, and they are less critical. Further, sciences are influenced by the privileged caste culture (Thomas, 2020), so unconsciously Dalit students embrace Brahmanical values, which are undemocratic and exclusionary. On the same campus, students in social sciences and humanities are more critical and engaged in sociopolitical and anti-caste politics. A considerable number of students in these disciplines narrated a range of counter stories of dominant narratives, incidents of caste discrimination, analyses of syllabus and academic texts, critiques of policy and the administration and specifically, persuasively articulated the significance of affirmative action in public higher education.

8.1.2 Quota Policy: Conflict and Contestation

The quota policy of the Constitution is probably the most polarizing and politicized discourse in Indian society, especially in higher education contexts. The findings presented in Chapter 7 indicate that the anti-quota protests have been a political

tool of the privileged castes to oppose the socioeconomic and political empowerment of Dalits in the state. Moreover, anti-quota protests of the 1980s, 1990 and 2018 were tactically executed by the privileged castes to influence the state assembly elections. In other words, anti-quota sentiments are part of the larger sociopolitical context of the state. My interlocutors reiterated that in 2018, when the *Patidar* agitation turned aggressive, debate on quota policy was instigated in the public domain. Sadly, Dalit students routinely receive subtle or explicit caste-based micro-aggressions, whether they are beneficiaries of the policy or not. Sometimes discussion on the topic gets hostile and quickly turns into openly casteist allegations, but even when it is not openly aggressive there is always a subtle casteist connotation in any conversation about reservations. Therefore, Dalit students try to evade any discussion of affirmative action policy altogether. I found that Dalit students walk a tightrope on campus, ensnared in a dilemma: whether they participate in the debate or escape it, they have to bear the double burden of subordinate identity and reprisal from privileged castes (Kamat, 2007).

My findings on the quota policy reveal that most interlocutors feel quota is a bigger stigma than caste; more interlocutors experienced offensive comments on quota than caste-based discrimination or casteist comments on the campus. This indicates that Dalit students experience a dual stigma: Dalit as a stigmatized social identity and a tag of quota beneficiary (Deshpande, 2019). I argue that the quota tag exposes caste identities and caste stigma, specifically, for the Dalit students. The stigma plays out in various situations both implicitly and explicitly, and privileged caste individuals consciously and unconsciously weaponize the quota policy against Dalit students. It is a commonly held bias by privileged caste peers and faculty that beneficiaries of quotas are undeserving

candidates in higher education; further, casteist stereotypes label Dalit students as non-meritocratic, dumb and lazy. Some faculty use sophisticated language to describe them as “lacking motivation,” or “uneducable” to deny institutional casteism and invalidate Dalit students’ academic progress.

Research shows that the performance gap between Dalit and general category students appears to lessen in academic performance in university education and it also reflects in post-university career outcomes (Patwardhan & Palsikar, 1992; Kirpal & Gupta, 1999). This indicates that Dalit students are learning from university education, but the standard academic measurements underestimate their academic progress and they also make considerable progress after their university education (Weisskopf, 2004). In the U.S. context, the positive impact of affirmative action is confirmed by Bowen and Bok (1998) in their seminal work; they analyzed an enormous volume of data (40,000 students records), and concluded that the increased higher education in Black students from 0.8 percent (1951) to 6.7 percent (1989) can be credited to race-conscious affirmative action policies in higher education. They also estimated that without the affirmative action policy, representation of Black students would have been significantly reduced, especially in the most selective educational institutions.

I presented in Chapter 7 that in most cases, when a quota recipient’s identity was publicly disclosed, then their caste identity came to be known to their privileged caste peers. Often, affirmative action is being used as a proxy for so-called ‘lower caste’ status, and historically caste stigma has been inseparably linked more closely with Dalits than Tribals or OBCs. Therefore, Dalit students face and feel affirmative action’s stigma more than Tribals and OBC students, despite the fact that considerably more Tribals (15%) and

OBCs (27%) benefit from quota than Dalits (7.5%) in the state. Caste and casteism intersect with social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, language and location; for example, some female interlocutors' experiences show that Dalit female student face triple discrimination; caste stigma, quota tag and misogynist culture, all three multiply the level of sexism, humiliation and violence for Dalit women. Such triple discrimination is evident for instance in the news story that reported that in the prestigious Delhi University, a Dalit female student was asked, have you come through the quota or have come from the brothel? (in Hindi, *quota se aaye hai, ya kothe se?*) (Kumar, 2016a).

As I presented in Chapter 7, most interlocutors reiterated the significance of quota for their higher education journeys and how it is an important intervention to support and empower the excluded social groups to develop the capacity to participate in the decision making process. In contrast, the privileged caste students perceive and treat the quota policy as one of the most unfair interventions by the Constitution. It is a well-known fact that since the beginning of higher education in India, privilege castes have dominated the system; the privileged castes are around one-third of the urban population, but around two-thirds of higher education and professional degree holders. Similarly, among the highly educated, their representation is double their share of the general population. (Deshpande, 2006).

Over the past two decades or so, the quota has started jolting their domination and now more and more Dalit and oppressed caste students enter into higher education. Therefore, privileged castes vehemently oppose the quota on the ground of merit, and meritocracy has become a major political ideology which derives its strength from higher

education.¹⁴³ Thus, the argument of merit has been strongly supported by the privileged castes against the quota policy, to justify and maintain their control over cultural capital. Subramanian (2015) discussed merit and caste relationship through Bourdieu's "the forms of capital" (Bourdieu, 1986) and Satish Deshpande's "social life of caste" framework (Deshpande, 2013). Subramanian argues that a large number of IIT students belong to the privileged castes who are enabled to transform their caste privileges into merit or in Deshpande's words, it is an exchange of "caste capital" into "modern capital" – merit.¹⁴⁴ Further, the privileged castes have been converting their caste capital into property, modern occupations and political power, and yet they hypocritically call themselves casteless (Deshpande, 2013).

According to the meritocratic values of higher education in India, merit becomes a standard argument used by the privileged castes to deny access and further discriminate against the oppressed caste students in the institutions (Deshpande, 2013). Meritocratic evaluation in higher education has been perceived as standard admission practices that provide an opportunity to better students who have higher academic achievement. It is an undeniable fact that merit has a certain significance in the evaluation process, but sole emphasis on meritocratic evaluation neglects other important aspects of education, socioeconomic and cultural realities, and what is being evaluated as skills and knowledge

¹⁴³ In context of neoliberal ideology, meritocratic values have taken a dominant position in higher education. Since the 1990s, the meritocratic argument consistently challenged the quota policy and disregarded the social justice spirit of the Constitution.

¹⁴⁴ Upadhyay (2007) notes that in the Indian IT industry, employees belong mainly to the urban middle and privileged castes. In regard to the caste identity, she found only 1 interlocutor from the SC-ST groups; however, 48 percent of interlocutors identified themselves as 'Brahmins' (around 5 percent of the population) out of 132 interlocutors of the study. This overwhelming proportion of Brahmins is not startling because of their historical supremacy in higher education in India. Similarly, other studies of the IT sector did not find a single employee from the SC-ST social groups in their investigations (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2007).

(Gosh, 2006). In Indian higher education, merit is being assessed on the basis of strict quantifiable criteria (e.g. exams and standardized tests) which are not comprehensive, and it favors the privileged groups. From a “resource discrimination” point of view (Deshpande, 2013), higher education in India discriminates against the poor and the oppressed castes who holds marginalized positions in society (Deshpande, 2006).

I argue that meritocratic arguments are specifically used against the excluded castes, yet it is considered acceptable for the privileged castes to compromise merit in the name of “self-financed” seats when financially affluent students are able to ‘buy’ their admission into public and private institutions, effectively negating their hypothetical defense about merit.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the privileged castes who have been opposing the quota for decades, now are disingenuously agitating to seek the quota on the ground of their own socioeconomic deprivation. It indicates that meritocratic arguments by the privileged castes have nothing to do with “merit”, but rather it is due to their fear about losing their caste privileges due to the progress of the Dalits, and rising resistance by Dalits to their dominant position in the society. I argue that meritocracy as an ideology has been created and pushed by the elites in their respective societies in a cynical move to maintain their historical hegemony and privileges in the modern palatable language. For example, in *“The Meritocracy Trap: How America's Foundational Myth Feeds Inequality, Dismantles the Middle Class, and Devours the Elite”*, Daniel Markovits, presents unequivocal statistics and socioeconomic realities of American society, and argues that the elites make

¹⁴⁵ According to the dominant narratives, the quota recipients are known as non-meritocratic, and to examine the meritocratic arguments, Deshpande & Weisskopf (2014) carried out an empirical study to measure the impacts of SC-ST employees in productivity of Indian Railways (the largest public sector employer in India). The study analyzed an extensive data set to test a hypothesis, has the presence of SC-ST staff impacted institutional productivity negatively? The authors did not find any evidence to support the argument of critics that SC-ST employees are non-meritocratic; consequently, adversely affecting productivity and efficiency of an Institution. In contrast, the study mentioned that the presence of SC-ST staff in higher level (A and B categories) jobs positively correlated with productivity.

sure that their children receive the best education and training, which starts from preschool until Ivy league college/university, to attain an exclusive career. Specific to higher education, Daniel states that Ivy league institutions enroll more elite students (from the top 1 percent households) than bottom half of the households (Markovitz, 2020).

The ideology of meritocracy is deeply grounded in the institutional life of higher education institutions, and negatively impacts Dalit students, forcing them to be defensive and tolerate offensive remarks. It has become clear that most privileged caste students' knowledge about the quota policy is superficial and influenced by the dominant narratives and stereotypes. Therefore, they generally make anti-quota comments or pass offensive remarks on Dalit students without knowing if they have benefited from quota or not. Interlocutors of the study echoed that the burden lies with them to educate the “meritocratic” (privileged castes) students, and put themselves into vulnerable positions in the larger institutional context and against the casteist mindset. Most opponents of quota policy do not know that affirmative action is widely practiced by many different countries in the world. I do believe that it might not a perfect instrument to deliver social justice to the oppressed groups; however, it is often used as a pragmatic intervention to assimilate the excluded groups in the development process (Gosh, 2006; Weisskopf, 2004; Basu, 2008).¹⁴⁶ In the absence of the policy, caste culture would continue, and societal discrimination and exclusion would not only persist but become reinforced in modern forms (Gosh, 2006).

¹⁴⁶ The significance of the policy has been recognized by the Supreme courts of India and the U.S., and has set an example in favor of social justice for the marginalized groups in both the countries. In the U.S., Sandra O'Connor in *Grutter v. Bollinger* case in 2003 (Garces, 2012), upheld affirmative action in higher education and in India, D. Y. Chandrachud and U. U. Lalit (Wire, 2019, May 12) pronounced the judgement on a series of petitions in 2019, and granted reservation in promotion in public services.

8.1.3 Equity and Inclusion Interventions: A Road Map to an Inclusive Campus

The need for quotas shows that injustice and discrimination still exist in the society, and the Indian state, which has been governed by the privileged castes, who have prevented the development of a holistic notion of social justice. In other words, the Brahmanical intellectuals and law makers do not allow inclusion of social justice frameworks into the context of the policy because they fear that their historical positions and institutional authority would be threatened by the rise of the oppressed (Ilaiah, 2008). Therefore, the policy is systematically hollowed out, and only offers access to address some aspects of untouchability and tribalism. Despite this, quota and subsequently other forms of affirmative action initiatives have enhanced the representation of historically excluded groups. As a result, college and university campuses are more diverse today than ever before in the history of independent India.

Student compositional diversity has been mounting in public Indian higher education. However, access by itself does not bring equity and inclusion for marginalized student groups and specifically, for the Dalit students (Tilak, 2015). I argue that equity and inclusion issues have been overlooked by the policy makers both intentionally and due to their ignorance. From the diversity framework, equity issues are linked with social and inclusion issues associated with the support system for stigmatized students and sensitization programs in Indian higher education. For example, despite the higher enrollment rate of Dalit students (through quota), their retention and degree attainment rates remain lower than that of privileged groups (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008; Tilak, 2015). This indicates that quota addresses access only, while equity and inclusion issues of Dalit

students are disregarded. Further, quota and affirmative action policies have been presented as “diversity” policies, but there is an absence of the diversity framework in Indian higher education, therefore, the existing compositional diversity is a source of social conflict on campuses. In other words, student diversity is supposed to be an asset, not a burden, yet it is indeed a burden for all parties in Indian higher education.

In the findings chapters, I presented the narratives and experiences of Dalit students which show that privileged caste culture is pervasive on campus, and Dalit students feel conflict with their culture (e.g., food and language and religious representations) and also are the target of subtle microaggressions which alienate them from the institutions. In other words, equity issues of Dalit students are an integral part of the campus climate, but due to lack of empirical research on the impact of campus climate on Dalit students, I was forced to borrow scholarship from racial studies of minority students in the U.S. Research on black students’ performance at PWIs reported that academic achievement in black students is lower than their counterparts, specifically for those who experience significant cultural adjustment issues. Black students often experience isolation, hostility and lack of support on PWIs; therefore, they tend to find and create their own sociocultural groups to support each other and avoid exclusion (Allen, 1986).

Findings in the “Campus Climate and Institutional Support” chapter presented some equity aspects of Dalit students such as irregularity in SC scholarship disbursement and deliberate denial of scholarship funds. Because funds are frequently not available in a timely manner, each year many Dalit and Tribal students go through tremendous mental stress, and some cannot continue their studies. This indicates the apathy of the

bureaucracy and the political class towards Dalit students.¹⁴⁷ Further, it also exposes the casteist attitude that is widespread in the current Union government (People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space, 2019).¹⁴⁸ Narratives of Dalit students who experienced discrimination and hostile behavior by their academic advisors and faculty in the classroom indicate that the classroom learning environment is a critical concern. A positive classroom experience is fundamental in enhancing academic enrichment and interaction among students which cultivates positive attitudes and intergroup interaction on campus (Tinto, 1997). My findings exemplify that the current academic environment is not positive; further, some faculty and staff members also abuse the institutional authority in favor of their vested interests or to discriminate against Dalit students.

Another important equity aspect that has come to light is that the SC-ST grievance redressal office is ineffective. This office was specifically created to resolve issues of discrimination of Dalit and Tribal students, but most Dalit students either do not know of its existence on campus or do not trust the staff of the office where they can register their complaints against privileged caste faculty and staff members. Research on SC-ST grievance redressal offices also indicate that across the college/university campuses, the situation is more or less similar; according to RTI (Right to Information) responses, many universities have not created or have not implemented any mechanism to address caste-based discrimination (Sitlhou, 2017, November 21).

Experiences of Dalit students demonstrate that there are progressive policies and

¹⁴⁷ The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment repeatedly (in 2017 & 2018) requested the Financial Minister to release SC-ST scholarship funds; however, the minister neither replied nor released the money, and held on to scholarships of around 5.6 million SC-ST students.

¹⁴⁸ Abhay Flavian Xaxa, a Dalit activist, stated that the current BJP/RSS government advances 'intellectual lynching' of the quota students. Further, he added that "this is happening in three ways – physical discrimination, fiscal discrimination and barriers put up against the policies meant for the development of ST, SC and OBC students" (People's Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space, 2019, p. 27).

protective measures to promote higher education among the Dalits and Tribals, but they are being systematically undermined by both faculty and administration, which is counterproductive to enhancing access (via quota) to higher education by Dalit students. Campus climate research suggests that developing a robust grievance mechanism is an essential condition to transform the campus climate (Gregory, 2000) and provide a positive institutional environment to the vulnerable students, but the institution utterly fails to provide this.

Inclusion of Dalit students is inseparably associated with access and equity issues. Research on institutional support shows that various support programs and services on campus are not only indispensable for minority students, but also provide complementary resources for privileged students (Bensimon, 2004). Further, these types of support and services act as a catalyst to improve the overall campus climate, and stimulate intellectual growth, academic performance and sense of belonging not only among the marginalized students but also the entire student body (Allen, 1992; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Most interlocutors of my study are either first-generation college students and/or from low social-class families, and they encountered numerous struggles and challenges during their higher education journeys. First-generation students with a low social-class background in higher education are more likely to encounter obstacles in performing well in their studies, and it reflects in their lower retention and degree achievement ratios (Stephens, Hamedani & Destin, 2014).

Dalit students also identified some personal issues such as limited knowledge of English and social adjustment in a new academic setting. All interlocutors expressed that they lack proficiency in English, and it reflects in their academic performance and social

relationships with peers who appear sophisticated because of cultural qualities such as urban, modern and intellectual. Following Bourdieu, I argue that English language competencies are not just linked with medium of instruction at school; they are also influenced by social conditions such as greater social class, academic cultural family capital and quality of education in school. It is most likely that privileged caste students do possess two or more of these social conditions, in contrast, more Dalits students do not possess any of these social conditions, and few possess one or more conditions (Lum, 2019). For instance, Neha was the only interlocutor who studied in an English medium school, which in her case was of low quality, and most instruction was conducted in Gujarati. She came from a middle-class family, but was not fluent in English, and I interviewed her in Gujarati and in my interactions with her, I did not find any significant difference in her English language skills compared to other non-English medium schooled peers. Therefore, I think it is disingenuous to compare Dalit and privileged caste students' English language skills only on the ground of medium of instructions in school.

The second aspect is difficulties in social adjustment at the beginning of an academic program; though, it is more evident in rural students than urban. These issues widen the cultural differences not only between privileged caste and rural Dalit students, but also between city Dalit students and rural. My research shows that privileged caste students are often unaware of with the socioeconomic conditions of Dalits and the prevalence of caste-based discrimination in society. Further, they have misconceptions and stereotypes about Dalit students, and as a result, Dalit students are at the receiving end of prejudice and hostility. Moreover, Dalit students do not have access to support programs and cultural comfort, and this intensifies their feeling of alienation and a lack of

sense of belonging to the institution.¹⁴⁹ This shows that sensitization and awareness programs/events specifically for the privilege castes students and (re)training the faculty and staff members are essential in order to make them change their behaviors towards stigmatized and marginalized students (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003).

Currently the sole focus of the Indian education system is preparing students for the job market, but it does not focus on civic learning and democratic engagement that educates students on how to be decent citizens. Education is a pivotal tool for the state to train students for unlearning non-democratic attitudes and behaviors and learning democratic values and practices (Thorat, 2013). I believe that in any multicultural society such as India and the U.S., democratic and civic learning are indispensable and essential in higher learning centers. For instance, in 1995, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) recommended diversity education in U.S higher education through civic learning courses. Since then numerous colleges and universities have embraced diversity focused curricula and academic courses to foster ‘civic capital’ among students. After fifteen years, in 2011, an impact assessment of the curriculum and courses presented positive results in civic sense and engagement and also in academic outcomes. I argue that it is high time to ask, are Indian universities inclusive? If not, then there is a dire need to evolve mechanisms and frameworks to make them inclusive and democratic. Otherwise, social tensions on campuses will escalate, and the learning environment will decline for all students (Kumar, 2016a), and Dalit and marginalized students will face worsening consequences of the increasingly hostile environment.

¹⁴⁹ Research suggests that social and cultural support programs/events, specifically focused on black students enhance their academic outcomes and social participation on campus (Jackson & Swan, 1991)

8.1.4 Counter Narratives and Anti-caste Politics of Dalit Students

I found that many interlocutors shared their stories, perspectives and experiences as critiques of the caste system, master narratives and institutional casteism on campus. Higher education offers a voice to the voiceless and avenues to reflect upon critical issues of the society and specifically, for Dalit students, it is an intellectual space to speak their minds, and breaks “the culture of silence” (Freire, 1972) and caste prejudice that have been imposed on them for more than two millennia (Deshpande, 2013). Over the past two decades, the student demographic has shifted and a significantly increasing number of oppressed caste students are on university campuses; hence, a new discourse has been generated, which is inherently critical of the dominant narratives constructed by the privileged castes. Moreover, the oppressed caste students challenge the caste system and Brahmanical ideology to deconstruct mythology, religious scriptures and casteist practices. In addition, they raise critical consciousness (Freire, 1996) through constructive narratives around equality, justice, secularism and progressive ideas and by projecting subaltern culture in the institutional life.

In the context of the sociopolitical climate of Gujarat, one of the objectives of my study was to examine and understand what Dalit students think about (and how they deal with), the dominant narratives and what type of anti-caste politics they engage with on campus. The ruling Hindu right-wing government has been in power for more than two decades in the state, and has introduced Hindu religious values and Hindu nationalism in every sphere of life; therefore, the state government has been perceived as “anti-Dalit”¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ In July 2016, a cow vigilante group publicly flogged four Dalit men in Una city, Gujarat. The four Dalit men were transporting dead cows to remove their skin. The vigilante groups were inspired by Hindu nationalism and patronized by the BJP and RSS; Hindu nationalists believe that the cow is a holy animal (mentioned in religious scriptures) and their spiritual mother (*gau mata*). Therefore, beef eating or cow

and “anti-Muslim”¹⁵¹. The government specifically targeted education; not only the school syllabus, but the state government has gradually introduced Hindu cultural texts and Brahmanical ideology in both school syllabi (Sharma, 2001, September 1; Setalvad, 2016) and the higher education curriculum (People’s Commission on Shrinking Democratic Space, 2019). For example, the state government issued a list of eighty-two topics, and ordered to all universities in the state that each doctoral student must select a minimum of five topics from the list; it dictates what types of topic should be studied at doctoral level research to endorse and glorify the government’s development programs and schemes (Gupta, 2016).

One of the interesting things I found is the significance of Dr. Ambedkar for Dalit students and his relevance on the campus. I presented in the previous chapter how the RSS has established its control in the public higher education system, and has been promoting right wing ideology and purging intellectual spaces. For instance, some interlocutors revealed that the Dr. Ambedkar Chair is being misused and Dr. Ambedkar’s political thoughts are being distorted by Hindu nationalists in favor Hindu nationalism. Further, the funds allocated to the Chair to promote Dr. Ambedkar’s ideology and development for Dalit students’ academic engagement have often been diverted to promote Hindu nationalism in the academy. The Chair is created at many universities across the country, but reports say that twenty-one Ambedkar Chairs are created in

slaughtering is a blasphemous act, and most Indian states have legally banned cow slaughter and beef-based food.

¹⁵¹ In 2002, Hindu nationalists conducted an infamous “Gujarat Pogrom”, in which the ruling BJP and RSS had orchestrated genocide of Muslims, raping Muslim women and looting and burning their properties across the state. Over 1000 people were killed and around 150,000 people had to move to relief campus (Ghaseem-Fachandi, 2010). I also witnessed the Pogrom in the city (Ahmedabad, the epicenter), specifically around my neighborhood, and it was a large scale well-planned violence targeted against the Muslim community.

different universities to endorse the thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar, and translate them into policymaking and research, but some are simply not functional (Mitra, 2018) and the rest seized by the right wing. Through appropriation and misinterpretation of Dr. Ambedkar's literature, the RSS deals with two huge concerns: first, projecting Dr. Ambedkar as a great Hindu nationalist (recognized as *pratah smaraniy* can be translated as "remember in the morning" for inspiration), who worked for making India a Hindu nation and second, to gain political ground among Dalits for electoral benefits by using Dr. Ambedkar's image as one of national idols of India.

I found that the source of counter narratives, critique of caste culture and Hindu religious practices and inspiration for anti-caste politics, largely emerges from Dr. Ambedkar's life journey, educational attainments and anti-caste politics; these are benchmarks to follow. Moreover, almost all interlocutors echoed that Dr. Ambedkar has been an inspiration in their life and educational journey. For many Dalit students, exposure to Dr. Ambedkar's ideology and social justice perspectives in their childhood had a significant influence in their critical thinking and anti-caste politics. It appears that the influence of Dr. Ambedkar on Dalit students is one of the most important factors during their identity formation stages, and their assertiveness as a Dalit against caste culture. Some of Dr. Ambedkar's quotes or messages have had a colossal impact on the consciousness of Dalit students; for example, his most well-known statement – "Educate, Organize and Agitate", is an emancipatory prophecy that speaks volumes to me and was one of my inspirations to pursue this study.

Student residential facilities on campus are run by the university administration, so food is strictly vegetarian, which represents the privileged caste culture and values,

whereas non-vegetarian food (a key part of Dalit, Tribal, Muslim and other students' diets) is strictly prohibited in the facilities. Recently, Dalit and other marginalized students have increasingly countered the dominant culture on the ground of food choice.¹⁵² As the Constitution allows every citizen to practice their culture, Dalit and other marginalized students exercise their democratic rights to consume beef as their preferred food, and recently, beef eating has become one of the most contentious topics on university campuses across the country. Over the past few years, many incidents of campus conflict over (non-vegetarian) food have made the news. A notable such incident occurred at HCU in 2012 when Dalit and marginalized students organized a 'Beef Festival', and Hindu right wing students violently objected to the festival in order to defend Hindu religious sentiments (Pathania, 2016). Moreover, the authorities argued in favor of the Hindu students that beef eating offends religious sentiments of other students and instigates social tension on the campus (Gundimeda, 2009). The cow is considered sacred and revered as "*gau mata*" (mother-cow) in Hindu culture, and consumption of beef is considered a desecrating act. Since 2014, a Hindu right wing government has been in power, and therefore, a beef ban is imposed in the country; beef consumption has been treated as blasphemy and a punishable crime in modern India. Similarly, the government, political leaders from BJP and Hindu right wing organizations have promoted "cow vigilante"¹⁵³ groups across the nation.

¹⁵² Many marginalized and Dalit students from South India like beef over other types of meat and vegetarian foods, similarly, most North-East Indian students prefer pork over beef in their meals.

¹⁵³ Emboldened Hindu hard-liners (including some law-makers) have killed many people in the name of cow-protection, and created an environment of fear specifically, among Muslims and Dalits (Reuters, 2017, July 11).

My findings indicate that despite the lack of established student groups specifically organized by and for oppressed caste students, small groups of Dalit and other marginalized students do engage in critical discourse and anti-caste politics in their close circles. There, Dalit and other marginalized students assert their oppressed identity to unite marginalized student groups across caste, gender, sexual orientation and religious lines. For instance, to defy the traditional caste identities, the groups coined unifying identities such as, “*Bahujan*”¹⁵⁴ (can be translated as ‘majority’ to appeal all marginalized social groups including religious minorities) and “*Mulnivasī*” (original inhabitants, as per the claim that they are natives of India) that provokes anti-caste and anti-Brahmanical narratives. Similarly, names of Ambedkar, Phule, Periyar, Savitribai and Birsamunda appear on the walls of universities, to the dismay of privileged caste faculty and the authorities, but directly they cannot prevent it. Therefore, authorities abuse the institutional power by denying permission to celebrate or organize events which featuring Dalit icons and anti-caste discourse (Kumar, 2016a).

During my fieldwork I observed that students from Social Sciences are more critical on sociocultural and political issues than Sciences; similarly, their narratives and perspectives also suggest the same reality. I believe that rural students are more likely to enroll in Social Sciences and Humanities than Sciences and other professional programs. In contrast, city students tend to pursue Sciences and professional programs. The data and my personal interaction with the interlocutors indicate that students in Sciences have little or no exposure to sociocultural and political ideas; whereas, in Social Sciences, students

¹⁵⁴ Bahujan term is derived from Buddhist literature, and Dr. Ambedkar used it to describe the oppressed castes and marginalized groups of India. In the 1980s, Kanshi Ram politicized the word and widely used it in his political discourses, and now Bahujan is considered as an inclusive identity which appeals to the majority of marginalized social groups across the country.

are engaged with a range of sociocultural, socioeconomic and political contents. Therefore, students from Social Sciences have presented more counter narratives and analytical arguments pertaining to their academic and institutional experiences, which they narrated as casteist, non-representative of Dalit history and culture and the feeling of exclusion in their academic experiences. I argue that this is the effect of the privileged castes' longstanding domination in higher education, as well as their Brahmanical world views and cultural tendencies which serve as master narratives where Dalits do not exist, or are not worthy to be mentioned in literature, scholarship and syllabus. I also noticed that in Social Sciences, Dalit students tend to focus their research on issues of caste, discrimination and social justice. As a result, it is only recently that Dalits have been studying and researching these issues; previously, they have been predominantly studied by privileged caste scholars. The next section offers recommendations for assisting Dalit students through support programs/services and policy changes for improving the campus climate.

8.2 Recommendations

This study provides a comprehensive description of Dalit students' higher education journeys, while presenting their struggles, survival, resilience and counter narratives; further, the study also offers recommendations for discrete actions to be taken by Indian higher education institutions to redress past discrimination and improve the academic experiences of Dalit and other marginalized students. Narratives and suggestions of Dalit students and faculty and the theoretical frameworks of the study are the source of these recommendations, which include institutional interventions, support

programs, awareness and sensitization programs/events and policy changes to resolve the issues of Dalit and vulnerable students as researchers, practitioners, scholars, leaders of higher education and members of the political class. Recommendations are broadly classified into two categories: policy level and institutional level.

8.2.1 Policy Level Recommendations

- Expand the scope of the quota policy beyond access (reserved seats) to incorporate equity (social justice issues) and inclusion (institutional support) aspects as a part of the policy in the context of Indian higher education.
- Develop a holistic diversity policy at the HECI (Higher Education Commission of India) level and define diversity in the context of higher education and how diversity would be attained at various levels in Indian higher education. Most public and private higher education institutions in the U.S. have adapted Equity, Diversity and Inclusion frameworks as an indispensable part of their institutional policy (e.g. University of Massachusetts Amherst, <https://www.umass.edu/diversity/home>).
- Develop a campus climate framework to periodically assess the overall environment on campus, specifically focusing on marginalized students to examine their perspectives and experiences in colleges and universities. For instance, most universities and big colleges in the U.S. regularly conduct a campus climate survey, and present the results in the public domain; (e.g. University of Michigan at Ann Arbor (Flagship campus), (<https://diversity.umich.edu/data-reports/climate-survey/>)).

- Create an effective and accountable institutional mechanism to evaluate and monitor quota policy at an institutional level, to enhance the representation of Dalit, Tribal and OBC students, staff and faculty, as well as to curtail misuse of quota slots. The new institutional mechanism should include an efficient scholarship disbursement system to provide consistent financial support to the targeted students. Similarly, monitor the SC-ST cells' functioning and establish a system to increase transparency in the grievance redressal process. For instance, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) in the U.S. (<https://www.eeoc.gov>) monitors and evaluates affirmative action programs, investigates complaints of discrimination in the public and private sectors and also provides trainings and educational resources about equal opportunity laws. More directly, the U.S. Office for Civil Rights, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html> ensures equal access to education and promotes academic excellence through comprehensive enforcement of civil rights in the nation's schools and institutions of higher education.
- Encourage and provide funds to create an extensive research framework to conduct a range of studies to understand the issues of exclusion, access, equity, inclusion, diversity and institutional support. For example, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (CSSEIP) supported by the Ex-University Grant Commission, India. Similarly, introduce Bahujan Studies or Dalit Studies academic programs across universities to promote interdisciplinary research and to enhance the sense of belonging among marginalized students (e.g. African American Studies program at Princeton University, <https://aas.princeton.edu>).

- Initiate a program that provides academic, financial and cultural enrichment support to underrepresented student groups in higher education to access college education and other specialized disciplines, along the lines of “Upward Bound” (<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html>) supported by the U.S. Department of Education, which offers support and mentorship to high school students from underrepresented groups to pursue their higher education aspirations.
- Representation of Bahunjan’s history and icons and their experiences in the syllabus and institutional culture; for example, each year celebration of Black History Month in the U.S. and other countries to recognize the role of Blacks in history and acknowledge their achievements (e.g. UMass Amherst Black Heritage Month, <https://www.umass.edu/gateway/feature/black-heritage-month-umass-amherst>).

8.2.2 Institutional-Level Recommendations

This is divided into two categories: first, support services and programs to assist both Dalit and other students, and second, awareness and sensitization trainings/events to raise consciousness of the campus community.

8.2.3 Support Services and Programs

- English language support programs, training and courses for different types of learners (e.g. beginner, intermediate and advanced levels). Similarly, English writing support services, which assist students to improve their academic and

professional writing skills; for example, many colleges and universities in the U.S. offer English writing services and resources to all students (e. g. Writing Program at University of Massachusetts Amherst, <https://www.umass.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter>).

- Provide research related support through professional services and mentorship programs to enhance the participation of Dalits, Tribals, OBCs, Muslims and women in various disciplines, specifically in sciences and professional disciplines (e. g. University of Michigan's Equity, Access and Success in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Initiative, <https://lsa.umich.edu/ncid/priorities/growing-stem.html>).
- Professional development support services and resources to help students in resume building, cover letter writing and resources for various professional assignments. For instance, professional development has been an integral part of academic training in the U.S. higher education (e. g. Office of Career Services, Harvard University, <https://ocs.fas.harvard.edu>).
- Development of Digital literacy training and services that focus on basic computer competencies and internet knowledge for professional and academic advancement (e.g. Digital Learners to Leaders program at Georgia State University, <https://innovation.gsu.edu/dll/>).
- Mental health support services especially designed to cater to Dalit and Tribal students to deal with humiliation, micro-aggressions, stigma and discrimination in institutional life. (e. g. University of Massachusetts Center for Counseling and Psychological Health, <http://www.umass.edu/counseling/>).

- Create a center where marginalized students can access academic support, mentorship, advocacy, professional development, social and cultural and counseling and psychological services. For example, Center for Multicultural Advancement and Student Success (CMASS, <https://www.umass.edu/cmass/>) at UMass, Amherst, is a significant place at the campus for the underrepresented students.
- Expand outreach to encourage and fund student organizations to conduct cultural, sensitization, advocacy, wellness, intellectual and professional development programs and events. For instance, to emphasize education outside of the classroom, most colleges and universities in the U.S. focus on student affairs to enrich learning experiences such as an office for Campus Involvement supports over 1400 organizations at the University of Michigan campus, Ann Arbor (<https://campusinvolvement.umich.edu/about>).

8.2.4 Awareness and Sensitization Programs and Measures

- Awareness and sensitization programs and training about stigma, micro-aggressions, stereotypes associated with vulnerable identities such as Dalits, Tribals, female, and other vulnerable groups. For example, Harvard University's anti-racism support and resources for people of color to deal with racism and to extend educational materials for all (<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/diversity/resources/anti-racism/list/>).
- Mandatory sensitization trainings specifically designed to counter stereotypes, prejudices and casteist attitudes of privileged caste students, faculty and staff

members. These training will expose how biases and micro-aggressions conveyed to Dalit students are normalized, and express through dominant narratives.

- Adapt inclusive pedagogies to embrace diversity, academic skills, English language proficiency, technological competencies and social characteristics of students, and to provide resources for faculty and graduate students across the campus to promote inclusive teaching and learning practices. For example, the Teaching and Learning Center at Princeton University (<https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/inclusive-teaching-series>).
- Design academic courses and trainings pertaining to civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. Diversity focused curricula have been adopted in many U.S. higher education institutions; for example, the Civic Engagement and Service Learning at UMass, Amherst (<https://www.umass.edu/cesl/>).
- Organize events to build bridges across difference between student groups, for instance, University of Michigan's "Intergroup Dialogue", a two way communication process between groups of students to engage into meaningful conversations, and gain deeper understanding about issues and others. (<https://igr.umich.edu/article/institute>).
- Develop a comprehensive website where students can access information, resources and assistance pertaining to legal advice, financial help, housing, food, transportation and mental health. For instance, at UMass, Amherst, "Single Stop Resources" (<https://www.umass.edu/studentlife/single-stop>) is a webpage where students can access a range of information and seek assistance.

8.3 Implications for Research

The deficit discourse of caste in Indian higher education indicates that issues relating to caste-based discrimination have to be examined through different lenses such as focusing on institutional life of the privileged castes, uncovering the life of caste, and revealing how historical and contemporary privileges are being reinforced and reinvented in higher education. Tatum (1997) stated that white privileges are an under researched topic; similarly, the privileged castes in India are scarcely examined and hardly any literature is available to obtain a theoretical understanding of the structure of privileges based on superior caste identity. In American higher education contexts, the CRT has been developed as an overarching theoretical and analytical framework to study racism and racial experiences of the people of color; by contrast, there are no corresponding frameworks to study institutional casteism and the experiences of Dalit students in Indian higher education. Therefore, my study suggests that ‘Critical Caste Theory’ should be developed as the theoretical framework to encompass a range of topics and dimensions pertaining to Dalit students and the institutional life of caste in education. Similar frameworks are needed to study issues pertaining to OBCs, and especially Tribal and Muslim students, due to their distinct social identities and socioeconomic and political conditions in contemporary India.

University or college is supposed to be a microcosm of secular democracy and this is especially relevant for the world’s largest democracy – India. If higher education in India does not represent secular democracy and the social justice spirit of the Constitution, then what can we expect from the larger society? The current university and college campuses do not represent the characteristics of secular democracy and

contrarily, they reproduce casteist social relations and reinforce exclusionary environments for vulnerable student groups. Similarly, Indian university and college campuses have been facing intergroup conflicts which are neglected by the states, policy makers and leaders of higher education. I argue that these Dalit and Bahujan students are the reality and their participation will only increase in the future; hence, the crisis in Indian higher education offers a timely opportunity to study the issues of equity and inclusion, and find solutions and interventions to transform the campuses into more inclusive spaces.

Research in higher education is largely focused on elite institutions, but a large number of students enroll in state universities; therefore, examining various aspects of state universities and their student demographics would provide essential data and information to improve the learning environment for all students, including students from marginalized social backgrounds. For example, consider “Inclusive University: Linking Diversity, Equity and Excellence for the 21st Century”, a collaborative project of the KSP Women’s Studies Center, Pune University and College of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst from 2014 to 2017. This project conducted a paper-based survey with over 1900 graduate students at the Pune University main campus and presented a range of illuminating statistics of student demographics and the campus climate (Kamat et al., 2018). In Indian higher education, the campus climate assessment or survey is a relatively new concept; therefore, the campus climate framework needs to be adapted in the Indian higher education contexts.

Future research should focus on conducting qualitative and quantitative studies to understand the needs of marginalized students, and how to provide institutional support.

These types of studies would produce a robust body of scholarship which will provide comprehensive data and a direction to generate institutional interventions to support the most marginalized students groups across campuses. Similarly, future longitudinal research should focus on student diversity at different levels such as undergrad and graduate programs and its influence on learning outcomes. Finally, I strongly believe that it should be an institutional imperative to studying the implications of student diversity and how it informs institutional practices.

8.4. Summary

The increasing presence of Dalit and other marginalized students at institutions of higher learning helps to break down the impermeable barriers between castes and presents unprecedented opportunities for these groups to assert for themselves an equal status in Indian society, and to help them redress historical injustice and contemporary exclusion and marginalization. However, by pursuing their journeys, marginalized students threaten the historical hegemony enjoyed by the privileged castes in society. These dominant castes fear their ascendancy and resist their struggle through methods both discreet and overt in order to maintain their dominant place in society. Thus pushback has come from their peers through means, both subtle and overt, ranging from subtle stereotyping and microaggressions, to demeaning comments active hostility and even outright violence. These acts can be due to casteist socialization, ignorance, denial or deceit; but all add to the burdens the students bring with them from their home to the institution. In addition, some resistance has come from the University administration and faculty, dominated by people from the privileged castes, who are loyal to a government

regime which explicitly supports reversion to caste norms in defiance of the Indian constitution.

To further their agenda, University officials have taken action (or in some cases failed to take action) in manners both subtle and overt, such as limiting the scope of reform efforts to access and goals to entry, failing to establish (or make people aware of) effective student support programs, English classes, anti-harassment procedures, professional development and effective distribution of scholarships, as well as suppression of speech critical to Hindu nationalism and Brahmanical propaganda, denial of caste strife as a cause of violent incidents and suicides and support and promotion of pro-Hindu festivals and student activities.

I have learned much about the life, educational experiences and viewpoints of a number of Dalit students and faculty to determine the challenges they face, the needs they have, how their upbringing formed their outlook, social background, and the impact of inter-caste relations on their lives, world views and attitude towards higher education, as well as their views of the University's efforts to facilitate a supportive learning environment towards historically excluded students. I have also discussed diversity, equity and inclusion interventions and policies of U.S. higher education, and described several campus facilitated support services, awareness activities and progressive policies that could be adapted to the Indian higher education system, and implemented by the institutions to ensure improvement of retention and graduation rates among Dalits and other marginalized students.

In the U.S., forward-thinking whites have fought the civil war to end slavery and played a crucial role in establishing the NAACP (National Alliance for Advancement of

Colored People) with their disadvantaged comrades of color, and participated in the civil right movement to support blacks to attain passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Galanter,1998). In India, the buck now stops with privileged castes; over the millennia, they have been enjoying all manner of freedoms and privileges; however, as a collective, they have hardly made any sincere attempt to break the shackles of caste hierarchies, and so far no such collective and institutional endeavor has been attempted by the privileged castes. It is high time for forward-thinking citizens of the privileged castes to recognize their historical role in the perpetuation of caste injustices and the validity of Dalit grievances and aspirations; also commit to changing their orientation and reject the existing hegemony and caste capital. To this end, the leaders of Indian higher education should increase their level of institutional commitment and action, as well as facilitate change in the attitudes of the privileged caste faculty, peers and administrators are necessary in order to help the marginalized students achieve success in their academic journeys and to create a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment for all.

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol - Student

Themes of Student Interview

1. Personal background and social identity
2. School and higher education journey
3. Faculty and Staff
4. Pedagogy and curriculum in graduate program
5. Social interaction
6. Extra curriculum spaces on the campus

Interview Protocol

Alias:

Institution:

Date:

Position:

1. Could you tell briefly about your family background?
2. In what ways did your family shape your educational aspirations?
3. In what ways did your neighborhood and school influence your educational aspirations?
4. How do you describe your school journey?
5. Did you witness or experience the role of caste in your school journey?
6. What inspired you to join under-grade degree?
7. Did you experience any kind of positive and negative experiences along caste lines?
8. Did you experience any barriers or obstacles in attaining your undergrad degree?
9. Please describe how did you deal with these barriers or obstacles?

10. What are your objectives and expectations to join the graduate (master) program?
11. How would you describe the climate/culture in the department and college?
12. What kind of social relation and friendship do you have with your peers?
13. Could you describe how the Dalit identity influence your current academic program?
14. Did you experience any kind of discrimination or bias in academic session?
15. Did you experience any kind of discrimination or bias from faculty?
16. Did you observe any kind of favoritism for certain students from faculty?
17. In what ways did your caste influence your interactions with faculty within your department?
18. Do you know any Dalit faculty in your department or college?
19. Did you experience any kind of discrimination or bias in group projects or lab work?
20. Did you experience any kind of discrimination or bias in administrative process?
21. Did you experience any kind of discrimination or bias from any administrative staff members?
22. Do you know any Dalit individuals in administrative staff?
23. What is your experience about the scheduled caste scholarship application process?
24. Did you organize any events/activities related to Dalit culture (e.g. birthday of Dr. Ambedkar) on the campus?
25. How would you describe your relations with privileged caste peers in dorms?
26. Do you think your Dalit identity impacts your social relations with peers?
27. Did you experience any kind of casteist remarks or derogatory comments on Dalit identity?
28. Did you experience any kind of negative experiences in dorms?
29. Did you experience or notice any kind of differential treatment in dorms or residential facilities?
30. Did you talk or discuss about caste issues with privileged caste peers?
31. Did you talk about caste issues of the college with family members?
32. Did your family members involve in any of your caste related problem?

33. Did you feel psychological stress for any reasons?
34. Please describe your relationships with Dalit peers in the department and college?
35. Do Dalit students discuss caste issues in their close circle?
36. Do you interact with other Dalit students in the college and on campus?
37. Do you receive any kind of support from any organization or individuals outside of your campus?
38. How do Dalit peers assist each other in any issue?
39. What kind of difficulties Dalit students are experiencing in the program?
40. Do you receive any kind of support from the university/college to deal with the issues of Dalit students?
41. Have you noticed any kind of program/event organized by the university/college to create awareness about discrimination or social justice issues?
42. If you experience any caste-based discrimination in the university - where do you register your complaint?
43. Do you feel comfortable and safe to voice any caste related grievances in the university/college?
44. Do you think institutional support programs could improve academic outcomes and wellbeing of Dalit students?
45. Please describe what types of specific support do you anticipate from the university/college to assist the Dalit students?
46. Do you think awareness programs on social justice issues could improve the campus environment?
47. Please describe what types of specific awareness programs/events do you anticipate improving the campus environment?
48. Is there anything you think I should know to understand your Dalit experience in the university/college better?
49. Are there any thoughts/personal experiences that you would like to share that we have not covered?

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol - Faculty

Themes of Interview

1. Personal background and social identity
2. School and higher education journey
3. Observations and experiences
4. Social interaction
5. Extra curriculum spaces on the campus

Interview Protocol

Alias:

Institution:

Date:

Position:

-
1. Could you tell briefly about your family background?
 2. In what ways did your family shape your educational aspirations?
 3. In what ways did your neighborhood and school influence your educational aspirations?
 4. How do you describe your school journey?
 5. Did you witness or experience the role of caste in your school journey?
 6. What inspired you to join under-grade degree?
 7. Did you experience any kind of positive and negative experiences along caste lines?
 8. Did you experience any barriers or obstacles in attaining your undergrad degree?
 9. Please describe how did you deal with these barriers or obstacles?

10. What were your objectives and expectations to join the graduate (master) program?
11. What is your inspiration to pursue higher education?
12. Could you describe how the Dalit identity influence your teaching experience?
13. Did you experience any kind of discrimination or bias in the university/college?
14. Did you experience any kind of discrimination or bias from other faculty?
15. Did you observe any kind of favoritism for certain students from other faculty?
16. In what ways did your caste influence your interactions with privileged caste faculty?
17. Do you know any other Dalit faculty in your department or college?
18. Did you observe any kind of discrimination or bias against Dalit students in group projects or lab work?
19. Do you think the needs of Dalit students are embraced in the pedagogy?
20. Did you experience any kind of discrimination or bias in administrative process?
21. Did you experience any kind of discrimination or bias from any administrative staff members or higher authority?
22. Do you know any Dalit individuals in administrative staff or higher authority?
23. Did you organize any events/activities related to Dalit culture (e.g. birthday of Dr. Ambedkar) on the campus?
24. Do you think your Dalit identity impacts your social relations with colleagues?
25. How would you describe your relations with privileged caste colleagues?
26. Did you experience any kind of casteist remarks or derogatory comments on Dalit identity?
27. Did you talk or discuss about caste issues with privileged caste colleagues?
28. Please describe your relationships with Dalit colleagues in the department and college?
29. Do Dalit faculties discuss caste issues in their close circle?
30. How do Dalit faculty assist each other in any issue?
31. What kind of relation do you have with Dalit students?
32. Do you know what kind of difficulties Dalit students are experiencing in the department and college?

33. Do you know any kind of support from the university/college to deal with the issues of Dalit students?
34. Have you noticed any kind of program/event organized by the college/ university to create awareness about discrimination or social justice issues?
35. If you experience any caste-based discrimination in the university - where do you register your complaint?
36. Do you feel comfortable and safe to voice any caste related grievances in the university/college?
37. Do you think institutional support programs could improve academic outcomes and wellbeing of Dalit students?
38. Please describe what types of specific support do you anticipate from the university to assist the Dalit students?
39. Do you think awareness programs on social justice issues could improve the campus environment?
40. Please describe what types of specific awareness programs/activities do you anticipate improving the campus environment?
41. Is there anything you think I should know to understand your Dalit experience in the university/college better?
42. Are there any thoughts/personal experiences that you would like to share that we haven't covered?

APPENDIX C

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study - Student University of Massachusetts Amherst

Researcher:	Bharat Rathod	Faculty Sponsor: Sangeeta Kamat
Study Title:	Dalit Academic Experiences: Caste, Social Reproduction and Systemic Exclusion in Indian Higher Education	

1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research.

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate and any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to take some time to think this over and ask questions now and at any other time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records.

2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

You are being invited to participate in this research because you have identified as a Dalit graduate student, who studying in master/doctoral degree in Ahmed University and Gandhi University (pseudo names). The interlocutors must be at least 18 years old to participate in the study.

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The research is designed to study academic journey of Dalit students in higher education institutions. Understanding a range of issues of Dalit students and the ways in which Dalit students navigate through higher education can help researchers, practitioners, policymakers and leaders of higher education initiate policies and programs that support the Dalit students in their higher education journey. By analyzing the lived experiences, this research will provide a deeper understanding about the institutional life and the resilience of Dalit students in higher education.

4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The study will be conducted in summer 2018 at two locations in Gujarat (India); Ahmed University and Gandhi University (pseudo names). Approximately 1.00 to 1.30 hours of

your time will be required to complete an interview. You can take a break in between the interview process. You will be contacted in future to verify transcription of interview and to validate your responses.

5. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. Approximately 1.00 to 1.30 hours of your time will be required to complete an interview. You will determine an interview date, time and location. In the interview, you will be asked a series of questions related to your experiences and observations in the university. Questions will be asked regarding issues of Dalit students, discrimination or bias along the caste lines and family background. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering.

I will also observe the interlocutors which will involve being part of their everyday routine on their respective campus and interact with them individually. I will observe the intergroup relation of the interlocutors and record different visible messages (e.g. posters and graffiti) on the campuses.

6. WHAT ARE MY BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may generate new knowledge and deeper insights about the life of Dalit students in higher education.

Potential societal benefits include:

- 1) Researchers, practitioners, leaders of higher education and policymakers who are interested in designing programs and policies that facilitate support to the Dalit students and other marginalized student groups.
- 2) Researchers who are interested in studying the issues of Dalit students and the role of caste in higher education.
- 3) Dalit students who are pursuing higher education may obtain comprehensive understanding about their issues and need for an institutional support framework.

7. WHAT ARE MY RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

This study has minimal risk. Although I have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions I ask are stressful or disturbing. If this happens, you can quit interview straightaway or choose not to answer the question.

The interlocutors might experience emotional stress while sharing their personal stories. To minimize emotional risk, I would stop the interview session immediately. If require I will provide a contact information of a counselor in the area.

8. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential, and the following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your study records:

1. The only persons who will know that you participated in this study will be the Principal Investigator (Bharat Rathod).
2. Your name will not be mentioned in any reports or publications resulting from the study.
3. The researcher will keep all study records in a UMass BOX account, and destroy all paper records.
4. Research records will be labeled with a code. A master key that links names and codes will be maintained in a separate and secure locations.
5. All electronic files (e.g. word documents, excel sheets and software program) containing identifiable information will be password protected in a personal computer.
6. At the conclusion of this study, the researcher may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations.
7. The purpose of the research is to study the issues of Dalit students in higher education, and the research is not intended to place any institutions in a bad light.

9. WILL I RECEIVE ANY PAYMENT FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

You will not receive any payment or gift for participation in this research.

10. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Please take as long as you like before you make a decision. We will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher: Bharat Rathod, Ph.D. Candidate at xxx xxx xxxx and email: brathod@educ.umass.edu. You can also contact to faculty sponsor (Sangeeta Kamat) at skamat@educ.umass.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

11. CAN I STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate. Any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you; this information could have an effect on your willingness to continue your participation.

12. WHAT IF I AM INJURED?

The University of Massachusetts, Amherst does not have a program for compensating interlocutors for injury or complications related to human subjects research, but the study personnel will assist you in getting treatment.

13. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

When signing this form, I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.

Interlocutor Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

By signing below, I indicate that the interlocutor has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

Signature of Person
Obtaining Consent

Print Name:

Date:

APPENDIX D

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study - Faculty University of Massachusetts Amherst

Researcher:	Bharat Rathod	Faculty Sponsor: Sangeeta Kamat
Study Title:	Dalit Academic Experiences: Caste, Social Reproduction and Systemic Exclusion in Indian Higher Education	

1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research.

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate and any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to take some time to think this over and ask questions now and at any other time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records.

2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

You are being invited to participate in this research because you have identified as a Dalit faculty, who studying in master/doctoral degree in Ahmed University and Gandhi University (pseudo names). The interlocutors must be at least 18 years old to participate in the study.

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The research is designed to study academic journey of Dalit students in higher education institutions. Understanding a range of issues of Dalit students and the ways in which Dalit students navigate through higher education can help researchers, practitioners, policymakers and leaders of higher education initiate policies and programs that support the Dalit students in their higher education journey. By analyzing the lived experiences, this research will provide a deeper understanding about the institutional life and the resilience of Dalit students in higher education.

4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The study will be conducted in summer 2018 at two locations in Gujarat (India); Ahmed University and Gandhi University (pseudo names). Approximately 1.00 to 1.30 hours of

your time will be required to complete an interview. You can take a break in between the interview process. You will be contacted in future to verify transcription of interview and to validate your responses.

5. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. Approximately 1.00 to 1.30 hours of your time will be required to complete an interview. You will determine an interview date, time and location. In the interview, you will be asked a series of questions related to your experiences and observations in the university. Questions will be asked regarding Dalit identity, work experience in the university, discrimination or bias along the caste lines and family background. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering.

I will also observe the interlocutors which will involve being part of their everyday routine on their respective campus and interact with them individually. I will observe the intergroup relation of the interlocutors and record different visible messages (e.g. posters and graffiti) on the campuses.

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- 2) Researchers who are interested in studying the issues of Dalit students and the role of caste in higher education.
- 3) Dalit students who are pursuing higher education may obtain comprehensive understanding about their issues and need for an institutional support framework.

7. WHAT ARE MY RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?

This study has minimal risk. Although I have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions I ask are stressful or disturbing. If this happens, you can quit interview straightaway or choose not to answer the question.

The interlocutors might experience emotional stress while sharing their negative personal stories. To minimize emotional risk, I would stop the interview session immediately. If require I will provide a contact information of a counselor in the area.

8. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential, and the following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your study records:

1. The only persons who will know that you participated in this study will be the Principal Investigator (Bharat Rathod).
2. Your name will not be mentioned in any reports or publications resulting from the study.
3. The researcher will keep all study records in a UMass BOX account, and destroy all paper records.
4. Research records will be labeled with a code. A master key that links names and codes will be maintained in a separate and secure locations.
5. All electronic files (e.g. word documents, excel sheets and software program) containing identifiable information will be password protected in a personal computer.
6. At the conclusion of this study, the researcher may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations.
7. The purpose of the research is to study the issues of Dalit students in higher education, and the research is not intended to place any institutions in a bad light.

9. WILL I RECEIVE ANY PAYMENT FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

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The University of Massachusetts, Amherst does not have a program for compensating interlocutors for injury or complications related to human subjects research, but the study personnel will assist you in getting treatment.

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When signing this form, I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.

Interlocutor Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

By signing below, I indicate that the interlocutor has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

Signature of Person
Obtaining Consent

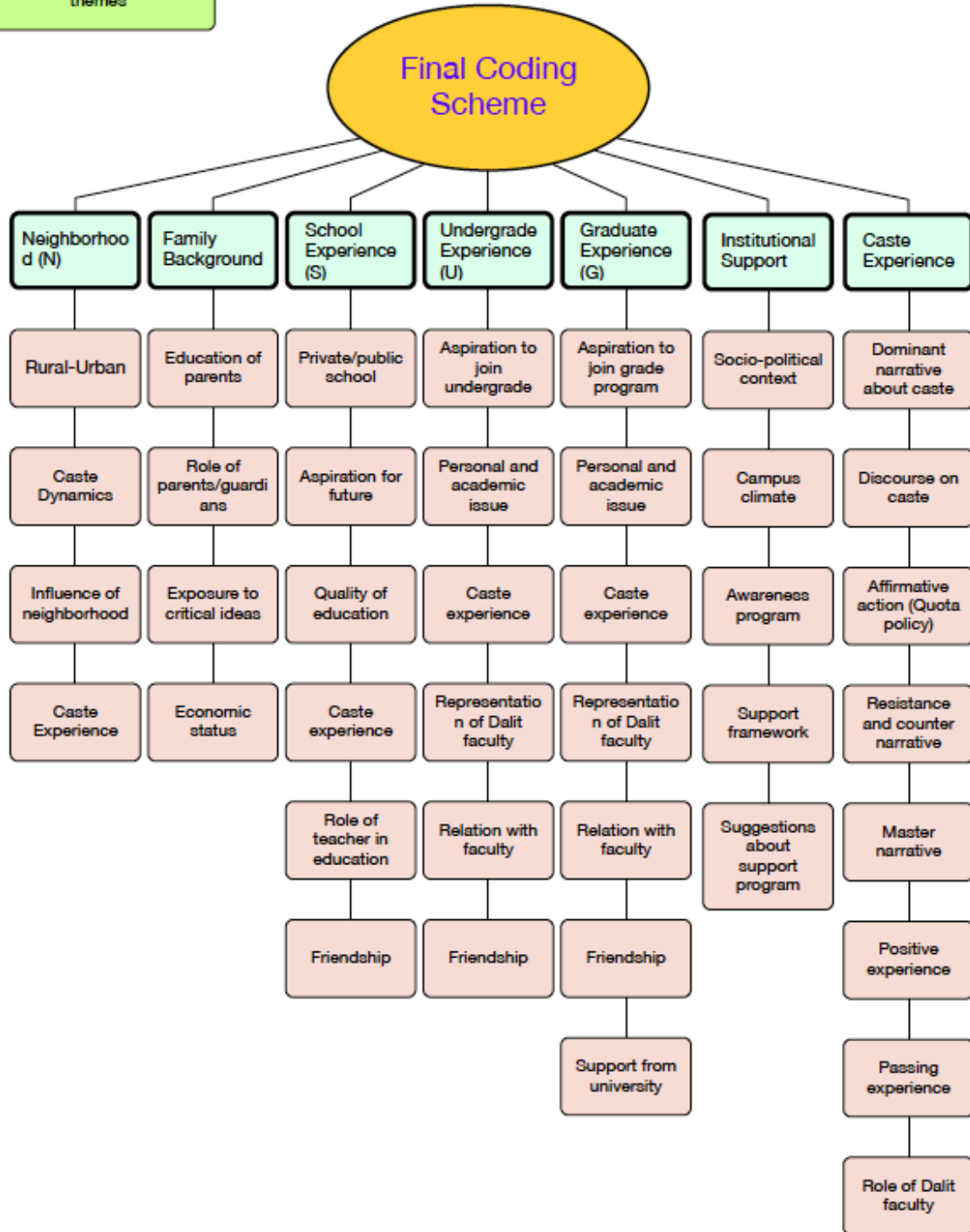
Print Name:

Date:

APPENDIX E

Final Codebook

Seven Categories and forty themes



APPENDIX F

Analytical Framework (Findings Chapters)

1. SOCIOCULTURAL HISTORIES:

- 1.1. Role of neighborhood in Dalit identity formation
 - 1.1.1. Dalit identity formation in rural contexts
 - 1.1.2. Dalit identity formation in urban contexts
- 1.2. The role of parents/guardians to inspire for education
- 1.3. Exposure to critical ideas

2. ACADEMIC JOURNEY:

- 2.1. Aspirations to Pursue Education
 - 2.1.1. Aspirations during schooling
 - 2.1.2. Aspirations before pursuing higher education
- 2.2. Struggles and Challenges in the Academic Journeys
 - 2.2.1. Academic struggles and challenges in higher education
 - 2.2.2. The role of academic advisors
- 2.3. Caste Experiences in the Academic Journey
 - 2.3.1. Caste experiences in school journey
 - 2.3.2. Caste experiences in higher education

3. CAMPUS CLIMATE AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT:

- 3.1. An overview of the campus climate through Dalit students' perspectives:
 - 3.1.1. Implications of the sociopolitical context on the campus climate
 - 3.1.2. Dalit students' perspectives of the campus climate
- 3.2. Importance of institutional support for Dalit students:
 - 3.2.1. Issues of social adjustment in the new institutional environment
 - 3.2.2. Socioeconomic challenges
 - 3.2.3. Experiences with the university's grievance redressal mechanism
- 3.3. Recommendations of Dalit students and faculty for institutional support

4. COUNTER NARRATIVES AND RESILIENCE:

- 4.1. Conflict and Contestation about Affirmative Action
 - 4.1.1. Affirmative action in sociopolitical contexts of Gujarat
 - 4.1.2. Dominant narratives about affirmative action
- 4.2. Counter Narratives and Resistance of Dalit Students:

- 4.2.1. Caste discourse and Counter narratives
- 4.2.2. Counter narratives and academic issues
- 4.3. Representation of Dalit faculty in Higher Education

APPENDIX G

NVivo Codebook

Name	Description	Files	References
CASTE EXPERIENCE	Caste experiences of interlocutors in the society	1	2
Affirmative action (reservation)	Affirmative action discourse	15	27
Discourse on caste	Interlocutors' perspectives regarding caste	13	25
Dominant narratives about caste	Interlocutors' experiences and perception about the dominant narratives of caste in the society	12	21
Explicit experience	Interlocutors' caste experience which are open, direct, offensive and violent in nature	8	11
Implicit experience	Interlocutors' caste-based subtle, hidden and micro-aggression experiences	3	3
Master narrative	Dalit interlocutors internalized master narrative	11	23
Passing Experiences	As a Dalit how they passed their caste identity.	2	2
Perception of caste identity	What are perceptions of interlocutors about their caste identity	7	10
Positive experience	Positive experiences of Dalit students	4	6
Resistance and counter narratives	Dalit students' resistance and counter narratives.	15	46
FAMILY BACKGROUND	Interlocutors' family background	0	0
Economic status		11	12
Education of parents	Education of parents/guardians of interlocutors	20	23
Exposure to critical ideas	Parents/guardians role to expose to the interlocutors to critical ideas	7	9
Influence of siblings and family		2	2
Role of parents-guardians	How parents/guardians influenced interlocutors' education	18	24
GRADUATE EXPERIENCE (G)	Interlocutors' graduate program experience	0	0
Academic and personal issues	What kind of issues the interlocutors faced - academic and personal problems	14	24
Aspiration to join (G)	Why interlocutors join graduate program	12	16
Caste experience (G)	Interlocutors' caste experiences during graduate	11	13

Name	Description	Files	References
	program		
Friendship (G)	Relation with peers	15	23
Relation with faculty (G)	Relation with faculty in graduate program	8	16
Representation of Dalit faculty	Dalit faculty during graduate program (college and University)	16	20
Support from University & dept	Type of support available from university and department	17	25
INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT	Types of support provided from the university	0	0
Awareness programs	Types of awareness programs organize by the university and department	18	27
Campus climate	Interlocutors' perspectives about the campus climate	11	17
Socio-political contexts	Larger social and political contexts that influences the university and policy	11	12
Suggestions about support programs	Interlocutors' suggestions about support programs	11	23
Support framework	Types of support programs being provided by the university	17	28
NEIGHBOURHOOD (N)	Interlocutors' neighborhood information	0	0
Caste awareness	Interlocutors' caste awareness in their neighborhood	3	3
Caste dynamics	Caste dynamics in interlocutors' neighborhood	10	11
Caste experience (N)	Interlocutors' caste experiences in their neighborhood	4	6
Influence of neighborhood	Neighborhood influence on interlocutors'	6	6
Rural-Urban	Interlocutors' location	5	7
SCHOOL EXPERIENCE (S)		0	0
Aspirations for future	What kind of thoughts interlocutors had about their future.	6	8
Caste experience (S)	Interlocutors' caste experiences during school	14	22
Friendship (S)	Interlocutors relation with peers	2	3
Private-public school	Interlocutors' school background	7	7

Name	Description	Files	References
Quality of education	How interlocutors' evaluate school experiences	8	8
Role of teacher in education	Interlocutors' experience with teacher	5	7
UNDERGRAD EXPERIENCE (U)	What are under grad experiences of interlocutors	0	0
Aspiration to join undergrad	Why interlocutors join undergrad	9	10
Caste experience (U)	Interlocutors' caste experiences during undergrad degree	4	5
Friendship (U)	Relation with peers	8	9
Personal and Academic issue	What kind of personal, academic and other issues faced	9	15
Relation with faculty (U)	Relation with faculty in undergrad	5	5
Representation of Dalit faculty (U)	Dalit faculty during undergrad degree	9	11
Support from college (U)	What kind of support was available during undergrad	1	1

APPENDIX H

Codebook with Analytical Themes

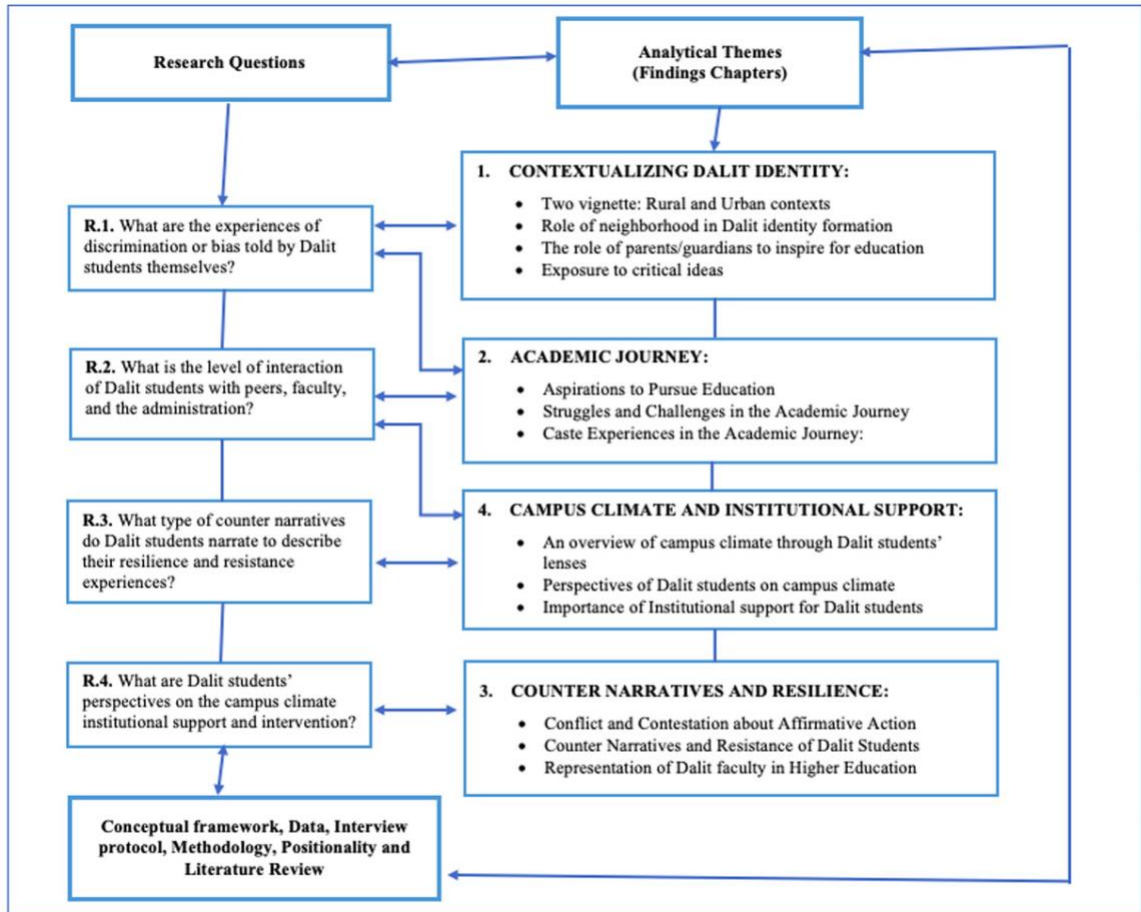
Analytical Theme No.	Name	Description	References
	CASTE EXPERIENCE	Caste experiences of interlocutors in the society	0
4	Affirmative action (reservation)	Affirmative action discourse	41
4	Discourse on caste	Interlocutors' perspectives regarding caste	42
4	Dominant narratives about caste	Interlocutors' experiences and perception about the dominant narratives of caste in the society	22
4	Master narrative	Dalit interlocutors internalized master narrative	28
4	Passing Experiences	As a Dalit how they passed their caste identity.	12
	Positive experience	Positive experiences of Dalit students	7
4	Resistance and counter narratives	Dalit students' resistance and counter narratives.	66
4	Role as a Dalit faculty	As a Dalit faculty, what are their experiences and issues.	21
	FAMILY BACKGROUND	Interlocutors' family background	0
1	Economic status	Class background of a family	16
1	Education of parents	Education of parents/guardians of interlocutors	30
1	Exposure to critical ideas	Parents/guardians role to expose to the interlocutors to critical ideas	14
1	Role of parents-guardians	How parents/guardians influenced interlocutors' education	34
	GRADUATE EXPERIENCE (G)	Interlocutors' graduate program experience	0
2	Academic and personal	What kind of issues the	31

Analytical Theme No.	Name	Description	References
	issues	interlocutors faced - academic and personal problems	
2	Aspiration to join (G)	Why interlocutors join graduate program	18
2	Caste experience (G)	Interlocutors' caste experiences during graduate program	18
2	Friendship (G)	Relation with peers	24
2	Relation with faculty (G)	Relation with faculty in graduate program	26
3	Representation of Dalit faculty	Dalit faculty during graduate program (college and University)	23
3	Support from University & dept	Type of support available from university and department	29
	INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT	Types of support provided from the university	0
3	Awareness programs	Types of awareness programs organize by the university and department	38
3	Campus climate	Interlocutors' perspectives about the campus climate	23
3	Socio-political contexts	Larger social and political contexts that influences the university and policy	18
3	Suggestions about support programs	Interlocutors' suggestions about support programs	35
3	Support framework	Types of support programs being provided by the university	40
	NEIGHBOURHOOD (N)	Interlocutors' neighborhood information	0
1	Caste dynamics	Caste dynamics in interlocutors' neighborhood	18
1	Caste experience (N)	Interlocutors' caste experiences in their neighborhood	19

Analytical Theme No.	Name	Description	References
1	Influence of neighborhood	Neighborhood influence on interlocutors'	8
1	Rural-Urban	Interlocutors' location	11
	SCHOOL EXPERIENCE (S)		0
2	Aspirations for future	What kind of thoughts interlocutors had about their future.	9
2	Caste experience (S)	Interlocutors' caste experiences during school	29
2	Friendship (S)	Interlocutors relation with peers	11
2	Private-public school	Interlocutors' school background	8
2	Quality of education	How interlocutors' evaluate school experiences	9
2	Role of teacher in education	Interlocutors' experience with teacher	11
	UNDERGRAD EXPERIENCE (U)	What are under grad experiences of interlocutors	0
2	Aspiration to join undergrad	Why interlocutors join undergrad	11
2	Caste experience (U)	Interlocutors' caste experiences during undergrad degree	6
2	Friendship (U)	Relation with peers	15
2	Personal and Academic issue	What kind of personal, academic and other issues faced	20
2	Relation with faculty (U)	Relation with faculty in undergrad	5
3	Representation of Dalit faculty (U)	Dalit faculty during undergrad degree	14
		Total number of coded text	860


APPENDIX I

Procedural Graph of Analytical Framework



APPENDIX J

Anti-Ragging Poster



The poster is set against a dark red background. At the top left, a white rectangular box contains a red circle with a diagonal slash over a black silhouette of a hand holding a stick, with the text "SAY NO TO RAGGING" in bold black letters. To the right, the text "BEFORE YOU EVEN THINK OF RAGGING" is written in large, bold, yellow capital letters. In the center, a white silhouette of a person is crouching with their head buried in their hands. To the left of this figure, a white circle contains the text "Download ANTI RAGGING App". Below the crouching figure, the words "THINK OF" are written in large, bold, yellow capital letters. Surrounding this central text are six white, torn-edge rectangular labels containing the following words in black: "Humiliation", "Suspension", "Ruined Career", "Blacklisting", "Expulsion", and "Possible Prosecution". Below these labels, a yellow banner contains the text "Don't just stand and watch. Stop Ragging! Show Character". Underneath the banner, the text "Remember RAGGING is for LOSERS" is written in a stylized font. Further down, it says "Visit UGC Website i.e. www.ugc.ac.in & www.antiragging.in to see UGC Anti Ragging regulations." followed by "Are You Being Ragged ?". At the bottom of this section, it says "Immediately call UGC Anti Ragging Helpline- 1800-180-5522 (24x7 Toll Free) Or Send an E-mail to helpline@antiragging.in". The bottom of the poster features two logos: on the left, the MHRD logo with the text "DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT GOVERNMENT OF INDIA"; on the right, the UGC logo with the text "विश्वविद्यालय अनुदान आयोग University Grants Commission quality higher education for all".

SAY NO TO RAGGING

BEFORE YOU EVEN THINK OF RAGGING

Download
ANTI RAGGING
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THINK OF

Humiliation
Suspension
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MHRD
DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION
MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

विश्वविद्यालय अनुदान आयोग
University Grants Commission
quality higher education for all

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