INTRODUCTION

Education in general and higher education in particular is a key tool for India’s growth and development, competitiveness and social stability. Education is a fundamental mechanism for social inclusion and is essential to ensure opportunity to participate in the developmental process. In a society where life chances are unevenly distributed, equality of opportunity depends not only on removal of disabilities but also on the creation of abilities (Tawney 1964) especially focusing on education to enhance the capacity. The system of higher education in any society is deeply involved in the creation and dissemination of knowledge as well as developing the skills necessary for its acquisition and utilization among the younger population. Higher education system in India experienced a phenomenal change and is recognized as a powerful instrument for socioeconomic advancement and a vehicle for upward social mobility for deprived and marginalized sections. Higher education in India has witnessed a steep growth trajectory, with India positioning itself as the world’s largest higher education system in terms of the number of institutions and second largest in terms of the number of students.

Despite impressive growth, the Gross enrolment rate (GER) of higher education in India is at 18 percent which is below the global average of 27 percent. The government targets to increase the GER in higher education to 30 percent by 2020 but to achieve the target it requires quick and effective change in terms of infrastructure and preparedness of society. India has distinctly increased the number and network of institutions of higher education but mere quantitative growth of institutions alone does not serve the objective. Despite efforts, inadequacy in access, uneven and inequitable opportunities for higher education across different categories and sections of the population, and low quality of education imparted at institutions of higher education are major hindrances in the progress of country’s educational attainment. India’s general enrolment rate (GER) in higher education is not adequate to meet its requirement of trained manpower, especially when India is likely to have a huge working population by 2025. The growth of GER is not entirely dependent on the extent of educational opportunities available to the students but on the cost and affordability as well. Hence the issue of equity is also equally important. Distinct disparities exist in GERs among the Scheduled Caste (SCs), Scheduled Tribes
(STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) while Muslims, Women and rural population. This needs to be addressed to achieve the objective of inclusive growth, to make the society more egalitarian, and harness the potentials for the development of the nation.

The issue of equity in education is closely related to the prevailing socio-economic inequalities in the society and with the disadvantaged social position. The preponderance of some sections of society over others in the social composition of higher education reflects the social gaps. With the nation’s vast size and diversity, the pattern of development is not uniform while in some regions, social-political movements paved way for the creation of institutions to meet the needs of socially and educationally backward communities such as the state of Tamil Nadu. Inequality in education or unequal access to education is costly as it infringes upon the individual and social welfare. Birdsall and Sabot (1996), Salmi and Bassett (2014) observes, ‘given the extensive social and private benefits that result from tertiary education, inclusive access and success are essential for achieving social justice to realize the full potential of all young people particularly those from the disadvantaged community.

In India, since Independence, education was given prime importance and subsequent governments, initiated efforts to enhance literacy, enrolment in schools, institutes of higher education and technical education. Currently the government spends around 3.8 percent of its GDP on education and about 1.25 percent of its GDP on higher education. It has a total literacy rate of 74.04 percent compared to the world average of 83.4 percent (Annual Report 2011-12, MHRD). However, in spite of the significant progress, higher education sector is plagued by several challenges such as inequitable access to higher education for certain caste groups, women, rural population and limitations in high-quality teaching and research resulting in sub-optimal outcomes.

The Constitutional framework through the Directive principles of state policy upholds the educational and economic interests of the scheduled castes and tribes with special concern. The positive and protective discrimination and reservations in educational institutions for the socially and economically marginalized segments brought significant progress in the literacy rates and enrolment among the SCs and STs in various stages of schools and higher education. However the GER for both SC (12.2) and ST (9.7) in
graduation and higher degree programs is still markedly lower than the national average according to UGC report, 2011. 15 per cent of the seats are reserved for SC members and 7.5 per cent for ST members and these ratios reflect the corresponding shares of Dalits and Adivasis in the national population. The majority of Indian higher educational institutions are indeed under central- or state-level government control but the number of private institutions has been growing due to the demands from the society as well as market response operating since early 1990’s. How and where are the SC/ST students are distributed in private institutions is an area to be explored. It is noted that the southern states have a better profile in terms of female literacy and the trends are continuing in the higher education scenario as well. The enrolment of women in higher education varies from state to state and within a state between urban and rural areas (MHRD, 2011).

It is evident that there have been significant increase in the enrolment of SC and ST students in Indian higher educational institutions over decades, though the SC and ST representation in such institutions remain proportionately well below the general population. Indian reservation policies have played a major role in increasing the opportunities for younger population of disadvantaged sections to continue their education at the college and university level but they have however done, in large part by significantly lowering minimum exam scores at entrance level for SC and ST students to enter universities as compared to scores required by general entry applicants (Weisskopf, 2004). Though the qualifying exam scores cannot be considered as a good predictor of performance in higher education, the lower scores characteristic of most SC and ST students especially at elite institutions do reflect less adequate academic preparation for the demands of a higher level of education. Both the lower scores and the less adequate academic preparation are highly correlated with socio-economic status, highlighting the challenge faced by the SC or ST students embarking on a higher educational experience. With the Liberalization in 1991, there is a substantial increase in the government spending and allocation of funds to higher education and entry of private players but the individual cost of higher education increased with the dominance of professional and techno science subjects.
Women in India are a disadvantaged group owing to the patriarchal nature of the society and societal constraints which begins right from birth and continues through the life cycle. The problem is exacerbated further when the disadvantage is compounded by class, caste and religious discrimination (Wazir, 2000). The literacy rate for women in India is low in comparison to the global statistics, with 65 percent at the national level for women in general and 56.50 percent for scheduled community women. There had been a distinct growth in the number of women students in higher education in the recent decades which increased from 10 percent at the time of independence to 41.6 percent in the academic year 2009-2010 (UGC, Report, 2011). The pace of growth has been quicker in the last two decades. However the enrolment has been almost static across states during 2009-2010 over the preceding year. Women have generally experienced increasing access to higher education, but closer examination reveals that such access has frequently been channeled into specific types of institutions and fields of study. (Moore, 1987). Women continue to enter traditionally women's fields such as teaching, nursing, social work and other service fields. The fields of greatest potential increase in the years ahead are the new technologies, computer science and the biological sciences where the tremendous demand for trained personnel has opened many opportunities that might not otherwise have been available. Women are gaining access to some of these new openings, but again stratification into lower levels appears to be occurring. Researchers have identified that subject choices of women in higher education are based on the feminine and masculine dichotomy of subjects (Acker 1994 and Thomas 1990). Therefore it is important to understand why certain subjects have become associated with women and others with men.

The gender gap in education is understood based on the overall position of women in social context and traditional constraints. The persistent gaps in enrolment and completion of course despite the allocation of considerable resources suggest that a more comprehensive approach to college access and successful completion is required. Merely providing financial aid for students to attend college is not sufficient to ensure that all students have equal access to the benefits associated with earning a college degree (Gladieux and Swail, 1998). A variety of factors influence college enrolment, including educational expectations and plans, academic ability and preparation, information about college options, availability of financial aid and informational support from teachers,
counselors, family members and peers (Perna, 2000). Chitnis (1989) points that the gender gap narrows as one goes up the education ladder, higher education in India has primarily been for middle and upper class women, who makes up only 3 percent of the total population. Thus the gender gap widens among those who fail to have access to the education (Mazumdar, 1987). Therefore, Chanana (1993) urges to carefully examine the meanings and intersections of gender with class, caste and geographical region. Chanana (2000) also emphasizes to examine the caste nature of women’s enrolment in specific disciplines and faculties in the Indian higher education, so as to further our understanding with regard to processes of gendering.

Higher education system and its interactions between institutions (social, economic, cultural and other institutions) are complex and inter-dependent. Higher education is not confined only with the universities and classrooms but a strong and dynamic influence prevail between college students and their families and, in turn, between families and institutions of higher education which are long-standing and complex. Family is a socio-biological unit that exerts greatest influence on the development and perpetuation of individual behavior (Sagar and Kaplan, 1992). Family background is normally considered in terms of the social class of the child’s parents, generally determined by occupation of the parents. The family determines the socio-economic origin of its children and this is seen as having a key influence on educational chances and outcomes (Croll, 2004). The resource and attitude of family members has a key role in the educational experiences and outcome for children. Much attention has been paid to the role of parents, in terms of how much they should be available and present for their college-going children, and how much information can and should be shared with parents by members of higher education institutions (Kiyama and Harper, 2015; Self, 2013; Taylor, 2006; Wartman and Savage, 2008) including offering financial support, and assisting with concerns of mental health issues, safety, and accommodation issues (Carney-Hall, 2008; Kiyama and Harper, 2015; Sax and Weintraub, 2014).

Researchers found that parental involvement promotes the college enrolment of underrepresented groups of students and parental involvement is associated with a greater likelihood of children’s aspiration to attend college and actual enrolment (Cabrera and La
Among other parental characteristics that differentiate between families, parental education, income, and wealth (Conley, 2001) are associated with a higher probability of children attending college, and parental income is associated with greater parental willingness to pay for college (Steelman and Powell, 1991). Involvement generally refers to parent’s management of their adolescents' careers (e.g., helping to select courses), active assistance such as helping with homework, encouragement of educational goals, and attendance at school events (Muller, 1995). Regarding the characteristics of children in the family, large sibships are associated with a lower probability of attending college (Conley, 2001). Another often-studied characteristic, later birth order is associated with greater financial support for college costs (Steelman and Powell, 1989). Research has found that parents will become more involved with the child’s education when they believe their involvement is expected and effective (Lee et al, 2007). It is important to fully understand the impact of parental involvement on enrolment as well as academic success. Most forms of parental involvement, such as parent’s educational aspirations for their children, parental competence, parental support, and parent-child communication about school, have been found to be positively related to educational outcomes including academic achievement, academic self-concept, student self-concept, self-efficacy and increased performance (Dumont et al, 2012; Galindo and Sheldon, 2012; Neuenschwander, Vida, Garett, and Eccles, 2007). Studies have shown that parents who earn a higher income and those with more education tend to be more involved in their children's education (Ames, DeStefano, Watkins, and Sheldon, 1995 and Muller and Kerbow, 1993). Also, studies have shown that parent involvement varies according to parent’s racial and ethnic background (Catsambis and Garland, 1997; Griffith, 1998). Consolidation of these studies prompts research need related to parental involvement and allied factors in Indian context, especially Dalit families which are disadvantageously positioned in terms of financial resources as well as resources required for modern education. Understanding the way Dalit parents are involved in children’s education, especially girl children will provide input for delineating factors associated with Dalit women accessing higher education.

Over the last few decades, advances in increased access to higher education for many historically underrepresented groups coupled with increased college participation
rates among high school graduates has generated an influx of new college students, some of whom are first in their family to go to college. First generation students are defined as those students whose parents have had no college or post secondary experiences (Billson and Terry, 1982; Horn and Nunez, 2000; Choy, 2001; Pascarella et al., 2004). Students with more educated parents tend to have an advantage over their first-generation peers in navigating the higher education landscape due to their greater access to financial, informational and social resources.

Research on higher education has been conducted at the individual level of analysis in largely in the western context and is requirement to understand the micro social context. Researchers have traditionally been concerned with the probability of a given individual’s attending college with the relative effects of her or his background and ability on that likelihood (Alexander and Eckland 1974; Thomas et al., 1979; Hearn 1984). Deepening knowledge about the process of educational attainment at the individual level will be useful for assessment of various social policies.

The question of access to higher education institutions is one of the major issues and results from a societal choice. It brings a series of inevitable changes to higher education systems with specific impacts and conditions that vary by location, but all societies will experience these factors to some extent. Student populations not only expand but also become more diverse with access. Research (Duru-Bellat, 2005 and Wolf, 2002) reveals that expansion tends to reproduce inequalities instead of promoting social justice. Consequently concern has shifted from expanding access i.e. increasing the number of students entering higher education to widening access i.e. focusing on providing equal access to higher education for previously underrepresented groups. One of the most important implications of greater access constitutes the expansion of women’s enrolments. Higher education system has to organize a specific student-funding framework, linked to its societal understanding of higher education.

Indeed, affordability has now become a key word for policies that help families pay for higher education. Affordability is a key issue facing higher education today. It is the responsibility of the community, at the local, State and National levels, to guarantee that financial barriers do not prevent any able and otherwise qualified young person from
receiving the opportunity for higher education. Income plays an important role in determining the demand for and affordability of higher education (Heller, 2001). The issue of private sector initiative in education sector has been a matter of great controversy and debate in India. The government has diluted its responsibility to provide tertiary education to all those who desire and deserve. The southern states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, however, allowed private institution to come up, especially in Engineering and Medical disciplines. Out of 252 engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu only 14 are run by government. With private unaided education providing nearly half of the higher education in India, it has been proved that there is considerable paying capacity within Indian middle-class presumably because of the high value attached to higher education (Kaul, 2006). However, Indian society is not just middle-class but there are vast majority of people who live below poverty line and do not even imagine their children to enter higher education as they cannot meet the financial requirements of higher education. Such circumstances are undoubtedly a major hindrance for those children who aspire to enter higher education from lower economic background.

Aspirations also motivate for better achievements (Sherwood, 1998), as achievements are largely linked to what they have aspired. Aspirations are an individual’s desire to obtain a status, objective or goals such as a particular level of education (Kao and Thompson, 2003; MacBrayne, 1987) or specific job or occupation. Educational aspirations could be influenced by family backgrounds, socioeconomic status, living areas and neighborhoods (Stewart et al., 2007). They may be different for the children of educated parents (Marjoribanks, 2005), those with a better economic status (MacBrayne, 1987) and those who live in urban areas (Haller and Virkler, 1993; Akande, 1987).

Bourdieu (1973) specifically explains that people must not only have relationship with others, but must further understand how these networks operate and how one can maintain and utilize these relationships overtime. He also emphasizes that social networks must be constructed and skillfully maintained in order for the actor to utilize the resources. Bourdieu (1973) with others (Colins, 1979; Bowles and Gintis 1976) stated the cultural reproduction theory which provides the idea that the marginalized groups are excluded from high prestige jobs and the educational system itself does not favor in achieving the
goal, which was established by the elites and becomes a hurdle in getting a higher level job. Each individual has his/her own network of social ties which expands or contracts with his/her passage through life (Bidart, 2005). Social network of girls accessing higher education and their parents are more important in guiding their behavior and can have profound impacts on their educational path.

A comprehensive review of previous research suggests that access to higher education is shaped by multiple layers of circumstance which includes academic preparation and achievement, financial resources, knowledge about college, and family support. Over the last ten years research has largely dealt with the analysis of access and admission processes to higher education. Some focus on issues of reservation in higher education, ongoing inequalities, and inclusiveness in higher education in addition to providing a general argument analyzing inequalities in access, voices of concern on the status of girls’ education in India both at the policy level as well as in academic discourses (Ahmad, 1979; Chanana, 1993, 2000, 2007; Kirpal, Swaminathan and Gupta, 1985) are also carried out. A few researchers also dealt with a series of academic and social adjustment of SC and ST students and seek to find out why education has not spread among the SCs and STs (Kirpal, 1978). Few studies highlighted that the parental involvement is associated with a greater likelihood of aspiring to attend college and actual enrolment (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Perna, 2000), as well as to measures of academic preparation for college (Lee, 1993; Muller, 1993; Zick, Bryant, and Osterbacka, 2001).

In spite of the growing visibility of the Dalit on various educational and professional courses, Dalit has progressed only to a certain limited extent (Kamble, 2002). A small proportion of Dalit’s living in large cities has been increasingly able to gain access to good schools and higher education institutes (Rao, 2007). However, the extent to which the fulfillment of Dalit students’ educational objectives is accompanied by caste bias or prejudice in urban universities or higher education institutes remains open to investigation. Research centered on the experiences of urban Dalit women in higher education is limited (Mehta, 2000; Seenaraine, 2004). A few literatures exist on the social background, employment and professionalization of educated Dalit women (Mehta, 2000). Dalit women continue to face obstacles to their access to educational institutions, as well as their
progress within such institutions (Sen, 2002). However, further studies are required to ascertain the background the Dalit females in obtaining the opportunity to access higher education. Though a number of studies focused on the educational inequalities between the Dalits and the upper castes (Nambissan and Sedwal, Anitha, 2002; Drez and Sen, 1995), research on access of Dalit girls to higher education is minimal and studies on social network of college going children and their parents is not noticeable in literature. Gaining direct insights into experiences of current Dalit female students accessing higher education will prove a valuable starting point. The research problem in a gist is the examination, description and explanation of the social networks of girls accessing higher education from the disadvantaged community. In view of the sociological importance and relatively fewer studies on social networks of Scheduled Caste girl’s in Indian context, the present study is undertaken.

In this backdrop, the present study will attempt to bring out the various perspectives such as the socio-economic conditions, parental involvement, family and institutional constraints, and the social network of SC girls accessing higher education in the backdrop of the changing global scenario. To examine the relationship between parental involvement, motivation and college enrolment, this study conceptualizes parental involvement as a form of social capital that provides individuals with access to resources that may facilitate college enrolment. The individual’s action (e.g., college enrolment) cannot be fully understood except in terms of the structural context. The structural context is defined in terms of the characteristics of the high school attended specifically the extent to which the school encourages the parental involvement and volume of resources that may be accessed via social networks at the parent’s working environment and networks of the girls that facilitate their entry into higher education. It is hoped that such an attempt would help devise possible strategies for sector-specific interventions and initiatives that fill various gaps to reach out to the disadvantaged groups particularly Scheduled Community girl’s and finally, to advocate sector specific adjustments in public policy.

Lack of educational attainment is an ongoing challenge in the advancement of Dalit communities. Institutions of learning remain under the caste-based ideologies and marginalization and segregation are dominant themes in the lives of Dalit individuals in
education. The extent to which these challenges persist will be examined in the following chapters, as we seek to explain and understand the impact of socio-economic factors and inter relationships of concepts such as parental involvement, family affordability, aspiration and social networks of Scheduled caste girls’ and their access to higher education.