REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Education is essential for any individual’s life chances and both within and across countries it continues to be a dividing line among different social groups. Besides, the individual benefits of education, it has positive outcome for the economy and society benefit from a rise in human capital achieved through education. It is widely acknowledged that education contributes significantly to socio-economic development (Prakash, 2007). Though education remains to be an important determinant of economic and social opportunities for individuals, there appears to be issues with access, equity in Indian Higher education system. It highlights the need for reforms to make it worthwhile and beneficial to all concerned.

As India strives to compete in a globalised economy that require highly trained professionals, the quality of higher education becomes increasingly important. Most observers (Philip, 2006, Dahlman and Utz, 2005) view, that Indian higher education with its significant and impressive developments faces major challenges in both quantitative and qualitative terms. It includes inadequate infrastructure and facilities, large vacancies in faculty positions and poor faculty, low student enrolment rate, outmoded teaching methods, declining research standards, unmotivated students, overcrowded classrooms and widespread geographic, income, gender, and ethnic imbalances. Ensuring equitable access to quality higher education for students coming from poor families is a major challenge (Singh, 2007). Students from poor background are put to further disadvantage as they are not academically prepared to crack highly competitive entrance examinations that have bias towards urban elite and rich students having access to private tuitions and coaching.

Inequality in education is primarily analyzed in relation to inequality in society as such, i.e. inequality in socio-economic background, class or status, as well as inequality in ethnic or racial background. Research on the effects of socio-economic background on education careers and attainment is mostly motivated by the understanding that not all social groups or social classes are equal in this respect, i.e. that there is stratification in education which is, more or less, reflecting the stratification in society( Müller and Karle, 1993, Wong, 1998); The links between stratification in society and educational
stratification have been discussed in a large number of research studies (Lucas, 2001; Müller and Karle, 1993; Raftery and Hout, 1993; Wong, 1998). In line with Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), one could argue that, since the education system is formed and organized by the social group that is in possession of power, it seeks to reproduce the same distribution of power in society and hence, reproduce social inequality. Inequality can be understood as the absence of equality, primarily in terms of equality of opportunities. Equality of opportunity that relates to access, particularly access to higher education, i.e. whether all students interested in enrolling in higher education can do so (Goastellec, 2010).

There is considerable disagreement concerning the capacity of formal education to empower previously excluded sections of society in India and other areas of the global South. Some scholars claim that formal education substantially improves the position of previously disadvantaged social actors by increasing their skills base, knowledge, confidence and freedoms (Dre`ze and Sen, 1995; Sen, 2000). Others, however, argue that school education acts as a ‘contradictory resource’, opening up certain opportunities but also drawing disadvantaged groups more tightly into systems of social inequality (Levinson and Holland, 1996). Hence it is important to examine, how far oppressed groups are able to use formal education to challenge iniquitous processes of social reproduction.

Caste is an institution that is peculiarly Indian in its specifics, although other institutions elsewhere notably race and ethnicity may have produced similar effects (Sharma, 1994; Fuller, 1996 and Deshpande, 2003). Caste as a system is notable for its comprehensiveness and rigidity. Caste status is acquired by birth, and being hereditary, cannot be changed. Caste membership involves rules and proscriptions relating to occupation, inter-marriage, food sharing and even social interaction. Caste are ranked in hierarchy according to notions of ritual purity and pollution, themselves believed to sanctioned in Hindu religious texts. In practice ritual hierarchy is been closely correlated with access to material resources and opportunities, or more broadly to life chances. The important point is that the correspondence between caste and life chances is enforced by traditional practices of exclusion backed by legal, social and ultimately religious sanction (Deshpande, 2009). Thus, it is apparent that access to education, property or occupations is
determined almost entirely by caste, in a sense that caste becomes a necessary precondition regulating access, though the constitution and other interventions attempt to break the determinacy.

Today, the term ‘Dalit’ is used in a positive manner and it reflects a unified movement against inequality (Michael, 2007). The Dalits continue to experience social discrimination, which includes being refused access to goods, services and learning institutions by both individuals and governmental bodies (Jogdand, 2002). Many Dalit have no access to universities, and those who do gain access to higher education face discrimination from their non-Dalit peers and tutors (Kundal, 2004). Issues of inaccessibility and caste bias affecting Dalit in schools and higher education continue to find expression in the dominant attitudes of Indian society (Pillai, 1999; Kundal, 2004).

Thorat (2002) undertakes the UN human right framework and examines how the Hindu Caste social order in its direct form comes in direct conflict with the universal human rights framework and how the continuation of the practice of the caste system and untouchability in modified forms leads to the ubiquitous violation of human rights particularly of Dalits. He also observes that the official evidence and regional studies based on primary data revealed that in rural India, the social behavior of caste Hindus is still governed by norms and codes of the traditional caste system, although there are some changes in some spheres of social relations and stratification in society is also reflected in the educational sphere. The roots of discrimination in India are deep and the social and economic disparities are deeply intertwined in complex ways. There is still a need for reservation in different groups as it is an efficient tool for transformation. The nature of Indian society ensures that without such measures, social discrimination and exclusion will only persist and be strengthened (Ghosh, 2006).

India is home to the elaborate and the largest 'positive' or 'affirmative' action programme in the world. It is this undeniable history of systematic, institutionalized discrimination that provides the needs for India's positive action programmes. These programmes evolved out of broader reform movements from above as well as mobilization from below in specific regional contexts. Prominent early measures addressed overt social discrimination by legisitating access to temples or to public facilities, especially water
sources like wells or tanks, or attempted to provide representation in legislatures and government employment. Official policies of positive action at the national level took shape during the 1930s and began to be implemented in the 1940s under the colonial regime, and were later expanded and written into the constitution of the newly independent nation. Since the adoption of Constitution on 26th January 1950, an extensive positive action project came onto effect with took three main forms setting aside or 'reserve' a population-linked share of legislative positions, government jobs and places in educational institutions for members of specified castes and tribes, apart from entitling them to other kinds of special benefits and targeted development programmes.

Following the guiding principles of State policy enshrined in our Constitution which assure social justice and equality of opportunity to all, several special facilities are offered to the scheduled castes in higher education' to help them overcome the handicaps arising from deep-rooted inequalities and to enable them to secure the same opportunities and position in life as others. Currently the reservation quotas assigned to various groups at the national level with Scheduled castes at 15%, Scheduled Tribes at 7.5% and OBCs at 27%, making a total of 49.5%. Marked progress has been made by the scheduled castes in education, as is manifest from the rise in their literacy rates, enrolment ratio and the proportion of their numbers in Class I and II categories of jobs in Central and State services.

The studies (Jalali, 1993; Crawford, 1998) on affirmative action in India primarily focus on the reservation policy for the SC/ST, mandated by the Constitution from its inception. More recently, some studies have tried to combine caste and community categories to analyze its implications for affirmative action. The Sachar Committee Report on the conditions of Muslims in India (Government of India, 2006) defined socio-religious categories (SRCs) and distinguished between Hindus (upper castes, SC/ST and other backward classes), Muslims (general and OBCs) and other minorities. These SRCs were further classified into economic groups (poor and non-poor). The analysis of data for these categories showed that educational and employment conditions varied across these groups.

Kulkarni and Desai (2008) reveals that substantial inequalities in education, employment and income exist based on caste and ethnicity and find that there is little
improvement in inequality at the college level and do not find evidence that upper-income groups, the so-called creamy layer of Dalits and Adivasis, disproportionately benefit from the affirmative action programs at the expense of their lower-income counterparts. Xaxa (2000) in his study of the quota system in the admission to the University of Delhi finds that even after implementation of the quota system in higher education and in government and semi-government jobs for SC/ST/OBC, the quotas remain largely unfulfilled in several places. Kirpal and Gupta (1999), in a study on reserved seat students entering the B Tech programme in five major and oldest Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs) between the year 1981 and 1992, found that the average graduation rates among the SC and ST students were lower than those of general students getting admission in those institutes and the performance of the reserved students was lower too.

Chakravarthy and Somanathan (2008) compare the job market achievements of the SC/ST and general candidates among Indian Institute of Management (IIM) graduates. They find no significant difference between the two categories of wages once the academic performance (Grade Point Average or GPA) is taken into account while fixing the wages. However, when academic performance is not taken into account (or controlled for) the average wages of SC/ST candidates tend to be lower than those of the general candidates. On an average, the GPA of SC/ST candidates were also found to be less than those of the general candidates. This implies that the weaker background of the SC/ST students admitted through the reservation policy, adversely affect their job market achievements because of lower GPA. Hence, even if the SC/ST candidates are given the opportunity to study at higher education institutions, their weak educational background should be taken care of before they reach the job market. This is consistent with the argument that the preferentially selected students would also need to be given significant human and financial support if the reservation policy is to fully serve the purpose of eliminating the differences (Weisskopf, 2004).

Hasan and Mehta (2006) dealt with an analysis and reveals that SC’s, ST’s, OBC’s and Muslims are seriously under-represented in Indian colleges relative to their population shares and states that this can be explained mostly by their low higher secondary school completion rates. Thus the primary distortions creating unequal representations in college
lie at lower rungs of the education ladder. Sundaram (2006) on the issue of fair access to higher education argued that the extent of under representation of a social group can only be judged by the comparison of a groups share in enrolments in a given level of education with their share in the population eligible for entry into that level of education. Kumar (1983) argued that education introduces bourgeois values among the oppressed and thereby curbs their potential for radical expression is based on the impact of education on an extremely small minority perceived from the point of view of non SC/ST educators.

The educational backwardness of the Dalit communities is generally attributed to poverty and illiterate home environments prevailing among them. Despite active encouragement from impoverished family members, the apathetic treatment by teachers and school administrators largely shape the learning experiences of these socially disadvantaged groups (Nambissan, 1996). There is a need to examine how far oppressed groups are able to use formal education to undermine unfair process of social reproduction. Under represented students continue to struggle with a myriad of social and educational inequities in their pursuit of higher education. Their under representation in colleges and universities has been influenced not by a lack of academic ability (Gonzalez, Stone, and Jovel, 2003) but by the rising costs of college, increased standards in admissions criteria, and inadequate secondary education preparation (Auerbach, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999).

Stratification in Indian society is reflected in inequalities in educational attainment across caste, religion and ethnic boundaries (Anitha, 2000; Dreze and Sen, 1995). Educational inequalities between upper caste Hindus and other religions on the one hand and Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims on the other remain evident throughout the period 1983-2000. The roots of unequal educational opportunity are deep, and higher education alone cannot redress the social imbalances that appear to threaten our country’s future (Gladieux and Swail, 2000).

**Education and inequality**

Given the history of affirmative action in India and current debates on issues relate to disadvantaged group, it is imperative to discuss the substantial disparities among the socially disadvantaged groups in higher education. The Dalit constitute about 16.2 per cent
(more than 200 million) of the Indian population (Thorat, 2009). In spite of efforts on the parts of various governments to ameliorate the condition of the Dalit, this social group is still the ‘poorest and most subordinated’ in Indian society (Thorat, 2009). The poor educational achievements of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes can be best understood in the context of deeply embedded caste and social hierarchies that are enacted and expressed in everyday social interactions of community, school and economic life. Functional from pre-colonial times, the system of socially sanctioned discrimination and prejudice against communities designated as outside the caste system has had far-reaching impacts on the self-worth, dignity and economic life of SC.

In the twenty-first century, caste is no longer the definitive mode of organizing economic and social relations in India, but it continues to have a lasting impact on the economic, political and social life of communities. Recent studies show that caste-based discrimination continues to be an influential factor in the low educational mobility of both Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups, despite government programmes that selectively target aid to children from these communities (Secada, 1989). Historically, SC communities were systematically segregated from the rest of the village and were denied access to education, housing and land. Public places such as temples, wells for drinking water, restaurants, toilets, and many other civic facilities were also out of bounds for them (Alexander, 2003). The caste-based ideology of hereditary occupations prescribes the most menial and low of occupations to SC groups and has determined the socio-economic life of these communities. Majority of SC individuals work as landless agricultural laborers or is engaged in what is considered ‘coolie’ work. While SCs have traditionally been denied education, even those with education have experienced very limited social mobility due to caste-based opposition to their occupational mobility (Jefferey et al, 2002). Issues of self-worth, dignity and livelihoods that school education has failed to address or even acknowledge also arise for Scheduled Caste communities. While SC students have much greater access to elementary education than ST children, they frequently encounter overt and covert acts of discrimination, prejudice and rejection from teachers and fellow students. Commonly reported instances of cruel treatment include being told to sit separately from other students, being called ‘untouchable’ or stupid, being beaten and so on (Drèze and Gazdar, 1997).
Substantial gaps exist between SC’s and others in access to education, quality of education, attitude of teachers, and access to learning enhancing resources, exacerbated by active discrimination inside schools. While the majority of Dalits are not directly affected by Affirmative Action, the programme enables many of them to escape subservient roles. Affirmative Action in India needs stronger implementation. Provision of quotas should be seen as the beginning of Affirmative Action, not its end (Deshpande, 2008). A growing number of states are devoting resources to merit-based financial aid programs (Heller, 2002). Since the mid-1990s, state funding for merit-based financial aid programs has increased at a faster rate than state funding for need-based programs (Heller, 2002).

Inequalities in primary and secondary education will produce unequal participation in higher education and hence they need to be studied together. Higher education is regarded as an engine for equitable economic and social progress, and inequalities in higher education are also reflective of cumulative inequalities in school education. Higher education in India expanded at a very fast rate during the last quarter century or so. Does the rapid expansion automatically lead to reduction in inequalities in education? Some strongly argue that the benefits of expansion have percolated to the lower strata of the society, while some (Deshpande, 2006) view that higher education is inherently an exclusive field and hence its elitism is an integral aspect of its nature; and that modes of exclusion are built into its fundamental structure as a matter of principle. Hence, it cannot be expected that growth in higher education will necessarily percolate to the downtrodden strata of the society.

Inequality in higher education can also examined by the access to higher education by particular groups. Access to higher education is influenced by many factors. First are those relating to the students themselves and their families, which include academic performance in primary and secondary education, and also parents’ economic situation and the value they place on education. Second is the government policy for higher education, including affirmative action, the fee structure and scholarship/incentive programmes for female students and other socially disadvantaged groups. Third is the student’s environment, such as the physical distance to educational institutions and the quality of
education which encourages or discourages young people to advance to higher education. Moreover, these influencing factors are further reinforced by other elements such as sex, ethnicity, caste and race (Ramachandran, 2010)

It embraces a sense of justice and fairness as it seeks to provide opportunities for under-represented groups in society, such as those of low economic status, women and girls, ethnic and other minorities, people with disabilities and others denied previous opportunity to enter higher education (Skilbeck 2000). Since the beginning of the century, there have been three conspicuous features of the history of access to higher education (Halsey et al., 1980; Jonsson and Mills, 1993) first, it has been a period of considerable expansion; second, studies have shown no diminution in relative social class inequality; and third, there has been a significant diminution in gender inequality (Heath, 1992; Heath et al., 1992). Over the past 20 years the tertiary education system has continued to expand, meeting the demand for increasingly differentiated and qualified labor. As Halsey (1992) points out, most of the expansion has occurred in cheaper forms of education, with some, though weak (Mills and Payne, 1989; Heath, 1992). Windolf (1985) has suggested that expanding access to universities is socially controlled by institutional differentiation so that more prestigious institutions remain the cultural possession of traditionally advantaged groups.

Equity in access to tertiary education, as noted by Teichler (1999), is considered even more important at the time when higher education is becoming the norm for the majority of the population because educational disadvantage could lead to social exclusion. Vukasovic and Sarrio (2010), states that inequality can be understood as the absence of equality primarily in terms of equality of opportunity, which implies that those of the less privileged socio economic background are under-represented or even not at all represented in higher education and this is termed as external exclusion. The hypothesis of maximally maintained inequality (Raftery and Hout 1993) suggests that until the dominant group attains educational saturation at any given level, educational inequalities will continue to persist even in an era of educational expansion at about the same level. Despite large increases in overall access to higher education, the gap in the level of participation between
the most affluent and most disadvantaged school-leavers has remained intact. The reason why some young people deferred entry to higher education highlight some of the barriers faced by all disadvantaged potential students that is in order to save money or otherwise prepare for higher education (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003). Young people of less advantaged social backgrounds have not increased their levels of participation in more ambitious educational options, thus closing the gap with their more advantaged counterparts (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997).

In terms of access to higher education by Hindu upper castes and under-represented groups there exists an inequality and there is something in the gate-keeping mechanism which regulates entry into higher education that makes it discriminate in favor of the “upper” and against the “lower” caste. However, the existence of inequality and discrimination may be necessary, but it is not sufficient to prove the existence of injustice (Deshpande 2006). Brocks (2010) argue that access to higher education has increased substantially, although some racial and ethnic groups remain under-represented but success in college, as measured by persistence and degree attainment has not improved at all.

Goastellec (2010), explained that access is no longer limited to access to higher education. Access to degrees has increasingly come under scrutiny, as the offspring of high-income families very often monopolize the most valuable and costly degrees; in massified higher education systems (Duru-Bellat, 2006). While young adults from ethnic minorities are now more likely to go to university than their white counter parts, they primarily attend ‘new’ institutions, which are considered to be less prestigious (Modood, 2006) and few studies convey the impression that students, family background creates an environment of ‘implicit assumptions and expectations’ (Hutchings and Archer, 2001) that makes certain choices ‘invisible’ (Pugsley, 1998).

Inequalities in education are examined by several characteristics, such as gender, caste, religion, economic conditions and between several regions. Inequalities in education are often examined by social groups by caste (scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribes (ST), other backward castes (OBCs) and non-scheduled/non-backward castes) and by religion (Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others) and by gender between women and men. These dimensions are widely considered as important inequalities that need to be addressed and
accordingly receive serious attention of the policy makers. Other equally, if not more, important dimensions of inequalities refer to interstate inequalities and inequalities between rural and urban population, and inequalities by economic groups between the rich and the poor. These categories are not mutually exclusive; the principal dimensions of inequalities often overlap; they even mutually reinforce each other. For example, SC population may be predominantly economically poor; the relatively economically poor may be living in rural areas. Gender categorization cuts across all other categories and so on.

As Shariff and Sharma (2003) have shown, a Dalit or Muslim in south India, though from the most disadvantaged among communities, would have better access to higher education than even upper caste Hindus in many other regions. Inability of certain marginalized segments to achieve higher education eligibility may be due to the unequal access to school education. Banerjee and Somanathan (2007) analyses the census data between 1971-1991 and finds that unequal access to primary schools has been a major factor in creating disparities among different caste groups. Despite constitutional provisions and safeguards, Dalit representation in higher educational institutes and in the workforce remains largely minimal. State initiated programmes and policies apart, it is also essential, to instill respect for diversity and a greater understanding of the disadvantaged (Rao, 2002).

Another form of inequality that gains momentum in higher education is gender inequality. Gender inequality is more pronounced in some aspects of the educational systems than in others. Explanations of gender inequality in higher education should distinguish between different aspects of education such as access to higher education and college experience, Pre and post collegiate outcomes and should explain those contexts in which women have attained parity as well as those in which they continue to lag behind men (Jacobs, 1996).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, 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. Although women's access and participation have lagged behind men's in many countries they are approaching a participation rate for women that is close to their birth proportion, especially
when all facets of higher education are included, such as non-degree programmes and courses for mature individuals (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.

Despite the fact that the non-monetary returns to schooling appear to be quite high (Colclough, 1982), many parents still don't send their children especially their daughters to school. Using Indian household data, Rosenzweig and Schultz (1982) find that children who are expected to be more economically productive as adults receive a larger share of family resources. Sathar and Lloyd (1994) also conclude that parents decide the amount of education a child receives on the basis of present and future anticipated costs and returns. 'Returns to educational investments in girls are likely to be seen by parents as lower than in boys because of their more limited opportunities in the labor market and the near certainty that they will marry out of the family and devote their future time and earnings to their husband's family' (Sathar and Lloyd 1994). A substantial number of girls are expected to contribute to the family income by their own labor or to look after their younger siblings (Aggarwal, 1987). The opportunity cost of educating girls is thus especially large in rural and low-income families (Sengupta and Guha 2002). According to (Sengupta and Guha, 2002) a study of girl children in West Bengal, the strongest factors with regard to school participation, enrolment and dropout were household factors such as parental, especially maternal schooling, household income and the father's occupation. They also found that caste and religion were important determinants of schooling. Muslim girls (irrespective of whether they lived in a rural or urban area) received less schooling than other religious communities.

Several studies have highlighted gender differences in higher educational participation across the states of India (Chanana 2000, 2004, 2007; Prakash 2007). Enrolment of women though showing marked improvement since fifties still lags behind
that of their male counterparts. The share of girl’s enrolment in total higher education enrolment rose from a meager 10 per cent in 1950–51 to 40.1 per cent in 2002–03 and dropped to 38.3 per cent in 2005–06, (Ministry of Human Resource Development, MHRD). The extent and magnitude of female disadvantage was found to vary across different states of India. The regional disparity in enrolment in basic and elementary education (Filmer and Pritchett 1998; Kingdon 2002) gets perpetuated in realms of higher education. The gender gap in higher education enrolment is particularly high for Bihar and Orissa, where in 2005–06, approximately 18 per cent of the students enrolled in higher education were girls as opposed to Kerala where a major proportion of the students were women (around 54 per cent). Pro-women cultural traditions and values and the migration of young men to the Middle East have been cited as plausible factors for this gender imbalance in favor of women (Chanana, 2004).

Mazumdar (1987) also stresses that the entrance into higher education for those women who had been historically deprived the opportunity because of social seclusion does not necessarily indicate gender equity. She argues that their communities educate women for other social gains to find a suitable groom, and to push them into the labor market in the face of increasing living costs. Drawing from Liddle and Joshi’s (1986) ethnography, Mukhopadhyay and Seymour (1994) assert that, male supremacy is no longer maintained through a ban on women’s education, but through controlling the kind, quantity and purpose of the education. As Chitnis (1989) points out, although 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 reminds us to continuously 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. For instance, among the already limited female cohort attending university, most women come from upper and middle class backgrounds and it seems that a degree in a “womanly” field (such as
Humanities and Arts) has and, in essence cultural commodity of ornamental value they bring into their marriage market (Chanana, 2000). So when the higher education sector further expands, diversifies and attracts more women, it is important to pay more close attention to how, in what ways, and to what end do women, both from upper and lower class/caste backgrounds attends university.

Differential social expectations across male and female offspring and additional dowry given to a relatively more educated girl (who are usually married to spouses with higher education and better employment status) are cited as reasons for discrimination. As pointed out by Chanana (2007), even for households belonging to urban middle and higher income categories, who are more approaching in terms of sending their daughters for higher education, it is not seen as an investment for future career option. Rather, for many, it is a safety net in the eventuality of some personal catastrophe or social status. Promotion of higher education as means of potential occupation is also not encouraged for daughters because under a patriarchal system, it is not socially acceptable to take a share of ‘daughter’s income’ and the latter is conditioned to accept the decision of the ‘groom’s family’ in this matter. The problem is also compounded by gender differential in returns to education. Duraisamy’s (1995) study finding reveals that even with same number of years of experience and educational qualification, the earnings of a female member are significantly lower than her male counterpart.

**Impact of socio-economic factors in accessing higher education**

It is widely recognized that economic and social factors such as class, gender or race, that contribute to inequalities in access to higher education do not function in isolation but are interlinked (Drèze and Sen, 2013).

Research has examined the role of socio-economic status, family size and structure and family decision making processes in an attempt to explain how they relate to educational inequalities in developing countries. Of course the relationship between family and socio-economic status and school achievement is complicated in contexts where enrolment and attainment themselves are conditional on family economic circumstances (Lockheed et al., 1989). Moreover, numerous studies indicate marked disparities in
enrolment and attainment associated with socio-economic status (Sathar and Lloyd 1993, Stash and Hannum 2001, Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 1996). Young people’s higher education choices has paid close attention to familial influences and has provided compelling evidence that class positions have a strong bearing on both how young people understand the Higher Education market (Reay et al., Ballet et al., 2002), and their decisions about whether to go on to university or college (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Walkerdine et al., 2001).

Family background was normally considered in terms of the social class of the child’s parents, generally determined by occupation of the father. The family determined the socio-economic origin of its children and this was identified to have a key influence on educational chances and outcomes (Croll, 2004). In the past three decades, a great deal of research has focused on the role of family background and school effects on educational attainment or enrolment. The stimuli for such research were two major projects, the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) in the United States and the Plowden Report in Great Britain, which concluded that family background was more important than school factors in determining children’s educational attainment or enrolment. These studies sparked a great deal of interest in assessing the determinants of educational attainment and achievement and set off a lively debate regarding the roles of family and school factors. A link with the socio-cultural backgrounds or conditioners can be traced to the choice of medium of instruction as well (Faust and Nagar 2001; Dewey 2006), with English being considered an elitist language that spawns a systemic divide with the majority who get educated in the vernacular. The choice of medium, as Rao (2008) argues, is formed largely by the cultural capital of the children, with English medium education being the exclusive privilege of one’s caste and class situation.

In the experience of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, therefore, failure to get a job in the modern economy means a double loss, because the ‘educated’ child is ill-equipped and/or unwilling to participate in the economic activity of the household. Studies also document that caste and political networks are crucial elements for competing successfully in the job market, and that even SC and ST youth who complete high school are often unable to secure jobs due to the lack of such social capital (Subrahmanian, 2005;
Jefferey et al., 2002). In such cases, the economic costs to SC and ST households are very high, given that ‘schooled’ children have lost their ability and inclination to contribute to the household economy, thereby further impoverishing the family (Balagopalan and Subrahmanian, 2003).

In addition to socioeconomic status, research has examined how family structure and size influence educational outcomes in developing regions. The relationship of family marital structure to parental contributions for college costs has received less attention. There is only one recent study of family marital structure and actual parental contribution to college costs. Turley and Desmond (2011) find that biological two-parent families contribute more to children’s college costs than either stepparent families or divorced parents. In the United States the well documented negative effects of single parenthood on children’s educational outcomes range from a greater probability of school drop-out to lower achievement. These effects have been attributed in part to economic stress associated with female headship, and in part to the lack of human or social capital in the household (Seltzer, 1994). Among other parental characteristics, 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).

Lloyd and Blanc (1996) analyzed the effects of female headship on children’s schooling in seven sub Saharan African countries. Female headed households tend to be poorer than other households, but children in female-headed house-holds were consistently more likely to be enrolled in school and to have completed grade four than were children in households headed by men. They maintain that ‘female’ household heads are more likely to invest resources, including time, money and emotional support, in facilitating the education of children living in their household.

Turning to the characteristics of children in the family, two characteristics of the sibship, number of children and gender composition, and two characteristics of the individual child, birth order and gender, have been examined. Larger sibships are associated with a lower probability of attending college (Conley, 2001), lower parental investments (Powell and Steelman, 1989; Steelman and Powell, 1989 and Yilmazer, 2008)
in any one child, and lower saving (Steelman and Powell, 1991) for each child’s education. Powell and Steelman (1989) measure sibship size separately by gender and find that an additional brother reduces parental financial support for a college education more than an additional sister. In studies of overall educational attainment that do not focus on college attendance, there is mixed evidence for sibship gender composition, with results ranging from findings that the sex composition of sibships affects educational attainment (Butcher and Case, 1994) to findings of no effect (Hauser and Kuo, 1998), and even a finding that having opposite-sex siblings reduces educational attainment (Conley, 2000).

Another often-studied characteristic, the individual child’s birth order, yields equally complex results. Later birth order is associated with greater financial support for college costs (Steelman and Powell, 1989) and more saving for the child (Steelman and Powell, 1991). Yet, there is also evidence of higher overall educational attainment (Black et al., 2005 and Booth and Kee, 2009) and higher achievement test scores (Conley et al., 2007) among earlier-born children. Results for gender of the individual child are also mixed. Steelman and Powell (1989) find female children receive greater financial assistance while the same authors (1991) find no gender difference in saving for college but a stated attitude of greater willingness to use debt to finance a son’s education.

There is significant evidence that family factors are important for educational outcomes in the developing world (Heyneman, 1976). Research has examined the role of socioeconomic status, family size and structure, and family decision-making processes to explain how they relate to educational inequalities in developing countries. The relationship between family socioeconomic status and school achievement is complicated in contexts where enrolment and attainment are restrictive on family economic circumstances. James (2001) argues that families socio-economic background factors are powerful when they coincide or combine with rurality. Alston and Kent (2009), showed a strong link between remote, rural and regional settings, social exclusion and restricted access to education. Young people from ‘socio-economically disadvantaged’ or ‘lower socio-economic backgrounds’ have been of particular focus in higher education access research internationally (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Shavit, Arum, and Gamoran 2007; Becker and Hecken 2009; McCoy and Smyth 2010), such disadvantaged groups typically
comprising those from working-class backgrounds or unemployed households. In many countries the relatively low enrolment of poor and disadvantaged youth in tertiary education (and also in non-compulsory secondary education) is a cause of social concern. Increasing the access to university education among these segments of the population has become a major element in educational and social policy. While the cause of low access of disadvantaged groups is multi-faceted, financial constraints evidently play a major explanatory role.

Recent studies using British data investigate the effect of several family related factors, including parent’s education, parent’s occupation, household income, family structure and parental involvement in their child’s education (Emrisch and Francesconi, 1997; Bradley and Taylor, 2004). All these factors are positively correlated with educational attainment. The economic background of students also influences participation in higher education indirectly through its influence on the type of school attended and the years of schooling completed. Students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have attended a public secondary school as they do not in general have access to private schools for financial reasons (Williams, 1987). The type of school attended can also influence participation in higher education in its own right, with the quality of academic preparation, status, achievement and ambitions being higher in non-government schools. Studies have suggested that low retention rates in secondary school and an associated low participation rate in higher education by people in lower socioeconomic groups can be largely attributed to lower aspirations and less encouragement and value placed on higher education (Williams et.al., 1993). Williams et al.,(1993) attribute these school system differences in education outcomes to the advantaged social origins of students who attend non- government schools. The type of school attended can also influence participation in higher education in its own right, with the quality of academic preparation, status, achievement and ambitions being higher in non-government schools.

Similarly, a study by Long, Carpenter, and Hayden (1999) found that young people with parents in professional and ‘white collar’ occupations were approximately 30 per cent more likely to participate in university than young people whose parents were involved in ‘blue
collar’ occupations. Financial constraints can limit higher education opportunities for the socioeconomicly disadvantaged who cannot afford the direct cost of a university education, and a reduced resource base can make it difficult to live as well as study (Clarke and Bull 1995). In addition to school system differences and differences in economic status, people in different socioeconomic groups may develop different attitudes, beliefs, expectations and values about higher education (Clarke, Zimmer and Main 1997). The cultural context in which a student grows up extends to their family and friends, affecting their attitudes to education.

**Access to higher education**

The vast majority of research examines the college enrolment of traditional aged students immediately after high school that is, within 2 years of high school graduation (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2001; Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler and Gallagher, 1987; Manski and Wise, 1983; Perna, 2000; St. John, 2003). Research consistently shows lower rates of enrolling in college within 1 or 2 years of high school graduation for students with lower income and low socio-economic status than for other students (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2001; Fitzgerald and Delaney, 2002; Perna, 2000; Plank and Jordan, 2001). Martin (2005) posited that a student chooses not to enroll in college (the optimal stopping rule) when the marginal cost (opportunity income lost and the debt that a student incurs during enrolment) for the student to attend college exceeds the marginal benefits. Costs of enrolling in higher education can be direct, such as tuition, fees, and books and forgone earnings. The direct cost of college, aspects of which are typically included in traditional econometric models of college enrolment, is an important component in a student’s college enrolment decision. Paulsen and St. John (2002) found that the cost of attending college and the financial aid given to lower college costs were significant factors in a low-income student’s college-choice decision. Heller (1997) also found that increases in tuition and decreases in aid affected the college enrolment of lower-income students to a greater degree than they affected the college enrolment of students from families with higher incomes.

College enrolment rates vary systematically based on income and socioeconomic status (SES), with lower enrolment rates for lower-income students and students with lower
SES than for their higher-income and SES peers (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2001). Although college enrolment rates increased for all groups over the past three decades, the gap in these rates between students from low-income families and those from high-income families was the same size in 1997 as in 1970 (Fitzgerald and Delaney, 2002). Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) found that, after controlling for relevant variables, college application rates were 26 percentage points lower for students with low socioeconomic status than for those with high socioeconomic status. These differential application and enrolment rates are especially disconcerting at a time when there are widening gaps in income and health insurance benefits between high school and college graduates (Baum and Ma, 2007).

Family characteristics in terms of parental education and income are an important influence on individual’s participation in higher education. In India, categorically those who are out of the higher education system belong to marginalized groups due to their economic class, caste, gender, religion etc. despite massive expansion of higher education. An individual’s likelihood of participation in higher education is influenced by social, religious and demographic characteristics for both rural and urban youth in India. Parental education and family income exert a direct effect on an individual’s propensity to participate in higher education. In terms of social and religious group, youth belonging to Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste have significantly lower odds of going to higher education compared to general category for the whole of India. Females are less likely to participate in higher education in rural area, while Hindu females in rural area are less probable to participate in higher education (Pramanik, 2015).

**Parental Involvement**

Generally, educational and psychological research sees parents as both more restrictive and more nurturing with daughters. Daughters are encouraged to stay close to home, to be rule bound, obedient, docile, studious and careful. Sons on the other hand, are more likely to be independent (Nelson and Robinson, 2002; Thorne, 1993). How then are these gendered messages translated into parent child interactions around schooling and college activities in the home?
Research shows that parental involvement is positively related to college aspirations and enrolment (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Horn, 1998; Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper, 1999; Perna, 2000), as well as to measures of academic preparation to college (Lee, 1993; Muller, 1993; Zick, Bryant, and Osterbacka, 2001). But involvement is often limited for low-income parents by economic, social, and psychological barriers (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, and Sameroff, 1999; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997; Perna, 2004).

Researchers (Gandara, 2002; Lareau, 1987, 2000; McDonough, 1997; Perna and Titus, 2005) typically conceptualize parental involvement as a form of social or cultural capital that promotes college enrolment. Coleman (1988) stresses the role of parental involvement in building social capital, arguing that social capital communicates the norms, trust, authority, and social controls that are required for educational attainment. Reflecting Bourdieu’s conceptualization, McDonough (1997) shows that students from high-SES families have the most valued forms of social and cultural capital and that they use this capital to maintain their class status. Most obviously, high-SES parents use their knowledge of their own college experience to advance their children's college enrolment processes (McDonough, 1997). Muller and Kerbow (1993) argued that parent involvement at school is important because it provides parents firsthand information about the school environment, allows parents to interact with and observe teachers as they perform their jobs, and enables parents to observe their children interacting with other students. Ultimately, these experiences may place parents in a better position to support their children's learning.

Parental involvement is an influential source that can encourage student’s natural talents, improve student’s behavior, increase classroom attendance, promote classroom compliance and increase adolescent achievement (Lee, Kushner and Cho, 2007). Parent involvement has been described as the degree to which a parent dedicates resources of time and energy to his or her child in a given developmental or educational domain (Grolnick et al., 2000; Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994). Parent involvement can be viewed as a form of social capital, contributing resources that support students’ academic motivation and affirm the importance placed by their families on education (Grolnick et al., 2000; Ibanez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, and Perilla, 2004). Suarez-Orozco (1995, 2001) found that children
of immigrants are keenly aware of the sacrifice their parents have made for them, and invest a great deal of energy into succeeding in educational and work activities that can help their families in both the short and long term. When parents demonstrate a high value on education through involvement in their children’s education, one likely way in which children will express their own investment is through a sense of belonging in school (Ibanez et al., 2004).

Researchers found that parental involvement promotes college enrolment of underrepresented groups of students and states that parental involvement is associated with a greater likelihood of aspiring to attend college and actually enrolling (Carbera and La Nasa, 2000; Horn, 1998; Perna, 2000) as well as with higher grades (Lee, 1993; Muller, 1993; Zick, Bryant, and Osterbacka, 2001), and lower likelihood of high school dropout (Mc Neal, 1999). However, research on relationship between parental involvement and college enrolment is limited in several ways. When included in quantitative analysis, parental involvement is generally operationalized using just one indicator such as a combination of the frequency of discussions between the parent and child about school-related activities (e.g., Horn, 1998; Perna, 2000), rather than a multidimensional construct as recommended by some researchers (e.g., Sui-Chu and Wilms, 1996). The educational level of mother seem to indicate the mother’s experience and knowledge of how one can progress through the educational system and therefore a more educated mother’s involvement in a child’s school career may be more effective (Laureau, 1989; Reay, 1998). Parents, particularly mothers, with more education tend to share in their children’s intellectual pursuits, pass down skills and beliefs that are more conducive to achievement (De Broucker and Underwood, 1998), get more involved in their children’s education, have higher educational expectations for academic success, and have greater familiarity with schools and teachers.

Although prior research sheds light on the relationship between parental involvement and college opportunity, as Perna and Titus (2005) argue, research on the contribution of parental involvement to college opportunity is limited in several ways. First, with only a few exceptions, quantitative research typically operationalizes parental involvement using a narrow set of indicators that focus on quantity rather than quality of
different types of involvement. Second, while Perna and Titus use multilevel modeling to demonstrate the relationship between both student and school-level measures of parental involvement and college enrolment, few researchers examine how parental involvement is shaped by school structures and, conversely, how school efforts to promote college opportunity are shaped by parental involvement. Finally, while some research explores racial/ethnic group differences in the relationship between parental involvement and college enrolment (e.g., Perna and Titus, 2005), little is known about variations in the relationship based on socioeconomic status.

Parental attitudes are known to weigh heavily in the subsequent participation rates of students of both sexes. In general, families in Western Europe and North America have tended to favor the attendance of male children but not female children in higher education, especially when a financial burden is involved. This varies considerably, based on class and ethnic origin as well. But it is quite common for female students to choose not to pursue higher education or only a limited course within it as a result of family attitudes. Studies by Beswick (1983, 1985) and others (Powles, 1986) on the Australian system of higher education have highlighted this point and also made some interesting connections between parental attitudes and the presence or absence of financial assistance for women students. In general, women who attend and complete Australian higher education appear to have benefited more from external financial assistance than from familial aid. Parental involvement was a common theme emerging from the focus groups. Research supports the often heard perception that parental involvement is critical (Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper, 1999). Some evidence suggests that parental support and encouragement is the single most important predictor of post secondary educational plans (Hossler, Schmidt and Vesper, 1999). Nonetheless, focus group participants also note that effectively involving parents is quite challenging, especially when family and social stresses are intertwined with low income.

Despite these positive relations between parental involvement practices and school-related outcomes, researchers have found that parental involvement declines in adolescence (Milgram and Toubiana, 1999; Muller, 1998). For example, Epstein and Dauber (1993) found that the level of parental involvement with school
activities was stronger in elementary school than middle school. Similarly, a recent National Household Education Survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (1998) found that the provision of opportunities by schools for parents to participate in school activities declined in middle school. Further research is needed to examine why parental involvement in adolescence is declining and to understand the consequences of that decline. Some researchers have suggested that the decline stems from parent’s recognition of an increased need for adolescents to express their autonomy (Ryan and Stiller, 1991; Steinberg, 1990). As noted by Wentzel and Battle (2010), "a hallmark of adolescent development is gaining emotional and psychological independence from family".

Parental goals and aspirations are best described as internal representations of desired states or outcomes that parents hold for their children. These, in turn, organize and direct parent’s behaviors toward their children (Austin and Vancouver, 1996; Wentzel, 1998). Parental values toward education represent the importance parents place on their children’s educational achievement (Bandura, 1989; Eccles and Wigfield, 1995; Ford, 1992). With respect to school achievement, parents might set certain goals and hold certain aspirations for their children, such as doing well in math class, graduating high school, and attending college. Similarly, parents might communicate to their children their values with respect to school (i.e., importance of education), intending for their children to adopt these values and beliefs. Researchers have found that parental aspirations, goals, and values are related to their children's setting of academic goals, persistence in school, course enrolment, intellectual accomplishments, and attendance of college (Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Crandall et al, 1964; Keeves, 1972; Pugh, 1976). Researchers have also found that parents values towards education relate to their children's educational attainment, persistence, and performance (Eccles et al., 1983; Lee, 1985; Prom-Jackson, 1987; Wigfield, 1993).

The extent to which parents are involved in the education of their adolescents has been more extensively studied than academic orientation. Involvement generally refers to parents' management of their adolescents’ careers (e.g., helping to select
courses), active assistance (e.g., helping with homework encouragement of educational goals, and attendance at school events (Muller, 1995). In general, such involvement promotes academic success, even when previous achievement is taken into account, though the importance of involvement may decline with time (Muller 1998; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, and Darling, 1992). Research has documented consistent empirical evidence of a positive link between parent involvement and a range of achievement and motivational outcomes (Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, and Hevey, 2000; Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994; Keith and Lichtman, 1994; Steinberg Lamborn, Dornbusch, and Darling, 1996; Stevenson and Baker, 1987). However, most research has emphasized direct effects of parent involvement on children’s academic outcomes (Grolnick et al., 2000).

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). For these reasons, it is important to fully understand the impact of parental involvement on student academic success in order to prevent student academic failure. 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, home work 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; Fehrman et al., 1987; Lareau, 1987; Muller and Kerbow, 1993). Also, studies have shown that parent involvement varies according to parents' racial and ethnic background (Catsambis and Garland, 1997; Griffith, 1998; Muller and Kerbow, 1993)

Aspirations for accessing higher education

Adolescents’ aspirations for post secondary education are shaped by diverse influences, of which parents play an important role (Rosenblatt and Peled, 2002 as cited in Gibson and Jefferson, 2006; Hanson, 1994; Wimberly and Noeth, 2004). Research has shown that parental involvement (i.e., parent-child communication about academic courses,
grades, and college preparation) in adolescent’s college preparation could have a significant relationship to adolescents’ own postsecondary expectations (Epstein and Sanders, 2002; Hossler and Stage, 1992). Although research studies have noted that parental demographic characteristics—socio-economic status, level of education, or race/ethnicity—might play a role in parents’ access to social and cultural capital required to adequately prepare children for college, most researchers have agreed that adolescents benefit from their parent’s involvement.

In terms of females’ future aspirations, values of autonomy and independence are valued much more strongly than in the past. A job or career has become part of women’s life project because it promises recognition and money of their own (Beck and Gernsheim, 2001). Despite the fact that gender inequality remains, young women do aspire to higher education. Some working class girls clearly do aspire to higher education and some do make it. In understanding this, it could be well be that working class parents are pushing their children because they want to transform their children’s educational fates recognizing higher education as necessary because of changes in the labor market (Miriam et al., 2003). Hubbard (2005) also suggests that observing under educated mothers struggling financially serves as a powerful motivating factor in aspirations for higher education and also cited that mothers’ lives were hard as the reason their mothers encouraged them to aim high and avoid the same life.

Reay (1998), drawing on Bourdieu, points to the notion of the gendered habitus and suggests that whilst girls recognize a need for educational credentials, their aspirations will reflect opportunities perceived as available to them in the labor market, alongside the gendered experience that shape habitus. Beck (1992) suggests that, even as the process of modernization and individualization has given a ‘freedom from’, it has not provided ‘freedom to’, that is although there has been liberation for women from the traditional ‘female status fate’ paradoxically their choices remain an essential part of women lives, women will always have obstacles to overcome.

An overwhelming majority of parents hold high postsecondary aspirations for their adolescents over 90% of surveyed parents expect their children to continue on to four-year college after high school (Catsambis and Garland, 1997; Cunningham, Erisman, and
Looney, 2007; Lippman, Guzman, Keith Kinukawa, and Shwalb, 2008). Although not all parents have access to supports necessary to navigate the college preparation process, most parents are involved in their children’s college plans, talking with their children about higher education and communicating the importance of a higher degree as a prerequisite for a successful career (Catsambis and Garland; Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, Moeller, Roddie, Gilliam, and Patton, 2008).

**Role of Networks**

Coleman’s (1988) extensive study of the social structure of parental ties and their influence on the creation of human capital gives us insight into the ways social capital is formed and benefits the actors. Initially Coleman defines social capital by its function, whereby individuals form social relationships that give them access to various resources that were previously not at their disposal. He emphasizes the deliberate process of building social networks through changes in relations among persons that benefits those who participate in the process. The success of this exchange is based on the credibility of the social environment and the actual extent of obligations held, a higher level of obligation implying a greater amount of social capital. In a school environment, this kind of social capital can be observed within the organizations of parents where the parents have strong links with one another, forming a cohesive group, and also when parents and teachers share a high level trust that can benefit the school.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) use Coleman’s framework of social capital to draw our attention toward the social relationships at work in the school communities and how the nature of social exchanges between the principal, teachers, students, and parents can enhance the school’s capacity to improve. Instead of affecting student learning directly, relational trust between the various stakeholders supports a set of conditions, some structural and some psychosocial, to make the environment more conducive to learning, ultimately leading to improved school productivity.

Coleman (1988) identifies another form of social capital that inheres in the information channels provided by a social network, that is, the use of social relations to access information that otherwise could be quite costly to access and share. Strong
relationships between parents and school personnel can provide this kind of informational capital as they effectively share ideas about students that, in turn, can enhance their abilities to make decisions in the best interest of the students. By providing information to parents about the choice of curricula that their children should select, such social relationships can improve students’ chances of future college access. These social ties can be of immense benefit, especially to those parents who have never been to college themselves and therefore lack the necessary information and expertise to aid their children in making effective curricular choices.

Oakes, Wells, Jones, and Datnow (1997) identifies that the practice of track in schools places students in various leveled tracks based on their merit. Oakes’ study revealed major curricular differences across tracks. Students in the top tracks were being provided knowledge and skills that were highly valued in society and that would help them in seeking college or university admission, eventually giving them access to higher social and economic positions in the adult world. The socially powerful parents were motivated by their own self-interest in maintaining a system of meritocracy in which their children got the best deals in terms of quality of education and subsequent placement in higher social and economic positions in society (Oakes et al., 1997).

Portes, (1998), observes that wherein members of a community enjoying the benefits of certain transactions, i.e., better prospects for their children due to tracking mechanisms, excluded others from these benefits. This case concur with Bourdieu’s ideas of social capital in which social capital has a symbolic power that the dominant class invests in to maintain and reproduce group solidarity and to preserve the group’s dominant position. Furthermore, to protect the group’s social capital, access to its membership is closely monitored (Bourdieu, 1985).

In the Oakes’ et al. (1997) study, students from lower socioeconomic classes were increasingly being pushed into the lower track classes, and attempts by the school to include them within the mainstream curriculum by way of detracking were being subverted by the groups of powerful parents belonging to higher socioeconomic status groups.
The Education Resources Institute (TERI) report (2004) found that students coming from disadvantaged racial and socioeconomic conditions are underserved by schools in the disbursal of college preparatory information and guidance. This report makes a strong case for providing extensive information to underrepresented students and their families who may lack basic knowledge about the process necessary to gain access to college. Unfortunately, the students who are most in need of such information are overly represented in schools where the student-to-guidance counselor ratio is very high, leaving very little time for the counselors to pay individual attention to these students. Whereas upper middle class and elite students under similar conditions can afford to pay for counseling services offered at a price by private, independent educational consultants, thus managing their admission to good colleges, students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds have to rely more on their schools for similar services (Jun and Colyar, 2002; McDonough, 1994, 1997; Vargas).

Based on their analyses of data from the National Educated Longitudinal Study (NELS), Plank and Jordan (2001) concluded that both families and school personnel are important sources of college-related information and guidance. But parents of low and high social classes utilize different sources or social networks to acquire college-related information (Lareau, 1987). Based on her study of parents and teachers of first- and second-grade students, Lareau found that working-class parents generally relied on local extended family for information, whereas middle class parents tended to rely on parents of other children attending the same school.

Research has shown strong linkages between the participation (and its absence) of parents in schools, their children’s scholastic performance, and the eventual probability of their access to college (Auerbach, 2002; Choy; McDonough, 1994, 1997). Choy (2001), reveals that students of color and lower socioeconomic status are largely under-represented in the institutions of higher studies. In light of these findings, what is required is the building up of strong social networks between parents, schools, and postsecondary education systems. In such networks, schools will have to act as intermediaries between parents and colleges so that the students can benefit from such networks to improve their chances of college access.
A review and synthesis of prior research suggests that measures of background characteristics (e.g., socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender), human capital (e.g., academic preparation and achievement), social capital (e.g., parental involvement in education), cultural capital (e.g., parental educational attainment), and financial resources (e.g., family income, tuition, and financial aid) all influence the decision of traditional age high school graduates to enroll in college. The higher education of women is a fundamental part of achieving the goals of liberty and equality. However, in the context of Indian society there are several factors which tend to hamper the educational achievement of women in general, particularly those of the Dalit community. There are multiple factors at work here, including socio-cultural, educational, economic and infrastructural which have an important bearing on the access of Dalits to Higher Education.