2018

The Indian Information Technology Sector: The New Caste Inequality Frontier

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Recommended Citation

Fernandez, M. (2018). The Indian Information Technology Sector: The New Caste Inequality Frontier. In The New Frontier: Merit Vs. Caste in the Indian IT Sector (pp. 1–64). Oxford University Press.

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The New Caste Inequality Frontier

My conversations with IT professionals, and Indians I met in social settings, about the current state of 'caste' in India and in Indian IT sector often went like this:[1] 'Why are we talking about caste in this modern age? Aren't we perpetuating caste distinctions by continuing to talk about it? Isn't it time to get rid of reservations as IT has done? Look at the progress the IT sector has brought to the country! It is "merit, pure merit" that matters, and not caste or any other background'. Such were the assessments, often angry and even dismissive, of many Indians and professionals who work in the IT sector.

These vociferous denials notwithstanding, the Indian IT occupational sector has become a new vector of caste inequality. A singular focus on

[1] Responses represent compilations of typical comments by several respondents. In the interest of authentic reporting, the written linguistic style of respondents has been largely left intact, including any grammatical errors, except for minimal changes presented within '[]' to improve readability.

'*Merit, Pure Merit*', assiduously honed in ideology and in practice, has ironically become responsible for reproducing caste structures in IT. How is this merit constructed and practiced in the IT sector? And how does caste factor into, even if implicitly, the merit constructions? Theoretically guided empirical answers to this set of questions are offered to clarify the broad assertion that Indian IT is the new caste inequality vector.

Pure merit in the Indian IT world, simply put, refers to technical skills and qualifications that are earned through a much heralded Horatio Alger model of personal aspiration, initiative, and hard work. It is the opposite of *caste-reservation* or *caste-earmarked*[2] *merit*—merit acquired through the constitutionally mandated caste-based social redress and justice programs, popularly referred to as reservation and affirmative action.[3] These programs were designed to reduce, and even to eliminate, the vestiges of centuries-long caste-based inequalities. But, how pure is 'pure merit' after all? Because, often left unspoken and not examined in the valorized abstract IT merit discourse is, the 'symbolic[4] merit'—the fact that the cultivation and practice of pure-merit is deeply embedded in, supported by, and 'hidden' behind the social and material privileges of the dominant castes and middle classes. In this sense, symbolically embedded merit is, ironically, not that different after all from reservation merit. But, unlike symbolic merit, reservation or earmarked-merit is foregrounded on minority caste status and authorized by the government, but not culturally accepted in the broader societal context.

[2] 'Reservation' and 'earmarked merit' are used interchangeably in the manuscript.

[3] Dalits, the lowest 'scheduled caste' in the caste hierarchy, and other backward classes (OBCs) are eligible for earmarked reservation benefits in public sector education, including IT higher education institutions. See Chapter 1 Appendix for a brief note about the caste system, definitions of caste groups, and state sponsored reservation programs. While the terms Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are often used in combination as SC/ST, much of the political, social, and academic foci have been on Scheduled Castes (SCs) as is the case in this research. Despite attempts to repeal caste-based reservation, particularly in higher education, a recent Supreme Court judgement of 10 April 2008, has upheld reservation for SC, ST, and OBC students in higher educational institutions (NCDHR 20 July 2008).

[4] Adapted from Bourdieu's culturally authorized symbolic capital (1990; 1995).

It is also quite clear, that to many in the IT sector, *caste* means *caste reservations* and not the caste privileges in which pure merit is embedded. Pure merit advocates are quick to point out that caste, meaning caste reservations, is not part of their organizational landscape. To them, *Reservation or Earmarked Merit*, because of its relaxed entry and promotion criteria, does not quite pass muster on the venerated pure IT merit yardstick; ergo, merit-worthy lower caste Dalits and their counterparts do not qualify as per the pure-merit requirements. The caste-free or caste-neutral claims of the IT organizational social space, hinge on this singular perspective which equates caste with reservation. It is these particular understandings of caste and merit that intermingle to create a 'caste-free IT' occupational space.

On closer scrutiny, there are spaces that open up in the IT merit construction processes for hidden caste privileges to filter through, and colour pure merit with caste undertones. For one, neither admitted nor recognized in the process, is the caste and class privileged embeddedness of pure IT merit dynamics in IT employment and in related educational preparation. Such 'misrecognized' dominance, as per Bourdieu (1990), leaves the construction of valorized 'pure' IT merit to be fiercely defended in a delicate and yet passionately contested balance between *pure IT merit* and *reservation merit*. The competition for scarce, open, or non-reserved[5] seats in elite public sector technical education institutions, along with the steep costs of private technology education and highly sought after IT jobs, has turned into a combative, competitive *blood sport* in which merit is pitted against caste rhetorically and sometimes even physically.

In short, more than half a century after the country gained independence in 1947, caste continues to be an ambivalent issue at best and vehemently combative in its worst moments. In the new private sector, Indian IT, questions about caste are either not raised or become very antagonistic and derisive when raised even in casual conversations. Besides, Indian IT, with its emphasis on the ideology of merit, associated technical skills, and education, is seen by many as the new equalizer and societal savior from a variety of caste inequalities and injustices. But, is it, really? To what extent has the new IT sector transformed India into a 'post-caste' society?

[5] As it currently stands, the 'reserved' or earmarked seats for Dalits and OBCs in elite publicly funded educational institutions are not to exceed 50 per cent, leaving only the rest open to dominant castes.

Despite the passionate caste deniers, Indian IT offers an excellent test case for proponents of 'post-caste' India. The caste system in India,[6] with its traditional occupational foundations, is as old as the IT occupational sector is new. Besides, the new Indian IT sector, in contrast to the traditional caste occupations, does not have a traditional caste basis (D'Cruz and Noronha 2013). Does the IT revolution in India represent a new bend in the historical arc of caste inequality? Or has the IT sector become another new site of inequality in India? Even though caste discrimination is officially outlawed in India for over 50 years, caste and associated intersectional privileges continue to permeate the Indian social fabric. Privileges are valued and vociferously defended by members and allies of the upper (or forward)[7] castes, particularly in the face of continued reservation programs in public sector education and employment. Adding fuel to the privilege furor is the fact, that despite equal employment and opportunity initiatives extended by the state, the lowest caste members or the Dalits continue to face deficits in education, employment, or in other life options.

Given this contested caste history, raising and answering caste-related questions are of scholarly, and even economic, significance. Empirical questions about whether caste is relevant to Indian IT, the kind of roles it plays, at what levels, and how it is manifested, are important in the scholarship of inequalities in developing societies. Such research might also offer insights into how the country can begin to more effectively move beyond the existing state sponsored programs to realize the vision of the country's founding fathers. After all, egregious and longstanding inequalities, particularly those based on caste and other ascribed characteristics, are not productive for any society.

In the interest of full disclosure, the original purpose of this research, perhaps naively, was to explore caste diversity, inclusivity, and possible discrimination in the private IT sector, implicit in the prevalence and incorporation rates of different caste groups. But, as preparations for fieldwork were being made, it soon became clear that the Indian IT sector neither maintained data on nor was interested in, and even resisted talking about,

[6] More detailed analyses are offered in the section titled 'Merit-Caste Contestations in Historical and Contemporary India', Appendix 1A.1.

[7] Forward Castes (FCs) or Upper Castes (UCs) are used interchangeably throughout the manuscript.

employee caste status. Consequently, the research purpose was altered. It was not possible to test overt/explicit discrimination against SCs, STs, and even OBCs in the private Indian IT sector. Rather, research attention was shifted to an examination of the 'disguised animus'[8] or implicit caste filtering bias in the avowed 'caste neutral' policies and their potential disparate caste impact.

As my conversations with IT professionals and their sector leaders proceeded, it became clear that the *pure IT merit* construction process has become an ironic vehicle for reproduction of caste hierarchies in the IT occupational world. The seemingly caste-neutral merit construction project has turned discriminatory of the lowest castes while privileging the dominant castes and classes. How is this pure merit culture constructed? What are the contours of the merit-caste debate in the IT merit culture production? How do IT professionals articulate caste neutrality of IT merit? How do they make sense of the caste/class laden, symbolic privileges that undergird IT merit? How does the merit construction process limit access to Dalits/the SCs, the 'other', even when the 'others' are qualified on the requisite IT merit markers? And how do Dalits or, for that matter, other less privileged groups, experience the caste stratified IT occupational sector? What lessons can be gleaned about caste inequality from IT women's experiences—another traditionally disadvantaged group? This research monograph is devoted to examining these questions to shed light on whether, and how, the Indian IT sector has become the new vector of inequality.

A Globalization Paradox: Case of Indian Information Technology

Caste and other inequalities in the new IT vector illustrate a globalization paradox. While proponents of globalized information revolution in India have touted the unprecedented prosperity that IT has brought to the society, detractors have been quick to point out its checkered presence. Prosperity, and the idealized Horatio Alger model of IT merit associated with globalization, has not only been over-hyped but has not been shared equally in the IT sector or for that matter in the broader society.

[8] SCOTUS Justice Anthony Kennedy in the Fair Housing Act decision of 25 June 2015.

Even the telling of the early history of the Indian IT sector belies the idealized global model of personal and private sector initiatives. The IT sector in India is in reality a product of the joint efforts between the government, individual firms, and industry associations, with the government being a central catalyst in the initial stages of the IT sector at the national and regional levels. India was 'one of the pioneering developing countries to make deliberate policy measures and institutional interventions, as early in the mid-1960s, towards developing an electronic production base in the country' (Joseph 2009: 4). Following a strategy for self-reliant growth, with limited foreign direct investment, public sector units were set up to meet local electronic hardware production needs. It was not until the 1980s and even the 1990s, with hardware trade lagging,[9] that the government liberalized foreign investment and its import-export policies. These economic reforms of 1991 are credited with facilitating the country's transformation into a global hub for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services. There have been corresponding shifts in ownership profiles of the IT industry, from government to private and foreign firms, and from hardware production to software development (Joseph 2009).

Proponents of Globalization

Proponents of globalization, like Friedman (2005), have argued that information technologies and economic globalization, that these new technologies have made possible, have 'flattened' the global landscape. Globalization has levelled, they posit, the playing field for, and reduced the gap between, developed and developing countries. Globalization is expected to bring unprecedented prosperity to all. On key, the growth in the size and diversity of the Indian IT sector has kept pace with the globalization frenzy of the 2000s.

The Indian IT sector is currently segmented into a broad spectrum of industry groups: Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Information Technology and Telecom (ITT); Information Technology Enabled Services and Solutions (ITES) for banking, insurance, and

[9] According to many industry experts, lack of foresight as well as political and social will to invest in the assembly oriented electronic industry has contributed to the decline in Indian hardware production and exports. Looming threats to the Indian software segments include limits placed by USA on outsourcing.

e-commerce; Business Process Outsourcing (BPO); and more recently the Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO) units in market research, engineering design, biotech, or pharmaceutical research (Remesh 2009; Sahoo and Patnaik 2009).

The contribution of the IT sector—hardware, software, and services—to the Indian GDP has also steadily grown from 1.2 per cent or US$ 4.8 billion in 1997 to 7.5 per cent in 2012.[10] According to Dubey and Garg (2014), quoting data from NASSCOM, a major trade body and the chamber of commerce of the IT-BPO industry in India, the primary contributors to this growth have been software services, followed by BPOs, and thirdly by software products and engineering services. Revenues from the export and domestic IT-BPO sectors increased six-fold from US$ 16.1 billion in 2003 to 100.8 billion in 2012. About two-thirds of this increase was from exports; the percent export share of revenues went up 8 percentage points from 61 per cent to 69 per cent. In 2015, the IT sector's aggregated revenues were US$ 147 billion—export revenue stood at US$ 99 billion, domestic at US$48 billion—a growth of over 13 per cent.

It is such growth in productivity, associated mushrooming of employment opportunities, and diversification in the Indian IT sector that are touted by proponents of globalization. Highly skilled engineering jobs in the IT software sub-sector, and more broad-based work in ITES, which is open to non-engineering graduates, have grown while employment opportunities in electronic manufacturing have shrunk. Between 2003 and 2012, there was a fourfold increase in employment numbers—from 670,000 to 2,770,000—with the growth focused primarily in the export sector.[11] Tata Consulting Services or TCS is reported to have hired 20,000 fresh graduates from all over India in 2013; other organizations like Wipro, Infosys, IBM, and Dell, among others, also added to the employment numbers.[12] Capitalizing on advancements in ICT technologies, major corporations in industrialized countries like the USA, have

[10] See Dubey and Garg (2014).

[11] Revenue and employment data from Dr. Anupam Khanna (2013), Chief Economist, 14 February 2013. 'India's IT/ITeS Industry: The Next Phase Non-Linear Growth & Broad-Based Innovation.' Knowledge-Based Capital Conference, OECD, Paris. Retrieved on 24 July 2015.

[12] Available at: http://info.shine.com/industry/it-ites-bpo/11.html. Retrieved on 24 July 2015.

offshored and/or outsourced many business services to India and other developing countries. At the same time, India has been successful in creating and attracting high-skill jobs in the IT[13] and in the BPO sectors[14] (Bhatt and Illiyan 2009; NASSCOM 2008; Sahoo and Patnaik 2009). These new occupational sectors, IT and BPO, include jobs that are outsourced through Indian companies like Infosys Technologies or Wipro and/or offshored by American companies like Oracle, HP, Microsoft, or IBM who have set up shop in India.[15] Recently, Indian corporations, like TCS, Wipro, Infosys offering software solutions, and Hindustan Computers Limited (HCL Technologies) with their hardware products and solutions, have developed and successfully exported software packages for banking, finance, accounting, and health care. Other industry developments have included a shift from on-site IT work at the site of the foreign company to offshore work done at the many software technology parks, say in Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Chennai. Multi-national western corporations like Oracle, Texas Instruments, HP, Microsoft, and IBM have also set up software development bases in India. Even though western multinational exports represent a small portion of Indian sales and exports, they are important clients of Indian software companies.

Such unprecedented growth in IT employment has been made possible in the sector by capitalizing on the information technology related skill sets, particularly of its educated segments. When additional language skills (such as English accents) are needed to serve the Western customer better, accent neutralization centres teach workers Western accents, popular culture, and even names to adopt in order to 'pass' as a Westerner (Nadeem 2009). It is also important to note that the IT-BPO sector jobs are the most sought after because of their monetary and associated benefits, including better than the typical Indian working environments and access to western culture.

Amidst this growth, pure or caste-neutral IT educational credentials and skills—a critical yardstick for IT work qualification—has become

[13] The IT sector includes computer or information technology programming, IT infrastructure management, research and development services, E-commerce & web services, and engineering services.

[14] The ITES/BPO sector covers customer service, financial service, and back office services for multinational companies.

[15] Loosing such work, previously done in the USA and Europe, has caused a lot of worry in the USA and in other advanced nations.

an article of faith in the community's social habitus. IT employment is purely merit-, and not caste-based, say the industry leaders. IT-BPO occupations, in principle, do not have a caste basis. Besides, the current surplus of Indian engineering graduates allows IT firms to be highly selective in choosing the most 'qualified' candidates. The ideal IT candidate is expected to have a certain blend of technical, social, and cultural skills. In fact, a pilot qualitative interview study by Jodhka and Newman (2010)[16] found employers who consistently spoke of 'merit'-based talent. These employers contrasted merit-based hiring in IT to the nepotism of old industries, where personal ties came first, family second, and caste third.

Detractors of Globalization

Yet, say the detractors, because of the exclusionary mechanisms at work in the Indian social and educational institutions, the most 'meritorious' IT professionals tend to come from upper caste, middle class, educated, urban, and male backgrounds. The globalization detractors also point to the continued and even deepening global and national inequalities, amidst the unprecedented prosperity. Economists Joseph Stiglitz (2007, 2003) and others (Appadurai 1996; Sassen 2000) have contrasted the dramatic changes in the global economy with various countries being more connected than ever before to the world of widening gaps both among and within societies. They cite cases, Africa for example, being disconnected from the globalizing world and of segments like the poor, even within the connected countries like India, for whom the world is certainly not flat. More realistically, globalized IT has brought prosperity only to some of the local economies. The lack of skills and resources needed to compete in the global economy is one important factor perpetuating the economic divide both among and within countries. But the problem according to Stiglitz, is not with globalization per se, but the way it has been managed. Stiglitz posited that the very global trade and financial practices, as well as the politics of international economic institutions, like IMF, World Bank, and WTO, which give advanced industrialized nations a definite advantage, have come at the expense of the poor countries and their poorer segments. The Dalits or 'Scheduled

[16] Their study had a convenience sample of 25 HR managers of large multinational and Indian firms based in New Delhi and their Indian satellite offices.

Castes', the focus of this research monograph, is one such marginalized segment in globalizing India.

India is a textbook case of globalized inequalities. The Indian IT success markers stand in stark contrast to a nation still characterized by high rates of illiteracy, US$2 per day median income, and a predominantly rural and agricultural economy. Poverty rates in the country continue to be high; poverty headcount ratio at US$1.25 a day (adjusted for inflation) has certainly declined from 55.5 per cent in 1983 to 32.7 per cent in 2010. But, these rates are still rather high when compared to Asian rates of 50.1 per cent in 1983 and down to 13.1 per cent in 2010.[17]

Scholars have documented social inequalities even within the new IT sector. At an intra-sectoral level, researchers have characterized the Indian IT world as one-third hardware/software IT and two-thirds softer BPO (Mohanty 2003). The privileges of IT professionals or symbolic analysts (Reich 1991) are contrasted with the repetitive work in routine production in the BPO sector.[18] Body shopping practices (Biao 2007) and associated contingent work conditions, under which many on site (working abroad) IT workers toil, are yet another illustration of the inequalities in the new IT sector. Nadeem (2009) documented the social hierarchy that has developed between the IT programmers vs. the transnational call centre workers in BPO. The night work shifts needed to synchronize with the rhythms of the global economy, along with the social parties and other non-monetary incentives (alcohol and cigarettes) provided to recruit and retain workers in these non-traditional working conditions, have lowered the social standing of transnational call centre workers in contrast to IT programmers. 'Depersonalized bullying' (to borrow a term from D'Cruz and Noronha 2013) that accompanies the 'othering', as per Michel Foucault, of call centre and soft-skilled workers, marks the perceived

[17] Available at http://humanprogress.org/story/2439. Retrieved on 23 July 2015.

[18] Chandra Mohanty's (2003) depiction of 'one-third world' versus the 'two-thirds world' is an appropriate IT privilege metaphor. The one-third world is represented by IT hardware and software producers while BPO is the two-thirds world. As per Reich (2001), symbolic analysts were ranked above the BPO or repetitive workers. Of course, given the economic benefits accruing to IT workers, irrespective of type of work, IT employment in general is more desired than non-IT work.

social weakness and low standing of BPO workers in the IT hierarchy. No doubt, BPO workers along with other marginalized groups like women, lower castes, lower class, and rural residents, if and when they make it into the IT world, make sense of and learn to live with their 'otherized' status.

These IT related inequalities have, according to scholars,[19] exacerbated, rather than diminished, the potency of other inequality vectors of gender, caste, and urbanicity. Specific examples of such multilayered inequalities abound. IT recruitment practices that favour a certain mix of technical, social, and cultural skills, when layered on to educational inequalities extant in the Indian society,[20] have fortified the multidimensional stratification in the Indian social fabric (Upadhya 2007a, 2007b). The gendered and cultural (English fluency) dynamics of the transnational class of IT workers (Radhakrishnan 2011) are other cases in point. Top IT positions are held by men while women are often relegated to lower entry level jobs. Individuals from upper/middle caste and class backgrounds dominate the IT industry (D'Costa 2011; Raghunath 2010). Because of the global industry's functional need for those with technical engineering education (bachelor's or even master's degrees), there is an inherent class bias in favour of the urban (often a proxy for English proficiency) educated middle class; those who have access to such education typically hail from upper and middle classes/caste urban backgrounds. Granted, the origins of educational disparities start early on in one's life course. While government technical institutes are well resourced, only limited resources are devoted to basic primary/secondary education. These early disparities create a narrowing funnel up the ladder to higher education. On balance, while merit in the IT industry is judged by educational credentials, access to these credentials continues to be influenced by early academic performance that is contingent on caste and class status, and urban location.

Such accumulated research evidence has begun to undermine the idea that the Indian IT sector, in contrast to the more traditional professional/white collar sectors, has opened up employment opportunities to a wider cross section of society. The highly selective IT hiring and promotion

[19] Annapoorna and Bagalkoti (2011) and Suriya and Nagarajan (2004) among others.

[20] More details on endemic educational inequalities are outlined later in Appendix 1A.1 and Chapter 4.

processes have created interesting social dynamics around the nexus of 'merit' and upper caste, urban, and gender identities, among others. In the judgement of the forward or higher castes, they do not explicitly discriminate or exclude SCs. Rather, they contend, educated SCs (because of the reservation system) simply do not have the appropriate 'merit' or requisite skill sets for the IT job, particularly in a market where impeccable technical credentials are critical. There is general agreement that the stringent academic environment in publicly funded engineering higher education often disadvantages the SCs who were granted admission based on quotas or reservation policies and/or poor socio-economic background. No doubt, many reservation (SC) students do not perform at a high level because of their prior weak educational preparation or limited English proficiency. Academic problems, however, are not unique to SC students; they are also faced by many from poor and rural communities. In a similar vein, for employers that doubt the legitimacy of the reservation system, the merit of SC's training and qualifications for hiring and advancement, become questionable. Yet, the quality of private technical credentials, sought after by many dominant caste and class students who did not get into the elite public institutions, is often left unquestioned. There has been a mushrooming of private and expensive technical education in response to the limited open seats available to forward castes (FC) and classes in publicly funded technical institutions.

Against this complicated background continue the raging debates about the effects of caste and casteism in India. There is growing political and public backlash against quotas or set aside privileges for SC/ST/OBC in government educational institutions, occupations, and political elections. Many upper castes, including some academicians, have claimed that caste discrimination is a thing of the past and it is time that the decades long privileges enjoyed by the SCs and OBCs are ended (Haub 2011). To others, reservation policies have met their goals and therefore should be discontinued. There are those who blame the constitutional redress provisions for caste dynamics continuing to permeate everyday life and politics in modern India. Some even argue that the reservation policies should never have been implemented in the first place because they have undermined the chances of poor Brahmins and other upper castes, even if the costs of exclusion for the poor FC members may not be as high as it would be for the lowest castes. Some FC members are taking actions to rectify their apparent disadvantages. A case in point is a Brahmin Trust

Fund which seeks to assist 'ONLY poor Brahmins' to pursue their education.[21] Debates also continue about caste enumeration in the decennial Census and other government sponsored surveys; should the government of India continue enumerating castes, asked Haub in 2011?

Unfortunately, while untouchability (against SCs) practices are illegal and waning a bit in urban India, casteism has an enduring and insidious presence.[22] At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the caste system remains a unique social organizing framework in the nation, leaving its unequal imprint on education, labour practices, electoral politics, and even health outcomes. As long as the intricate connections between caste-based inequalities and the nation's economic development are unsettled, politicians, community activists, and their lobbyists will continue to manipulate the government's reservation policies. At the national level, research questions need to be raised and answered about how restricted better-paying jobs are to the SC segment in the national talent pool and whether such restrictions severely shrink the prospects for national growth and individual achievement. Other questions that need to be publicly debated are whether information scarcity and mobility traps, based on caste and other ascribed characteristics, can be resolved through more effective institutional means. More importantly, correcting these disparities will require organizational and cultural changes not only in the public governmental sector, but also in the private sector, including IT sector where caste baste reservations do not apply.

Theoretically Disentangling Contradictions in the Caste-Merit Constructions

Returning to my conversations with IT professionals, managers, technical staff, and the general Indian public, it was clear that many vehemently denied the contemporary relevance of caste in IT—either of the caste earmarked or of the symbolically privileged kind. They touted an idealized work social habitus marked by individualized merit ideology, skills, and worldviews that are authorized globally and nationally. However, as

[21] As per personal communication with author.

[22] See Atul Sethi and Divya A. 'A Gene Called Caste' in *Times of India*, 16 May 2010.

postulated in this research, it is the very ideology and practice of merit that has led to caste reproductions in the Indian IT workplace. There is evidence, in the lived experiences of IT professionals and industry informants, that the Indian IT *social habitus* (Bourdieu 1990), the occupational sector and its workplace structures[23] have become *a new site of caste inequality* through transference and replication of broader social caste hierarchies into the work structures in the IT occupational sector. Bourdieu's notions of *symbolic and hidden capital* (1990, 1995) are useful in unpacking the contradictory connections between merit capital and other inequalities reproduced in the IT sector. Unequal caste, gender, community, and even religious structures and processes operative in the larger Indian society have found their way into the IT sector. But, not all inequalities are equal; IT sector leaders seem more open to addressing gender than caste inequalities, as evidenced in NASSCOM's recent gender inclusive initiatives. These contradictions can be viewed as byproducts of the gender, family, and caste intersections (Fernandez 1997).[24] In the final analyses, search for ways to disrupt caste hierarchies will have to be located in the *'symbolic struggles'* in the context of *'social domination'* (Pratto et al. 1994; Whitley Jr. 1999).

How can the IT sector go from being the new inequalities saviour to becoming another vector of caste reproduction? Theoretically speaking, *pure merit* and the associated skill sets, the golden currency in the IT workplace and in the broader society, operate as central mediating mechanisms through which caste hierarchies can enter and take root in Indian IT. *Pure merit* is used to articulate *'appropriate differences'*[25] at multiple

[23] Following a noted organizational theorist, Dr. Charles Powers (2016 personal communication), a workplace can be treated as a setting in which to see the meaning of social structure. A social structure is a set of recurrent and patterned ways in which people are allocated to different roles that are defined relative to one another and linked by regular communication links between the occupants of different roles, with rules and role expectations are enforced, and role performance monitored. The work structure has both, formal (aspects of role behaviour, organized communication, and officially proscribed rule enforcement) and informal (aspects of role behaviour, communication, and rule enforcement which unofficially emerge but take place alongside of officially prescribed behaviour) dimensions.

[24] Discussed further in Chapter 5; also see Shenoy-Packer (2014).

[25] This is an adaptation of Radhakrishnan's (2011) appropriate difference in which she distinguishes between traditional and respectable middle-class

levels of structures and discourse. It sets apart the globalized IT structure from the non-IT work sectors. It is also posited to be the opposite of merit gained through state sponsored social redress programs in education and workplace hiring and promotion. To reiterate, a clear distinction is drawn between the ideology and practice of *pure/sheer/caste neutral merit* and *earmarked* or *reservation* merit. Pure merit is ostensibly unsullied by the traditional vectors of caste or class while reservation merit is weak because reservation beneficiaries do not face the same stringent qualifications as dominant castes and classes. The pure merit argument is bolstered by the reality that Dalits/SCs continue to face deficits in economic, social, and cultural capital resources, despite more than half century long reserved quotas. But, as scholars have noted, the practice of 'pure' merit is deeply *embedded in the social and economic privileges* of the dominant castes and classes.[26] By virtue of how merit is defined and acquired, the socially constructed IT 'merit' culture favours the higher castes (HCs) and other privileged segments. If this is the case, can IT merit be caste neutral?

How do symbolic and hidden capital resources and processes fade to the background in the caste-merit debate? To be sure, the functional need for efficiency and productivity in the globalized IT industry has prompted the sector and its professionals to '*streamline*'[27] and to anchor the ideology and practice of pure merit, the educational preparations for and cultivation of associated skills and work habits, in the individual and not in the family or other social groupings. The new streamlined IT merit ostensibly is tightly honed and stripped off of the particularistic inequality vectors of caste, gender, and religion, among others, which allegedly dominate the public sector and non-IT family owned private sector. Anathema in the Indian IT workplace, as per IT professionals and key informants/knowledge leaders, is the caste-based public sector reservations as well

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femininity embodied by the female IT professional, between the Indian and global, and between IT ideology and practices versus reservations in jobs and education.

[26] For example, see Annapoorna and Bagalkoti (2011); Bourdieu (1977, 1990, 1995); Radhakrishnan (2011); Suriya and Nagarajan (2004); Upadhya (2006, 2007a, 2007b).

[27] Another adaptation of Radhakrishnan's cultural streamlining (2011: 21) which she defined as 'the process of simplifying a dizzying diversity of cultural practices into a stable, transferable, modular set of norms and beliefs that can move quickly and easily through space'.

as the weight of community-caste-religious ties, and resultant *homosocial reproduction*[28] of dominant community employees and management that is rampant in the non-IT private sector, they posit.

Concurrently, a perfect storm of events has turned the acquisition of merit skills into a fiercely contested competition to the point of becoming a *blood sport*. As streamlined pure merit collides with the reservation merit, particularly in the preparation for merit skills needed in the IT workplace, caste contestations get to the forefront. Distinctions are drawn between open, or 'pure merit', and earmarked or 'caste reservation merit' seats in education. The vehemence in the merit competition is fuelled by the restricted open seats for dominant castes in elite publicly funded educational institutions; there is a 50 per cent upper limit on earmarked or 'reserved' seats for Dalits and OBCs.[29] In response to this perceived crunch, private technical education institutions, where redress earmarks do not apply, have mushroomed in recent years. But, the prohibitive cost of private technical education, affordable primarily by the wealthier castes and classes, has fuelled the bitterness of the competition. For its part, the private IT employment sector has vigorously and fiercely sought to keep out 'reservation merit' because of its purported weak quality. In a highly coveted, but limited employment market, the ideology and practice of pure merit is upheld in opposition to social redress policies, injecting fierceness, and a metaphorical bloodiness, into the debate.

Yet, the *unacknowledged embeddedness* of the Indian IT sector and its professionals in multiple, intersectionally intertwining, and traditional inequality vectors renders the streamlining of meritorious symbolic capital to be hidden, and loosely woven, leaving enough room for caste and other traditional inequality vectors to seep through and layer 'pure' IT merit with caste inequalities. For example, if 'pure' merit is primarily accessible to the dominant castes and classes, it stands to reason that caste privileges are reproduced in the new IT sector. Caste privileges, percolated into the preparation of 'pure' merit and in its application in the recruitment and promotion structures in the IT workplace, set the stage for diffusion and replication of caste hierarchies in the IT workplace structure and

[28] From Chapter 3 of Kanter's (1977a) homosocial social reproduction of management.

[29] More details on the history and specifics of reservation policies are available in Appendix 1A.1.

practices. Rather than being the expected social saviour from the deep rooted ravages of caste inequalities, the new Indian IT sector has itself turned into a new vector of inequality.

Following these theoretical strands, a *broad definition of Merit* is proposed for the analyses of caste reproduction in the Indian IT workplace. For one, merit refers to the skill sets validated by a streamlined 'pure' merit ideology. Merit, to the *Merit Camp*, refers to the efforts and successes of the individual in acquiring the skills sets, work habits as well as orientations imbued with a thirst for learning, tireless work ethic, flexibility, and willingness to adapt to new technologies and shifting work conditions. This set of pure merit ideology and practices, deemed a functional prerequisite for success in global IT, is authorized and privileged by the global IT world and the larger Indian society. *Pure merit*, to many Indians from dominant caste and class backgrounds, is also the opposite of reservation merit. In fact, to the privileged dominant castes and classes in the *Pure Merit Camp*, who are embedded in normalized caste privileges, equating caste privileges with merit is oxymoronic. Caste, to them, stands for SC (Dalits) and for reservation merit gained by Dalits and other minorities through the social justice programs. If there is a 'Dalit deficit' in Indian IT, it is because Dalits' IT qualifications, acquired through less stringent admission requirements, are weaker than pure merit.

But, merit is also the caste and class embedded kind, deeply rooted, and unacknowledged, in the economic and cultural privileges of dominant castes and classes. It is this caste embedded merit, hidden and normalized, that offers clues into the caste diffusion and replicating potential in Indian IT. To the *Caste Camp*, 'pure' merit is just a 'code' word for caste advantages fiercely defended by the historically privileged, to the point of turning the competition into a 'blood sport'. It is ironic that many in the IT professional circles do not recognize the hidden caste undertones of the pure merit yardstick that they so ardently bandy about. Many seem unaware of their middle class background and resources (hidden capital) that have privileged them in the acquisition of merit, be it in elite educational human capital or in other social/cultural capital. Even though hidden symbolic merit is not that different from reservation merit, it is caste privileged merit of the dominant castes that offers the key to understanding how IT has become the new vector of caste inequality. Ironically, reservation merit, contrary to its maligned portrayal as weak and reinforcing caste distinctions, has the potential for disrupting caste

inequality reproduction, provided the necessary supportive structures are in place in the educational and workplace systems. It is also in the unpacking of these conflicting strands in the merit-caste debates—caste neutrality, reservation caste merit, and caste privilege embeddedness—that the keys to understanding the caste privileges in a sector that was expected to dismantle the historic caste-based inequalities lie.

How are these conflicting Merit-Caste strands experienced on the ground? On the one hand, the ideology of IT based skill or caste neutral 'merit' has become preeminent dogma in the IT community. Skill based merit is essential for Indian IT companies to function successfully in a globalized industry, they say. On the other, contrary to these pronouncements, minorities from SCs and rural backgrounds, and even women, have experienced the culture and practices of the new Indian IT sector as discriminatory. To these groups, the centuries old caste traditions and inequalities have not simply disappeared even in the purportedly caste-less new occupational sector. It is in this context that the broad set of questions that guided this research was located: How is the 'merit' IT culture project constructed in the Indian IT sector? How does the merit project become discriminatory in ways that even a new occupational sector undergoes caste-based (and other minority statuses) transformation? And, if caste-inequalities have been imported into the IT culture, how can it get disrupted?

Merit Culture Making in the IT Social Habitus

On the face of it, *pure IT 'skills'* appear to have replaced caste, religion, and/or communities as social vectors in the IT sector, and by extension, in the IT imbued contemporary Indian society. Merit, another term for IT skills, is often valorized in the daily social discourse on IT campuses and on the street. As Parthasarathy noted, 'The valorization of particularistic notions of merit dominates much of the public and even academic debate on the issue of caste-based reservations in higher education in India ...' (2012: 256). Even in the social habitus of a globalized IT workplace, merit and its underlying ideology has become the unquestioned refrain. A frequently offered rationale is that merit signals 'quality' to western customers (Krishna and Brihmadesam 2006; Upadhya 2007a). This merit-based culture has come to represent a 'paracosm' of structured mental attributes that helps map, organize, and shed light on the particular unique new world of Indian IT.

How has this paracosm been developed and maintained in IT? One credible theoretical answer can be offered by adapting Radhakrishnan's (2011) idea of '*streamlining*' to create '*appropriate differences*' between IT merit and merit created by reservation policies.[30] To appropriately differentiate, the Indian IT sector has identified and assiduously honed 'a generic, transferable set of "Indian" (Radhakrishnan 2011: 5) cultural norms that are palatable to their Western clients; "merit" has become the key/overt marker of transferable norms'. In Radhakrishnan's analysis, the resulting 'transnational class' (2011: 3), an exemplar of appropriate difference, is simultaneously Indian, but different from the India-Indian. The ideal IT professional is someone with skills, communication styles, and processes (adaptability and flexibility) that are pragmatic and transferable anywhere globally. In fact, the framers of modern India set up elite technical institutions (like the IITs)[31] to offer broad based science and technology based resources to spur industrial modernity and development. Products of these elite technical institutions, the privileged transnational knowledge class, espouse a particular worldview, of beliefs, ethos, and knowledge that could be employed globally.

The IT sector and those connected with that world streamline multiple identities (class, caste, urbanism, religion, and gender) and create 'appropriate differences' to highlight and privilege those skills that have cache and symbolic capital in the new global IT sector. Merit, and associated IT skills, has become the basis for appropriate difference between IT on the one hand and the public sector on the other. Streamlining is used to draw sharp contrasts between the private Indian IT and the government sectors. The IT sector with its caste neutral merit ideology and practices is set apart from the public sector with its caste-based reservations or quotas and ostensibly merit neutral principles. While reservation merit has cache in the government sector, streamlined merit is a pre-requisite for success in the IT knowledge sector. Merit terminology, with its singular focus on

[30] Radhakrishnan (2011) conceptualized the merit ideology in opposition to quota policies that reinforces caste. In this sense, merit was not necessarily a marker of appropriate difference between IT and non-IT occupational sectors.

[31] IITs, deemed 'Institutes of National Importance' were approved by the Indian Parliament between 1951 and 1961. Initially, five IITs were set up; since 1994, 11 more were added (more details in Chapter 4).

merit/skill, also offers a way to streamline hiring and advancement expectations in the IT workplace.

It is in this streamlining process that *pure merit* can become delinked from caste, rendering merit *caste neutral*. It is also in this process that the 'merit-based IT culture' can become discriminatory implicitly, or even in reality, on the basis of caste (or class and community) status. Valorized merit, because of its hidden symbolic nature, has become a tool for transferring and perpetuating caste and its hierarchies in Indian IT. In addition to the distinctions drawn between the IT and non-IT government sector occupations, sub-sectors in IT, like BPO, are also stratified using appropriately different skill sets. In the final analyses, it is the appropriate differentiation based on merit valorization that has the potential for reproducing centuries-old caste hierarchical practices in hiring and promotions in the new IT occupational sector.

The Merit vs. Caste Debate in the IT Culture Making Project

It is also in this 'caste-neutral merit culture' context that the *Merit-Caste* debate is waged. To the *Merit Camp*, streamlining has become the basis for moulding a global IT professional for a global workplace. There is a general assumption that the cultural and work norms/skills of the traditional Indian occupational sectors are not compatible with the demands of the global IT industry. Therefore, a transnational IT class, that is appropriately different from the 'reservation-class' in other occupational sectors, had to be created and cultivated. The IT elite and non-elite alike rationalize the appropriately different IT professional on the grounds that a globally transferable skill set is critical to appeal to the Western cosmopolitan culture of multinational clients. For another, streamlined merit is an imperative in the (avowed) interests of efficiency and productivity. In a culturally streamlined Indian IT sector, *pure merit* is viewed as normal (naturalized á la Bourdieu), universal, and respected. An IT value set, that includes adaptability, flexibility, drive, and performance, required and valorized in the knowledge economy, reinforces the ideology of merit and fits well with merit construction in the IT sector; if you have merit and work hard you will be rewarded. Once again, pure merit in the IT sector is claimed to be free from the restrictions of traditional social vectors such as caste, community, or religion.

But, the implications of streamlining go beyond just being a functional management tool. Merit streamlining, says the *Caste Camp*, is not so much

an efficient merit-based management tool, but rather is used to manage the matrix of privileges associated with symbolic and material capital that intertwine and reinforce each other to create and sustain the merit IT culture. Besides, if 'pattern recognition',[32] is used as a hiring and promotion tool in the IT job sectors, with resultant 'homosocial reproduction' (Kanter 1977a), it stands to reason that the matrix of caste privileges in the broader society are replicated in the Indian IT sector. For sure, homosocial reproduction is not a simple byproduct of sexism or racism or casteism; rather it often is an insidious byproduct of organizational uncertainty, organizational efficiency, and manager discretions in hiring.

In the final analyses, the passionately argued reasoning on either side of the merit-caste debate continues, with each side getting more entrenched in their respective *Blood Sport* competitive camp corners. In a global environment with its merit imperatives, the obscured privileges of the dominant castes combined with historical distressed social/cultural capital assets of SCs, have added fuel to the ongoing debate.

Obscured/Hidden Privileges as IT Symbolic Capital

It should be clear by now that the globalized Indian IT sector can be rife with inequality contradictions. It has rendered invisible the privileged backgrounds of the transnational class. Interestingly, the obscured privileges play out at both the macro-state and meso-IT sectoral levels. At the macro state level, the knowledge for development (K4D) model (Radhakrishnan 2007: 2011) was used by the government as a tool for leapfrogging traditional modernization/development pathways. Ironically, the broad-based K4D models were 'not to be restricted' to elites. Because the framers of modern India firmly believed that science and technology would offer the best nationwide resources to spur industrial modernity

[32] Pattern recognition perspective in entrepreneurship (Baron 2006) is typically applied to separate the successful from the less successful entrepreneurs. Successful entrepreneurs, using their prior knowledge of the industry, are able to connect the dots among emerging technologies, changing demographics, markets, and government policies, to identify opportunities for new products, services, and ventures. Applied to hiring and promotion in the IT industry, pattern identification would include using personal success markers in evaluating potential candidates.

and development, the Indian Parliament established IITs, the elite technical institutions, with reservation quotas mandates. But the very principle of elite education, at one level, has obscured the caste/class privilege of the knowledge class. For example, the IITs currently serve as pipelines for many knowledge professionals recruited into the Indian IT sector. Besides, IT professionals, erroneously but ardently, believe that the IT industry ahistorically emerged and succeeded without state intervention. Even today it is the extensive government policies and programs, such as setting up technology parks in IT hubs, which continue to invigorate and cultivate the IT sector.

At the meso IT sector level, privileges associated with social and cultural locations of individuals, and even companies, make higher technical education possible for, or even available only to, those from certain backgrounds, including upper caste, education, family ties, and other obscure privileges.[33] For one, as noted earlier, IT educated professionals, who have received rigorous training in hardware and software, come from an overwhelmingly homogenous social-economic-urban location background. Although IT professionals and the IT sector claim universality in the knowledge class's resource access, it is, in historic reality, restricted to a relatively few, namely the educated professional class who are sons and daughters of the previous generations of middle class government workers, bank staff, and petit bourgeoisie. Education and higher education in particular, has continued to be the vehicle through which class inequality in the technology sector is perpetuated. For sure, the BPO sub-sector, and its non- or semi-technical skilled employees in call centres, data entry and management, and printing shops, is more open to a broader social range of society and less elitist in the IT hierarchy.

Bourdieu's theoretical treatment of *symbolic capital* nicely captures the obscured privileges underlying merit-caste nexus in IT. In Bourdieu's rendering of the symbolic nature of capital, indicated by education, income, urban location, language, or culture, those who own capital resources 'exert power from a dominant position; but this dominance is "*misrecognized*" as natural and permanent, thus making it appear as if the dominant group is not exerting power at all' (Radhakrishnan 2009: 200). Privileged Indians (by class, caste, urban residence) take pride in their ability to speak fluent,

[33] Drawn from Fernandes and Heller (2006); Krishna and Brihmadesam (2006); Radhakrishnan (2011); Rai (2002); Upadhya (2007a).

even if British accented, English. English language facility is a critical cultural capital in a globalized workplace and groups like the Dalits are found lacking in this resource (Upadhya and Vasavi 2006). Even Call Centre workplaces of the BPO sector, where employees are trained in accent modification for their 24/7 working shifts, are not quite open to Dalits and other minority groups. To recast the rampant hidden privileges in Bourdieuian terms, *pure merit* is valorized to the extent that the privileges and exclusion at work in Indian IT are concealed, even before the IT professional enters the workplace. The Indian self, embedded in the family-caste-class-gender-religion-community nexus, privileges some while disadvantaging others, often only because of the social location of their birth.

Another mechanism through which privileges are obscured lies in the *agency*, more specifically lack thereof, associated with the disadvantaged. Symbolic and material privileges accrued by knowledge professionals are authorized by the nation;[34] national authorization implies that 'merit is available to everyone who desires it'. Those who do not access these valued resources, as in the case of lower castes, either do not want them (remember they are dependent on government subsidies) or could not get them because they were not qualified enough (as in lower entrance scores for the SCs). In this privilege discourse, educational and professional credentials are equated with personal 'merit'. To the new professional class and their particular types of work, ethos, and lifestyles, the IT occupational system is open or accessible to anyone who desires it. Paradoxically, such misplaced agency further masks or obscures the perpetuated inequalities in merit acquisition. The cultural dominance of the old middle class and castes is continued, while contributing to the limited presence of Dalits, a Dalit Deficit, in the IT sector.

Dalit Deficits in Indian IT: Distressed Capital or Caste Filtering?

Considering the historical discrimination faced by SCs (Dalits), one might argue that the younger generations of Dalits face an *insecure or distressed*

[34] National authorization is part of the reason why IT professionals are considered the most privileged workers in the global economy as per Reich (1991).

social habitus that offers them limited access to the kinds of social and cultural capital needed in the globalized IT world. *Social capital resources* (Coleman 1988), embedded in family and community networks, are necessary for successful educational outcomes in the USA, be they school retention or low drop-out rates (Dika and Singh 2002). Extant research on US job search processes and occupational attainment has tied individual mobilization of resources to successful entry into and retention in a job. Other multiple dimensions of the resource mobilization needed for life success in education and in the job market include: cultural habitus or lifestyles characterized by aesthetic preferences, value commitments, and associated consumption patterns (Bourdieu 1977, 1984); *'resources-in-networks'* and information flows (Lin 1999, 2001); *'strength of weak ties'* (Granovetter 1973), and *'bridging-bonding'* social capital (Fernandez and Nichols 2002). In social capital terms, the successful FCs in IT have access to the required socially and culturally approved capital as well as the broad networks of acquaintances (weak ties) with deep resource networks that connect them to the educational and labour market. On the contrary, disadvantages in resource mobilization contribute to the Dalit deficit in IT. Even when Dalits have the requisite qualifications for the IT-BPO occupational sector, the fact that they are associated with the quota systems in education and occupations renders their merit questionable. In short, despite the official outlawing of caste-based discrimination, caste continues to be a potent, even if hidden, bridge that channels one's access to resources in modern India.

A counter explanation for the Dalit deficit in IT lies in the *'caste positionality'* and *implicit 'caste position filtering'* bias embedded in the hiring management's pattern recognition strategies. Applied to caste, symbolic capital can operate via the lens of 'Caste Positionality' through which a person's success experiences are filtered. Positionality can also work through class, community, urban location, and other ascribed boundaries. Because caste and community are ascribed characteristics that are near immutable, the power of 'Particularity'[35] becomes salient in people's lived experiences. If one's identity is framed by hard, ascribed boundaries, that is, if you come from a particular social/caste position and even urban or rural location, you might have more depth and definition to your identity that is harder to change than if you grew up in an eclectic, multi-cultural/caste/class/geographical environment. And if caste filtering undergirds

[35] See Brooks (2012).

the recognition of patterns of behaviours/skills/values predicted to lead to success, new hires can be quite similar to those already in the industry, namely the forward castes and cultural elites. In other words, through a homo-social reproduction process, caste hierarchy and related norms can be diffused and reproduced in the IT sector structures.

Against these theoretical contexts, it is possible to ask: to what extent do IT professionals, embedded in gendered, religious, national, and class histories, engage in hidden 'implicit caste filtering' as part of their pattern recognition processes. IT professionals represent quite a homogenous elite and are almost always drawn from certain (class, caste, and urban) backgrounds. Caste and privilege filtering in IT, when it exists, lead to reproduction of privileges. Stated differently, the worker profile required in IT and the outsourcing business makes it more difficult for people from lower caste/class and non-urban backgrounds to break into IT, because they are deemed to lack the social and cultural attributes deemed necessary to work in a '"global" environment' (Channa 1993; Upadhya 2007a). SC skills are not authorized as fitting into the patterns known to succeed in the IT world. Given the potency of the 'appropriately different' IT persona, there is no reason to expect drastically different filtering processes in the BPO sector either, even though it is lower on the IT stratification hierarchy.

A Gendered Lens

A gendered lens offers another tool in clarifying the embedded nature of caste privileges in the IT sector. Highlighting the extent to which women are included in a national narrative of pure IT merit and the ways gender based inequalities and gender-caste privilege interactions are factored into the constructions of IT merit are instructive in clarifying the boundaries of caste reproduction in IT.

To their credit, Indian IT companies have been making concerted efforts in recent years to not only include but also to empower women in their workforce. An illustrative case in point is NASSCOM's gender inclusivity awards.[36] To NASSCOM's credit, the award recognizes best

[36] Available at: https://www.infosys.com/about/awards/Pages/nasscom-gender-inclusivity-award.aspx. Perhaps in response to pressures from their global parent companies and partners, there are also initiatives for the PWDs (people with disability), LGBT communities, multiple generations, and nationalities.

practices in IT companies that promote gender empowerment and leadership development. Infosys won the award in the 'IT services and product companies' category for the second consecutive year. Gender initiatives are driven partly by the growing number of women graduating with engineering and information technology degrees, notwithstanding the leaky gender pipelines in engineering education. But, if meritorious IT women are also products of caste and class privileges,[37] caste inequality reproduction in Indian IT can only deepen. Besides, the IT sector remains silent on caste diversity/inclusivity initiatives.

Like their male counterparts, Indian women in IT also culturally streamline their work lives. Upadhya (2007b) and Radhakrishnan (2011) demonstrated some ways in which Indian women knowledge professionals maintain an Indian core while adopting a global persona in the interest of their own productivity and advancement. There was a time when government bank jobs, the jobs that their parents held, were considered appropriate for Indian women; but, not anymore. IT women, unlike their parents, want to attain financial independence before getting married. But marriage is still heavily desired, indicating a gendered adaptation to appropriate difference. The new Indian IT woman creates a respectable femininity that is 'marked simultaneously through her potential for professionalism in the workplace and through her adherence to an essentialized notion of Indianness' (Radhakrishnan 2011: 49). Even when faced with the proverbial glass ceiling, the women 'naturalized [it] in gendered terms' (Radhakrishnan 2011: 105). Radhakrishnan's women were more likely to do the softer and natural jobs of communication, writing, quality control, and maintenance but not ones with the harder, as in coding, content. Many technically degreed Indian women, and families on their behalf, desired to work in IT divisions that offered palpable insulation from non-related-outsider males. Computer work in cubicles located in fancy air conditioned buildings that did not involve much face-to-face interactions with outsiders, particularly men, was attractive to IT women. IT jobs with flexible relationship to work choices and hours compatible with family-work balance, were also more appealing than those considered

[37] See also Shenoy-Packer (2014) for a discussion of the multi-dimensional lives of Indian women; they simultaneously benefit from their caste-class privileges while living within a patriarchal society that disadvantages them in the public and private spheres.

inappropriate and 'unsafe' because of the required travel. For sure, these women were 'penalized' in their professional advancement and often hit the glass ceiling, perhaps because of their limited weak network ties (Granovetter 1973), resources-in-IT *networks* (Coleman 1988; Lin 1999, 2001), and *gendered pattern recognition* (Kanter 1977b) by management with their *symbolic, hidden sources* (Bourdieu 1977, 1984) *of gendered merit.*

Notwithstanding women's pigeon-holing and advancement penalties in IT, not all women are so blessed with the options of crafting their appropriate difference. Indian women of dominant groups tend to have the edge over other women or for that matter even lower caste men. Because of the *interlocking or intersectional matrix* (Fernandez 1997) of compounding privileges of gender and caste,[38] only the merit/skills of dominant caste/class women and their *strong family ties* (Granovetter 1973) to IT men are culturally authorized. They are also authorized by the society to create married roles that are appropriately different. It is also interesting that, in the IT habitus, privileged gender equality, or inequality, as the case might be, is more readily accessible and amenable for discussion, analyses, and redress than caste (in)equality. While women of dominant castes have increasingly been recognized and authorized as national symbols, the same recognition does not seem to be afforded to lower caste women and their men.

Here again, isomorphic pressures offer clues. Normative, coercive, and mimetic isomorphic[39] pressures from international partners might encourage, or even coerce, Indian IT companies to mimic the gender inclusive

[38] In a patriarchal society like India, an additive hierarchical ranking of caste and gender might look like this: men from the upper castes will be at the top of the pyramid, followed by men from the less dominant castes. Women, albeit similarly caste stratified as their male counterparts, will follow below men in the hierarchy. In an interactional ranking, upper caste women follow their caste men; lower caste men and women remain at the bottom.

[39] Isomorphism in its traditional institutional sense, as defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), captured an organizational reality where the less powerful companies followed the models for organizational structures and norms offered by more powerful companies. While there is no systematic evidence, in this manuscript, for caste isomorphism in the Indian IT workplace, it can be argued that the recent attention to gender diversity in the IT occupational sector is perhaps due to isomorphic pressures.

social habitus of their parent or client companies (Parthasarathy 2012; Currie 2012). Gender equality is a global issue and Indian IT companies operating in a globalized environment are strongly encouraged to craft gender inclusive workplaces. But, caste inequalities, localized to the Indian context, escape the inequality radar of international parent companies. Absent external pressures, caste hierarchies, and dynamics in the broader Indian society are more likely, than not, to filter into IT corporations.

Resistance to Caste Diversity Revisited

To recap the resistance to caste diversity in Indian IT: The main driver of the dissonance in the gender and caste discourse is, once again, the perceived disconnects, be they putative or real, between the practice of quotas (reservation) in government educational institutions and IT *pure merit*. The reservation castes do not have to meet the same stringent entrance criteria as the dominant castes in admission to government technical institutions. Consequently, in the 'merit' discourse of the IT sector and in the public arena, SC IT professionals are not judged to be as meritorious as those who do not have the benefits of reservations. Arguments against reservations in the public discourse have ranged widely. One common narrative is that unearned privileges awarded to the (inherently) less qualified, less talented, and unmotivated (aka backward castes and classes) has itself created a new system of inequality. That only the 'creamy layer' (the rich) in the lower caste groups have been beneficiaries of reservation programs is another accusation. Reservations in electoral offices being used as a vote getting tool by caste politicians adds more fuel to the already heated caste-merit contests.

The deep resistance to caste reservations evoked in the private sector, including IT, is because in the words of Radhakrishnan (2011: 93), '... the introduction of caste-based quotas appears to threaten not only the talent base of the company, as the leaders in the industry claim, but more fundamentally the abstract language of merit ...'. In the contentious and visceral caste reservations vs merit debates, the government/public sector educational and work institutions are dubbed 'backward'. The projections are so gloomy that the IT sector views the government, and the reserved groups, as standing in the way of India and Indian IT industry's rosy future trajectory. In fact, discussions about caste diversity and inclusivity have become non-negotiable.

On balance, pitting merit against caste in the organization of the Indian IT social habitus and its 'merit' culture making project has led to reproduction of caste-based inequalities in Indian IT. Even the progress women have made in Indian IT, unlike the strong resistance to disrupting caste domination, has caste undertones.[40] It is then axiomatic that these embedded processes, left to their natural evolution, will lead to deepening of inequalities in the Indian IT sector. The ostensibly non-caste IT occupational sector, mimics by replicating the hierarchies of the broader Indian society in which it is embedded. Applied to IT organizations, caste inequalities can be theorized to be a consequence, even if unintended, of institutions trying to achieve rationality in uncertain and constraining globalized environments. These pressures, and associated emphasis on 'merit', may also explain some of the resistance to opening the IT world of work to SCs.

Disrupting Caste Reproduction: Theoretical Possibilities

Other sources of resistance to disrupting caste reproduction lie in historical incidents and philosophical understandings of the workings of social dominance and related discrimination in India. The equal opportunity and quota/reservation policies were formulated by the founders of modern India without the benefit of empirical research on market and non-market caste discrimination (Annapoorna and Bagalkoti 2011; Biao 2007; Rai 2002; Upadhya 2007a). Besides, the social and economic benefits that the quota system make available to the disadvantaged SCs is viewed by dominant castes from a 'zero-sum' perspective.

While history cannot be changed, and perceptions are difficult to alter, Social Dominance Theory (Pratto et al. 1994; Whitley 1999) and Bourdieu's (1995) *Symbolic Struggles* open up some realistic possibilities for reducing the role caste plays in Indian IT. Starting from the assumption that individuals tend to form and maintain group-based hierarchies, social dominance theorists have examined both structural and individual psychological factors that lead to group dominance and oppression. Group-based hierarchies and oppression are conceptualized to be functions of the complex and mutually reinforcing mix of individual

[40] For example, Shenoy-Parker's upper-caste/class women felt the limiting burden of caste quotas as they tried to advance their professional career.

orientation, discriminatory behaviours, legitimizing ideologies, and social allocation practices of institutions. For an individual, a social dominance orientation is the product of in-group desires to dominate over and to be superior to out-groups (Pratto et al. 1994: 742; Whitley 1999). Groups perpetuate dominant ideologies by institutionalizing practices and beliefs about their dominance. Individuals who share these beliefs and ideologies tend to support institutions that reinforce these ideals and practices. As a result, desired resources, including the rewards of power, status, and privileges, are funnelled towards dominant and powerful groups while less desirable goods are allocated to the powerless. Under this scenario, it stands to reason that dominant groups will have little incentive to challenge the status quo and enact real change. Restructuring caste hierarchies to be more equal, even in the new globalized IT occupational settings, is bound to be perceived by the dominant castes to be a personal loss, an outcome to be avoided at all costs. In fact, they can be expected to justify and legitimize ideologies that place the onus for unequal caste standing on the individuals' lack of merit qualifications for the job.

However, there are conditions under which we could expect the dominant castes to be open to structural changes in institutions. Again, Bourdieu's symbolic struggles and the limits of symbolic capital in preserving the status quo offer promise (Appelrouth and Edles 2011). To Bourdieu, while symbolic capital embodied in prestige, honour, reputation, or charisma offers individuals the options to mould the social world according to their 'self-interested' economic and political desires, there are limits to the powers of symbolic capital (2011: 454). To successfully utilize symbolic capital so that one's interests are preserved and promoted, Bourdieu argues, such capital must be perceived by subordinate groups as legitimate and authoritative, or at least 'disinterested' or unaffected by self-interest. Also, as interpreted by Radhakrishnan (2009: 200), in Bourdieu's 'treatment of symbolic capital', those with symbolic capital implicitly exert power from a dominant position, implicit because their dominance is 'misrecognized' as being natural and permanent, making it appear as if they are not exerting their power at all.

By extension, a scenario can be hypothesized where the dominant caste group supports realignment of caste hierarchies, at least in the new IT occupational sectors. They can legitimize caste inequalities as products of historical legacies and consequently absolve themselves of personal responsibility for the same. Recast in Bourdieu's (particularly 1990 and in other

publications as well) language, dominant castes desirous of participating in realigning caste hierarchies in Indian IT need to become more aware of the structural sources of inequalities and legitimate stakeholders in caste equality, as well as become disinterested in zero-sum outcomes. It is then reasonable to predict that dominant castes, in response to global economic imperatives, might become more open to structural caste realignments. However, such caste realignments will not be complete without a concomitant fostering of positive caste consciousness (following Rajashekar's (2002) '*caste identity* theory'), a call to lower castes to become conscious of and affirm their own caste identity just as the dominant castes do.

Of course, these changes will require active public (government)-private partnerships. Thorat and Newman (2010a: 24) and some of their colleagues have offered evidence that casts doubt on whether market or individual/private corporate initiatives by themselves can correct inefficiencies of caste-based labour market allocation. Public economic empowerment along with equal opportunity policies might be needed in the IT sector, if the sector is to disrupt its march towards deepening caste inequalities and if India is to begin shedding its caste foundations. Realistically, such disruptions might initially be localized to the cutting edge IT sub-sectors.

Caste Reproduction Potential in Indian IT: A Recapitulation

In the caste-imbued Indian social atmosphere, the ICT based occupational revolution in India has the untapped potential of being an ideal site for disrupting the traditional caste-occupation link. Unfortunately, much scholarly research signals the introduction of caste inequalities in the IT industry. The IT-BPO occupational sector has turned into a new domain of the privileged castes, they say. Educational credentials in the IT sector, while seemingly modern and non-nepotistic in terminology, rather than equalizing opportunities, often act as a double edged sword (D'Costa 2011; Jodhka and Newman 2010; Raghunath 2010; Upadhya 2006). IT professionals, almost uniformly, tend to hail from well-resourced backgrounds. Merit-based elites are, more often than not, urban and upper castes.[41]

[41] Specific examples can be found in Banerjee, Bertrand, Datta, and Mullainathan (2008); Krishna and Brihmadesam (2006); Raghunath (2010); and Upadhya (2007a).

Distinctions within the intra-IT occupational sector, and between inter-occupational sectors of IT and non-IT, have been attributed to the filtering through inter-sectioning privileges based on caste, class, gender, religion, community, and urban location. In the final analyses, even though the IT occupational sector, unlike the traditional Indian occupations, does not have a caste foundation, the *inter-sectioning privileged processes* have led to the re-creation and fostering of caste-based cultural hierarchies in the new IT habitus. Since the constitutional protections accorded to Dalits and OBCs in the public sector do not have a standing in the private IT industry, they face hurdles in entry, retention, and advancement. Given more than half a century of educational quotas for SCs, including in the prestigious public institutions of higher education like the IITs and other technical institutions, one may expect to find qualified Dalits in the IT-BOP occupational sector in proportions approximately similar to their graduation rates from technical institutions. Unfortunately data to test this expectation are not maintained in the private sector.

Nonetheless, unpacking the IT Merit Construction Project offers a window into caste reproduction in the IT social habitus. The fervent contrasts that are drawn between a streamlined *pure IT merit* and *reservation merit* obscure the symbolic privileges of forward castes in the industry. The Merit Camp equates caste with caste reservations; reservations, they say, undermine the attentively crafted and practiced pure merit credentials, an efficient management tool for success in a globalized industry. To the Merit Camp, caste hierarchy and associated symbolic capital, and hidden privileges are not constituent elements of caste. But, as the Caste Camp has countered, streamlined pure merit is but a symbolic tool to manage the matrix of symbolic and material caste privileges that intertwine and reinforce each other to create and sustain the unique merit IT culture. The merit construction project makes it possible for caste to be factored into pure merit constructions and become discriminatory of lower castes.

It is the passionately vocal, sometimes strident, arguments on either side of the debate that take on the shades of a 'blood sport'. The growing popularity of technology jobs, along with structural constraints in access to technical education, further fuels the 'blood sport'. Yet, the caste dimensions in the competitive sport of technical education favour the dominant castes and even IT qualified women. Disrupting caste reproduction in Indian IT will require corporate social responsibility that leverages the strategic business values of caste diversity and inclusiveness.

Settling the Caste-Merit Debates: Using Mixed Methodologies

Sorting out the volatile contestations about the nature of the merit-caste debates in Indian IT and claims about the new inequality vector require a multilayered set of perspectives. Multiple voices, expressed through different media, were tapped to provide a more robust empirical foundation for the Merit Culture Making project and its potential for reproducing caste inequalities in the Indian IT sector.

An online web survey, fielded with rank-and-file Indian IT professionals about their IT work experiences, offered a ground level view of their merit culture making experiences. Supplementing the individual employee experiences, were interviews with IT key informants or knowledge leaders who provided a broader organizational perspective. National secondary data on Human Capital, and other capital resources set the national context for the merit-caste debates. Rounding out this multilayered portrayal was content analyses of scholarly writing on Indian IT and newspaper reports of caste tensions and successes. Informed consent, voluntary participation, and relevant anonymity/confidentiality guarantees marked the ethical protocol for the primary data collection process, both through the web surveys and narrative interviews.

Web Survey

The web survey, administered during January–August 2010, was completed by 514 professionals who worked in Indian IT companies. Survey respondents answered questions about their employment history in IT, their views on the relative weights of 'merit' versus 'caste' in their portrayal of an ideal IT employee, and general thoughts on caste and the role of women in IT.

Planning to field the survey offered the first valuable lesson about the contentious nature of caste in contemporary India. The original plan was to distribute the surveys through the Human Resource (HR) divisions of Indian IT companies. However, in initial conversations with a few HR staff in India, it quickly became clear that they would not (and could not, according to them) officially distribute a survey on caste to their employees because of their companies' equal employment opportunity policies. Consequently, IT professionals in India, identified through snowball

sampling, were invited to complete the survey. The goal was to get a large enough sample (at least 500) to counter at least two sets of potential limitations in snowball sampling: the first of generalizability that comes with a non-random snow-ball sampling technique; the second of authentic reporting problems potentially associated with a confidential web survey.

As of 15 August 2010, 514 IT professionals completed the survey. The initial 'full' survey, which included detailed caste questions, was completed by 149 individuals. However, due to the intense resistance to completing a survey that included multiple questions about caste, a more streamlined survey with only 1 caste question[42] was distributed, through HR managers and other knowledge leaders; this version was completed by 365 IT professionals. In the following chapters, these respondents will be referred to, alternatively, as rank-and-file IT professionals, or IT professionals, or survey respondents. Copies of the email invitation with anonymity assurances and informed consent procedures, as well as the long and streamlined forms of the surveys are available in Appendix 1A.2 and 1A.3.

Qualitative Interviews with Key Informants

To flesh out an organizational perspective on the IT merit construction process, caste reproduction and other related dynamics, in-person qualitative narrative interviews were conducted with sources knowledgeable about the Indian IT industry. Conversations were held with 30 key informants, including HR managers, senior staff, consultants, educators, and social commentators. These leaders were located in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Trivandrum; these are Tier I IT cities in the four southern Indian states that either have IT hubs or emerging IT hubs.[43] A wide range of topics were explored; these included the hiring process, such as what they look for in a potential employee and what qualifies and disqualifies an applicant, as well as important elements in their retention success. Discussions about reservation and quota system were gingerly approached. There was general consensus in the IT

[42] More details of the specific caste questions are available in Chapters 2 and 3.

[43] Most multinational technology firms have operations in these hub cities and have significantly transformed the landscapes of these cities. IT hubs are expanding to Tier II cities also (John and Phadnis 2014).

knowledge community that Dalits often gravitate towards public sector jobs (Deshpande and Newman 2010).

Unlike the guaranteed reserved quotas for entrance into and job security in the public sector, private companies including IT/BPOs are not required to adhere to the SC/ST/OBC quota system. Recent demands in certain political circles to require private companies to hire employees according to the public sector reservation/quota system were resisted by most key informants. However, a few BPO companies like Infosys Technologies, have instituted pilot programs to recruit and retain qualified Dalits in their workforce; sources knowledgeable about these programs were also interviewed to ascertain their experiences with the caste diversity initiatives. All interview respondents were guaranteed confidentiality in reports of their responses.

National Secondary Data

To provide a national empirical basis for the caste-merit debates, data from two national human and economic capital surveys were accessed. The 2005–6 NFHS–3 National Family Health Survey[44] and the 2005 India Human Development Survey (IHDS)[45] included valuable information on caste and regional distribution of wealth, education, and other socioeconomic resources per individuals and households. This data offered a national assessment of the Dalit deficit thesis and related issues.

Scholarly and Newspaper Sources

Content analyses of scholarly literature, case studies, and other empirical writings, on the Indian IT companies offered additional glimpses into the workings of IT companies. Also used were newspaper sources that regularly publish reports on caste, caste induced tensions, and commentaries on the current national discussions on caste. Some examples of newspapers accessed were: *The Indian Express* (indianexpress.com) *Times of India* (timesofindia.com), *Deccan Herald* (deccanherald.com), and

[44] See Desai, Vanneman, and National Council of Applied Economic Research (2005). India Human Development Survey (IHDS) New Delhi.

[45] International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International (2007).

electronic sources like The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)'s *Dalits in News* (ncdhr.org.in).

Data Analyses Strategies

Both quantitative statistical and qualitative analytic tools were utilized in an iterative, dialectic, and convergent fashion to capitalize on the complementary data sources. Survey data, interview comments, and scholarly and newspaper writings were merged and interspersed throughout the manuscript to critically validate the main themes. For example, to develop a portrait of the Indian IT occupational structure, the employment and educational histories of web survey respondents and national sample demographics were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Factor analyses captured the IT merit and other metrics in the 'merit-culture making' project. The comments in the survey and in the qualitative interviews offered rich narratives on the IT merit-making project and the caste-merit debates. Van Manen's (1997) hermeneutic phenomenology,[46] emerging out of people's lived experiences, was another analytic strategy used. On the one hand, the main tropes or themes in the study participants' (both surveys and interviews) narrative comments about caste in the IT sector were guided by the objectives of the research. At the same time, enough room was allowed for new tropes to emerge in the study participants' verbal and written responses about additional dimensions they thought were relevant for a study on caste in the Indian IT sector.

A Road Map to the Upcoming Chapters

The story of how the Indian IT has the potential to become *a new vector of caste inequality is rooted in the IT merit construction project* and the contradictions in the *Merit-Caste debates* in the Indian IT social habitus (Chapter 2). What does the profile of the IT occupational structure look like in the lived experiences of rank-and-file IT professionals? What is a typical occupational trajectory of IT professionals in the new occupational sector? As IT professionals engaged in their merit culture making project in their work habitus, they *valorized merit as pure* while *caste and other traditional symbolic privileges stayed obscured.* Yet, *merit,* to them, *was*

[46] Also see Laverty (2003).

also holistic, with subjective markers of English fluency, habits of the mind, intellect, spirit, and of 'soft' skills of communication, that offered entry points through which traditional social vectors of caste, community, and religion make their way into the IT occupational habitat.

It was when rank-and-file IT professionals and key informants were pointedly invited to talk about their views of and experiences with caste in the merit construction process, that the conversations became passionately vocal, sometimes strident, and other times palpably silent (Chapter 3). Sifting through the vehement and nuanced voices of IT professionals, shades of a competitive 'blood sport' were revealed. Those on the '"Merit' side of the rink characterized the IT social space as *'caste neutral'*; Indian IT companies, they say, are guided by ideals of meritocracy and equality. Private IT companies did not abide by the government's reservation policies. Reservations, with their diluted or reduced standards, were equated with merit deficits. On the other hand, the opposing *'Caste Camp'* emphasized the *obscured forward caste privileges*, the *implicit caste filtering* based on perceived and/or real upper caste merit, *the Dalit social capital deficit*, and *resultant discriminatory outcomes*. Using caste hermeneutical lenses to articulate their case, the Caste Camp asserted with equal vehemence that casteism has not disappeared. *Societal caste hierarchies* have been reproduced in the IT sector either in its original or modified forms through *caste networks and caste-tinged filtered pattern recognitions*. In the original representation of caste in Indian society, SCs are at the bottom of the hierarchy. In the modified form, SCs are still at the lowest rung, but the top caste tier has been expanded to make room for other dominant class/castes, 'communities', in the top tier of a resource intensive IT sector. In the absence of hard caste evidence to test the competing contentions and their respective outcomes, the only tenable conclusion to be deductively drawn was that the IT sector, rather than being the caste neutral bastion many claim it to be, has in fact become the new frontier for caste. The much *valorized 'merit'* criteria, by virtue of *embedded-privilege exclusion of SCs and other disadvantaged groups*, has opened the doors for *diffusion of caste norms and reproduction* in Indian IT, and the rise of a new caste inequality vector.

The arguments and counter arguments about caste in the merit culture making project are also played out in the arena of Indian higher technical education (Chapter 4). The intensity of the debate is fuelled partly by the growing popularity of technology jobs but in equal part by the

caste underpinnings in access to education. The elite public funded Indian technical education system stands in sharp contrast to the weaker, but pricier, private technical institutions. Even so, the *caste dimensions in the competitive sport of technical education still favour the dominant castes.* To the SC and poor OBC youth, who are priced out of the private market, the relatively less expensive seats reserved for them in public institutions are the only realistic choice. Ironically, the public nature of prestigious technical institutions has made them a primary site where the Merit-Caste blood sport is overtly waged. Yet, private technical institutions are where the solid foundations for caste inequalities in the IT occupational sector are silently laid. Just as both public and private institutions of technical higher education have become the sites where merit is culturally constructed, they can also be ideal locations for deconstructing the merit culture making project and revealing the project's caste foundations.

Gender initiatives in the IT sector (Chapter 5) offered a useful contrast to the resistance to caste diversity in Indian IT. The singular tool for gender parity, the current diversity hallmark in the IT work habitus, has been *gender neutral IT merit.* However, gender diversity in the IT workplace is a work in progress; the gender-neutral IT merit values, the *glass ceiling faced by women,* and a *singular gender perspective* were indicative of the persistent challenges faced by women and by the IT sector in transforming the IT work habitat into a more gender inclusive space. While *gender inclusiveness* was not quite on the radar of the rank-and-file IT professionals, gender discussion—analyses and redress options—were more accessible and amenable in the IT sector than caste inequalities. At this time in the nation's history, caste, perhaps, is a bridge too high or far to cross.

What would it take for the IT sector to live up to its predicted role as the new equalizer and societal savior from the vestiges of casteism and other inequalities (Chapter 6)? Taking cues from the gender diversity models that the leaders in the IT sector, like NASSCOM, have celebrated and encouraged, a call is made for corporate social responsibility *to adopt caste inclusive human resource techniques* to potentially disrupt caste transference and reproduction in IT. If Indian IT is to deliver on its promise to bend the arc of inequality in India, sector *sub-units, like their cutting-edge knowledge production divisions,* will need to take leadership in leveraging the strategic business values of caste diversity and inclusiveness.

Appendix 1A.1: Merit-Caste Contestations in Historical and Contemporary India

Because the Merit-Caste debates, and their potential for existing caste-based inequalities to be reinforced in the Indian IT sector, are rooted in the historicity of the caste system, a brief review of historical and contemporary caste dynamics in India is pertinent. The caste system continues to permeate, even if subtly, major life course events in the lives of Indians. Whether hidden in caste privileges or explicit in caste social redress programs, caste identity is an important marker for many Indians, in deciding who is merit worthy in access to education, jobs, the legal and political systems as well as in marriage and in community relationships.

The Caste System and Inequalities in Historical Perspective

The roots of the caste system have been associated, in recent genetic studies (Engelhardt and Stephens 2010; Moorjani et al. 2013), with the practice of endogamy that originated about 4,000 years ago. Genetic information collected from 73 Indian and Pakistani groups showed that, around that period, mixing through marriage stopped and the endogamous caste system started.

Prior to the start of admixture, there was free genetic mixture between two broad homogenous groups, Ancestral North Indians (ANI) and Ancestral South Indians (ASI).[47] Later, socio-economic imperatives, such as protection of wealth, were predicted to have contributed to the rise of caste endogamy.

At an elementary historical level, the caste system comprises an endogamous set of groups with religiously prescribed set of practices that define some as hierarchically 'purer' than others. Stated in broad terms, the caste hierarchy or the Varna system in India has five strata: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Shudra, and SCs (also referred to as Dalits). However, within each of these ranks are the scores of ground-level 'castes' or jatis into which people are born, marry, and die. To add to complexity, the caste system is simultaneously an all India phenomenon as well as highly localized.

[47] ANIs are related to Central Asians, middle easterners, Caucasians, and Europeans while the ASIs were primarily from the sub-continent (Engelhardt and Stephens 2010; Moorjani et al. 2013).

Caste names, for example, vary from place to place. But, irrespective of the local variability, caste privileges have traditionally been translated into educational and economic privileges afforded to some and denied to others. And, far from being a historical anachronism, caste continues to be socially relevant in modern India.

While the caste system is a social and economic classification supported by religious ideologies and unique customary rules and norms, the core governing principle of the system is not simply of distinctions among different caste groups, but also about inequality, social exclusion and discrimination. The graded caste inequality implies hierarchically unequal entitlement; every caste, except the forward or higher castes, has suffered and continues to do so, a degree of exclusion and denial. As one moves down the caste hierarchy, the rights and privileges get reduced even more. Dalits or SCs suffer the most from untouchability, residential, and social exclusion. The OBCs have also faced exclusion in education and employment, but not as much as the SCs.

Who are the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs)?

In contemporary India, SCs, STs, and OBCs are three historically marginalized groups in India that are constitutionally recognized. 'Scheduled Castes', which includes the former 'untouchables', are called so because their caste names are listed in the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, a schedule of the Indian constitution. Currently, the term Dalits, meaning downtrodden or oppressed, has gained currency because it is a non-pejorative term. The list of schedules castes are periodically updated (caste names are deleted or added) by each state in the Union to account for changing social and economic circumstances (see Government of India 1978 and 2014). The term 'Scheduled Tribes' refers to specific indigenous peoples of India whose status is acknowledged, to some formal degree, by national legislation (Government of India, Constitution, Scheduled Tribes Order, 1950); the list has been amended in 1976 and later.

When the Indian Constitution listed SCs/Dalits in a separate schedule, only those who professed Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism were included; Christian or Muslims were entirely omitted (Paragraph 3 of the Constitution, Scheduled Caste Order of 1950). However, because

there were many marginalized groups in the Christian and Muslim communities, there was a growing clamour for making reservation provisions for them too. The Mandal Commission, which was set up in response, denoted a third category, 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs) in its report issued in 1980; OBCs included the socially and economically exploited groups of Christians and Muslims (Rai 2002). Other Backward Classes, a third collective term used by the Indian government classifies castes and classes, irrespective of religion, which are socially and educationally disadvantaged.

As of the 2011 Census of India, SCs represented 16.6 percent and STs 8.6 percent of the population. The OBC count was at 41.0 per cent of the population in 2006. A third (30.8 per cent) belonged to the FCs (Sachar 2006). Like the SC and ST listing, the OBC list is also periodically updated (as recently as 2014) through constitutional amendments, to account for changing social and economic circumstances. For example, OBCs comprised 52 per cent of the country's population (across all religions) in the Mandal Commission report of 1980; by 2006, when the National Sample Survey Organization was conducted, the OBC numbers shrunk to 41 per cent. Downward or upward shifts in the OBC numbers and OBC group lists (which are maintained both by the Central and State governments to account for local variations) are the result of communities being added or removed depending on their social, educational, and economic conditions.

How is the OBC Classification Distributed Across Different Religious Communities?

As seen in the Table 1A.1, OBCs were more likely to be Hindus (42.8 per cent), followed by Muslims (39.2 per cent) and Christians (24.8 per cent). The Hindu, Christian, and Sikh communities had the most caste diversity. Aside from the plurality of Hindu OBCs (42.8 per cent), the rest were primarily from either forward communities (26 per cent) or SCs (22.2 per cent). Christians were more likely to be part of the forward groups (33.3 per cent) or Scheduled Tribes (32.8 per cent) than OBC (24.8 per cent). In contrast, Muslims were either forward (59.5 per cent) or OBC (39.2 per cent). The Sikh community was similar, yet slightly different, to their Hindu counterparts in their caste diversity: a plurality of Sikhs were from forward communities (46.1 per cent), followed by the

Appendix: Table 1A.1 Distribution of Population of Each Religion by Caste Categories

Religion/Caste	SCs	STs	OBCs	Forward Castes/Others	(n per 1,000)
Hinduism	22.2%	9.0	42.8	26.0	1,598 (80.0%)
Islam	0.8%	0.5	39.2	59.5	283 (14.1%)
Christianity	9.0%	32.8	24.8	33.3	46 (2.3%)
Sikhism	30.7%	0.9	22.4	46.1	39 (1.9%)
Jainism	0.0%	2.6	3.0	94.3	8 (0.4%)
Buddhism	89.5%	7.4	0.4	2.7	16 (0.8%)
Zoroastrianism	0.0%	15.9	13.7	70.4	7 (0.4%)
Others	2.6%	82.5	6.25	8.7	2 (0.1%)
Total	**19.7%**	**8.5%**	**41.1%**	**30.8%**	**1,997**

Source: Merged sample of Schedule 1 and Schedule 10 of available data from the NSSO 55th (1999-2000) and NSSO 61st Rounds (2004–05) Round Survey. Available at: http://mospi.gov.in/national_data_bank/pdf/NSS%2061st%20Round-521.pdf. Retrieved on 28 April 2015.

30.7 per cent of SCs and 22.4 per cent of OBCs. Finally, the Jain (94.3 per cent) and Zoroastrian (70.4 per cent) communities were primarily FCs.

Why Do SCs, STs, and OBCs Receive Special Privileges?

The historical occupational foundation of castes is one mechanism through which the caste-economic nexus has been enacted and inequalities perpetuated. Each caste group has a traditional association with one or two occupations (Srinivas 1976). The Brahmins who occupy the top strata of the caste hierarchy are priests and educators; Kshatriyas, on the second rung, are the warriors/landowners and are followed by Vaisyas, the merchants/farmers. The Shudras, the fourth and lower caste, are the artisans, agriculturalists, dhobis (clothes washers). The Scheduled Castes, also known as Dalits or Harijans, the former untouchables, are outside the caste hierarchy, relegated to jobs that are considered ritually polluting to the upper caste members; street cleaning, barbering, and working with animal products such as leather and meat, and with human and animal waste and the dead are some examples of polluting occupations.

It was to address the centuries old exclusion and discrimination of SCs and STs that the founders and writers of the Constitution of the republic

of independent India (1950) established economic empowerment or EE (pro-poor) policies, supplemented with equal opportunity (EO) policies for SC and STs (Thorat and Newman 2010b). While the EE policies were expected to improve the capital assets of the poor, irrespective of caste status, the founders made a prescient assumption that in the absence of EO policies, SCs will continue to be discriminated against. Moved by the manifest, visible social and economic disparities between the upper and lower castes (particularly 'scheduled' castes), the framers of the Indian constitution did not wait for academic research to demonstrate said inequalities before implementing equal opportunity policies or reservations in government sponsored education, employment, and in the political process.

The quotas and earmarked seats (not to exceed 50 per cent) in government institutions of education, occupations, and elected bodies are part of the EO social redress programs. For example, all central government-funded educational institutions, including higher education institutions, reserve 15 per cent of the seats for students of SCs or Dalit groups. Later in 1980 (based on the Mandal Commission Report) the reservation group was expanded to include a broader range of excluded groups, under the title 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs). The total percentage of reservations (for SCs, STs, and OBCs) was also increased up to 49.5 per cent in higher education, jobs, and in elected political offices; 15 per cent for SCs; 7.5 per cent for STs; 27 per cent for OBC.

Special Privileges and Caste Tensions

The reservation and quota system has been a simple, but administratively robust program to redress centuries old inequalities in access to higher education (but not with what happens once they are admitted (Parthasarathy 2012)). Under the existing social justice program, community identity (not class within the community) is the sole marker of entitlement to social justice redress programs. But, questions have been raised about whether everybody in the SC and OBC communities qualifies for reservation. Scheduled caste and OBC based reservations have been litigated periodically[48] but have withstood legal scrutiny. For

[48] Few salient examples: (*a*) M R Balaji v Mysore AIR 1963 SC 649: put 50 per cent cap on reservations; (*b*) Supreme Court in Indira Sawhney &

example, the exclusion of the 'creamy layer' in OBC communities from the scope of reservation policies is one issue about OBC reservation quotas that has been litigated and sustained in the country's Supreme Court, first in 2007 (in Ashok Kumar vs. Union of India). The 'creamy layer' was defined by economic (family income above 600,000 rupees a year) or social capital; this group includes, children of doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, actors, consultants, media professionals, writers, bureaucrats, defense officers of colonel and equivalent rank or higher, high court and Supreme Court judges, all central and state government Class A and B officials, and MPs and MLAs. But the 'creamy layer' issue in higher education has been litigated in favour of OBC and SC caste status, and not class, identities. The primary reasoning has been two-fold: excluding the creamy layer of SCs and OBCs from the reservation program will shut out the very group (creamy layer) that is most likely to go to college and make reservations in education available only to the economically marginalized groups that are the least likely to use it. Besides, with creamy layer exclusions, where caste is replaced by class, discount caste discrimination or disadvantage (Deshpande 2012). Indian courts have been very clear that the 'Creamy Layer' principle, cannot be applied to STs and SCs. SCs and STs are legally deemed to be separate classes by themselves. In addition, the quota provisions were extended to what some call, the last bastion of upper caste privilege, the elite central government educational institutes like IITs, IIMs (Indian Institute of Management), and central universities. 'With social justice legislation now covering two-thirds of the population, the upper castes were exposed for the minority they have always been' (Deshpande 2012: 229). However, the redress programs did not address what happens once SCs are admitted to these institutions (see Parthasarathy 2012).

Ors vs. Union of India. AIR 1993 SC 477, 1992 Supp (3) SCC 217: upheld implementation of separate reservation for other backward classes in central government jobs; ordered exclusion of 'creamy layer' of OBCs from enjoying reservation facilities; reinforced restrictions of reservations within 50 per cent limit; declared separate reservations for economically poor among forward castes as invalid; and declared separate reservations for economically poor among forward castes as invalid; (*c*) A variety of court judgements about reservations as they apply, or do not, to promotions within jobs. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_Cases_Related_to_Reservation_in_India.

Complaints against the reservation system have come from both sides. Those against the system point to reserved seats being left unfilled; only 7 per cent of 27 per cent quota filled mainly because of limited numbers of OBC students in the primary school pipelines. A political party using these communities as vote banks is another complaint. But, say the pro-reservation group, these reservations do not apply to private sector industries. It is not a coincidence that the Indian IT sector, which is mostly private, has become the new vector of caste inequality.

Caste Exclusion and Discrimination: Research Evidence[49]

The contemporary societal caste literature and discussions are replete with caste terminology. A review of simple definitions of these terms showed that discrimination against SCs is multidimensional in nature. *Casteism* refers to the complete or partial exclusion of certain castes from participation in social and institutional processes on the basis of group identities. These exclusionary social relations have outcomes that deprive some caste groups, say SCs, from full participation in social and economic opportunities (Thorat 2008). *Caste Discrimination (Active Exclusion)* is the practice of casteism which manifests in a variety of insidious forms of exclusions. The following examples offered by Thorat (2008) are instructive: (*a*) Complete exclusion of SCs and OBCs by members of the Forward Castes (FCs) from the sale/purchase of factors of production and hiring, housing and other consumer goods; (*b*) Selective inclusion and privileges for FCs in the pricing mechanisms; FCs are charged or receive preferred prices breaching market rates, even in public institutions; (*c*) Unfavourable inclusion, often by force, of SCs who are bound by caste obligations and duties resulting in overwork, loss of freedom, bondage and differential treatment at work; and (*d*) Exclusion of SC/STs, that traditionally worked in 'unclean jobs', from certain categories of 'clean' jobs. While the discriminatory examples outlined above represent active acts of exclusion, scholars and activists have also identified instances of *passive exclusion* of SCs from social and economic opportunities. Often social processes (requiring English fluency and other cultural markers of dress and appearance) are set up and operate in ways that, even in the absence

[49] The analyses in this section were drawn from Buvinic (2004), Sen (2000), and other researchers noted in the text.

of active exclusion, result in exclusion of SCs from many competitive positions (Sen 2000).

More specifically, the caste system works to enhance, or limit as the case might be, the life options of the average Indian. These inequalities are reflected in limited education, employment, and overall reduced life options for SCs. An individual's caste identity is hereditarily predetermined or 'ascribed' at birth and is accompanied by unequal and hierarchical entitlement to economic and social rights. The caste system does not recognize the individual or family. Rather, the caste group is the primary unit of Indian society with individuals' rights and privileges (or lack thereof) derived from the caste to which they belong. As one goes down the graded caste hierarchy, rights and privileges become narrower. Also one's caste group does not exist singularly in isolation, but as an interlinking graded hierarchy with unequal measures of rights and privileges in all walks of life. To reiterate, forward or high upper castes have more rights than OBCs; and SCs have the fewest rights and suffer the most exclusion from full participation in the Indian society.

In addition to the rights and privileges that caste groups offer their members, the system also provides a community regulatory mechanism of social ostracism to enforce exclusion and discrimination. These regulatory mechanisms are, in some circles, justified using selective philosophical elements of the Hindu religious code. The fixed and predetermined social and economic rights associated with each caste and their members imply 'forced exclusion', a necessary outcome of its governing principles. For example, SCs are prevented from participating fully in socio-economic-political opportunities primarily because of restrictions imposed by upper castes on the lower castes. Contrary to true free market principles, the restrictions embedded in caste-based social-economic-political relations, are imposed and suffered by culturally delineated, ascribed groups rather than because of individual agency and responsibility.

It is not surprising that despite the legal redress provisions caste remains an important troubling undercurrent in the Indian social fabric. Caste-based conflict persist in education, employment, and in social relations. The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), which monitors newspaper accounts of daily human rights violations, has reported a variety of incidents of caste-based conflict. There are incidents of public humiliation, rape, murder, accusations of caste slurs in academic institutions, and Dalit student expulsion from the premier IITs on

grounds of 'poor performance'. There have also been reports of legal challenges and policy intervention in caste conflicts. Amidst these continuing struggles, are the few high profile successes, such as a Dalit who was the chief economist of the Reserve Bank of India and then vice-chancellor of Pune University ('Dalit Dreams' in *Times Of India*, 16 January 2004). Even the purportedly a-political Indian bureaucracy is heavily politicized with caste undertones. For example, a state chief minister from one of the SC castes is more likely to appoint and promote bureaucrats from the same caste, superseding equally qualified candidates of other castes. The same is true of the dominant castes as well (Iyer and Mani 2012). Such politicized bureaucrats help politicians during elections.

Inequality and Casteism in the (Non-IT) Private Job Sector

In this caste imbued social milieu, it should be no surprise if discrimination and exclusion of SCs along with simultaneous passive inclusion of FCs continues in the private sector of contemporary India. Starting at the job application stage, earnings, and overall limited options for life, SCs remain marginalized because they are deemed less merit worthy. Thorat and Attewell (2010: 48) found caste favouritism and social exclusion of Dalits and Muslims to occur in private Indian companies at the job application stage. Urban FCs (in Madheswaran and Attewell's 2010 study) fared better than SCs in employment and earnings; discrimination, defined as inequalities in access to certain occupations and some wage discrimination, accounted for the gross earning differentials between SCs and non-SCs in the regular salaried urban labour market.

Deficits in education and other capital endowments of SCs added to the earning inequalities. Caste-based disparities are blatantly stronger in rural than in urban areas. Only a fifth of urban Dalits that Thorat, Mahamallik, and Sadana (2010) surveyed were self-employed and property owners; besides, the market for the purchase and sales of Dalit products were often restricted to members of their community. There were other poignant reminders of the pervasiveness of the caste hierarchies in rural communities: SCs were not hired for household work in FC households; they were paid lower wages (for similar work); their payments were delayed due to social restrictions like avoidance of physical touch; and were not sold land in proximity to upper castes to avoid 'pollution', a practice akin to 'red lining' in the US real estate

market. These inequalities also transferred into realms of food insecurities (Thorat and Lee 2010) and unequal health outcomes for Dalits (Acharya 2010; Borooah 2010).

Researchers have found that such caste-based exclusion and economic discrimination practices have significant negative consequences for the nation and for SCs. Whatever the original functions of the caste system, the foundation of the current/classic form of casteism is not so much economic efficiency but rather the economic motive of income maximization through coercion (Thorat and Newman 2010a: 12). Unequal access of SCs to economic rights directly translates into deprivations of opportunities in educational and economic spheres and high poverty rates. Unfortunately, despite the insidious nature of casteism, powerful deterrents against changing the system are posed by practices of social ostracism, the economic costs of breaking caste rules, and FC monopolies.

SC Educational Deficits Start Early and Continue into Adulthood

While no more than 4–7 per cent of all Indians are college educated, SCs are even less so. On average, older SC men and women (36 and older in the 2015 IHDS) have completed only 4 and 1 years of education respectively. The comparable rates for men and women of the forward castes were 7 and 4 in completed years of education. In fact, SC educational disadvantages start at the *elementary and secondary school levels* (Hasan and Nussbaum 2012). Even though primary/elementary and secondary education, provided through the public and private sectors, is quasi mandatory in India, there are many caste and class based obstacles to entering and completing elementary and secondary schools (Ghosh 2012). For one, SC/ST caste members are typically first generation school goers, if they even make it into the educational system. Also, the almost 'essential' reliance on private out-of-the classroom tutoring for basic elementary education (consequences of the heavy ambitious curriculum combined with poor teacher performance) put SC/STs without the necessary family resources at a competitive disadvantage. Subtle forms of discouragement and ostracism in grade schools (Nambissan 2010) and net inequalities in the mastery of reading and arithmetic (Desai, Adams, and Dubey 2010) add to the educational deficits of SC students.

These early mechanisms continue their disparate impacts into the SC youth's *later educational careers* (Deshpande 2012).[50] Compounding the limited higher education access of SCs, nearly half the institutions of higher learning are concentrated in urban areas of mainly five southern Indian states; professional courses are located primarily in another five states (Government of India 2009). Cumulatively, these factors, contribute to the low education rates in the SC/ST communities (Amartya Sen's Op-Ed in *The Hindu*, 19 December, 2009). The ubiquitous practice of using expensive *'coaching centres'*, to prepare candidates for entrance exams and ultimate admissions into the elite IT related higher education institutions, is often beyond the means of poor SC families.[51] Even when SC/ST students secure admission to the prestigious IITs,[52] say based on caste reservations, the academic and social structures and climate in these institutions are often not conducive to the success of minority students. Parthasarathy's (2012) analyses of key informant opinions, emails, and fora comments found traditional educational practices to not help, and even hindered the success of minority students. IIT faculty in his study were more interested in research than in teaching, in using traditional standardized tests for evaluation rather

[50] Of the Indian youth who finish their higher secondary education, only about 12 per cent enrol in higher education.

[51] Stringent entrance criteria for the limited and coveted seats in the 16 Indian Institutes of Technology (the premier technology institutions in the country with only 9,000 seats per year) and other professional and technical institutions, has given rise to private, expensive coaching centres. For example, there has been a proliferation of coaching centres for the competitive entrance tests administered by the Joint Admission Board (JAB) for admission to the IITs, the premier technology institutions which are feeders for IT occupations. Other top engineering colleges, like the BITS-Pilani, have their own separate test requirements; two examples are AIEEE and CET. Because the syllabi for these entrance examinations are much tougher than the regular Class XII curriculum (final year of high school), parents who can afford the extra tuition shell out anywhere between 40,000 rupees and 1.2 lakh rupees to get their children prepared for the tests (Sangeetha 2009).

[52] Dalit alums of IIT have an alumni association, named IIT Dalits, which aims to 'to bring together Dalits educated at IITs to contribute to the Dalit cause by helping Dalit students to avail scholarships to pursue higher education'. Available at: http://iit.org/alumni-groups/iit-dalits/?searchterm=dalit. As of 18 July 2008, the organization had 76 members.

than projects or essays, and allowing exams only in English (and not also in Hindi or a regional language); these alternative educational practices, Parthasarathy argued, could benefit minority students.

Even after graduation from IT institutions, there are profound differences in life course expectations between equally qualified Dalit and non-reservation students (Deshpande and Newman 2010).[53] Dalit/SC students expected to work more in the public sector than in the private sector, confirming the critical importance of reservations in the public sector job market. In contrast, family connections were the catch-phrase for non-SC students; they were likely to rely on family connections and expected to find jobs much sooner, about five months after graduation rather than the ten months predicted by SC students.

Multiple Pathways to Caste Reproduction in Indian IT

There is some empirical evidence for a variety of intervening mechanisms through which IT Merit construction operates to limit opportunities, or enhance them as the case may be. To quote Jodhka and Newman (2010: 57), '... the production of merit itself is a highly unequal business, and hence the linkage ... of merit with cultural capital, effectively eliminates Dalits, for example, from the competition'. Individuals from urban areas, high/middle castes and classes, and men, who were privileged in the merit construction process, have dominated the IT industry. In intersecting fashion, these ascribed statuses, associated capital resources, and cosmopolitan outlooks, inherited from educated parents, have recreated inequalities by limiting IT Merit opportunities for some while boosting them for others. The distribution of 'merit' or credentials along the ascribed axes renders questionable whether 'merit' is solely a function of individual talent. In other words, to minorities, say SCs, those from rural backgrounds, and even women in these groups, the centuries old caste traditions and inequalities have not simply disappeared even in the purportedly casteless IT occupational sector.

Some specific examples of the intersecting exclusionary mechanism at work in the inequality processes are illustrative here. The credential or

[53] Of the 173 students who were completing their post-graduate degrees from prestigious universities in India, a third of the students were from reserved caste groups.

'degree' requirement for employment in the IT industry excludes a larger percentage of the population without access to college (secondary or tertiary) education, thereby skewing employment opportunities in favour of *educated middle classes*. Without the foundation of a quality basic education,[54] those at the bottom of the social hierarchies, have little chance of reaching higher levels of education, effectively excluding them from the IT sector. Indian IT has been described as a class 'enclave' (D'Costa 2011), with an inherent upper class bias working within the sector. In Raghunath's (2010) ethnographic study,[55] while 'merit' was judged by educational credentials, access to higher education was dictated by caste status and prior academic performance. Family background, denoted by parent's occupation, education, and family surname, were used to ratify 'merit' in another survey of three software firms in Bangalore by Krishna and Brihmadesam (2006).[56] Having two educated parents, and not so much the place of origin or family economic background, most commonly characterized newly recruited software professionals. In an environment where career-related information is hard to come by, because no counselling centres or career guidance were available either in high schools or in most undergraduate colleges, having two educated parents was a distinct advantage and asset. Educated parents networked with other educated and well-informed people about IT job options for their children.

Recruitment practices in IT companies add yet another stratifying mechanism in the IT industry (Upadhya and Vasavi 2006). Carol Upadhya's (2007a) software engineers[57] came from high/middle caste, middle class, well educated, and urban families despite industry leaders' claims of diversity in hiring. Rather than being based solely on 'merit', employers tended to be biased towards skills possessed mainly by the privileged in society, adding another layer to the existing social hierarchies. These social and

[54] As noted earlier, resources for primary education are limited in contrast to the well-funded, highly regarded government technical institutes (where quotas for SCs apply).

[55] The ethnography included three workplaces in Bangalore, India, from 2002 to 2006. Ascribed parental status still plays a more dominant role than 'just' or 'pure' merit.

[56] Fathers of all new recruits in their sample had at least a high school degree or better (75 per cent were college graduates). More than 80 per cent of all mothers also had at least a high school education.

[57] They were in a survey of 132 software engineers working in Bangalore.

economic hierarchies that produce 'meritorious candidates' exclude the marginalized SCs.

A *'soft skills'* component of merit, a less than objective measure, is yet another mechanism through which inequality is reproduced in the Indian IT sector. Apart from the required education credentials, the language of meritocracy also includes a requisite set of cultural capital resources or sophistication or know-how. These cultural resources are denoted by English fluency, urban location of education, 'professional' appearance, and parent/family background. Soft skills become code words or corroborating evidence for 'merit', particularly for promotion into managerial positions. Evidence from a field experiment reported by Banerjee, Bertrand, Datta, and Mullainathan (2008) found that formal educational qualifications were not sufficient; companies added soft skills in hiring the 'ideal' worker, in addition to hard technical skills. In this hiring scenario, candidates from OBCs, ST, or SC were ranked lower than higher caste candidates. Employment practices that emphasized soft skills, by definition reduced, if not eliminated, the chances of SCs and even OBCs of entering and succeeding in IT. In the absence of quantifiable measures for soft skills, proxy measures of family background, educational location, and caste offered corroborating evidence for 'merit', and rendered culturally reproduced 'merit' to be meritorious.

Soft skills that vary by *urban-rural location* add to the SC deficits. Jodhka and Newman's HR managers (2010: 64–71), in charge of hiring decisions in large urban location firms, were likely to prefer candidates from cosmopolitan cities; the assumption was that non-cosmopolitan candidates would not have or be weak in the cultural capital, worldviews, verbal and behavioural styles, all required to succeed in the IT sector. The urban preference, ostensibly, was to reduce workplace tensions that might be created by placing workers with different lifestyles on the same project. Stereotypical preferences, whether by caste, region, religion, were particularly pronounced in family owned and operated companies. Even when caste was not an explicit factor, regional ethnicities or religion[58] were invoked as selection criteria, all in the name of suitability for a given occupation, like nursing, that the upper caste find unsuitable. In the final analyses, SCs were thought not to have the requisite skills or the mind-set for the IT job and therefore excluded.

[58] The preponderance of Christian nurses from Kerala is rationalized by the state's long tradition of women with nursing degrees.

SCs who break through the caste ceiling in prestigious educational institutions or into the IT workplace have complained about being made to feel guilty for stealing slots from 'qualified' non-SC candidates (Parthasarathy 2012). Others internalize the extant hierarchies or find ways to make sense (almost rationalize) of the apparent contradictions. Mahalingam's (2003) quasi-experimental design or thought experiment, with a hypothetical brain transplant or transfer paradigm is illustrative; a Brahmin's brain was hypothesized to have been transferred to a poor man and vice versa. He concluded that, unlike subordinate groups, Brahmins tended to essentialize social identities; they believed in the inalterable nature of privileged social class identity. Some Dalits half-heartedly essentialized the privilege that potential mobility options offered through reservation programs. Faced with depersonalized bullying, subtle devaluation based on group membership, in the workplace, D'Cruz and Noronha's sample of SCs made sense of their dissatisfaction by focusing on the economic, 'bounded benefits' (2013: 6) they accrued.

It is also not surprising that *women in the Indian IT sector* are targets of cumulative disparities. Top IT positions were held by men, with women relegated to the lower entry level jobs (Annapoorna and Bagalkoti 2011). More specifically, women piled up in low end IT jobs such as coding and programming than in high end areas of development (Suriya and Nagarajan 2004). While women have made inroads in the IT industry, they have yet to assume significant roles and status in IT. The unequal distribution of men and women in IT often is attributed to the unbalanced gender ratio in the Indian educational system as well as the social family-work pressures that women face.

Appendix 1A.2: Survey of Indian Information Technology Professionals

Web Survey invitation:

RE: SEEKING YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE ROLE OF CASTE IN THE INDIAN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECTOR

Dear colleague,

Hello. My name is Dr. Marilyn Fernandez, Professor of Sociology at Santa Clara University in California, USA. I am conducting a study of professionals who work in Indian information technology companies. I would very much appreciate

it if you would answer all, or as many, of the following questions below. Please remember that there is neither a right nor wrong answer to these questions. Please respond based on your experiences. Your honest and complete responses would be greatly appreciated.

This data will become the basis for a book that I'm writing. Your responses will be reported anonymously with no names attached and will be presented only in the aggregate when appropriate. If you chose to complete (in part or in full) the survey it will represent informed consent to use your responses in my research. Thank you for your help in this project. If you have any questions or comments, I can be reached at mfernandez@scu.edu.

Please go to www.scu.edu/survey/?s=260 where you will find the survey. Your **password** is **ITSURVEY** (in CAPS). It will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey. Thank you, again, for sharing your work experiences with me.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Fernandez, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Sociology
O'Connor 331
Santa Clara University
Santa Clara, CA 95053
408-554-4432 (Telephone)
408-554-4189 (Fax)
www.scu.edu/cas/sociology/

1. **What type of Information Technology company do you work for? Check all that apply to you**
   a. Computer or information technology programming _____
   b. IT Infrastructure Management _____
   c. R&D services _____
   d. E-commerce & web services _____
   e. Engineering services
   f. Business Process Outsourcing (Customer service for multinational companies) _____
   g. Business Process Outsourcing (Financial and back office services for multinational Companies _____
   h. Other; please specify _____
2. **Approximately how many employees does your company have?** _____
3. **How long have you worked for this company?** _____
4. **What is your current position in this company?** _____
5. **How long have you held this current position?** _____
6. **If you have changed positions within this company, please list the previous positions:**

   _____

7. **What is the highest degree you have completed?** _____
8. **From which institution (name and country) did you receive your highest degree?**

   _____

9. **Where (state, city, village) did you finish your high school?**

   _____

10. What is your sex: Are you?

Male _____ Female _____

11. Your age? _____

12. Are you currently married?

Yes _____ No _____

13. If you have children, how many do you have? _____

14. Listed below are some characteristics of an excellent IT worker. Please check (X) how important each characteristic is on the scale provided.

	Not at all Important	Not Important	Not Relevant	Important	Very Important
a). Technical skills (specific to the job)					
b). Ability to work well in a team					
c). Willing to put in the extra effort (hours, days) to get the job done					
d). Someone who shows individual initiative					
e). Someone who is meticulous (complete the work correctly)					
f). Ability to communicate in English (Written)					
g). Ability to communicate in English (Verbal)					

	Not at all Important	Not Important	Not Relevant	Important	Very Important
h). Where he/she went to college					
i). Which college she/he went to					
j). Whether he/she grew up in a city or urban area					
k). Someone from a non-scheduled caste background					
l). Someone you would feel comfortable socializing with after work					
m). Someone your family would be comfortable meeting					
n). Someone your family would be comfortable having a meal with					

15. What other skills do you think are important for an excellent IT professional? And why do you think so? _____

_____

16. There are many who claim that the new information technology jobs are open ONLY to those who are qualified (they have the right education and skills) for the job. What do you think?

_____

_____

17. Of all the different colleges that offer technical degrees and diplomas, name three colleges that you think are good. Why do you think so?

_____

_____

18. Name three colleges that you think are not that good? Why do you think so?

_____

_____

_____

19. How open are employment opportunities in Information Technology to women? Why do you think that?

_____

_____

20. Do you think the women who work in Information Technology jobs these days are as qualified as the men? Please explain why you think so.

_____

_____

21. There are many who claim that caste/community is no longer a barrier to work in the information technology sector in India. What do you think?

_____

_____

22. There are many who claim that too many jobs in high-tech companies are offered to scheduled caste members. What do you think?

Yes, there are too many (Go to Question 23) No, there are not many (Skip to Question 24)

23. If yes, why do you think that is the case?

_____

_____

24. If not, why do you think so?

_____

_____

25. There are many who think that hiring managers will hire mainly people from their own caste/community. What do you think?

_____

_____

26. Based on your experience, to which caste/community do hiring managers belong?

_____

_____

27. And finally, what would you say is your caste/community background?

_____

_____

28. Date completed _____

Appendix 1A.3: Survey of Indian Information Technology Professionals

Web Survey invitation:

RE. SEEKING YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE ROLE OF CASTE IN THE INDIAN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECTOR

Dear colleague,

Hello. My name is Dr. Marilyn Fernandez, Professor of Sociology at Santa Clara University in California, USA. I am conducting a study of professionals who work in Indian information technology companies. I would very much appreciate it if you would answer all, or as many, of the following questions below. Please remember that there is neither a right nor wrong answer to these questions. Please respond based on your experiences. Your honest and complete responses would be greatly appreciated.

This data will become the basis for a book that I'm writing. Your responses will be reported anonymously with no names attached and will be presented only in the aggregate when appropriate. If you chose to complete (in part or in full) the survey, it will represent informed consent to use your responses in my research. Thank you for your help in this project. If you have any questions or comments, I can be reached at mfernandez@scu.edu.

Please go to www.scu.edu/survey/?s=260 where you will find the survey. Your **password** is **ITSURVEY** (in CAPS). It will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey. Thank you, again, for sharing your work experiences with me.

Sincerely,

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1. What type of Information Technology company do you work for? Check all that apply to you

a. Computer or information technology programming _____

b. IT Infrastructure Management _____

c. R&D services _____

d. E-commerce & web services _____

e. Engineering services _____

f. Business Process Outsourcing (Customer service for multinational companies) _____

g. Business Process Outsourcing (Financial and back office services for multinational Companies _____

h. Other; please specify _____

2. Approximately how many employees does your company have? _____

3. How long have you worked for this company? _____

4. What is your current position in this company? _____

5. How long have you held this current position? _____

6. If you have changed positions within this company, please list the previous positions:

_____

7. What is the highest degree you have completed? _____

8. From which institution (name and country) did you receive your highest degree?

_____

9. Where (state, city, village) did you finish your high school?

_____

10. What is your sex: Are you?

Male _____ Female _____

11. Your age? _____

12. Are you currently married?

Yes _____ No _____

13. If you have children, how many do you have? _____

14. Listed below are some characteristics of an excellent IT worker. Please check (X) how important each characteristic is on the scale provided.

	Not at all Important	Not Important	Not Relevant	Important	Very Important
a). Technical skills (specific to the job)					
b). Ability to work well in a team					
c). Willing to put in the extra effort (hours, days) to get the job done					
d). Someone who shows individual initiative					
e). Someone who is meticulous (complete the work correctly)					
f). Ability to communicate in English (Written)					
g). Ability to communicate in English (Verbal)					

	Not at all Important	Not Important	Not Relevant	Important	Very Important
h). Where he/she went to college					
i). Which college she/he went to					
j). Whether he/she grew up in a city or urban area					
k). Someone you would feel comfortable socializing with after work					
l). Someone your family would be comfortable meeting					
m). Someone your family would be comfortable having a meal with					

15. What other skills do you think are important for an excellent IT professional? And why do you think so? _____

_____

16. There are many who claim that the new information technology jobs are open ONLY to those who are qualified (they have the right education and skills) for the job. What do you think?

_____

_____

17. Of all the different colleges that offer technical degrees and diplomas, name three colleges that you think are good. Why do you think so?

_____

_____

18. Name three colleges that you think are not that good? Why do you think so?

_____

_____

_____

19. How open are employment opportunities in Information Technology to women? Why do you think that?

_____

_____

20. Do you think the women who work in Information Technology jobs these days are as qualified as the men? Please explain why you think so.

_____

_____

21. There are many who claim that caste/community is no longer a barrier to work in the information technology sector in India. What do you think?

_____

_____

22. Date completed _____