University of St. Thomas, Minnesota
UST Research Online

Education Doctoral Dissertations in Leadership | School of Education

2022

Impacts of Caste Based Reservation System on the Lives of Scheduled Caste Engineers in India: A Case Study

Kamal K. Sharma

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.stthomas.edu/caps_ed_lead_docdiss

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons

IMPACTS OF CASTE BASED RESERVATION SYSTEM ON THE LIVES OF SCHEDULED CASTE ENGINEERS IN INDIA: A CASE STUDY

by

Kamal K Sharma

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE EDUCATION FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

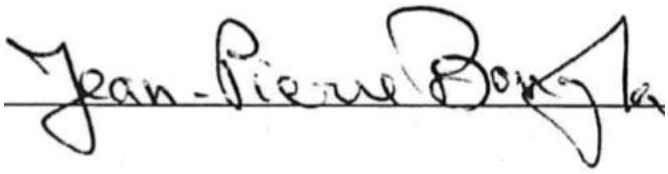
2022

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

Impacts of Caste-Based Reservation System on the Lives of Scheduled Caste Engineers in India: A Case Study

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee



Dr. Jean-Pierre Bongila, Committee Chair

Dr. Sarah Noonan, Committee Member

Dr. Chientzu Candace Chou, Committee Member

April 27, 2022

Final Approval Date

ABSTRACT

This case study in the qualitative inquiry investigated the social and economic conditions of scheduled caste engineers in India who utilized affirmative action known as caste-based reservation program, to complete their Bachelor of Engineering studies and proceeded onto an engineering career. I selected seven scheduled caste engineers (five males and two females) as participants in this study. Data collection methods consisted of in-depth interviews, documents, and personal reflexivity journals. Data analysis generated two major themes. The first theme summarized the participants' socio-economic conditions before they received affirmative action while the second theme portrayed their lives afterward. The study revealed the existence of discrimination, overall poverty, social stigma, and lack of economic and social opportunities before affirmative action. Their economic conditions improved after affirmative action, although their social situation—marred with stigma and discrimination—either remained unchanged or worsened. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) explained that the formation of social groups (lower versus upper castes) and the ordinariness of racism (normalization of the caste system) could lead to the participants' unchanged social conditions. One major recommendation is for the government of India to continue affirmative action benefits to the scheduled castes with more focus on improving their social conditions. Future studies could investigate the impacts of caste-based reservation system on other professions such as teaching, medicine, and management.

Keywords: scheduled caste, upper caste, affirmative action, engineers, caste-based reservation system

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In this final phase of my doctoral studies, I want to take the opportunity to thank some of the people who made a difference in my intense journey toward learning about social justice leadership. Deciding to join the doctorate program in leadership was the most challenging decision of my life. Before I started the program as an engineer, I always missed opportunities to look at the social aspects of life and was confused about making sense of the complex world around me. Whenever I witnessed a social issue concerning racism, I used to question what I could do about it since I always felt helpless as a spectator. My ideas and thinking took a turn when I met Dr. Randy Nelson, who is behind my motivation to first begin the journey of doctoral studies. I am grateful to him for uniquely inspiring and encouraging me to further my studies in the field of leadership. This was an exceptional, inspirational, and transforming experience that I would not have had if not for him.

I thank Dr. Jean-Pierre Bongila, my dissertation chair, for his knowledgeable advice and guidance as I worked on my dissertation. His support at every step of my research gave me a lot of confidence and he always made sure to motivate and encourage me to complete my thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Sarah Noonan, who guided me throughout the program. I also want to thank Dr. Chientzu Candace Chou for her expert advice as a committee member.

I also cannot forget to thank some of my friends who made a difference in my life. They continually motivated me and engaged in some of the most profound conversations on racism I have ever had. First, thanks to Stacey Johnson, who always inspired me with her knowledge and understanding of racism and always provided me with a great perspective on social justice topics. I can remember numerous discussions on microaggressions and how we both made sense of the society around us. Second, Michelle Kramer understood my feelings on social justice, and

engaged in numerous discussions with me about these topics. I learned a lot from her. Michelle and Stacey, “Thank You.”

I also want to thank my wife and kids, who do not even know that they supported me throughout these years since they did not get time to spend with me when I was writing my assignments and busy with my dissertation. Thanks for your support always.

My thankfulness would not be complete if I forgot to mention the seven engineers who served as participants in my study. I greatly appreciate them for readily accepting to work with me and kindly offering their precious time and invaluable knowledge for my research. A special thank you to two participants who acted as gatekeepers to my research study and led me to the other interested participants. You both inspired me to choose my dissertation topic, and I am indebted to you both forever. I will always need your support to complete the mission of generating awareness about racism and social justice, which will start after my doctorate.

Apart from the people mentioned above, I want to thank God for defining this path for me and giving me the strength to embark on a journey toward social justice. Second, I want to dedicate my degree to my parents, who always wanted me to get the highest education possible and made sure I had everything I needed to get here from childhood. Finally, I want to remember my dearest friend “Sandeep,” who is not with me today and left for his heavenly abode last year due to the pandemic. I remember him every day, as he was near to my heart always. I also want to express my gratitude to Sandeep’s family, who understood my emotions and allowed me to walk along with them through the most challenging time after this loss.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv
LIST OF TABLES ix
LIST OF FIGURES x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1
Statement of the Problem 4
Significance of the Study 7
Purpose of the Study 9
Research Question 9
Definition of Terms 10
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW 12
History and Categories of Castes in India 14
Evolution of Caste-Based Reservation Systems 17
Kalelkar Commission (1955) and Mandal Commission (1978-1989) 19
Impacts of Caste-based System on Indian Society 21
Inequality Based on Caste System 23
Theoretical Rationale 24
Social Identity Theory 24
Critical Race Theory 28
Conclusion 32
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY 34
Qualitative Research 34
Case Study Research 36
Institutional Review Board 38
Recruitment and Selection of Participants 39
Data Collection 40
In-Depth Interviews 40
Reflexivity Journal 41
Documents 43

Data Analysis 44
Internal Validity……..45
Ethical Considerations.....46
CHAPTER FOUR: SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE SCHEDULED CASTE ENGINEERS BEFORE UTILIZATION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION.....49
Social Conditions 51
Social Stigma 51
Discrimination..... 57
Economic Conditions 63
Lack of Opportunities 63
Poverty 66
Conclusion.....67
CHAPTER FIVE: SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITION OF SCHEDULED CASTE ENGINEERS AFTER UTILIZATION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION.....69
Social Conditions 71
Improved Social Conditions 71
Permanence of Social Status Quo: Enduring Stigma..... 72
Economic Conditions 80
Improved Economic Conditions 81
Negative Economic Impacts 82
CHAPTER SIX: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS.....89
Conditions of Scheduled- Caste and Social Identity Theory 89
Formation of Social Groups..... 91
In-Groups Discriminate Against Out-Groups..... 93
Conditions of Scheduled-Caste and Critical Race Theory.....94
Race is a socially constructed category 94
Ordinariness of racism 95
Naming one's own reality..... 96
Discussion 98

Conclusion.....101

CHAPTER SEVEN:STUDY SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS.....103

Study Summary.....103

Implications of the Study.....106

Recommendations.....109

Conclusion.....113

REFERENCES.....116

Appendices.....123

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Study Participants' Profiles……40

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Social and Economic Conditions of Scheduled Caste Engineers Pre-Affirmative Action-Major Themes……50

Figure 2. Social and Economic Conditions of Schedule Caste Engineers Post-Affirmative Action-Major Themes……70

Figure 3. Socio-Cultural Evolution of the Lives of Scheduled Caste Engineers……..87

Figure 4. Economic Evolution of the Lives of Scheduled Caste Engineers…….88

Figure 5. Theorizing Social Conditions of Scheduled Caste……102

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impacts of the Indian caste-based reservation programs (in other words, affirmative action) on the personal, social, and economic life of scheduled caste engineers who benefitted from it. Several personal and social experiences led me to undertake this study. First, I learned about a young lower caste doctorate student in India who died by suicide in 2016 after becoming the victim of oppression and discrimination. In his suicide note, he wrote something that forced me to think about my positionality and biases against lower castes. His suicide note said the following: "Please give us poison at the time of admission itself instead of humiliating us like this" (Farooq, 2016). Comparing my own privileged experience to that of this doctoral student has caused me to ruminate about how I unknowingly perpetuated the system of inequality. Living in the relative comfort that I did, I never questioned what life was like for underrepresented individuals.

I am a Brahmin, meaning I belong to an upper caste. I can say that like white people who experience privilege in the U.S., I lived the life of a privileged person in India. My last name is well known in India and shows I am upper caste, and I always knew that it would work to my advantage. Even though I never tried to analyze society through that set of eyes, I feel somewhere inside I knew implicitly that I was upper caste, meaning there would be less discrimination against me in society. I also knew that I had access to more opportunities as the social order would place me in higher ranking than my lower caste peers.

I studied my bachelor's degree in a government engineering college in India. All engineering colleges have reservations for lower castes and my college also had the same reservation. Students from different castes used to join our college from all states from India. From the first year on, everyone was aware of each other's reserved quota. I had friends from

lower castes and understood the discrimination that they used to face because of the way they had got admission in the college and the way they use to feel inferior or discounted. My familiarity with the field of engineering and contacts with fellow engineers is the driving force behind studying this population of interest.

The main issue that I faced into my adulthood was that I never understood what privilege meant and I became defensive in some discussions. My initial reaction to anyone who said to me "Oh, you are fine as you are an upper caste" was "so what? We all are equal, and I don't believe in the caste system." I also used to feel angry inside learning from others that I was privileged because it made me question whether my accomplishments were really my own. People used to say that "I am lucky that I was born as an upper caste" but I struggled to understand the meaning of privilege and difference. It was not that I lacked resources to understand the meaning of privilege, it was simply that I did not want to face the reality that people who belonged to my group had always discriminated against the lower castes. I did not realize that I needed to acknowledge my privilege to understand the discrimination faced by my lower caste friends.

I have come to resonate with Adams et al. (2010), who states that "No matter what privileged group you belong to, if you want to understand the problem of privilege and difference, the first stumbling block is usually the idea of privilege itself" (p. 16). Adams et al. (2010) expounded, "When people hear that they belong to a privileged group or benefit from something like 'white privilege' or 'male privilege,' they don't get it, or they feel angry and defensive about what they do get" (p. 16).

The second reason that motivated my undertaking of this study was the story of a high school classmate of mine who is lower caste. He once shared with me that he and his family face discrimination on a daily basis. Once his last name is identified (which links him to a lower

caste), people try to create distance with him and his family. He shared with me an incident where he was looking for a nanny for his two kids, as he and his wife both were working professionals and desperately needed help. He was refused by all nannies in his area; the reason given to him was that he was a lower caste and thus nannies refused to work at his home. He shared that this is just one of the incidents that his family has faced. He explained that although he is an engineer and earns an income that is at par with any upper caste engineer, society still looks at him like he is not part of it. He discussed how he feels invisible and that his opinions do not matter as no one is ready to listen to him. Even if he tries to give opinions, they are ignored.

The third major reason that motivated my resolve to study the conditions of the schedule caste engineers was a position I had taken as at my high school. I vividly remember, on a bright sunny day in 1991, being on a podium in front of all students in my high school talking about injustice done to "upper castes" by the government of India in a high-school debate competition. I showed my anger by speaking loudly and emotionally against the government policies, and finally concluded my debate by proposing a merit-based system in all educational institutions and jobs to achieve equality in Indian society. At the time, I believed that the reservation system gave lower castes an unearned advantage and was unable to acknowledge the systemic oppression that necessitated affirmative action.

Today, I am neither proud of my past position on this issue nor of my lack of understanding regarding the discrimination faced by lower castes. I wish for another chance in my life to re-write that high school debate in favor of lower castes and address their plight and grievances. This is one of the reasons I decided to focus my final dissertation on affirmative action and the reservation system. I hope to learn how participation in the reservation system, and subsequent employment opportunities, changed the lives (if at all) of participants in my

study. I now recognize that my bias as someone who was born into and raised as an upper caste member is something that I need to be constantly aware of as I conduct my research. There may be power dynamics at play that I have not previously recognized, as an upper caste interviewer speaking with lower caste interviewees. With all these factors in mind, I hope my research could generate some value in the lives of lower castes in India, by way of amplifying their voices.

As I explore my past, identity, caste, privilege and how all of them are related within the context of society, I can say that it is challenging to openly discuss the biases I have internalized. One of the most impactful statements that I have read comes from Cornel West (2008 as cited in Adams et al., 2010) who said,

> It takes courage to interrogate yourself. It takes courage to look at the mirror and see past your reflection to who you really are when you take off the mask, when you're not performing the same old routines and social roles, it takes courage to ask –how did I become so well adjusted to injustice? (p. 587)

After I read the above quote, I decided to take my own mask off for a while and explore if I have the courage to discuss how I have felt about the caste system in India from my childhood to now.

Statement of the Problem

My study concerns the impacts of an affirmative action program known as the caste-based "reservation system" in India (Joshi, 2014, p. 197). The Constitution of India reserved a certain percentage of seats in educational institutions and jobs for persons who belong to the historically underprivileged and oppressed classes known as "lower castes" or "depressed classes." The depressed classes are also known as "scheduled castes" and "scheduled tribes" (Government of India Act, 1935, p. 217). According to the United Nations in India, "Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are among the most disadvantaged socioeconomic

groups in India" (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, n.d., p. 1). The caste system in India began based on the occupation of a person. When the caste system started, the lower castes were not allowed to perform any upper caste jobs, initiating socioeconomic disparity between castes. Deshpande (2008) stated that this ancient form of social stratification is around 2500 years old. Now, lower castes are not prohibited from any career; however, the systemic discrimination based on caste still presents barrier to them entering higher education institutions necessary for upper caste jobs.

The reservation for admissions in higher education institutions is as follows: scheduled castes = 15%; scheduled tribes = 7.5%; other lower castes (also known as "Other Backward Classes," or OBCs, in India) = 27% (Laskar, 2010). This reserved quota of seats is designed to make sure that SCs and STs are well represented in schools and colleges. The Constitution of India in Article 15(4) stated "All citizens shall have equal opportunities of receiving education. Noting herein contained shall preclude the State from providing special facilities for educationally backward sections (not "communities") of the population" (Government of India, 2016). It also maintains that "The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of society (in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and aboriginal tribes), and shall protect them from social 'injustice' and all forms of exploitation." The article further states that "nothing in Article 15(4) will prevent the nation from helping SCs and STs for their betterment [betterment' up to the level enjoyed by the average member of other communities]" (p. 214).

To achieve the objectives of Article 15(4), graduate programs relax the admissions requirements for standardized entrance tests in order to fill the number of seats reserved for

lower castes. According to a 2015 All India Survey of Higher Education report from the Ministry of Human Resources Development,

> Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India is 24.5%, which is calculated for 18-23 years of age group. GER for male population is 25.4% and for females, it is 23.5%. For Scheduled Castes, it is 19.9% and for Scheduled Tribes, it is 14.2% as compared to the national GER of 24.5%. (p. 4)

In spite of the apparent benefits the lower castes receive from the Indian government by way of affirmative action, allowing lower castes to enter higher educational institutions and join upper caste jobs, discrimination seems to be ongoing part of their lives. For example, the 2015-2016 annual report from the National Commission of SCs and STs (Government of India, 2016) also acknowledged that:

> Besides cases of caste-based atrocities the Commission has been in receipt of a number of complaints of discrimination and harassment against the SC students in the educational institutes from school level to higher studies.

On the one hand, affirmative action appears to benefit the lower caste students by allowing them to achieve academic goals. On the other hand, the same policy does nothing to help curtail the discrimination the lower caste beneficiaries face after their enrollment in a university. One would question the real consequences of affirmative action on the academic, professional, and social life of the lower caste students.

I have chosen to investigate the life experience of engineers from lower castes that have utilized affirmative action for their education and subsequent careers. It appeared that a study needed to examine how discrimination was part of their day-to-day life of the scheduled castes and communities. More importantly, it was paramount to investigate ways to give a voice to

some scheduled castes such as engineers in their quest for equality and justice. The whole idea of enacting an affirmative action program was to bring these communities at par with upper castes: “the only way to level the playing field for those who are by an accident of birth marked as 'lesser beings'” (Butalia, 2006).

Significance of the Study

My study of the impacts of affirmative action in India explored the main objectives of the caste-based reservation system which according to the Government of India (2016) is as follows:

> The main objective of the reservation system is to increase the opportunities for enhanced social and educational status of the underprivileged communities and, thus, enable them to take their rightful place in the mainstream of Indian society. The reservation system exists to provide opportunities for the member of the SC/STs to increase their representation in every field of life. (p. 214)

Literature showed a handful of studies on how the above stated purposes of Indian affirmative action might have changed the lives of those lower caste beneficiaries, particularly engineering students. However, most of them are quantitative studies in nature and focused on the “economics” part of the socio-economic status of lower caste individuals. Some of those studies in this field included Boorah et al. (2007), Deshpande (2008), Joshi (2014), Bagde et al. (2016), and Girard (2018). The missing element in all these studies was the “social” part of the socio-economic status, the lived experience of scheduled caste engineers and how they created meaning out of that experience upon receiving affirmative action benefits. Closer to my research study is doctoral research by Prakash (2008); although this study focuses on effects of affirmative action in India, it used quantitative research methodology.

To my knowledge, none of the studies on this topic have captured narratives of engineers on how they feel today after having spent a generation (30+ years) accessing affirmative action at each milestone of selection for college and career alike. My approach was also different because I did it as a case study that was bounded in nature and had a flavor of ethnography, which means that participants belonged to a culture sharing group – those who belonged to scheduled caste and considered themselves as a cultural group sharing similar beliefs, values, and ways of being in the world.

Specifically, my study comprised two factors that make it a unique contribution to the literature: it is qualitative in nature, and it intended to analyze the impact of affirmative action of engineering students who benefitted from it. This study is likely to contribute to filling the literature gap on how affirmative action in India may have altered the professional and social life of lower caste engineers who benefitted from it. In particular, this study captured narratives of engineers who had seen a generation of life experience following utilization of the reservation system for their education and career.

More importantly this study captured the ongoing struggle of scheduled caste engineers to become visible in our society by learning about the experiences of those attempting to change an assigned caste. Through this study, the voices of the oppressed members of a lower caste, particularly the engineers, offered an important step toward understanding if and how affirmative action policies affect participating members from the lower castes. I hoped to learn whether the reservation system serves as the most helpful or efficient form of social justice based on the perspectives and experiences of individuals who participated in the reservation system. The answer to my research question may aid transformative efforts by social change agents to better the lives of the scheduled castes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impacts of the Indian reservation programs (in other words, affirmative action) on the personal and social life of scheduled caste engineers who benefitted from it. It also intended to examine the level of discrimination those scheduled caste engineers have faced prior to and after the award of the reservation programs. Similarly, the study aimed to capture the changes the participants have experienced in their personal, professional, and social status due to their access to the affirmative program in India. More specifically, I planned to learn from the recipients of affirmative action how this policy program impacted their occupational status, their working conditions, and the changes it created in their families and in the caste system as a whole. My goals involved learning about the experiences of engineers and how they interpreted their caste status after the change in their education and profession.

Research Question

I adopted the following research question to guide my case study: How do lower caste engineers in India who participated in an affirmative action program describe the impacts of this program on their professional and personal lives?

The following are sub questions that support my study:

1. What changes have participants experienced in their social status as people of lower caste?
2. How do participants construct the meaning of their caste today?
3. How have caste system and social stratification based on caste impacted participants' life?

The goal of my case study was to generate awareness about the impacts of the caste-based reservation system on the lives of lower caste engineers and discuss how these programs changed their social interactions over a period of a generation.

Definition of Terms

I adopted the following terms and terminologies for use in this study.

Affirmative Action*:* "an active effort to improve the employment or educational opportunities of members of minority groups and women" (Merriam-Webster.com, 2018).

Scheduled Caste (SC): "'The scheduled castes' means such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes, being castes, races, tribes, parts or groups which appear to His Majesty in Council to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as 'the depressed classes', as His Majesty in Council may specify" (Government of India Act, 1935, p. 217). There are over 1,000 castes in India (List of Scheduled Castes, 2016).

The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 states that "no person professing a religion different from Hindu or Sikh, or Buddhist religion can be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste" (Department of Public Enterprises, n.d. p. 6).

India's Affirmative action program:

"India's affirmative action programme [sic]— launched in 1950, making it the world's oldest— was originally intended to benefit Scheduled Castes, which include Dalits, or untouchables, who had been oppressed for centuries under the caste system and accounted for about 16 percent of the population, and Scheduled Tribes, the historically neglected tribal groups that accounted for about 8 percent of the population" (Human Development Report, 2016, p. 119).

Upper Caste or High Caste: "The caste system consists of four distinct occupational groups: the Brahmins (priests and teachers), the Ksyatriyas (rulers and soldiers), the Vaishyas (merchants

and traders), and the Shudras (laborers and artisans). The first three classes are referred to as "high caste" and control the power and function of the Indian society" (Joshi, 2014, p. 200).

***Upper Castes or High Castes**:* Referred to as "upper caste" or "high caste" individuals in this case study.

***Brahmin**:* According to the ancient caste system in India, "Brahmins comprised priests and teachers also categorized a high caste or upper caste" (Joshi, 2014, p. 200).

***Ksyatriyas**:* According to the ancient caste system in India, "Ksyatriyas comprised rulers and soldiers also categorized as a high caste or upper caste" (Joshi, 2014, p. 200).

***Vaishyas**:* According to the ancient caste system in India, "Vaishyas comprised merchants and traders also categorized as a high caste or upper caste" (Joshi, 2014, p. 200).

Shudras: According to the ancient caste system in India, "Shudras comprised laborers and artisans, also categorized as a lower caste" (Joshi, 2014, p. 200).

Dalits: "Also referred to as the "untouchables" because they are considered to fall outside of the four recognized castes listed above" (Joshi, 2014, p. 200).

PSU: "Public sector undertakings are government owned corporations with at least 51% ownership, making them subject to following affirmative action programs" (Public Sector Undertakings in India, n.d., para 1)**.**

OBC: "'Other backward classes' that are not scheduled castes or scheduled tribes but still qualify for affirmative actions" (Government of India, 2016, p. 214).

***Oppression**:* The systematic discrimination against lower castes in India.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

My study involved the experiences of scheduled caste engineers that had utilized the caste-based reservation system or affirmative action. I conducted a review of the literature to understand the history of the reservation system in India, its application, its relation to social inequality and exclusion of scheduled castes as well as to determine whether other scholars have researched the impacts on lower castes of the affirmative action.

According to the Human Development Report (2016), affirmative action is defined as "positive discrimination for distributive justice," and "has been important in redressing historical and persistent group disparities and group discrimination and in reiterating that every human being has equal rights" (p. 118). In practice, affirmative action is enacted to provide equal opportunities to all people, no matter their race, socioeconomic status, and religion. The concept Lyndon B. Johnson used the following analogy to illustrate the concept behind this policy:

> Imagine a hundred-yard dash in which one of the two runners has his legs shackled together. He has progressed 10 yards, while the unshackled runner has gone 50 yards. How do they rectify the situation? Do they merely remove the shackles and allow the race to proceed? They could say that "equal opportunity" now prevailed. But one of the runners would still be 40 yards ahead of the other. Would it not be the better part of justice to allow the previously shackled runner to make up the 40-yard gap; or to start the race all over again? (Gutmann & Thompson, 1990, p. 209).

Affirmative action programs have helped upgrade the socioeconomic status of historically underrepresented groups and have become public policy in many countries. For example, Adams (1997) stated that in the U.S., affirmative action is "designed to compensate for past discrimination ... it addresses specifically the effects of racism against African Americans"

(p. 244). President Johnson's analogy stated above can be interpreted as "African Americans" as the shackled runners vs. "white Americans" as the unshackled runners in the U.S. In India, the same analogy can be applied to "upper castes" and "scheduled castes or lower castes."

To review literature based on my research question, I adopted the following search terms: *caste, caste system, caste-based reservation system, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, Dalits, equality, minority rights, affirmative action, social justice, democracy, discrimination, stigma, prejudice,* etc. Using these terms, I selected literature from various databases accessible via the UST Library, including JSTOR, Ebscohost, Academic Search Premier, and reviewed around 40 articles.

I reviewed studies focusing on the origin of affirmative action in India, the caste system itself, and the continuing forms of discrimination in Indian society. I also read articles opposing the caste-based reservation system. My review included websites related to the cause of "lower castes," including India's National Commission on Scheduled Castes. The Commission gathers data and produces annual reports to show progress as well as discrimination and atrocities committed against scheduled castes.

I organized the result of the review of the literature in the following themes: (a) history and categories of castes in India; (b) the evolution of the caste-based reservation systems; (c) the impacts of the caste-based system on people and society (especially scheduled castes); (d) social inequality in India based on caste identity. The literature revealed major themes of social injustice, discrimination based on caste identity, crimes, social exclusion, and segregation embedded in Indian society. I further develop each theme in the next sections.

History and Categories of Castes in India

Indian society has based its caste system upon the occupation of a person. This ancient form of social stratification has existed for approximately 2500 years (Deshpande, 2008). According to Joshi (2014):

> The caste system consists of four distinct occupational groups: the Brahmins (priests and teachers), the Ksyatriyas (rulers and soldiers), the Vaishyas (merchants and traders), and the Shudras (laborers and artisans). The first three classes are referred to as "high caste" and control the power and function of the Indian society. On the next "tier" are the Shudras, their purpose is to serve the needs of the other three castes, essentially acting as servants. Below the Shudras are the Dalits, who are also referred to as the "untouchables" because they are considered to fall outside of the four recognized castes listed above. (p. 200)

The Shudras and Dalits are considered lower castes and are underrepresented groups in India due to the historical nature of the work they perform as servants. The impacts of the caste system are somewhat analogous to the institution of slavery in the U.S., in that African-American citizens are still affected by the fact that their ancestors were enslaved (DeGruy, 2018).

Shudras and Dalits are categorized as scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) as per the Constitution of India (Government of India Act, 1935). The definition of SC and ST as per the Government of India is:

> The scheduled castes' means such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes, being castes, races, tribes, parts or groups which appear to His Majesty in Council to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as 'the

> depressed classes', as His Majesty in Council may specify. (Government of India Act, 1935, p. 217)

Population statistics from the 2001 Census (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2001) found the total scheduled castes population is 16.2% of India's total population and scheduled tribe population is 8.2% of India's total population.

My study concerned lower caste engineers (SCs and STs); in other words, those who are Shudras and Dalits and considered servant class. As per Joshi (2014)'s explanation on occupation and its relation to the caste system, engineering is supposed to be an upper caste profession. The affirmative action program in India, which is also known as caste-based reservation system, makes it possible for SCs and STs to join upper caste professions like engineering.

Affirmative action seeks to address the wrongs experienced by historically underrepresented groups (Affirmative Action, n.d.). The existence of affirmative action policies in countries ranging from the United States to South Africa to Nepal and India illustrates the prevalence of these practices across the world. In India, the lower caste groups have been discriminated against for thousands of years (Deshpande, 2008). The reservation system, otherwise known as affirmative action, was enacted in response to these historical wrongs (Joshi, 2014). The reservation system defines quota percentages for each of the lower castes to gain admissions to higher education institutions as well as job employment.

According to (All India Survey of Higher Education, 2015), the program wise enrollment data shows the actual enrollment of SCs in a Bachelor of Engineering program (B.E.) is 212,084. The actual enrollment of STs in B.E. programs is 43,519, and actual enrollment of OBCs in B.E. programs is 809,352. From the numbers of enrollment as seen in this report, the lower caste

groups are utilizing the reservation quotas allotted to them by government. Bahri (2017) studied students from engineering colleges and reported that "As many as 26% male and 35% female students from India's most disadvantaged castes and tribes in 245 engineering colleges would not be there without reservation" (para. 1).

Bagde et al. (2016) concluded that "We find that affirmative action policy works largely as intended. The policy clearly increases attendance among targeted students, especially for those in the most disadvantaged groups" (p. 1520). However, it is not clear that all allotted seats in every college are filled each year. According to the annual report from the National Commission of SCs and STs (Government of India, 2016), there is underrepresentation of SCs and STs in educational institutions despite affirmative action programs. According to Bagde et al. (2016), "Even with the attendance gains from affirmative action, the most disadvantaged castes still attend in smaller proportions than their population shares" (p. 1516).

As stated in the National Commission of SCs and STs (Government of India, 2016), the government has issued instructions for providing reservation in the jobs to the lower castes. The annual reports (Government of India, 2016) also show the individual state profiles of SCs and STs. Reports contain data about the percentage of government jobs filled by SCs and STs. To make sure that jobs are filled, government has relaxed the selection criterion for SCs and STs. According to Jain and Ratnam (1994), relaxations given in the workforce to SCs and STs are provided in terms of age, fee, educational qualifications/standards, experience, etc. For example, age limits for employment purposes are relaxed by five years for lower castes.

As per the 2015-2016 annual report from the National Commission of SCs and STs (Government of India, 2016), "The Commission in its review meetings with the State Governments and PSUs has observed inadequate representations of Scheduled Castes are there in

services/posts" in addition to "a backlog of Scheduled Castes vacancies in various cadres/posts." The same report highlighted job data from different states:

> On analysis of data given by the 16 states it was seen that: representation of SCs is at par with norms in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka; in all other States SC representation is less than norms; the representation of SCs in state PSUs is below norms in almost all states. (p. 33)

PSUs in India are defined as "government-owned corporations" (Public Sector Undertakings in India, n.d.). The 2015-2016 annual report from the National Commission of SCs and STs (Government of India, 2016) suggested that there is underrepresentation of SCs in state PSUs: "The Commission while reviewing the Public Sector Organizations, it observed that in certain cadre posts, the requisite percentage of reservation for SCs and OBCs were below the prescribed reservation of 15% and 27%" (p. 73). The 2016-2017 annual report from the National Commission of SCs and STs showed that there is also an under-representation in the teaching jobs at engineering colleges in India.

Evolution of Caste-Based Reservation Systems

The Constitution of India, written in 1949, contains articles relating to equality and people's rights to nondiscrimination based on caste, color, creed, sex, religion and region. The preamble states the importance of social justice and declares how it is an integral part of India as a nation, including the "equality of status and opportunity" (The Constitution of India, 1949, p. 1).

Due to the historical oppression of lower caste members in society, it became clear from the preamble's vision in the Constitution that a program was necessary to lift the oppressed citizens of India. As a result, the country implemented one of the world's oldest affirmative

action programs (Human Development Report, 2016). The affirmative action program officially gained national visibility when the government implemented it across India in 1950 based on the adoption of the Constitution of India (Human Development Report, 2016).

Even though reservations "for members of the lower castes" in India have existed since colonial times (1858-1947; Laskar, 2010), the reservation system was not the same in every state across India. It was also not a new system in some places: "The policy of reservation was not a post-constitutional phenomenon but had its antecedents in the colonial times" (Laskar, 2010, p. 29). Prior to 1949, individual states and regions in India implemented their own use of reservation quotas, attempting to address poverty within lower castes.

The 1950 reservation system involved access to higher education. After the ratification of the Constitution in 1950, the government established a national reservation system. According to the Human Development Report (2016):

> India's affirmative action programme [sic]— launched in 1950, making it the world's oldest—was originally intended to benefit Scheduled Castes, which include Dalits, or untouchables, who had been oppressed for centuries under the caste system and accounted for about 16 percent of the population, and Scheduled Tribes, the historically neglected tribal groups that accounted for about 8 percent of the population. (p. 119)

The quotas limited the opportunities or "reservations" for "scheduled castes" (SCs) and "scheduled tribes" (STs), including 15% for SCs and 7.5% for STs (Laskar, 2010).

Indian leaders like Dr. Ambedkar also created and implemented special articles in the Constitution to uplift members of SCs and STs. The most important article, Article 46, contains provisions for people from lower castes, including members of SCs and STs:

> The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (as cited in Joshi, 2014, p. 205).

The Constitution of India also made it clear that the influences of the courts should not affect affirmative action programs: "The Indian Supreme Court plays a less significant role in the affirmative action mechanisms implemented throughout the nation because these affirmative action programs are explicitly authorized by the Indian Constitution" (Joshi, 2014, p. 209). This protects affirmative action programs from litigation because no one can challenge these articles of the constitution in the local courts, lodge complaints, or initiate cases against affirmative action programs. Several commissions investigated the effects of the reservation system and these commissions recommended changes. The purpose of these commissions was to find out the socially and educationally disadvantaged classes in India (Laskar, 2010).

Kalelkar Commission (1955) and Mandal Commission (1978-1989*)*

While the constitution mandated 15% reservation for scheduled castes (SCs) and 7.5% reservation for scheduled tribes (STs), the creation of the Kalelkar Commission aimed to better identify more lower caste communities and groups in need of affirmative action (Laskar, 2010). The Kalelkar report made it evident that the reservation system was not effective enough for all citizens, especially those who would benefit from the reservation system but were not classified as an SC or ST. The 1955 report aimed to further advance the status of all lower castes once they were properly identified. This report "failed to make an impact in any major way" because each state could not implement the system in a standardized manner (How the Other Half Lives, n.d.).

The Indian government created the Mandal Commission in 1978 because the Kalelkar Commission was unsuccessful in its original mission: to identify all socially disadvantaged classes. The Mandal Commission presented 11 indicators to identify lower castes based on social, educational, and economic conditions of people of various communities in its 1980 report (Laskar, 2010). As reservations have always been a sensitive, controversial topic in India, for the following 10 years, no politician was willing to engage with the report's findings. However, in 1990, Prime Minister V. P. Singh implemented the recommendations of the Mandal Commission (How the Other Half Lives, n.d.).

The lower castes named Prime Minister Singh a "social champion" for the expansion of the program. The quota of reservation seats significantly increased for all lower castes, which encompassed approximately 25% of the population (Human Development Report, 2016). This increase in percentage of reservation quotas resulted in mass protests and riots throughout India in 1990.

The protests included strikes, marches, looting, and demonstration by students and people from all walks of life (Srinivasan, 2013, para. 22). One of the major turning points changing the face of nation forever was the attempted self-immolation, or the act of killing oneself as a sacrifice, by Rajiv Goswami. According to the *Tribune India* (2004), "Goswami had attempted self-immolation in front of his South Delhi college in October 1990 to protest against job reservation for backwards as recommended by the Mandal Commission" (para. 4). The self-immolation of Rajiv Goswami "triggered more self-immolations. Around 75 students in the North self-immolated themselves, protesting against the Mandal report. In the riots followed, more than 200 people died" (Srinivasan, 2013, para. 23). The revolt from the upper caste, then and even now, depicts the division in society caused by the affirmative action policy.

The main elements of the reservation system or affirmative action program have stayed the same since the Mandal Commission in the early 1990s. The reservation as it stands now includes the following percentages: scheduled castes (SCs) = 15%; scheduled tribes (STs)= 7.5%; OBCs = 27% (Laskar, 2010). As the Supreme Court ruled, no state can exceed 50% reservation quotas; however, it also directs states to take independent action according to the needs of the lower castes (Joshi, 2014). Despite the concerted efforts that took place between India's independence and the implementation of the Mandal Commission's reservation system, social inequality remains pervasive.

Impacts of Caste-based System on Indian Society

The articles on the caste system and implementation of affirmative action highlight that despite the policies and efforts toward equality previously described, discrimination continues against members of lower castes in various walks of life.

> However, it is clear that despite these provisions, covert and overt instances of untouchability and discrimination continue. The Affirmative Action programme does not target all these aspects, but its main aim is to provide employment, increase representation and improve the relative status of SCs-STs. (Deshpande, 2008, p. 161)

Drawing from Deshpande (2008) and Nambissan (2009), a case can be clearly made that discrimination and social exclusion against people based on their caste continues to exist despite government reservation systems. One stark example is how the experiences of Dalit children (officially known as scheduled castes per the Constitution of India) in schools of a particular area in a state in India exposed racism (Nambissan, 2009). The author interviewed Dalit families about their experiences of racism faced by children on a daily basis. This study found Dalits could not drink or touch water jars in certain schools in certain areas (Nambissan, 2009). If any

Dalit touched the water jar, the non-Dalits would wash the jugs with sand before drinking water. This is one of many examples that show how mainstream society refuses to accept lower caste culture and rituals and consider members of lower castes "unclean." Nambissan (2009) also revealed that hierarchy of the caste system is still in place, and social exclusion and discriminatory practices are part of everyday life. Members of the upper caste degrade the people, culture, and rituals of lower castes, and refuse to engage with them (High school classmate, personal communication, April 2018). These examples show that society has created a culture of disrespect toward members of the lower castes.

Protests and marches capture the spirit of anger among lower castes in response to the disrespect they encounter daily. An incident in April 2018 that shook the whole nation happened during a protest by the Dalits. According to the *New York Times*, "Young men barricaded railroad tracks, burned buses and hurled bricks at police officers" to protest against the caste system (Gettleman & Raj, 2018, para. 3). The protest turned violent, resulting in the death of 11 Dalits and hundreds of people arrested. This incident and the others like it depict the intensity of anger within lower caste communities and highlights the continued conflict between upper and lower castes. The incidents detailed above highlight just how deeply rooted discrimination is within society, as well as how far India still has to go in order to fulfill Dr. Ambedkar's dream of social justice and equity for all.

Nambissan (2009) emphasized the role of education in raising awareness about this discrimination as some argue that the entire school system has itself become a medium or platform where discrimination and humiliation is practiced based on caste identity by teachers, peer-students, and other staff against scheduled castes. Nambissan (2009) went on to claim that education has not been substantial in generating consciousness in our society that can resist

discrimination at grass roots level. Daily incidents of racism in schools and colleges based on caste identity act as evidence backing the validity of this statement. One such sad example is the story of a young lower caste doctorate student in India who committed suicide in 2016 after becoming the victim of oppression and discrimination. His suicide note said the following: "Please give us poison at the time of admission itself instead of humiliating us like this" (Farooq, 2016).

Inequality Based on Caste System

The annual report from India's National Commission on SCs and STs (Government of India, 2016) clearly quantified that the rate of discrimination and crimes against SCs is on the rise. It is shocking to learn from the report that the crimes like murder and kidnapping have significantly increased against SCs in 2014 as compared to 2013 (Government of India, 2016).

Apart from violent crimes and micro-aggressions, a few articles also discussed how caste stereotypes work in Indian job recruitment. For example, Deshpande's (2008) findings add to the statements above that discrimination based on caste (or last name that can easily identify your caste) is plentiful. The study found the following:

> In the first major correspondence study in India, Thorat and Attewell (2007) sent out identical resumes to private companies, both domestic and MNCs, in New Delhi during 2005-06. The applicants asked to be called back for an interview. The only difference in the resumes was the easily identifiable names of applicants and three categories were used: Hindu upper caste, Hindu Dalit, and Muslims. The study revealed significant differences in call-backs between Hindu upper castes and the rest. (p. 159)

Deshpande (2008) showed how the surnames or last names of people impact the fair recruitment process and proves how certain sections of society have reservations for a caste. The

more “call-backs” for Hindu upper castes than SCs/STs applying for jobs show how discrimination is deeply rooted in society and actually starts once one reveals his or her full name. Therefore, it is critical to understand whether the reservation system has worked for lower castes despite the issues related to the last name that is their identity and will stay with them forever.

Theoretical Rationale

To form a conceptual framework that assisted in analyzing my findings related to the ramifications of affirmative action for scheduled caste engineers in India, I adopted the following two analytical theories: social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Additionally, these theories explain how dominant groups of a society knowingly or unknowingly possess biases and prejudice against people of lower castes and provide a critical lens to analyze the root causes and effects of discrimination on society as whole.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory originated in the 1960s and 1970s. Henry Tajfel and his colleague John Turner created this theory in order to understand group behavior (Tajfel, 1981). They studied social groups, intergroup conflicts, and various factors that affect one’s social identity. These theorists also discussed the concepts of in-group and out-group bias, which contributes to “us vs. them” mentality. Out-groups are typically those that aren't as commonly identified with, and therefore may be discriminated against. As per Tajfel and Turner (1979), social groups

> provide their members with an identification of themselves in social terms. These identifications are to a very large extent relational and comparative: they define the

> individual as similar to or different from, as "better" or "worse" than, members of other groups. (p. 40)

Tajfel and Turner (1979) further explained that social identity theory consists of "those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (p. 40). According to social identity theory, these social categories and social groups define one's identity and his behavior toward others who are part of his communities.

The main tenets of social identity theory that are relevant to my research topic as per Tajfel and Turner's (1979) analysis of inter group conflict are as follows:

1. Individuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity.
2. Positive social identity is based to a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups: the in-group must be perceived as positively differentiated or distinct from the relevant out-groups.
3. Social identity theory states that the in-group will discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image. (pp. 40-41)

Building on first tenet above, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) work highlights how group membership contributes to one's self-perception. According to McLeod's (2008) analysis of social identity theory, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) research demonstrated that "the groups (e.g., social class, family, football team, etc.) to which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world" (p. 1).

As stated within the second and third tenet above, social identity theory posits that society has divided itself into various in-groups and out-groups: "we divided the world into 'them' and 'us' based through a process of social categorization (i.e. we put people into social

groups)" (McLeod, 2008, p. 1). McLeod goes on to say that concepts of social identity theory dictate the in-group and out-group formations and states, "the in-group will discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image" (p. 1).

The concept of social identities and one group's behavior toward the other is tightly linked with prejudice. Allport (1958) defined prejudice as hostile behavior toward someone based solely on the group they belong to. As previously described, upper castes treat lower castes with hostility solely because they belong to a marginalized group. The examples like segregation of drinking water clearly show the existence of prejudice in the minds of the dominant groups or upper castes that influence their behaviors toward lower castes. Incidents across the country and crime reports demonstrate this prejudice and the underlying problem of oppression, which is also easily felt by the common name that the SCs have assigned to themselves. These SC groups call themselves "dalit" – a term of pride that means "oppressed" or "broken" (Deshpande, 2008, p. 156).

In finding answers to why dominant groups discriminate against minorities, Becker (1956) as cited in Thorat et al. (2016) wrote that in the U.S.,

> the white males discriminate against their black counterparts because they have a taste for discrimination from which they derive utility, and this taste emanates from prejudices that an individual from one group holds against individuals of another group, in this case blacks and women. (p. 21)

White males benefit from discrimination in many ways, namely socioeconomic status; one example of how this manifest in India is the caste system, as members of the upper caste benefit at the expense of the lower castes.

Arrow (1973) provides another reason as to why people discriminate against minorities, stating that minorities are perceived as less productive (even if that is objectively untrue or only true due to systemic limitations) which in turn harms their chances of employment or their earnings compared to white counterparts. The reservation system is designed to ameliorate the systemic limitations placed on scheduled castes (minority group), but if the majority group cannot recognize those systemic limitations, it appears to them as an unfair, unearned benefit.

Akerlof (1976) explained discrimination within the context of social identities, describing discrimination as consequence of a socially constructed distinction based on the majority group. This distinction creates a divide between the in-group (us) and the out-group (them). Akerlof (1976) also explains this phenomenon by citing an example of Whites who think of Blacks as "them" instead of considering them part of "us all." Based on social identity theory, my research will examine how the mentality of "us" versus "them" plays out between the upper and lower castes in India. This divide and feeling of superiority of one's own group may further explain the discrimination toward lower castes. Since surnames indicate the caste that an individual belongs to, and castes were based on occupation when the system was first established, it is extremely difficult for lower caste members to achieve upward mobility. The "us" versus "them" dichotomy makes it even harder by perpetually "othering" lower castes who do benefit from the reservation system.

The story of this Dalit surgeon underscores the pertinence of social identity theory, which I intend to use to explain the findings of this proposed research:

> It is India's most shameful paradox—this country has made almost unimaginable progress in nearly every sphere of human life, but the one thing unchanged is the condition of its dalits and backward communities. I am a microsurgeon specialising in

> hand and spinal reconstruction, and am [a Member of Legislative Assembly] from Bihar, but I still remain very much a dalit—a dhobi, to be precise— open to routine humiliation from the upper castes. (Nirula, 2008, p. 266)

This is just one of many experiences of the Shudras and Dalits who have gained specialized, skillful employment after graduating from university; while they may be equal or superior to upper caste employees in their field, they are not treated as such due to their caste status.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) came about as a response to legal obstacles for civil rights activists in the 1970s in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) wrote that the "CRT movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p. 3). They went on to explain that "CRT questions the very foundation of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (p. 3). Critical race theory rapidly gained popularity, spreading throughout the United States.

Although critical race theory started in the field of law, it has spread beyond that discipline. As per Delgado and Stefancic (2012): "Many in the field of education consider themselves critical race theorists who use CRT's ideas to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, affirmative action, high stakes testing, controversies over curriculum and history, and alternative and charter schools" (p. 6). According to these authors, critical race theory includes the following major tenets, which I develop in the next sections: ordinariness of racism or refusal to acknowledge its existence, interest convergence, race as a socially constructed category, uniqueness of the voice of color people.

Regarding the ordinariness of racism, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained that racism is an everyday experience of people of color in the U.S. and is not an easy thing to handle. In explaining that ordinariness of racism, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) clarified "This also means that racism is difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged" (p. 8). This means that one must first acknowledge that racism exists in our society. Nothing can be done without that acknowledgement. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), interest convergence constitutes another major theme of critical race theory. They posited that most of society does not want to eliminate racism, as it works in the interest of white elites and the working-class Caucasians. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) also brought forth an example of interest convergence through the famous civil rights case Brown v. Board of Education (1954), which may have been "more the result of the self-interest of the elite whites than a wish to help Blacks" (p. 8).

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) also posited that as a social construction, the concept of race in critical race theory emanates from social thoughts and relations. This concept relates to social identity theory, which states how social groups, in-group, and out-group formations in society lead to discrimination and in other words racism. They explained that according to the social construction theme of critical race theory "races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient. People with common origins share certain physical traits, of course, such as skin color, physique, and hair texture" (p. 8).

The notion of unique voice of people, as explained by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), is another feature of critical race theory. It holds that people of color may be able to tell their white colleagues something that whites don't know and cannot even think of give their history of

oppression and prejudice. For example, a white person would discuss “Black Lives Matter” from a different angle than a Black person whose ancestors faced oppression.

All of the tenets discussed above talk about racism and oppressions in the context of the U.S. In the next section I will try to draw commonality between critical race theory in the U.S. and how it is also applicable in India’s caste system. In the U.S., discrimination is based on skin color and in India it is based on caste identity (which dictates surname), and therefore may be compared (Nirula, 2008). Once majority group members recognize the minoritized individual’s identity as lower caste, their treatment drastically changes. Both countries have laws in place to legislate fairness and equality and have affirmative action programs in place, but discrimination and social status of racial minorities has changed only a little. According to Nirula (2008),

> In both countries, caste- or race-based stigma has not been erased by upward class mobility. Even for the minority of Dalits who have managed to defy their religiously proscribed economic lot, social oppression has not fallen away. (p. 266)

In India incidents of racism and violence against Dalits happen frequently. The annual report from the national commission of SCs and STs state that crime has increased against minorities (Government of India, 2016). Also, as per Nirula (2008), “every day—a crime is committed against a Dalit every eighteen minutes” (p. 260).

While the racial problems of both the countries may not be exactly same, many similarities exist in the way racial minorities are treated and how oppression is deeply rooted in both cultures. In addition of the tenets of critical race theory I have analyzed above, I would explore an important theme in the next paragraph concerning critical race theory to support and guide in the understanding of the plight of lower caste engineers in India.

The theme of "naming one's own reality" is a theoretical framework that can be used to analyze the ongoing discrimination against the lower castes (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57). Storytelling is an instrument by which one can name their own reality. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), "Historically, storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression" (p. 57). In sum, the process of narrating one's own reality through storytelling can make an impact on both the self and the oppressor. Dominant groups live and form their own reality to satisfy their privileged positions in the society requiring some action to bring subconscious racism to their attention. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), in this reality, oppression is rational. In the context of my research, storytelling by the lower castes can create cognitive dissonance for dominant groups by providing compelling challenges to their own view of world.

Human rights activist Desmond Tutu once said, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality" (Desmond Tutu Quotes, n.d.). So, it is important to understand oppression from the angle of the oppressed lower caste engineers to generate an awareness of the reality that affirmative action as well as policies and laws alone cannot bring redress.

Another component attached to naming one's own reality in critical race theory is "voice," which can be defined as "a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step to the road of justice" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). Finding voices and using them together for a collective action toward change is key to any democratic society; that seems to be missing in India. Klein (2016) explained the process of collective action by making a point that "The practice of voice in the company of other voices empowers

participation by developing political literacy," building on Carr's analysis that "political literacy as knowledge and understanding of political that develops agency for the promotion of social justice" (Carr & Lund as cited in Klein, 2016, p. 69). One can infer that as lower castes' voices were ignored, the Indian democratic system has not achieved political literacy and thus could not promote social justice.

In sum both theories (social identity theory and critical race theory) will help me analyze and understand what sort of discrimination lower caste engineers experience and mainly because of or despite their participation in Indian affirmative action. This may help me to see how those engineers have constructed meaning of their life as a member of a lower caste. By collecting the stories of various lower caste engineers who benefitted from the reservation system, I can challenge the dominant narrative that Dalits are "less than" or "untouchable," as "social reality is constructed by the formulation and exchange of stories about individual situations" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57)

Conclusion

The evolution of affirmative action in India for the socially disadvantaged classes is an ongoing process. Key historical periods and actions taken by the government of India in the area of reservations shows that government of India has consistently worked toward uplifting the lower castes in India. The Government of India also has provisions to safeguard lower castes from social injustice and any form of exploitation according to the mandates in The Constitution of India (The Constitution of India, 1949). Throughout history, as stated in the Article 46 and evolution of caste-based reservation system, the government implemented reservation law and articles to create opportunities for the lower castes (Human Development Report, 2016).

However, the mere existence of laws and policies has not eradicated oppression from Indian society. The impacts of affirmative action need attention and study. According to Human Development Report (2016), “The programme [sic] has not remedied caste-based exclusions, but it has had substantial positive effects. In 1965, for example, Dalits held fewer than 2 percent of senior civil service positions, but the share had grown to 11 percent by 2001” (p. 119). The report clearly states that the affirmative action program has not eliminated the case-based exclusions, which again, means that discrimination is still part of society.

None of the previous research has captured narratives of engineers as on how they feel today after having spent a generation (30+ years) utilizing affirmative action at school, college, and their job. My approach is also different because I did it as a case study that was bounded in nature and had flavors of ethnography, which means that my participants belonged to a culture sharing group – being members of the same caste and consider themselves as a cultural group. Therefore, my research intended to fill a gap in the literature, as it concerns the lived, social experience of members of the scheduled castes who have utilized affirmative action.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to capture and analyze the experiences and life stories of scheduled caste engineers who have utilized affirmative action programs and proceeded into a career in engineering. To achieve this, I adopted a qualitative case-study method. In this chapter, I review the reasons for choosing a qualitative research method to conduct my study. I discuss a brief history of qualitative research method as well as explain the research design, a case study including the process of data collection and analysis. I also describe the process of obtaining the necessary approvals from University of Saint Thomas' IRB (Institutional Review Board) to conduct my study.

Qualitative Research

Creswell and Poth (2018) states that "qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/ theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 44). Investigating "assigned meaning to a social or human problem" requires an approach that values depth of data. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) add, "Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p. 3).

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that research begins with researchers' set of beliefs and philosophical assumptions which are then analyzed further by using an interpretive framework or paradigm. An interpretive framework or paradigm is described by Creswell and Poth (2018) as "beliefs that the researcher brings to the process of research, or they may be theories or theoretical orientations that guide the practice of research" (p. 22). Some of the interpretive

frameworks described by Creswell and Poth (2018) include post-positivism, social constructivism, transformative, and postmodernism paradigms.

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained the reasons behind using qualitative research, which include answering a question about a group of people, studying variables that are not quantifiable, and providing a platform for those who have been silenced. Likewise, I plan to conduct a study of the oppressed, those whose voices are silenced by the dominant groups. As my study concerns the lower castes in India that are still experiencing oppression after many years, a qualitative study is the best instrument to capture their feelings by listening to their life stories. Quantitative studies on the other hand can utilize surveys and statistics to count the number of lower castes who have utilized affirmative action, but it is difficult to measure the level of microaggression and racism they have faced in their life journey—which only a qualitative study can achieve.

Additionally, as per Patton (2015), "Qualitative inquiries study how people and groups construct meaning…Qualitative analysis involves interpreting interviews and documents—the data of qualitative inquiry—to find substantively meaningful patterns and themes" (p. 47). As I spoke to lower caste engineers about their life journey, the impacts of affirmative action on their education, life, and career, and what their caste status means to them today, qualitative research best suited these questions. My research questions deal with the construction of meaning of their lived experiences as members of the lower caste.

As my study relates to members of "scheduled castes" in India – those who have been marginalized and oppressed by society throughout their lives—I chose a transformative framework to guide my research. The choice of my interpretive framework can be explained through the work of Mertens (2003), which is described by Creswell and Poth (2018): "The basic

tenet of this transformative framework is that knowledge is not neutral, and it reflects the power and social relationships within the society; thus, the purpose of knowledge construction is to aid people to improve society" (p. 25).

As stated in my research question section, one of my goals is to share the experiences of these classes with communities and educational institutions so that they can use my research to raise social justice awareness. Creswell and Poth (2018) further clarified that "These individuals include marginalized groups…and societies that need a more hopeful, positive psychology and resilience" (p. 25).

My dissertation amplifies the voices of scheduled castes by discussing their experiences of democratic and social justice processes that they have encountered in their lives, which is accomplished through a transformative framework. Creswell and Poth (2018) endorsed the fact that a researcher, by exposing the issues of oppression and marginalization, "provides a voice for these participants, raising their consciousness and improving their lives" (p. 25).

Case Study Research

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that "Case study research is defined as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection" (p. 96). Yin (2014) also suggested that case study research involves the study of a case (or cases) within a real-life, contemporary context or setting. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that "This case may be a concrete entity, such as an individual, a small group, an organization, a or a partnership" (p. 96).

I determined case study research to be most suitable for my study because my research explored the lives of people in specific culture-sharing groups. The groups included engineers that belonged to scheduled castes who used affirmative action to get admission to engineering college and jobs making all individuals in my research as cases that are bounded in nature. Boundaries are vital in the case study research as Creswell and Poth (2018) described that "the key to the case identification is that it is bounded, meaning that it can be defined or described within certain parameters" (p. 97).

Also, my study explored scheduled caste engineers' life experiences pre-affirmative action and post-affirmative action concerning their social and economic conditions spanning over a period of one generation (30+ years) which made this study unique in nature. Uniqueness of case is also an important factor in case study research as explained by Merriam (1998) that said, "A case study might be selected for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to" (p. 33). Based on Merriam's statement, as my study explored real life experiences of engineers, it could add knowledge and phenomena that might not have been exposed yet. Merriam (1998) also explained, "Case studies include as many variables as possible and portray their interaction, often over a period of time" (p. 30). As my study captured narratives of engineers who had seen a generation of life experience at various stages of their personal and professional lives, it made good sense to analyze it as case study research.

As a case study, this investigation focused on a unique social group that includes only scheduled castes who are beneficiaries of the affirmative action policy. Yin (1981) claimed that "an empirical inquiry must examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context" (p. 98). Each individual member of this homogenous group shared a narrative of their reality that is

unique to their castes, contributing to a greater understanding of the experience of the scheduled castes as a whole.

Even though my researched was conducted as a case study, it also had a flavor of ethnography research. As per Creswell and Poth (2018), ethnography demands selection of a culture sharing group and then select cultural themes, issues, or theories to study about the group. Themes for ethnography include topics like inequality, domination, socialization etc. which made proper sense in my case study that had a goal of asking scheduled castes engineers their experiences in their interactions in society. As I hoped to learn whether the reservation system served as the most helpful or efficient form of social justice based on the perspectives and experiences of individuals who participated in the reservation system, case study research was an appropriate research design.

Institutional Review Board

As per UST's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) webpage (What is the Institutional Review Board, n.d., para. 1), the IRB's purpose is to review proposed research studies involving human participants to safeguard the rights, safety, and welfare of people involved in research activities conducted at or sponsored by the University of St. Thomas.

To start, I completed a required training on the guidelines and research techniques to be used in conduction research on human subject's research. The training gave instructions on designing the research study and precautions needed to recruit the participants. Additionally, the IRB training provided guidance on ethical research principles so that researchers' biases do not become barriers in the interpretation of the data received from the participants.

I created all required documents for IRB and submitted my application in January 2021. After securing the IRB approval, I proceeded to recruit participants in the study and collect data.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

For the purpose of this study, I selected my participants using a purposeful sampling strategy that, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), consists of "taking decisions as to whom to select as participants (or sites) for the study, the specific type of sampling strategy, and the size of the sample to be studied" (p. 157). In my case study, participants were from scheduled caste groups, leading me to establish a criterion for the participants using criterion sampling.

As per Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), criterion sampling is about setting a criterion on who and what to study established on attainment of certain perspective on sequential time in the social life of the group. Criterion sampling made sense in my case study as one of my goals was to capture the lived experiences of scheduled castes spanning a generation (30+ years). The criteria I set was that participants belonged to scheduled caste groups, utilized affirmative action to gain admission to engineering colleges and entry to government jobs, are middle aged married men and women (range 30-45 yrs.), and have at least 10 years of work experience in the engineering field.

To study the lives and stories of scheduled caste engineers with a set criterion as stated above, I talked to two engineers I knew from my childhood that belonged to the scheduled caste community who acted as gatekeepers. I needed an insider to a cultural group who could lead me to other interested participants as per the set criterion. As per Atkinson (2015), a gatekeeper is the one with whom the researcher meets first to get leads on the other participants. Initially, I planned to select 10 participants. Gatekeepers reached out to their social groups and identified 12 potential participants meeting the criterion who I was able to contact via phone calls. After contacting all 12, only seven consented to continue with their participation. Table 1 provides the profile of my research participants.

Table 1

Study Participants' Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Years of Service in Govt. Engineering jobs (Range)
Diwakar	M	40-45	15-20
Suman	F	35-40	15-20
Lata	F	35-40	15-20
Saagar	M	40-45	15-20
Anand	M	30-35	10-15
Shekhar	M	40-45	15-20
Jayant	M	40-45	15-20

Note. F = female; M = male.

After identifying participants that met the above-mentioned criterion, I invited them to take part in my study by sending an informed consent letter. In my consent letter, I described my research study, its significance, and purpose. I gave them ample time to review the content of the letter. I held phone calls with them to explain my research and what they could expect as the participants. I also made sure that they understand their rights as established by IRB guidelines for study participants (Information for Study Participants, n.d.) including their right to withdraw at any time during the study.

Data Collection

In-Depth Interviews

Patton (2015) indicated "The purpose of interviewing… is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective," and adds that "We interview to find out what is in and on someone

else's mind to gather their stories" (p. 787). I used interviews as my main tool to aid my qualitative research. Interviews are a powerful tool that can lead to insights and stories that can provide qualitative data that may not be easily found in literature reviews. The in-depth personal interaction with open-ended questions (see Appendix B) helped lead the participants to share what they had felt in their life being scheduled caste engineers.

After recruiting my participants, I sent them a more detailed explanation of my study and the informed consent letter to sign. After receiving the signed informed consent form the participants, I scheduled interviews using the phone and in three cases a video conferencing platform. Creswell and Poth (2018) acknowledged virtual via web-based interviews as one of the methods of data collection. Interviewing via web-based platforms (e.g., Skype, Zoom) also has some advantages over manual interviewing according to Creswell and Poth (2018), including time and cost efficiency, flexibility for participants, and greater ease for participants. These conditions provide them with an opportunity for deeper reflection on the interview questions.

Before conducting the interviews, once again I explained to participants their rights and protections during the research study. I also explained to them that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time they wish. I reviewed the IRB documentation once again with them to make sure there are no misunderstandings related to the material provided to them and asked them to sign the informed consent letter to start the interview process. I had two rounds of interviews with each participant and each interview lasted around 90-120 minutes.

Reflexivity Journal

Patton (2015) explained the importance of reflections during interview protocols. As per Patton (2015), reflexivity prompts the researcher to be considerate and mindful "of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspectives" (p. 710). Patton

(2015) also stated that “Reflexivity calls for self-reflection, indeed, critical self-reflection and self-knowledge, and a willingness to consider *how* who one is affects what one is able to observe, hear and understand” (p. 710). Based on these suggestions by Patton (2015), I decided to use reflexivity journal during the in-depth interviews.

Being an upper caste, I felt it was necessary to maintain a journal because I wanted to critically reflect on some of the participants’ statements and stories and keep my own bias in check. I recorded my notes in the journal to refer to later at the time of data analysis. To ensure I have rich information in the journal, I designed a simple interview protocol form (see Appendix C). The form had a column called “Reflective Notes” to write my notes. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended “the use of protocol, a predesigned form used to record information collected during an interview.” (p. 169). Creswell and Poth (2018) also stated that “The interview protocol enables a person to take notes during the interview about the responses of the interviewee.” (p. 169)

During the interviews, I wrote the “Reflective Notes” column, so I that I wouldn’t forget my initial thoughts and reactions to some of the participant comments. I referred to the interview recordings in a few cases and wrote my stance and position on the topics. I captured some of the sensitive comments from participants towards upper caste members like “They don’t understand us,” “you guys,” and “They will never get it.” The questions challenged me throughout as an upper caste.

I also wrote notes on my perspectives on some of the issues that participants discussed to critically reflect later during data analysis. For example, my perspective on prejudice against lower castes and the version of prejudice that I hear from my upper caste classmates challenged me critically reflect on what my participants were trying to say. I kept my opinions away from

the research as the study belonged to the scheduled castes and was not about my positionality. The reflexivity journal helped me later during data analysis in creating themes and patterns as things were clear to me as to what participants said and what I thought of some of the topics.

Documents

Document collection is another tool suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that documents ranging from private to public are forms of data to collect during a study. I collected documents related to the caste system in India, scheduled castes, and caste-based reservation system. Documents included digital newspapers and digital articles suggested by participants on the key political issues concerning the rights of the scheduled castes, disputes and opposing perspectives between upper castes and scheduled castes, and the impact of those disputes on the community. I also collected media such as videos related to the caste system in India and listened to speeches by scheduled caste leaders.

Some of the relevant and useful documents that I reviewed were

Annual report from the National Commission of SCs and STs (Government of India, 2016) b) Brochure on Reservation department of Public Enterprises: Ministry of Fin (Department of Public Enterprises, n.d.); c) Government of India Act, 1935 (Government of India Act,1935); d) Document about the Constitution of India (The Constitution of India,1949); e) List of castes in India state wise (List of Scheduled Castes, 2016); f) Dr. Ambedkar speeches and writings (Writings and speeches of Babasaheb dr. B.R. Ambedkar, n.d.); g) News on Dalit protests (Al Jazeera, 2018); h) Article on India's caste system (BBC, 2019); i) Documents on caste discrimination in India from International Dalit Solidarity Network (2016); j) Video on caste

oppression system in India (Mundi, 2018); and k) Video on breaking India's unjust caste system (Journeyman Pictures, 2016)

Even though my research is related to the life stories of scheduled caste engineers, I used these documents to provide context to understand the living environment of the people who have utilized affirmative action that are now working at par with upper caste jobs.

Data Analysis

I performed a series of in-depth interviews with the participants with sets of open-ended questions to encourage them to speak freely looking back at their lives and experiences. After the data was collected, I coded the transcriptions and created a concept map (see Appendix A). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the development of coding is essential to qualitative research and entails making sense of the content collected from interviews and documents.

To code, I used the lean method of coding. As per Creswell and Poth (2018), lean coding involves creating short list of codes that could be expanded if needed. I kept reviewing the list of codes a few times and performed the re-reviews also that gave me my final list of codes. After finding all the codes, I started making sense of the data collected and arranged it into broad categories of information. As per Creswell and Poth (2018), "Themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (p. 194). I also used memoing during my data analysis phase and kept taking notes as themes emerged. I associated the memos with the codes.

I also created detailed descriptions of my codes, themes they connected to and interpreted the information from my view as well as views of literature on the existence of age-old caste system in India. Detailed description is described as a great tool by Creswell and Poth (2018), who stated "Detailed description means that the authors describe what they see…Description

becomes a good place to start in a qualitative study (after reading and managing data), and it plays a central role in ethnographic and case studies" (p. 194). Also, I highlighted some important and relevant quotes from the participants that were impactful and associated with the themes and purpose of my study which helped me in the interpreting the data collected. As a result, the thematic analysis of the codes and concept maps helped identify major themes and sub-themes in participant responses.

Internal Validity

Assessing the validity of the case study results is a crucial element of the research process, as both Creswell and Poth (2018) and Merriam (1998) point out. Creswell and Poth (2018) identified validation in qualitative research to be an endeavor to evaluate the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data findings. Angen (2000) suggests that validation is "a judgement of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research" (p. 387). Creswell and Poth (2018) have identified nine validation strategies frequently used by qualitative researchers in various combinations to evaluate their results: prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review debriefing; negative case analysis; clarifying researcher bias; member checking; rich, thick description; collaborating with participants and external audits. Also, Creswell and Poth (2018) have recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of the validation strategies.

I used two strategies to validate my data: member checking and triangulation. As per Creswell and Poth (2018), during member checking the researcher asks participants' understandings of the integrity of the findings. To establish internal validity using member checking, after I transcribed the interviews, I connected with the participants via phone so that they could cross-check the information and thoughts they shared during the in-depth interviews.

The validation process allowed participants to suggest changes and add anything that they had missed. For triangulation purposes, I utilized three major methods of data collection: interviews, official and unofficial documents, and personal journals. Triangulation is a process of verifying the collected data through multiple sources of information, which validates the emergent themes. Creswell and Poth, (2018) stated that "when researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings" (p. 260). I performed data analysis through multiple sources of information and made sure the data was triangulated and thus reliable.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that an ethical study requires the researcher to anticipate potential ethical dilemmas ahead of time. According to these authors, the most common issues stem from a lack of respect, concern for welfare, or justice. Based on these guidelines, and as my study related to people who have a conflict with the upper castes, I made sure that I did not disclose anyone's names to any of the participants during or after completion of the interview process. Also, I made sure that no last names were exposed to anyone directly or indirectly in any of the in-depth interviews. Last names could reveal caste of a person and it was important to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

Data storage and security plays an important part in making sure that nothing related to the study is leaked anywhere at any stage of my study. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that researchers "Protect the anonymity of participants by masking their names in the data, and if a master list is needed, be sure to store it locally" (p. 175). Anonymity of the participants was of highest concern to me. To achieve this, the participant's audio recordings were only stored in my personal laptop and then were transferred to the UST cloud that required my username and

password, as well as two-factor authentication, to access it. This way, I utilized UST's IT department's firewall to safeguard identity of my participants and made sure any sensitive information provided by them was not leaked to the public that could create a political issue in their regions. I gave my participants pseudonyms so that their real names were not revealed at any point during or after my dissertation. E-mail communication to participants was also done via my UST e-mail address that is password protected (Director of IRB, personal communication, April 2019).

An obvious limitation of my study originated from the fact that I, as a researcher, belong to upper caste—which was also obvious to participants because of my last name that is considered as dominant caste in India. As Merriam and Tisdell (2015) advised, I bracketed myself to make sure that I remained as much in the role a researcher as possible and respected the stories of oppression however derogatory that may be against upper castes. If I needed to debrief an interview that affected me personally, I did it with a trusted advisor to ensure that my personal feelings do not affect the integrity of my research.

To make sure my personal biases, as I grew up as an upper caste, did not become a barrier in understanding what the participants were feeling at the time of interviews while sharing their stories, I made sure that the interview questions were kept open ended without expecting any definite answers. I also did not try to distract the discussions by providing my own opinion or my experiences, and stories when they were talking about their life stories. Finally, I followed all IRB guidelines (What is the Institutional Review Board, n.d) in order to maintain all ethical standards for my qualitative research.

As part of informed consent (see Appendix F), I had participants understand their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. The list of participant rights was located on the IRB

website and was also dispatched to all participants along with the informed consent letter. I clearly communicated in the letter that the participation in my study was a volunteer activity and according to IRB's guidelines for study participants (Information for Study Participants, n.d.) every participant had a right to "drop out of a study without a penalty."

I kept data collected during interviews in the form of documents and audio material confidential as per IRB guidelines and policies. I will make sure that after the dissertation is defended and approved, the data collected during interviews including documents and audio materials will be destroyed as per IRB's archival policy and this information on how long the data would be kept was also provided to the participants for awareness that their data is always kept safe and confidential.

CHAPTER FOUR:

SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE SCHEDULED CASTE ENGINEERS BEFORE UTILIZATION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impacts of the Indian caste-based reservation programs (i.e., affirmative action) on the personal, professional, and social life of scheduled caste engineers who participated in this research. The findings of this study resulted from three main sources including: a) seven one-on-one in-depth series of interviews with the participants; b) reflexivity journal; and c) various documents (online social media posts from the engineers, government official documents and digital newspaper articles).

I performed a series of in-depth interviews with the participants with sets of open-ended questions to encourage them to speak freely looking back at their lives and experiences. After the data was collected in Hindi - the national language of the participants, I translated the interviews into English and transcribed each participant's interview. I coded the transcriptions and created a coding map (see Appendix A). Thematic analysis of the codes and concept maps helped identify major themes and sub-themes in participant responses. Two major themes emerged from the analysis of the data pertaining to the participants' life before and after they had utilized affirmative action. Specifically, the themes read as follows:

1. Socio-cultural and economic condition of the scheduled caste engineers *before* affirmative action.
2. Socio-cultural and economic condition of the scheduled caste engineers *after* affirmative action.

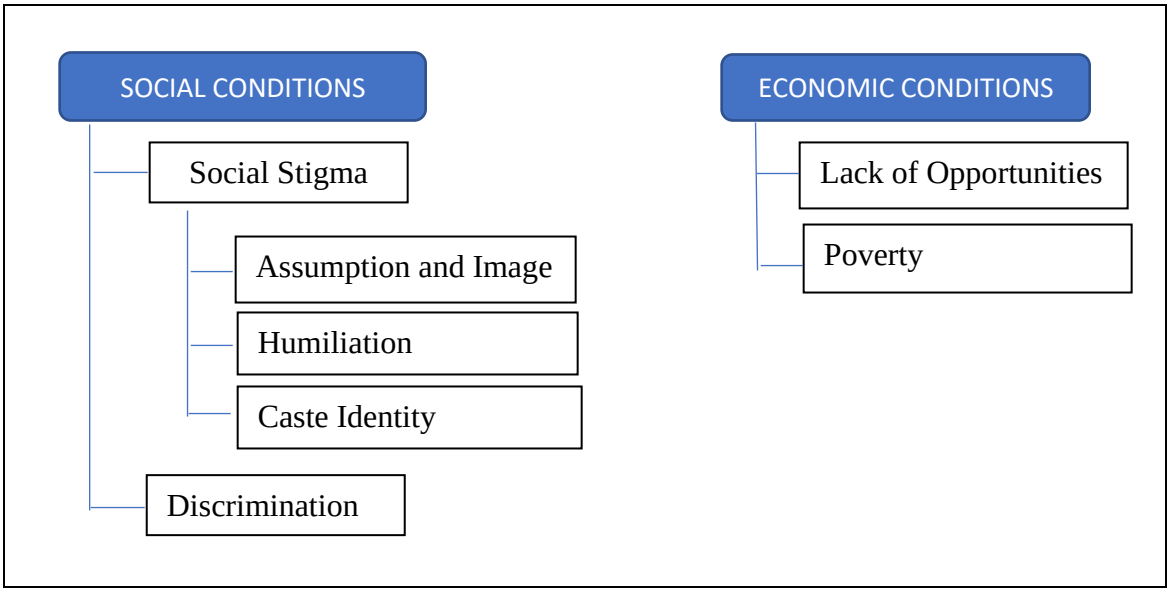
In this chapter, I present the findings related to the social and economic conditions of the participants before they benefitted from affirmative action. All participants lived with their

parents before they utilized affirmative action to complete their Bachelor of Engineering. During their undergraduate, they lived in the dormitories of the colleges away from their parents' homes. Participants' lived experiences discussed in this chapter pre-affirmative action were those of their childhood to high school times before joining their bachelor's in engineering when they lived with their parents and were dependents.

Figure 1 below is a graphical representation of subthemes that emerged from the overarching social and economic conditions of scheduled caste engineers before the use of affirmative action.

Figure 1

Social and Economic Conditions of Scheduled Caste Engineers Pre-Affirmative Action – Major Themes



Social and Economic Conditions Before Use of Affirmative Action

Social Conditions

Every engineer participant in this study stated that they were discounted individuals in their society, and that they had nothing to be proud of in their lives. Their lives were negatively influenced by the treatment that society inflicted upon them. For example, Jayant told me about his personal experiences from childhood that his neighbors did not invite him and his family members to any of the celebrations or parties at their homes only because he belonged to a lower caste. Jayant expressed that these experiences made him feel left out of his society and neighborhood.

Anand also shared a similar experience where the neighbors did not invite him and his family to birthday parties. Anand said, “it was a feeling of being left out if no one wanted to accept us as part of this community, and this feeling troubled me a lot.” All seven participants identified the following factors that had deeply impacted them at a personal and social level: social stigma, caste identity, assumption about scheduled caste and discrimination. I develop each of these factors in the next sections.

Social Stigma

During the interview, the participants shared that their castes are called “lower castes” and are considered lowest in the hierarchy of the overall castes in India. The scheduled caste list is officially published as per The Constitution of India (List of Scheduled Castes, 2016). There are many scheduled castes in India and each state in India has a variety of scheduled caste groups (List of Scheduled Castes, 2016). For example, some of the common scheduled castes in Jayant’s state in India are Barwala, Basith, Batwal, Chamar or Ramdasia, Chamar Rohidas, Chamar-Ravidas, Gardi, Jolaha, Chura, and Bhangi.

As per *What is India's caste system?* (BBC, 2019), the last name of a person directly or indirectly indicates one's caste which is known by the society, so irrespective of the current occupation of a person, he or she is still treated as a scheduled caste and thus considered lowest in the hierarchy of social stratification. The scheduled castes were made to serve others and did menial jobs in the olden times. For example, Shekhar said that his grandparents used to be serving the landlords by doing a variety of cleaning work at their agriculture fields and homes. During interviews, the participants discussed the social stigma attached to their castes and indirectly with their last names.

In explaining what he meant by the social stigma attached to his caste and last name, Jayant shared that he is known by his last name—which indicates his caste—in his neighborhood and not by his deeds or good nature. When explaining about his life before utilizing affirmative action, Jayant said that whenever he went anywhere in his neighborhood or larger community, everyone welcomed him in their groups and shared everything, but as soon as they knew his last name, they started creating distance from him.

Diwakar resonated with Jayant and said many times during the interviews that his life in his childhood was miserable as his caste was always highlighted because of his last name. Due to this, he did not make many friends at school. Diwakar recalled, "I used to make some friends in school, but as soon as they came close to me, they used to ask me 'what is your caste' and once they knew my caste, they showed their true colors." When asked the meaning of true colors, Diwakar said that "true colors mean their thinking was so small and narrow-minded." Diwakar also shared an incident that impacted his life where he was asked to stand up in the classroom and asked by the teacher to which caste, he belonged. He shared this incident with a lot of

hesitation and felt that he was insulted in front of the class. Diwakar's experiences highlight the caste system's power over personal interactions in Indian society.

In their interviews, Mrs. Suman and Mrs. Lata said that it is their last names and the castes that were seen by society and their treatment was also based on that. For example, Mrs. Suman shared an incident where an important mail communication was hidden from her because she belonged to a lower caste community. Some upper caste people in her community did not want her to progress.

Saagar and Anand also mentioned frequently in their interviews that their last name was always highlighted and their life before college where people used to create distance from them just because they belonged to a lower caste.

Diwakar and Saagar shared their frustration that wherever they used to fill any application form it became apparent to everyone that they were from a lower caste. Diwakar said angrily "there should be no last name of a person at all so that no one could see him as someone different or discounted and that he could live freely."

Caste Identity. Remembering incidents concerning their life before affirmative action, five out of the seven participants shared their lived experiences of how people who interacted with them inquired about their castes in their social set ups. They remembered incidents of their childhood and when they were in high schools that how the question of caste identity in the neighborhood and their day-to-day life haunted them and made them feel low in the society. They revealed that the questions "What is your caste," "Who are you," "Which caste you belong to," "What is your last name," or "Who are you" (referring to the caste of a person) are common in their lives. According to the participants, asking these types of personal questions regarding

caste status or identity has been a social norm since their childhood before they even had utilized affirmative action as adults.

Regarding caste identity, Diwakar reported about the proactive disposition of his brother who purposely does not use his last name in professional settings to avoid the discrimination associated with scheduled caste status and identity. He noted that the livelihood of his business depends upon having respect from the customers and that respect is automatically lost if his last name comes into the picture.

Four participants shared how their last name becomes a hurdle in their lives from time to time. For example, Diwakar shared an incident from his middle school where his teacher knowingly announced his last name in front of everyone to make him feel low. He said that if that teacher would have also announced last names of each student in the class irrespective of the caste, he would not have felt bad. This incident highlighted his caste and after that the behavior of students changed with him as everyone now understood that his caste was considered a lower caste.

Jayant and Anand repeatedly shared in their interviews that people used to ask them their last name whenever they met anyone for the first time. Jayant shared that the main question he faced in his high school days when people used to learn his last name was “who are you” and “which caste.” Jayant claimed that people somehow wanted confirmations on the caste so that they could create a distance.

Shekhar shared that in his life before affirmative action utilization, he and his family faced barriers to finding a good rental accommodation. He said, “wherever we used to go, the owners used to inquire about my caste after asking my last name.” He said that once we revealed our last names, the owners used to ask next question which was “which caste in particular you

belong to." These questions used to crush him from inside as he expressed in his frustration during the interview. Shekhar discussed that these incidents did not happen only once but many times before he had utilized affirmative action. Shekhar also provided documents and blogs from his social media posts that showed that questions on one's caste identity are common in Indian society.

Assumption and Image. All seven participants claimed the existence of preconceived notions about their caste. Diwakar shared his experiences from the time before he had utilized affirmative action and from his childhood days and stated that "You know, if you were dressed nicely with branded clothes and nice shoes, people would think that you are not a lower caste." Anand also stated that everyone has an image in their mind about the lower castes. Anand stated that since childhood, he has noticed that the behavior of people toward him is nice until they knew his last name or caste. Once he had revealed his caste, which he used to do but does no longer, the treatment and behavior toward him changed.

During the interview, Anand felt so frustrated that he said that his caste was seen so low in the society that he does not have anything to be proud of in his life. In explaining further, he said that "people don't think we can actually do anything in life. They have an image of my caste and always think the same thing even if I do something good in my life." Anand also stated that there was always some hesitation in telling his caste to people, but he also said that he could not do much about it; caste and last name comes out anyways from the neighbors or friends despite his best efforts.

Jayant shared that "Dominant groups have an internalized assumption about our caste community. They think about us being poor, dressed badly wearing outfits that gentlemen don't wear." He added that he had heard his upper-caste classmates in high school talk to each other,

referring to us like “Hey, you look like them.” As per Jayant, hearing statements like “You look like them” and “Don’t behave like them” were common in his childhood. Diwakar said that “if you are dressed nicely, someone used to say that see how he has maintained himself. He does not look like he belongs to a scheduled caste at all.” As a youngster, Saagar heard his classmates saying that those scheduled castes could not do anything good in their careers and lives. They made those statements without even analyzing how well someone might be doing in their studies.

Humiliation. Humiliation is a common feeling that five participants shared and claimed by providing examples of actual incidents that happened with them and their families. For example, Jayant and Anand both shared that their caste is considered a “slur” in some upper caste communities, and they are seeing the same thing happening from their childhoods. Jayant and Anand both stated that they have heard in some instances where their caste was made fun of and even called names in schools and other social gathering places.

Jayant said, “from my childhood I am noticing that it is like they use our caste name when they have to degrade someone.” The social stratification and degradation of lower castes from hundreds of years is still evident today. Jayant, while talking about caste discrimination said that at least in his community, there is an increase in the micro-aggression incidents against lower castes as compared to his childhood.

While sharing about the humiliation he felt when asked about his caste, Diwakar shared an incident prior to utilizing affirmative action when he was travelling in a train, sitting next to an engineer who was serving in a very good post in a public service organization. As the journey was long, they started interacting. A few hours into the journey, Diwakar thought he had made a

good friend. Suddenly, the topic shifted to local politics and this gentleman told him (Diwakar) that “see nowadays, we need to bend before leaders who used to sit at our feets in the past.”

In the interview, Diwakar explained that “this gentleman was referring to the lower caste leaders of his state and was referring to them in a manner that was dehumanizing and degrading them and their associated castes.” Diwakar stated that “this person did not know that I had the same caste as the scheduled caste leader that he was referring to in our conversations.” Diwakar continued to explain that:

> I felt so humiliated with his behavior, and I thought in my mind: see, an engineer progressed to such a nice position in his life, but his mindset is still stuck in old era; that’s why he showed his true colors, that he still does not consider lower caste people worthy of doing anything in life.

It became evident through Diwakar’s interview that prior to his utilization of affirmative action, he had internalized negative messages of hopelessness and humiliation related to his caste identity. Saagar and Mrs. Suman both also shared that it is a common thing that happened with them in their growing years that people used to create distance with them after learning about the caste and their last names. Mrs. Suman said that “Even if someone became a friend, he or she asked the caste and the last name so to confirm if their groups were matching with ours.”

Discrimination

All participants shared that they have faced discrimination at various points of time in their lives. Specifically, they shared how they faced discrimination and microaggressions from society before they had utilized affirmative action. Incidents of micro-aggression and discrimination were evident from their past experiences that happened with them. They shared their personal lived experiences where they had felt discrimination and microaggressions from

members of other caste communities in social settings before they had utilized affirmative action particularly from their childhood times. They said the same thing that they were frequently asked about what their caste was, where were they from, and who they are.

These questions are few of the examples of microaggressions that upper castes used to do with the members of the scheduled caste to make them feel that they are somehow discounted population and do not deserve to be humans at all. These questions were posed to the participants to force them to reveal their caste, after which it was actually decided how they should be treated. Diwakar and Mrs. Suman opened on the topic of microaggression. They discussed that they had faced questions like “ok, who are you actually” and “what is your background” and “what is the caste” and even if they told the caste, they were queried, “which sub-caste or type” to confirm caste identity. As per Diwakar and Mrs. Suman, people posed these questions on the caste to target them and make them realize from time to time that they were not welcomed to be friends with anyone outside their caste. Diwakar said, “the questions on our caste were so common.”

Telling about his childhood experiences on microaggressions, Saagar also echoed with Diwakar and Mrs. Suman that it was very common that people asked about his caste during normal conversations. After he declared the caste, they used to ask other questions “which caste actually” and “where are you from.” He said that his last name was like an upper caste's last name in another community, so people always confirmed after listening to his last name if it was the upper caste's last name or the lower caste's last name. The question “where are you from” gave Saagar a feeling of being alien in his land, one of the common themes of microaggression. Saagar’s frustration was clear from the first interview. Saagar started his first interview with a question to me which was “Are you an upper caste”. As I said “yes”, he asked me his next

question on why I was doing this study as it would eventually benefit the lower castes. I allowed him to keep telling his stories as my experiences were of least importance at that point in time. I kept my opinions away from my research in order to avoid infusing bias in my research.

The participants said that these questions on their identity and background added complexity in their minds as far as process of understanding their social identities was concerned. For example, Mrs. Suman shared that “I used to think if we belonged to this society or not.” Diwakar said that “He was so fed up with these questions that he stopped answering to other students about his caste and always kept quiet.” He added that “you know what, I stopped making friends at school. It was like psychological in nature that I felt so much pressure from the society and did not know how to process these questions and then answer.”

Talking about microaggressions, Jayant and Anand shared that during their school time, during regular conversations on career planning, etc., the upper caste students made comments like, “Oh, you will be fine, you have a reserved quota you will get the jobs easily.” Another common comment they heard was, “I think jobs should be given based on merit and qualification, " clearly stating that the scheduled caste community is being given unfair benefits because of their caste. Per Jayant, “Sometimes I did not feel like answering these kinds of questions and felt really bad.”

In my one-on-one interview with Anand, he stated: “I remember from my childhood that when people had functions in their homes for example, weddings or birthdays, they would not invite us to their home.” As a kid, he could not understand the rationale behind their neighbors’ behavior. Finally, when he grew up, he came to know that they did not invite his family because they were from the scheduled castes. He stated that “There were only couple of homes that belonged to scheduled castes in our colony, and all of them were left out. Imagine how one

would feel if left out when others were celebrating." Anand paused and in the flurry of emotions of this experience, could not express the feeling of social seclusion in his own neighborhood.

In conversation with Mrs. Suman shared that someone in their colony/community wanted to hide important mail communication that was meant to impact their family in a big way. It was a job offer for one of her immediate family members and that mail communication was kept hidden from her family. When asked if she knew why someone could hide such an important document from them, she said she can only say that someone in their community did not want them to progress in life as they were from a scheduled caste. She said that "the mail at first place should have been delivered to the recipient and not opened by anyone who could see the contents. This is violation of our privacy."

As evident from the statements by Mrs. Suman, privileges like privacy as well as a right to progress in life—equity—were halted by their community, and stories like hers are not uncommon. At the end of the interview, she reiterated that the equality referenced in the Constitution is nowhere to be found and ended up in frustration saying that "you know what, no one even cares about what is written in the constitution." In expressing emotions and mild anger/frustration during interview, Mrs. Suman told me that "it is really a big thing that you are doing research on this topic. No one will allow you to even research on this topic if you were doing your doctorate in any Indian university."

Likewise, Diwakar discussed the same kind of behavior by certain members of upper castes that tried to hide important information from him as he belonged to a scheduled caste. Diwakar shared that when he was applying for top-rated engineering colleges in India, an upper caste administrator in one of the colleges hide information on some of the colleges from him just because of his lower caste status. When asked how he knew the information was hidden from

him, he said that the same information was given to him by another person of his caste and the whole thing got exposed on its own, so there is no doubt in his mind about this incident. Diwakar added that:

> Someone hiding information from us is a very common thing that happens to our community. As you know, lower castes used to servants in the past and actually some upper castes don't want to see us progress and grow in life, because if we progress then who will be their servants, so they hide and block information from us and don't let us progress or perform jobs that were only made for upper castes.

The other four interview participants shared similar incidents where discrimination based on the caste was highlighted. For example, Saagar said the following:

> In my childhood, I had a good friend who was an upper caste. I used to go to their home, and we were very friendly. Both of our families were financially equal, so I mixed up with them nicely, which is what I feel at least. After a few years, he and his family were doing good and were financially sound. I remember I was meeting him after a long time, but I did see a change this time when I entered their home, they told me to leave shoes outside the home. I felt very bad as I used to meet them before at their home and enter their home with shoes also. They did not allow me to enter kitchen although in the past, I used to go to their kitchen also and prepare meals etc. with them. I felt bad that they had some caste thing in their mind now after they have become little rich. I still meet him, but now that kind of openness is not there as his mindset has changed now.

Saagar indicated that whenever he went and sat in his social circle anywhere in his neighborhoods, people found out that he belonged to a scheduled caste from their last names and

acted like they are somehow not part of the society. Saagar exclaimed: “These things hurt… But what to do. These things exist and we cannot deny them.”

Saagar continued telling his experiences of unfair treatment and discrimination with his caste members. He opened the topic of being a priest in Hindu temples in India. In India, the social set up allows only a Brahmin – an upper caste member to become priest. Saagar wondered why people of his caste are not allowed to be Hindu priests. He posed a question to me and said, “tell me why my caste person can’t be a priest in a temple. This is discrimination that will never end even after someone utilizes affirmative action.” Jayant echoed Saagar’s reasoning by saying “even if my caste person does a doctorate in Hindu religious studies, society will never allow him to run a temple as a priest. This is the prejudice that we have to live with in this lifetime.” Saagar also challenged upper castes by saying “you say that the lower castes are enjoying reservation system and quotas, you tell me if only a Brahmin can be priest in a temple, isn’t this true that upper castes have reservation quota in temples, and they don’t want to give their place to any other caste.”

Two participants shared incidents of discrimination that went beyond micro-aggressions and involved threats, violence, and involvement of the police. Jayant shared a childhood episode that involved a fight in his village between the upper castes and the lower castes where police got involved. The altercation was that the upper castes did not want the lower castes to touch some public facilities that were open to all.

Another incident that Jayant shared from his childhood days was as follows:

> There was a marriage procession happening and people of my community were going to a different village to celebrate the marriage. On the way, there was an area where only upper castes lived. The whole marriage procession was stopped by upper castes, and they

> threatened us by saying that we are not allowed to dance and walk through their areas like this and asked to go back.

This was a devastating incident as per Jayant. He shared that "You see they don't even want us to celebrate something. These things leave a major impact on your life when you live in a mixed community, and you are the only one who is targeted always." Next, I present the economic conditions of the scheduled caste engineers before affirmative action.

Economic Conditions

The affirmative action program (i.e., caste-based reservation system) was aimed to improve socio-economic conditions of the scheduled caste population in India. I asked all participants about their economic wellbeing before utilization of the affirmative action program. I wanted them to tell their stories and incidents pertaining to the time when they had not utilized any of the benefits provided by the government of India. Participants were to respond to the question of "how was your economic life before affirmative action?"

All participants shared two common factors including lack of opportunities and poverty, as well as difficult working conditions. As participants lived with their parents pre-affirmative action, they recounted their family backgrounds and told stories of how they all have come so far in life that they cannot even tell how life was for their parents when they were kids. For participants in this study, the most important thing was to put food on the table, but poverty kept looming over their heads. Participants said that due to poverty, their parents could not afford good education and thereby did not get access to jobs that could take care of their financial needs.

Lack of Opportunities

Five participants shared that they and their family members struggled to make ends meet. They faced poverty as they could only work in certain jobs like servants etc. For example, Saagar shared that his parents could not afford education in their time. He said that he was the first person in his entire family history to get admission in an engineering college. He shared that "before affirmative action, the jobs that the lower castes could do were limited as people could not afford education and were not qualified for jobs like engineering." Diwakar, Shekhar, and Mrs. Suman echoed with Saagar that the lack of access to education due to poverty made them do menial jobs like being servants for others. Jayant also shared that his parents also could not afford to get any good job and struggled because of lack of access to education.

The limitation of jobs restricted the economic growth of the participants as the job pay scales at the level of servants were minimum wages—and sometimes did not even involve wages with which one can survive. In explaining how their economic life was before the affirmative action program, Shekhar indicated that his grandfather was a laborer. He used to work in the fields for the Zamindars (i.e., landlords). His grand-father's job was to be a servant and just obey the landlords and nothing else. It was as if their whole family was at the mercy of the landlord. The wages were even less than minimum, and not enough to provide three meals for the day.

Shekhar said that "The situation continued until my father did get a chance to finally get education and come out of this ditch." Even though the question in the interview to Shekhar was directed toward economic condition, he kept diverting toward the discrimination and oppression his grandfather and his whole family faced while being a servant for this landlord. I could notice the emotions that Shekhar went through while telling his family history, as well as how intertwined his family's experience of poverty and social discrimination were. Shekhar gave an

analogy when telling his story, stating that “his family was in ditch before.” When asked to explain what he meant by ditch, he said that

> it was like a time when my family had nothing and it was not even enough to survive, that is why I call it a ditch and the challenge was to first come out of this ditch and then start playing on the level plain field with others and it took years and years for their family to do so.

All participants discussed that before affirmative action program came into picture, no one gave the scheduled castes any chance to work in the upper caste professions like teaching and engineering. They all stated that inequality in the kinds of jobs a lower caste performs limited their ability to rise in life. The castes in the lower spectrum of the social hierarchy were only allowed to be servants and perform certain types of menial jobs. As per Mittal (2016), lower castes “were supposed to do menial jobs as sweepers, gutter cleaners, scavengers, watchmen, farm laborers, rearers of unclean animals such as pigs, and curers of hides” (para. 4). All participants stated that these jobs not only had limited set of opportunities and had poor working conditions. Growth was not at all a consideration or a point of discussion in their families as there was no path to grow in these jobs as stated by the participants. All participants claimed that it was a constant struggle until affirmative action program came into action after independence. Shekhar stated that he and his family had limited resources to live their lives. Sometimes they did not have food to eat. His father made sure that he always had shelter though. He said that “life was really tough before affirmative action. My parents worked very hard to make me reach where I am today.” As per Mrs. Lata and Jayant, the biggest challenge for them was also to provide food to family as they always had shelter.

Likewise, Mrs. Suman said that her father had struggled a lot to provide to all his kids. He always wanted to give her kids most comfortable things in life because he himself had not seen any comfort and had only seen poverty. In every conversation and her story, she kept referencing to her father's hard work and said she could not imagine what her father would have gone through in his lifetime before affirmative action program.

Saagar shared that his parents had seen a lot of struggles and worked very hard to bring them where their family was today. He said that the lack of opportunities on the education front also made his family struggle more because once affirmative action was put in place, the education was a necessary tool to progress. Basic education was missing in their family, as were the opportunities that come with the education.

Poverty

All seven participants shared the fact that they themselves, their immediate families, and older generations had faced poverty and had struggled a lot to provide for their families. They said that their ancestors had seen the worst economic conditions as compared to their current generation. Their ancestors had struggled a lot while working as servants and jobs that required a lot of manual effort and that did not earn minimum wage also.

The trend of poverty had continued until one of their generations did get a chance to get some education, though only because the government of India and its leaders wanted to eliminate inequality based on the caste of a person. All participants said that the extent of their poverty was limited to providing basic amenities like clothes and food to all family members and they all did have shelters and a place to stay. They did not encounter any situation where they or their family members were homeless. In conversation with Jayant, he said that poverty in his family was related to affording food for all family members. He and his family always had shelter. Jayant

said that “food was the only concern my family had. We just wanted to provide bare minimum needed for our families.”

In a detailed discussion on the struggle and use of affirmative action, it came out that along with the worst economic conditions and poverty that they faced, Jayant argued that not everyone in a scheduled caste gets the benefit of affirmative action. Their progress on that front is also halted due to various reasons and he resonated his experience with what Shekhar who referred to the life before as being in stuck in a ditch. Jayant shared that he was lucky to utilize affirmative action but there are thousands of people in his caste community that lack support and are not able to get the same benefit as he did. He shared that:

> How can my people from my community compete with someone who is getting everything from so many years? People in my community start from a minus level in their lives. They do not have economical support; no social support and they do not have anyone supporting them. How can they rise finally?

The notions of “being in a ditch” and “being at a minus level” as discussed by five participants’ personal stories confirm that the economic conditions of their families were far from required living conditions. Participants themselves as kids and the generation of their fathers and grandfathers had struggled at the times of inequality with below minimum wage situations and struggled to provide bread and butter to their families.

Conclusion

This chapter presented findings of the data analysis that emerged out of the in-depth interviews with seven scheduled caste engineers and from various documents I analyzed. Findings include patterns organized into major themes and subthemes that emerged out of the interviews through data analysis. Participants’ personal experiences before utilization of

affirmative action highlighted how deep-rooted the caste system is in Indian society as well as its impact on their day-to-day life, emphasized by the contrast of stories passed down generation to generation of the hardships faced by scheduled castes over the years.

While sharing stories related to social and economic conditions before utilizing affirmative action, participants shared various patterns of discrimination in their society which are largely derived from their social identity, stigma, and oppression as per the caste system and the dominant castes' privilege. Participants also highlighted how important of a role their last names play in their lives as a marker of their caste.

Participants shared their personal stories on how they deal with the social stigma and constantly struggled with their identities in social settings. In the next chapter, I discuss what impacts (if any) participants felt in their experience after utilization of affirmative action.

CHAPTER FIVE:

SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITION OF SCHEDULED CASTE ENGINEERS AFTER UTILIZATION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

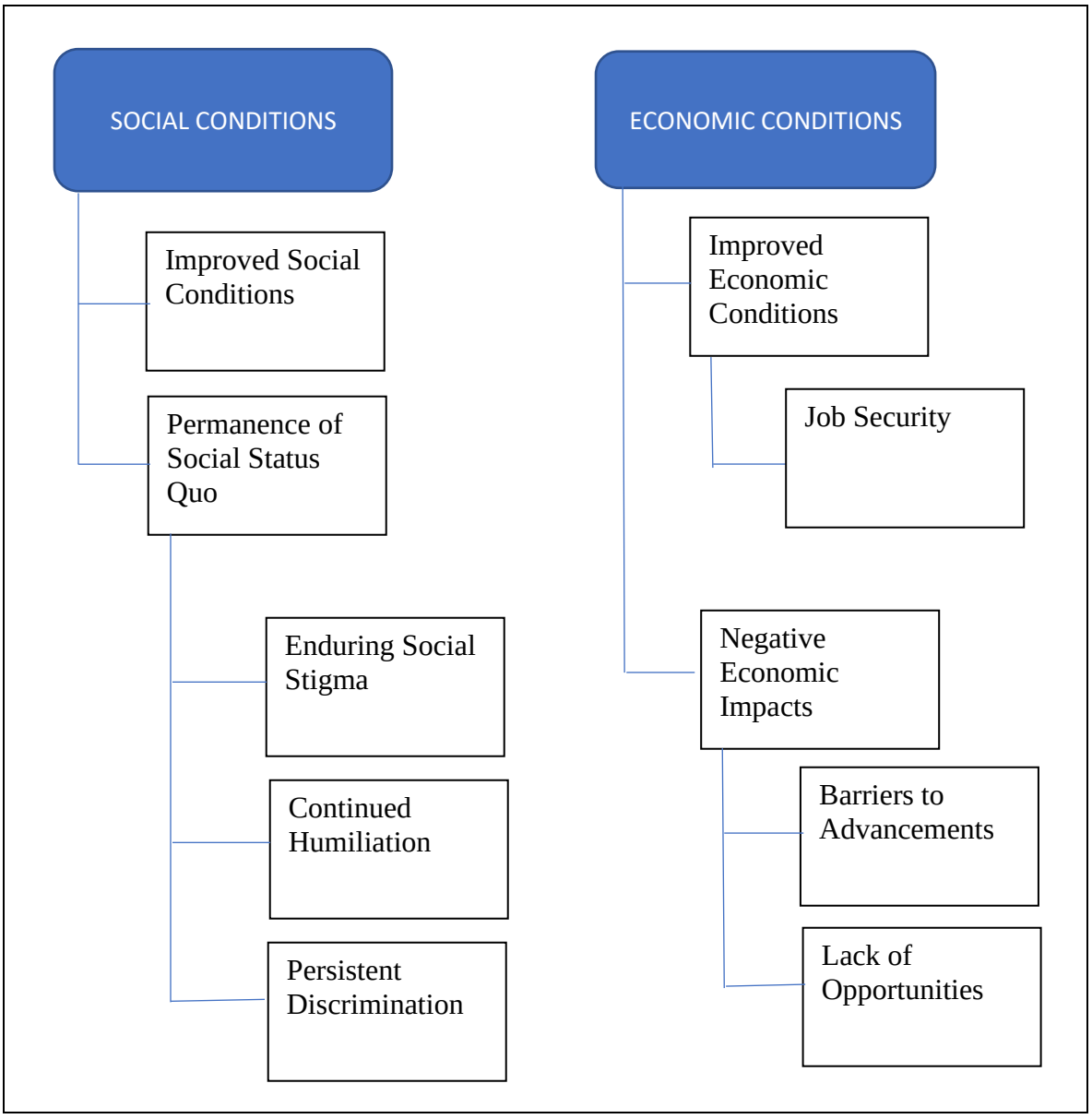
Chapter 4 of this study had a focus on the socio-cultural and economic conditions of scheduled caste engineers before they received affirmative action. In this chapter, I present exclusively the findings from interviews conducted with participants about the socio-cultural and economic conditions of the scheduled caste engineers after they utilized affirmative action programs.

Figure 2 below shows the two major themes and four sub-themes that emerged out of the data analysis. There are two major times in the lives of scheduled castes when they utilize affirmative action. One is to get admissions into the engineering colleges, where there is a specific quota percentage reserved for scheduled castes. As per Frisancho and Krishna (2016), "the central government requires that 15 % of the students admitted to universities must be from SC." In this case, their college life would be considered "life after utilizing affirmative action" (p. 618).

Another time is when scheduled caste members have reservation quotas for government jobs, and they utilize the affirmative action to secure the jobs (Department of Public Enterprises, n.d). In this case, their life after securing the job is considered as post-affirmative action life. I present the two themes in this chapter from these two perspectives of affirmative action as a result of admission in Engineering school and of the government's job-assistance quota. More explicitly, this chapter presents the post college and post-affirmative action employment for the engineers who participated in this study.

Figure 2

Social and Economic Conditions of Schedule Caste Engineers Post-Affirmative Action – Major Themes



Social Conditions

Improved Social Conditions

Four participants indicated that even though their social status was still driven by their castes and last names, they saw a little improvement in the behavior of people in their society toward them due to serving as high paid engineers who held good designations and posts in some of the important government sectors. In explaining his social life and behavior of society toward him after utilization of affirmative action, Jayant shared that "the little social status that I have is all because of my appointment to the position I hold. All this will go away if I am not on this position." When asked about the difference he has seen in people's behavior after reaching a certain position in his office, Jayant said, "Definitely, there is some change. You see we would not even have gotten to this place if it were not for the reservation system." Mrs. Lata echoed Jayant and said that:

> I think that there is an improvement in the behavior of people toward me in society, but I also know that all the respect that I have earned is only because of my job and if my job is lost today, people won't give me any importance

Anand shared similar kind of feeling that after getting a job, his family's social status has a little improvement. He said that "people in my neighborhood at least recognize me and give me some value because I have a good job" and "this little improvement in my life is only because of the post I hold at my job which is given importance." Mrs. Suman said that "my situation has certainly improved because of my education and job that I did get because of the reservation system. I have some respect at my job and neighborhood now." Like Jayant and Mrs. Lata, Mrs. Suman was also sure that all the respect she has earned will be gone soon if she leaves her job.

Yet, all four participants who said that they saw a little improvement in their social condition also indicated that this improvement would go away if they left their jobs due to any

reason. However, none of them provided any incident to substantiate their claim. On the contrary, the other three participants did not agree with the explanations of the above four participants and said that there is no change at all in their social condition and society still considers them as discounted individuals and the social stigma continues, which I present in the next sections.

Permanence of Social Status Quo: Enduring Stigma

All seven participants found that while a level of discrimination and degradation existed in their college time, this situation has gotten worse after college life and during their engineering careers. In the next sections, participants elaborate on the worsening of their social conditions post-affirmative action.

During College Life. During the in-depth interviews, five participants shared that during their time in college, they found that their social interactions with their college mates, teachers, and staff was fine. They did not encounter many issues related to discrimination based on the caste system. They said that even though they joined the colleges based on the reserved quota of seats of their choice, they were not treated unfairly by any of the students, teachers, and staff. Diwakar said “In college, unlike my school time I did make some good friends and some of them were upper castes. I did not face any incident where any of my upper caste friends would have said anything degrading to me because of my caste.” He added that before joining the college he was little afraid that people would judge him based on his caste because everyone would know that he has taken admission in the college in the reserved quota, but he found that no one in the college tried to degrade him and commented on him as he had faced in his school time. Shekhar said that “My college experience was good. I was comfortable in interacting with everyone. My friends did not mistreat me anytime because I belonged to a scheduled caste.”

Jayant also related to Diwakar and Shekhar on the overall experiences during their college days. Jayant shared that his college journey was okay, and he also did not experience much discrimination based on his caste. He said the following:

> College time was better as compared to the life earlier to that time. I did not face any discrimination when I was in college studying. Inside college, all went well and in fact I can say with confidence that situation has improved overall within colleges.

Anand and Saagar resonated with Jayant and said that neither faced any discrimination during college. Anand said that "my college time was good. I did not encounter any discriminatory behavior from any of my friends or teachers." Saagar stated the same experience but brought up a point that he did not face discrimination, but he had to work hard as compared to other classmates as he had internalized this idea that he needs to work hard if he is to do something in life. He felt he could not explain this further but wondered if he knew from deep within that the kind of background, he belonged to demanded extra effort in his studies lest his caste stigma take precedence over his capability and intelligence.

However, two participants shared that they noticed traces of racism and discrimination against them but discussed that the incidents that happened with them felt relatively small as compared to what happened to them after their college years. For example, Mrs. Lata shared that there were certain teachers of upper castes who did not treat her well and she just ignored all that as she thought that was part of the life and just continued with her studies.

In explaining particular situations and incidents, Mrs. Lara said that "One incident that I can share is whenever in a class, I asked an upper caste teacher a question or doubt, that teacher ignored me but that teacher did answer other upper caste students and was nice to them." She added that this type of behavior from the upper caste teacher was an indication of racism as she

did notice this behavior many times and it was confirmed to her that it was not a mistake on the part of the upper caste teacher. She said that she felt humiliated when that feeling arose that somehow upper caste teachers ignored her because she belonged to a scheduled caste community. Mrs. Lata's experience of being ignored clearly shows that this was an act of micro-aggression with a theme of considering Mrs. Lata as "a second-class citizen" from the upper caste teacher. Mrs. Lata also said, "Apart from this situation of ignorance, there were no other incidents of discrimination that happened to her during college time."

Diwakar also discussed that he faced racist behavior from his seniors who repeatedly asked him questions like "to which scheduled caste group you belong to?" He added that "clearly they wanted me to realize my place in the society otherwise they would never have asked me caste related questions." Diwakar was referring to the age-old social stratification based on caste when he talked about his place in the society he acknowledged.

Finally, from the participant's experiences shared above, majority of them had a good college life and they did not face any discrimination based on their caste compared to what they had felt before utilizing affirmative action during their childhood and school time. Overall, all participants did not spend as much time discussing this topic of college life as they said they felt the real impact of affirmative action in their post-college life.

Post-College Life. All participants indicated that upon the use of affirmative action for employment, they secured jobs. Their social status, however, did not improve much. Rather, they asserted that there was an additional layer of discrimination in their overall social lives. This discrimination was due to the fact that people attributed their educational achievements to the reservation system alone and discounted their work as a consequence.

All seven participants discussed this fact that even though they perform all their job duties as per expectations, it has been consistently communicated to them that they are not competitive. Shekhar and Diwakar shared during their interviews that their managers who belong to the upper castes had always degraded them by saying things that indicated that they are in the jobs because of the reserved quota otherwise they don't deserve it. When asked about if they wanted to share specific wordings from their managers, they refrained from saying exact quotes of managers because they said they want to keep things confidential as exposing exact quotes or names may reveal their identity.

Diwakar shared that his manager never used to take him to the sites as he always thought "I was not competitive enough to go for site inspections." Even though his manager never explicitly stated the reason, it was obvious to him nonetheless as all engineers who got chances to go the sites were from upper castes. Diwakar shared that "I was given office paperwork because I belonged to SC quota and my manager always made sure I am not given anything that involved my skillset to be used at the sites."

Continued Humiliation. Referring to their engineering job colleagues, most participants shared that they face continued humiliation now as compared to the time before utilization of affirmative action.

Diwakar said that:

> It has become worse after I have utilized of affirmative action as now people judge me quickly when they know my last name. Their first impression is that I am from a reserved quota as they assume based on my last name that I have used affirmative action to get this job without knowing how much capable I am in my job duties."

Jayant echoed with Diwakar and said that “definitely situation has worsened as compared to life before utilization of affirmative action.” During discussion on continued humiliation, Jayant wanted to make sure I understand why the affirmative action is still needed in India despite of the fact as per his statements that many of his colleagues at job want this system to be shut down and want to make everything as a merit-based system. I kept listening to his views as I felt he opened his heart during this interview, and I felt his views must be captured and shared with the society.

Jayant continued:

> Who would have listened to us? You know still people call names to our caste. Our caste is a *gaali* [name calling or slur] for upper castes, they use our caste to call names in their conversations till date. This is a true incident that has happened to me. In my first posting, this incident happened that someone was calling name to someone in my office and saying my caste as a slur. Imagine how bad it is and how would I have felt after hearing that. That person did not know that I also belonged to that community about whom they were associating a name calling. If they knew, they would not have said that, but this is what they think. They treat our community as a *gaali*.

Jayant told an incident where there was an SC Engineer officer at a good post who invited couple of upper caste engineers and others to his home for a function/celebration. Jayant noticed that the upper caste engineers were discussing among each other that “see what days have come now we need to go to their homes”. He pointed at the word “their.” He explained how bad he felt on that after being referred to as “their.” He also stated that “Discrimination continues, and I am telling you that these things are not that old. This is happening in this age. These are very recent incidents that I am sharing with you.”

Anand echoed with Jayant on the continued humiliation and said that

> My caste is considered as a slur in the community. I have heard many of my upper caste friends and colleagues use my caste as a slur in their conversations. Imagine how someone would feel if their community were used in the conversations as a slur

Mrs. Lata shared same experience post-affirmative action utilization at her job on the continued humiliation but refrained from telling exact incidents for sake of her privacy. Saagar and Mrs. Suman also did not discuss any incidents related to continued humiliation but said that nothing has changed in their social treatment after utilization of affirmative action.

Saagar said:

> my caste and last name are still seen as a lower caste and people in general avoid interactions with me after learning that I belong to a lower caste. I really feel bad but cannot do much so have started ignoring them.

Persistent Discrimination. All participants shared that they have experienced that the caste system and their caste identities have still made them victims of discrimination and micro-aggressions even after performing well as engineers at their respective jobs. Jayant discussed that the situation of his caste and community has worsened when talking about discrimination overall in last few years instead of improving. When asked in what ways the situation has worsened in the past couple of years for him, he discussed about a national protest that happened in 2018 which turned violent. The protests were related to an amendment that was made to the Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribe Act (known as the prevention of atrocities act):

> Behavior of people have changed due to some political unrest in the country after changes were announced to the prevention of atrocities act. This happened in 2018 and

> protests turned violent. After this change, scheduled castes feel that discrimination will now increase more in our country. (Al Jazeera, 2018)

Shekhar shared an incident that changed his life forever that happened with him at his job. Before this incident, he recalls living in denial of his lower caste status as all his upper caste colleagues behaved nicely with him. However, a couple of years back, his office implemented a new reservation policy under which contracts were to be given to scheduled castes. He added, "Of course, this was a government policy and I had nothing in framing this policy." Due to this new reservation policy, he got the contract. One of his colleagues, who was an upper caste, became hostile and started blaming scheduled castes as if they had something to do with it. Shekhar said that his colleague even tried to threaten him and his family after getting drunk one day. Police got involved in this incident and that person was jailed for threatening Shekhar. Shekhar continued:

> In all this, I got a shock of my life, and it was a major turning point as now I knew that people who are so close can also keep a grudge against me just because of who I am. You see, I had no hand in framing any government policy of reservation but still got targeted for doing nothing. I got all this after having helped that colleague so many times.

Shekhar also shared that finally he accepted that colleague's apology and carried on with his life, but this incident shocked him. When asked what the reaction of this incident on his family was, he responded "definitely these things impact your family but at the end of the day we need to be very strong, and I told the same to my family." Shekhar explained that he and his family are always vigilant and ready to face racism and microaggression or even macroaggressions such as this threat of physical violence against them; but he will continue to work against the unfair treatment against him and his caste community.

Taking about persistent discrimination, Jayant indicated that there is news every now and then that someone killed a lower caste; for example, when someone did not want to let a lower caste walk through their lawn. As per his statements, these things are happening in this age also. He laughed and said, “Can you believe it.” According to him, the incidents of discrimination has not ended yet and the mindset of people where caste is everything has not changed yet.

Jayant added:

> Due to reservation, at least people have recognized the scheduled castes that they are at a certain designation or post. Now Imagine, if we were not at these designations, nobody would have even noticed us and seen us. Nobody would have respected us this little also that we have today due to our jobs.

Jayant also highlighted another face of racism where he talked about the continued discrimination and increasing caste differences. He shared that these differences between the upper castes and lower castes have become so large that certain upper caste communities did not even let lower castes complete their last Hindu rituals in a burial ground that according to the upper castes belonged to them. Finally, separate burial grounds had to be made so to keep last rituals separately for upper castes and the lower castes. Jayant shared sarcastically that “see, we are humiliated so much that people don’t even leave us be after death.”

Mrs. Suman was so upset by the treatment and discrimination she has continued to experience after securing her position of employment that she stated that she does not see any future in India for her kids and said that she will never tell her kids about existence of the reservation system in India and want them not to use the affirmative action to get admission in the colleges. She stated that she wants her kids to study hard and score equivalent to other upper caste students in the entrance exams for admissions to the colleges. She wants to do this so that

they do not have to face an additional layer of discrimination merely based on that fact that they have utilized affirmative action to get admissions to a college or entry into a job.

Mrs. Suman also explained that even though her kids won't be able to change their caste as their last name will always stay same and they will always be lower castes in India, at least her kids will avoid unnecessary stress in their life that is caused by utilization of affirmative action and implications that they are not worthy of their place because they did not earn it. Mrs. Suman also shared that she would try to settle abroad in a western country where there is no caste system. She stated that she felt strongly that her family would be much safer in western countries than in India, where the caste system haunted them severely.

Diwakar shared different views on the same topic and said, "nothing good will happen if your kids don't utilize affirmative action as society will always assume that you have used it and will base all their interactions based on the last name or caste anyways." It appears that Mrs. Suman holds out hope that merit-based admission, as defined by the upper castes, will hold some weight in the treatment of her children whereas Diwakar believes that the discrimination will happen in one form or another regardless of whether the affirmative action is used. Diwakar concluded his thoughts by saying that "Reservation or affirmative action program is like poison served in a golden spoon…life is different if one utilizes affirmative action as people now think that we got something that we do not deserve, and discrimination continues."

Economic Conditions

The caste-based reservation system was developed to improve socio-economic conditions of the scheduled caste population in India. I asked all participants how the program and its utilization affected their families' economic conditions after utilization of affirmative action as well as any changes that have occurred post affirmative action. All acknowledged that their

economic condition has improved a lot due to the opportunities and jobs they got because of the reservation system. They added that their socio-economic conditions would have been worse-off if the caste-based reservation system were not in place.

Improved Economic Conditions

Shekhar stated that "The Constitution of India has helped us in reaching where we are today." Anand assured that

> Yes, we see improvement. In my childhood, I never used to tell my caste to anyone. Today, I say it with confidence to everyone without any thinking of stigma associated with it as I feel I have reached somewhere economically in my life now. This is all due to my job status and economic condition today.

Participant indicated that after caste-based reservation was provided to them and their families, they were able to pay all their bills, meet rent, and put food on their tables as they had faced poverty and lack of support from the community. Post-affirmative action, the scheduled caste communities no longer had limited availability of jobs due to the nature of the caste system which was based on the occupations. The onset of affirmative action program did bring a positive change in their lives as now they could think of joining jobs that were made only for the upper castes.

Job Security. After the participants themselves have utilized the reservation program, they can live a comfortable life without having to work as servants or on other minimum wage/non-livable jobs. They all shared same experience and stated that caste-based reservation program lifted the restrictions on who could perform what type jobs, opened all jobs to the scheduled caste communities, and then reserved seats in government jobs for the scheduled castes so there is a representation from people of all communities. They described significant

benefit from these opportunities that otherwise would have been very difficult to obtain without the support and the reservation provided by the government.

Shekhar reported:

> There was a lot of improvement in economic condition of our family. There is no doubt about this that reservation made sure that people from Scheduled Caste community could be uplifted and given jobs otherwise people would have hired only their own people from their own community always.

When asked what he meant specifically by "people would have hired only their people," in the above quote, he said that he was referring to the upper castes in the scenario, "that they would never hire us if caste-based reservation was not there in place." Referring to the struggle of his family, Shekhar said that his family was in a ditch and his father had filled the ditch by studying; he brought them to ground level and now it was his job to build on all that he had done.

Likewise, Diwakar affirmed that he has held his current position because of reservation program; otherwise, he would not have achieved this in his life. His economic situation has improved significantly because of the opportunity provided by the government in the form of reservation. Mrs. Suman and Mrs. Lata echoed their own families' experiences and shared that caste-based reservation made a difference in their families' economic condition.

As participants shared above that they have witnessed positive economic outcome in their lives due to the affirmative action. At the same time, whenever they had a chance during interviews, each participant also expressed frustration that their social status remains same and/or has worsened as compared to their past lives.

Negative Economic Impacts

Barriers to Advancement. All the participants in this study agreed that despite progress made in their lives because of affirmative action, they feel that there is an enduring perception in the society that they are inferior to the upper castes and are not competitive at their jobs. For example, Diwakar shared that people judge scheduled castes engineers or employees who utilized affirmative action as people who are not competitive for the job. He explained:

> What I mean to say is, they think that we are not competitive enough for the job. You see, we always need to prove ourselves and do extra work than others what is required of the job. At work, people judge us by our caste and not by what we do or perform and say that we are not competitive.

For Saagar, whatever he does at his job will never be rewarded, as if everyone judges him by his caste and not the actual work he does at the office. Shekhar and Anand agreed with Saagar that they need to be extra vigilant at the office, as a small mistake could lead people from upper caste management to think that they are not competitive.

The reserved seats in the government jobs have a lower admission cut off to provide opportunities to the lower castes. The cut off was lower when lower caste engineers entered the jobs giving into the perception that they were not competitive regardless of their outstanding performance. For Mrs. Suman, this assumption never goes away even if one is performing better that the upper castes who came to the job by getting better entrance exam scores. The perception is that lower caste engineers cannot perform well.

All participants stated that people see scheduled castes as the personnel who came to the jobs with a low merit and not fit for the job. Jayant explained,

> say for example, a bridge collapses and the engineer for that job happens to be a scheduled caste, people will quickly judge and say: ‘see it is because of this scheduled

caste engineer that the bridge has collapsed;' they would not even wait for any investigation to happen. This is the image of a scheduled caste engineer at job.

Also, each participant said that it takes a lot of effort to prove how good they are at their jobs and said that this perception of inferiority constitutes a barrier hard to overcome, no matter what. Anand added that he needs to be extra cautious at executing his job duties so no one could raise any doubts on his performance at job as he belongs to a lower caste.

Four participants shared that they always have to make a good impression to upper-class colleagues and customers. Anand said it is difficult to explain why he needs to be extra polite with some upper caste clients and customers. He does so to avoid giving the impression of not paying attention to them and or showing caste discrimination in the process of serving them. He is constantly disturbed by this idea of pleasing others only because he belongs to a scheduled caste community.

The other three participants did not discuss about impression management but did confirm that they always need to do something extra to prove their worth at job or skills but did not discuss about the extra work and its nature. They hinted that they do it to maintain their image which is otherwise assumed as incompetent.

Lack of Opportunities. Lower-caste status has resulted in poor job evaluations. Saagar shared another important point related to the same kind of barriers which is directly related to the growth and that is promotions in the jobs and the annual performance appraisals. He said, "Managers know our last names and that makes an important impact when an upper caste manager has to promote a lower caste employee."

Diwakar shared his frustration that "I say that managers should not know last names of employees." Diwakar continued in anger and said that "You know what, I say that there should

not be any last name of a person." He said that as upper caste managers know the last names, they give poor reviews on the performance appraisals but do not tell the real reason on why the employee was given a low rating.

During Anand's interview, I asked what would happen if someone from a scheduled caste would become a high-ranking officer and make sure that there are no barriers to the promotion of scheduled caste employees. He paused and said, "that is impossible, no one will let us reach there in the first place." Mrs. Lata highlighted the same issue of lack of growth opportunities of scheduled caste workers, that no one lets scheduled castes reach such high-ranking positions at jobs. "The system is actually a set up," she added. When asked to explain the meaning of "set up" and its impact, she shared that when a scheduled caste is hired, they (upper caste managers in this context) make sure that scheduled castes are assigned to all lower-level positions at jobs so that opportunities to rise in the ranks are so rare in their careers, making them almost negligible.

Diwakar claimed that he has seen instances at his job where people from lower caste employees were deployed to hazardous locations where upper castes did not want to go and that would put their life in danger. He queried, "Isn't it unfair that people from lower castes are posted at dangerous places? There is no equality in our society." When asked if he has ever filed a complaint on this kind of discrimination, he smiled and said,

> Where will one go after raising an issue like that? Truth is that you want your job. Isn't it? You know, this is how discrimination plays out that they (upper castes) did not even send me for any site visit as if I was not competitive enough to go for a site visit. They kept me in the office work, and I used to feel so humiliated with their behavior.

When asked if he did anything about this situation and asked if his company is having anti-discriminatory policies and a complaint unit, he argued that "the policies does exist but I have not seen anyone using it for the same reason—that you need your job and nothing is more important than that" and that "it is useless to complaint as this whole caste system stigma is not going to go away from minds of people so what is the point of a complaint."

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings of the data analysis that emerged out of the in-depth interviews with seven scheduled caste engineers as it relates to the social-cultural and economic conditions after utilization of affirmative action. First, related to economic conditions, participants stated that there is an improvement in their economic conditions post-affirmative action which shows that one of the goals of affirmative action which was to provide economic upliftment to the scheduled caste communities is being met. Participants said that they had access to good education post-affirmative action. They also had access to job opportunities at par with the upper castes however there were barriers to their advancement and growth at jobs.

Regarding the social conditions, participants discussed that there is no improvement on the front of socio-cultural condition for them and their families. Participants shared various patterns of discrimination that continue to happen with them which are largely derived from their social identity, stigma, and social construction as per the caste system and the dominant castes' privilege contributing to their oppression. They also discussed how their last names still play an important role in their lives when stating that even though they are working at well placed jobs now, they don't have any sort of social mobility as far as their caste is concerned and they are still seen as a lower caste after reaching at some of the top posts and designations of their jobs that shows how the caste system's stigma is still lingering and enduring in the Indian society.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 below summarizes the socio-cultural and economic evolution of the lives of scheduled caste engineers.

To sum, it appeared that the situation of caste system and the mindset of people are still at a tenuous stage although people from the lower castes are becoming more and more aware of their constitutional rights that allow them to confront biased policies. In the next chapter, I discuss theoretical frameworks that shed a light on the major themes that emerged from this study.

Figure 3.

Socio-Cultural Evolution of the Lives of Scheduled Caste Engineers

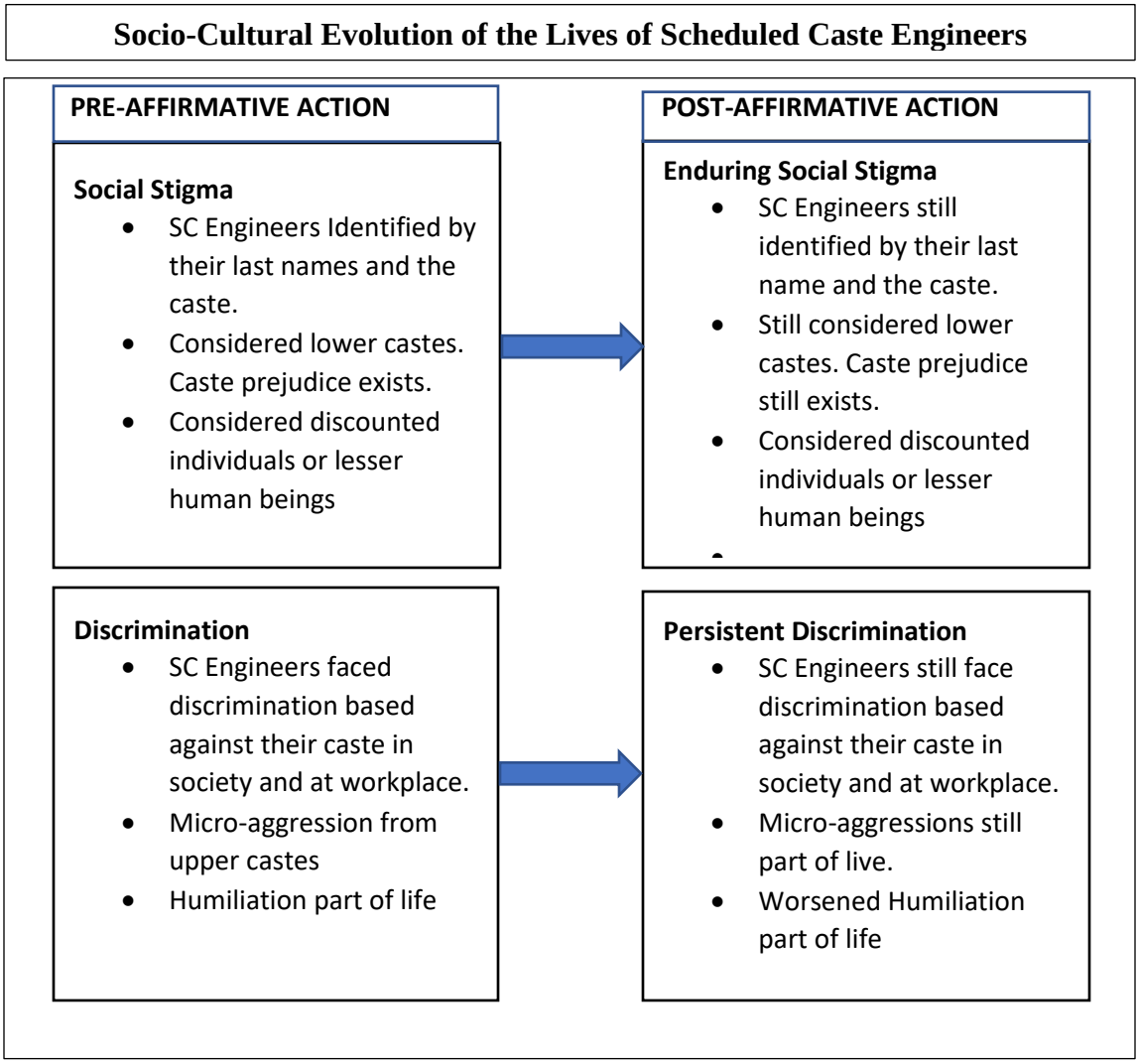
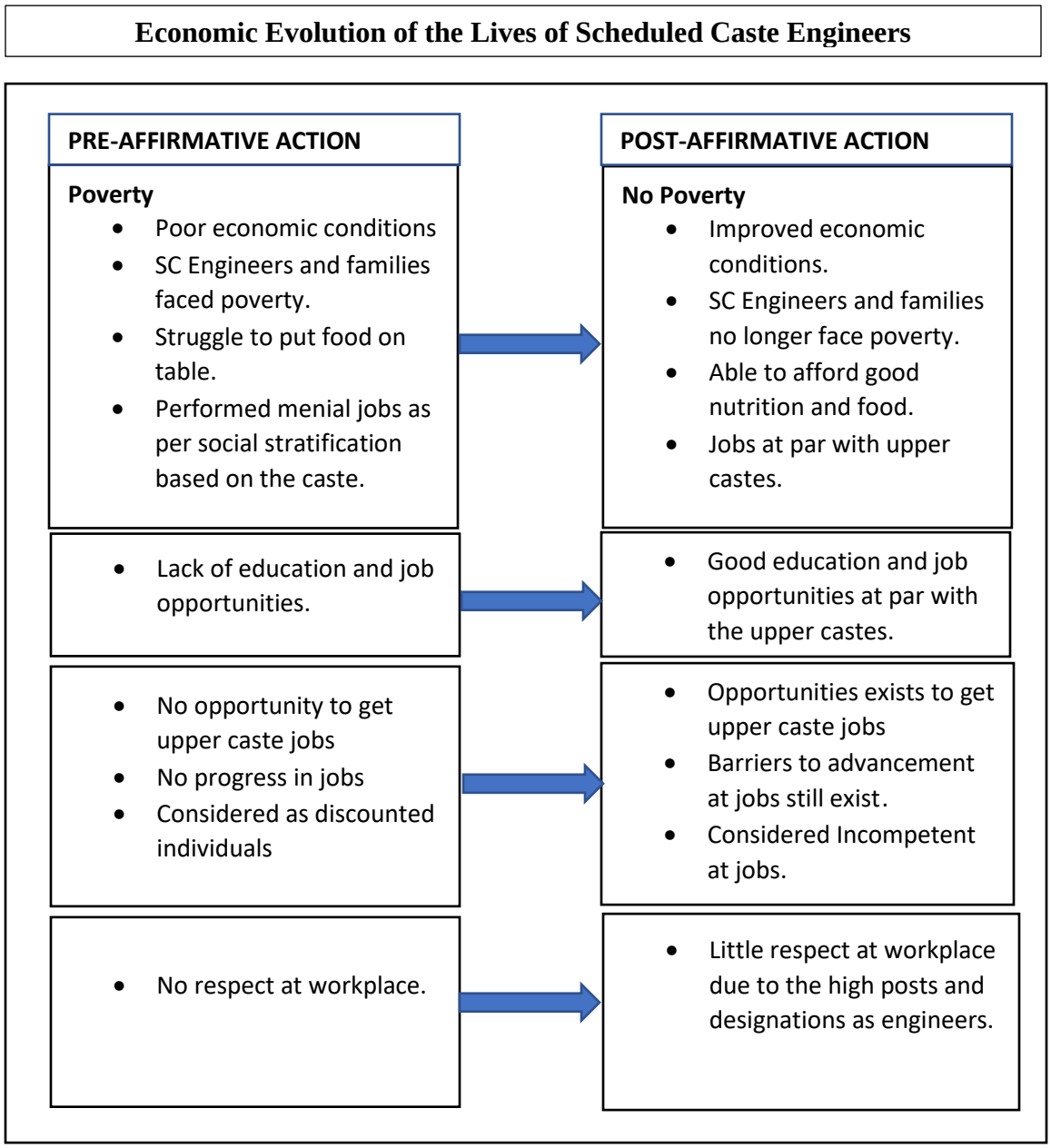


Figure 4.

Economic Evolution of the Lives of Scheduled Caste Engineers



CHAPTER SIX: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

This study aimed at examining how the Indian reservation program (in other words, affirmative action) affected the personal and social life of scheduled caste engineers who used this system to complete their bachelor's degree education. Results of this study have highlighted the changes in the social and economic conditions of the scheduled caste engineers before and after the utilization of the affirmative action program. Data collected for the purpose of this study yielded two major themes, each broken into the two subthemes for social conditions and economic conditions. The first theme was the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled caste engineers before their access to affirmation action. The second theme included the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled caste engineers after benefitting from affirmative action. This chapter analyzes the findings of the lived experiences of the scheduled caste engineers in the light of two analytical frameworks I identified in Chapter 2: social identity theory and critical race theory. First, I discuss how social identity theory applies and explain the selected findings of this study.

Conditions of Scheduled- Caste and Social Identity Theory

Pre-affirmative action, participants in this study indicated that their life rife with social stigma against their caste. The upper caste and other members of the Indian society held a negative image of their caste. Their last names identified the engineers who participated in study in a negative way and caused them to experience discrimination in the form of insult, microaggression, and lack of economic opportunities. There was a struggle to earn a livable wage, to provide food on the table, and basic education was very inaccessible. However, while discussing their economic conditions, participants often reverted to the topics of oppression and discrimination that they faced because and which denied their very human identity. They were

all frustrated that a thousand-year-old caste system and social stratification were haunting their communities. As a consequence, their economic conditions were not any better than those of their parents and fore-parents who were submitted to ostracizing conditions because they were born to a scheduled caste.

However, in post-affirmative action era of each of their lives, participants enjoyed improved economic conditions but stated that the little respect that they have is short lived and will be gone once they leave their jobs. Still, their life after obtaining affirmative action was that of enduring social stigma against their caste. They are still seen as a lower caste after reaching some of the top posts and designations of their jobs. The caste system's stigma is still lingering and enduring.

For the purpose of this study, I employed social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to help situate participants' experiences within a theoretical framework. Social identity theory posits that society has divided itself into various in-groups and out-groups: "we divided the world into 'them' and 'us' based through a process of social categorization (i.e., we put people into social groups)" (McLeod, 2008, p. 1). McLeod (2008) goes on to say that concepts of social identity theory dictate the in-group and out-group formations and states, "the in-group will discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image" (p. 1). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), there are social categories and social groups that define one's identity and their behavior toward others who are part of their communities. The main tenets of social identity theory as per Tajfel and Turner's (1979) analysis of intergroup conflict are a) formation of social groups including in-groups and out-groups and b) in-group discrimination against out-group to enhance their self-image. Next, I discuss both tenets.

Formation of Social Groups Pre-Affirmative Action

Through the analysis of Tajfel and Turner's (1979) proposal of groups and relating them to social stratification of Indian society, it can be said that castes are large social groups and people within their social groups feel a sense of pride and self-esteem. Existence of the large caste groups relates to social identity theory's concept of formation of groups. During interviews, it was observed that in every story and experience that participants shared there was a mention of "we" and "they" as well as "us" and "them." Most of the interview answers started with "they." All participants have discussed that their caste is considered as the lowest in the caste hierarchy and that is the reason that they are also called as the lower castes.

As per social identity theory, the world is divided into "them" and "us" through the development of social categorization. According to McLeod's (2008) analysis of social identity theory, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) research demonstrated that "the groups (e.g. social class, family, football team, etc.) to which people belonged were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world" (p. 1).

Likewise, social stratification on the castes of people has given birth to the groups they belong to. The castes can be seen as large group memberships that everyone belongs to. Participants stated in their interviews that they see caste as a prime identification of themselves in society. Caste gives them a sense of pride also which means that they have a feeling of patriotism associated with their caste. Caste patriotism is also discussed in the work of Ghurye (2016) who said:

> The problem of caste arises mainly out of caste-patriotism. It is the spirit of caste patriotism which engenders opposition to other castes and creates an unhealthy

> atmosphere for the full growth of the national consciousness. It is the caste patriotism that we have to fight against and totally uproot. (p. 213)

Ghurye (2016)'s analysis on a casteless or a plural society in India stated the fact that society has divided itself into these large groups and each group within a caste feels proud of being a part of it. Participants have indicated the continued existence of the caste system and caste patriotism during their interviews. Scheduled caste participants in this study felt the domination of the upper castes. Participants endured humiliation and microaggressions throughout their life. The cultural barrier between lower and upper classes in India relates to what social identity identifies as the formation of social in-groups and out-groups. Specifically, scheduled caste engineers knew that they all belonged to out-groups in the dominant society of the upper castes.

Post-Affirmative Action

Participants indicated there are still two distinctive groups even after affirmative action: scheduled caste and upper caste. The formation of social groups continued for the scheduled caste engineers even though they now had good jobs and were at top posts and designations. Although they have joined ranks with the upper castes in high paying engineering jobs, they are still being identified as scheduled castes. Their colleagues maintain a distance from them and some will take any chance to insult or humiliate them at the workplace.

Social identity theory's first tenet explains the formation of in-groups and out-groups and these social groups are still visible in Indian society after implementation of affirmative action (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As per McLeod (2008), the concept of "us" vs "them" is still visible in Indian society post-affirmative action utilization. Tajfel and Turner (1979) stated that "People favor the in-group over the out-group in the minimal group paradigm in order to establish a

social order where the in-group is superior to the out-group" (p. 6). Participants have also indicated that these caste groups are clearly visible at their workplaces because upper castes maintain a distance from them and remain in their own groups.

In-Groups Discriminate Against Out-Groups

During both pre and post affirmative action, participants have felt discriminated against. They understand that they are considered lowest in the society and no matter what they do, they will never be given any importance in their lives. They associated their social identity with the prejudice that they face in their everyday lives.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) studied social groups, intergroup conflicts, and various factors that affect one's social identity. Tajfel and Turner (1979) also discussed the concepts of in-group and out-group bias, which contributes to "us vs. them" mentality. As per their analysis, out-groups are typically those that aren't as commonly identified with, and therefore may be discriminated against.

Analyzing the aspects of discrimination by in-groups (upper castes), the participants stated in their interviews that the upper castes do not treat them well and they still face discrimination in the form of micro-aggression after they had utilized affirmative action. The authors of social identity theory posited that there are in-groups who want to always maintain the status quo that is their dominance (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As per McLeod's (2008) analysis of social identity theory, in-group is considered as "us" and out-group is considered as "them." The central hypothesis of social identity theory is that group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image.

The questions like "where are you from" gave the participants a feeling of being alien in their own land. The negative attitude of the upper castes (in-groups) who discriminate against the

scheduled castes (out-groups) can be explained by how the in-groups try to seek a positive distinctiveness, according to social identify theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In doing so, upper class (in-group) discriminates against the out-groups – scheduled caste engineers. According to social identity theory,

> We seek ways to gain positive feelings from that group membership. Viewing the ingroup more positively than other groups ("outgroups") is one way to achieve those positive feelings. Seeking positive distinctiveness for one's ingroup hence becomes an explanation for holding negative beliefs and attitudes about outgroups in our environment, and hence for prejudice and ultimately discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, pp. 40-41)

Conditions of Scheduled-Caste and Critical Race Theory

Pre- and post-affirmative action did not change the discriminatory conditions of the structured castes in this study All participants maintained that caste system was based on the occupations of the people at the time when it started but today even though people have changed their occupations, they are still identified as belonging to the same castes and it all has finally come down to what their ancestors were, and caste is decided at birth of a person. Social stratification in India based on the caste of a person clearly shows that caste is a socially constructed category as critical race theory explains it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Critical race theory helped to situate participants' experiences within a framework similar to discrimination based upon skin colors (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Tenets of critical race theory includes a) race is a socially constructed category b) ordinariness of racism and c) naming one's own reality. Next, I discuss these tenets one by one.

Race is a socially constructed category

Race in the context of my study can be thought of as the caste of a person. Participants maintained that the age-old caste system is still visible in Indian society and the social construction still has layers of hierarchy. Expounding on the social construction theme of critical race theory, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) stated that

> The social construction thesis holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient (p. 8)

Participants have continually indicated in their interviews that they are always seen as the lowest in society whatever they do. They are perceived as incompetent at the workplace only because of their caste. Upper castes managers at their workplaces do not judge them by their skillset or good performance but follow the assumptions that society has created for the lower castes. Age-old social construction based on caste is still driving the lives of the scheduled caste community in India.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) also suggested that society disregards one's character, intellect, and ethical behavior and has false assumptions about certain races or people. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) said, "That society frequently chooses to ignore these scientific truths, creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics is of great interest to critical race theory" (p. 9). Participants have discussed that the social stigma exists even after affirmative action, indicating that the Indian society has created false images and assumptions of the scheduled caste community. Critical race theory identifies such images and assumptions as "permanent pseudo- characteristics" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 9).

Ordinariness of racism

Incidents of discrimination and microaggressions can relate to the second tenet of critical race theory, which is "ordinariness of racism" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8). All participants discussed a myth that discrimination based on caste has ended in India. They stated that some of their upper-caste classmates in their school time always used to say that they don't see caste at all but at the same time used their castes as name-calling or used it as a slur. Using someone's caste as a slur and then trying to pretend that there is no caste system or India has become a plural society shows that the dominant caste – upper castes do not acknowledge that racism exists, and they treat this topic as an ordinary one.

Regarding the ordinariness of racism, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained that racism is an everyday experience of people of color in the U.S. and is not an easy thing to handle. The authors further clarified, "This also means that racism is difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged" (p. 8). One must first acknowledge that racism exists in our society. Acknowledgment of racism is necessary for Indian society. Critical race theory could explain the caste racism in India as upper castes, and in fact, everyone in India maintains discrimination as part of the country's social fabric.

Naming one's own reality

Another tenet of critical race theory is the uniqueness of the voice of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race theory stresses the power of storytelling because there is a power in the voice of people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). An important feature of naming one's own reality in critical race theory is "voice," which can be defined as "a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step to the road of justice" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). Although this study was limited to the scheduled castes, there was talk about upper castes' dominance, privilege, and power in all participants'

interviews. Participants “named the reality” of their own family history, background, and the long road they have come in their journeys of becoming an engineer today.

Regarding the concept of genuine storytelling, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) wrote “the hope is that well-told stories describing the reality of black and brown lives can help readers to bridge the gap between their worlds and those of others” (p. 48). The authors again emphasized that “engaging stories can help us understand what life is like for others and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world.” As Delgado and Stefancic (2012) posited regarding interest convergence that dominant sections of society believe in what benefits them, the upper castes have maintained status quo in the Indian society because they are the dominant race and dominate the social discourse. However, participants in this study held a common idea that no one hears them in society, especially the dominant castes.

However, scheduled castes contribute to Indian society. That contribution can relate to the importance of the voice-of-color thesis that said, “writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). One can replace caste with color in the context of Indian society. The stories of oppression that participants shared create an awareness in the community. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) also claimed that:

> Stories also serve as a powerful additional function for minority communities. Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence or blame themselves for their predicament. Stories can give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences. Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated. (p. 49)

Discussion

Data findings from the participant interviews have shown that the upper castes treat scheduled castes with hostility solely because they belong to a marginalized group. The incidents like an altercation over using a public facility as shared by a participant in addition to the one incident where there was an altercation during a marriage procession show the existence of prejudice in the minds of the dominant groups or upper castes that influence their behaviors toward scheduled castes.

Akerlof (1976) echoed Tajfel and Turner (1979) in describing discrimination as consequence of a socially constructed distinction based on the majority group and this distinction creates a divide between the in-group (us) and the out-group (them). Akerlof (1976) also explained this phenomenon by citing an example of Whites who think of Blacks as "them" instead of considering them part of "us all." Following Akerlof (1976)'s analysis and social identity theory, this study has revealed that the mentality of "us" versus "them" exits between the in-groups (upper castes) and out-groups (lower castes). The concept of social identities and one group's behavior toward the other is tightly linked with prejudice. Allport (1958) defined prejudice as hostile behavior toward someone based solely on the group they belong to.

In finding answers to why dominant groups discriminate against minorities, Becker (1956 as cited in Thorat et al., 2016) wrote that in the U.S.,

> the white males discriminate against their black counterparts because they have a taste for discrimination from which they derive utility, and this taste emanates from prejudices that an individual from one group holds against individuals of another group, in this case blacks and women. (p. 21)

White males benefit from discrimination in many ways, namely socioeconomic status. A typical example of how discrimination based on social status manifest in India is the caste system, as members of the upper caste benefit at the expense of the lower castes. According to Brewer (1979), the awareness alone that one belongs to a particular group is enough to create prejudice against minority groups. Participants have indicated that the scheduled castes are seen as incompetent at their jobs as the upper castes think that they have got the jobs due to the affirmative action program. Upper caste managers, to maintain their superiority, assign them jobs at dangerous sites.

Arrow (1973) provides another reason as to why people discriminate against minorities, stating that minorities are perceived as less productive (even if that is objectively untrue or only true due to systemic limitations) which in turn harms their chances of employment or their earnings compared to white counterparts. The reservation system is designed to ameliorate the systemic limitations placed on scheduled castes (minority group), but if the majority group cannot recognize those systemic limitations, it appears to them as an unfair, unearned benefit. In the context of the Indian caste system, participants have mentioned that their upper-caste friends during their school time always used to say that the affirmative action program is a disadvantage for them, and selection or admission to a university or a job should be merit based.

Critical race theory's theme of "naming one's own reality" applies to this research (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57). Storytelling is an instrument by which one can name their own reality. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), "Historically, storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression" (p. 57). In sum, the process of narrating one's own reality through storytelling can make an impact on both the self

and the oppressor. Dominant groups live and form their own reality to satisfy their privileged positions in society, requiring some action to bring subconscious racism to their attention.

According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), in this reality, oppression is rational. In the context of my research, stories by scheduled castes engineers and experiences of racism and oppression could create cognitive dissonance for dominant group—the upper castes—by providing compelling challenges to their own view of world. Related to the power of voices and genuine personal stories, Noonan and Fish (2007) stated that "personal stories leave an imprint on individual and collective consciousness" (p. 46). They also said that "Submerged just below the surface of personal and cultural memory, stories explain our actions and experience to others, sometimes merging our individual story with the collective, cultural stories of communities." (p. 46). The lived experiences and personal as well as cultural stories of all seven scheduled caste engineers captured in the study could generate a community consciousness and may give a message to the community on the change required in Indian society.

As per Aguirre (2000), through their personal stories, minorities are given voice as "critical race theorists focus on giving voice to marginalized persons and communities because they are suppressed in the majority's stories" (p. 322). Voice of the marginalized communities applies directly to my caste study in the context of affirmative action. The majority, the upper castes, tell the lower castes that they have unearned advantage, and they don't deserve these jobs. Participants have confirmed this behavior from the upper castes at their workplace. The upper castes debate that everything should be merit-based, and the reservation system should be eliminated from Indian society if it were to progress toward equality.

As per Aguirre (2000), the majority thinks that access to any opportunity should be merit-based. Upper caste's views on affirmative action align with what Aguirre's (2000) analysis has

tried to explain. The upper castes or majority describe that they are innocent victims of reverse discrimination.

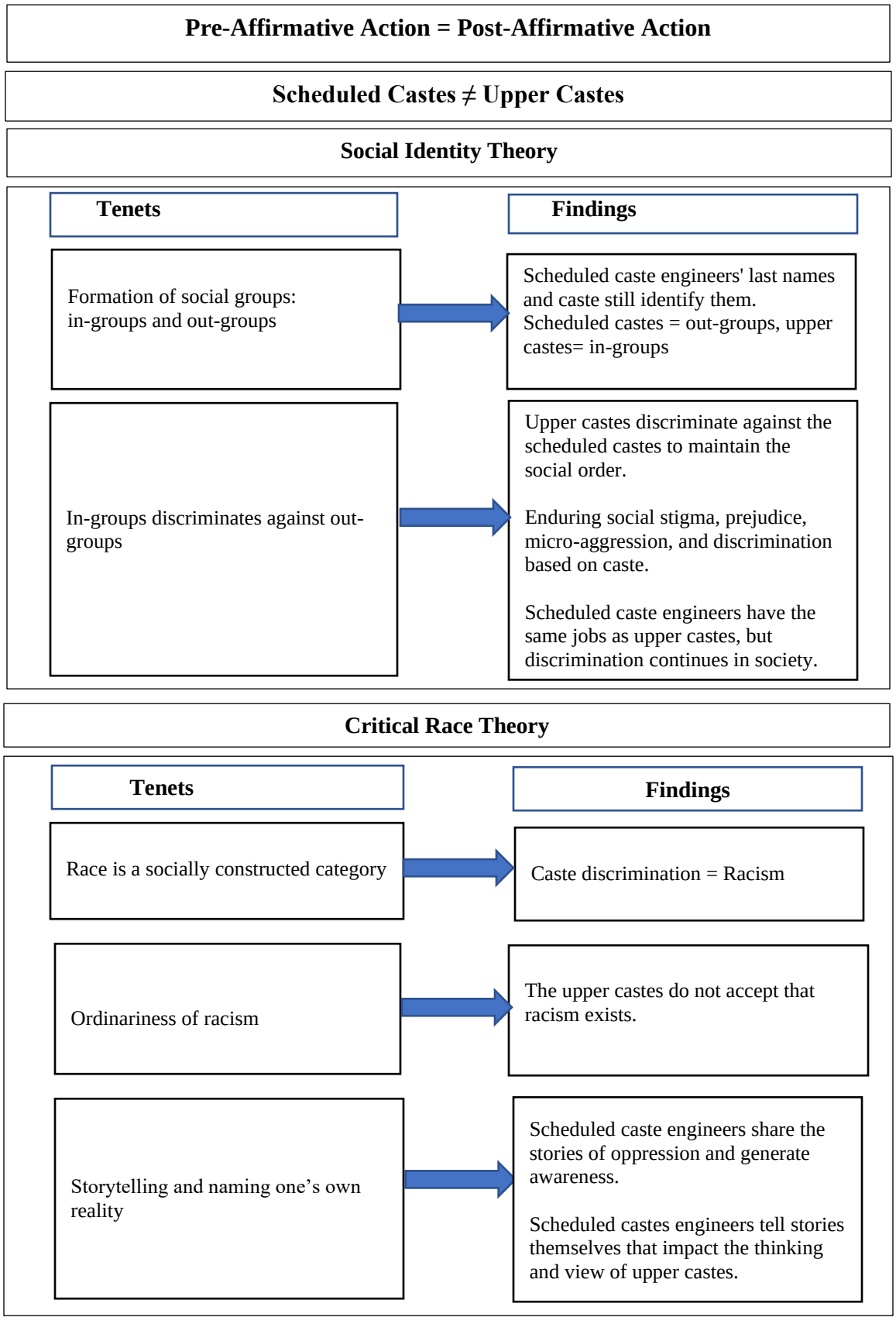
Participants have also indicated that they face barriers at their jobs regarding promotions and annual appraisals. The barriers at work can also be explained by the work of Aguirre (2000) on affirmative action initiatives in academia in the United States. Aguirre (2000) stated that "However, the initiatives have fallen short of reducing the obstacles faced by minorities in academia. For example, minority faculty encounter obstacles rooted in prejudice and discrimination in their pursuit of professional goals, such as tenure and promotion" (p. 331). Aguirre (2000)'s analysis on the obstacles faced by the minorities can directly be linked to the obstacles faced by the scheduled caste engineers at their workplace.

Conclusion

Figure 5 below summarizes the tenets of social identity theory and critical race theory as they relate to the unchanged social conditions of the scheduled caste both before and after affirmative action. Social identity theory explains that the scheduled engineers (scheduled caste) and the upper caste fit the description of a *formation of social groups*. The caste of the scheduled engineers is *out-group* whereas the upper class represents the *in-group*. There is a fight between both groups with the upper caste discriminating against the scheduled engineers before and after affirmative action. In turn, critical race theory sheds the light on the notion of caste as a *social construct*. It explains why the stagnant conditions of the scheduled engineers both before and after affirmative action relate to the notion of *ordinariness of racism* or the normalization of the caste system.

Figure 5.

Theorizing Social Conditions of Scheduled Caste



CHAPTER SEVEN:

STUDY SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to capture and analyze the experiences and life stories of scheduled caste engineers who have utilized affirmative action programs and proceeded into a career in engineering. To achieve this, I adopted a qualitative case-study method. My research participants shared personal experiences from their life before and after utilizing affirmative action. In this chapter, I provide a summary of the study, including the findings, some implications of the study findings, as well as areas of recommendations for the Indian government, scheduled caste engineers, and upper caste engineers. I end the chapter by highlighting the contribution of this study to the academia and recommendations for further studies on this topic.

Study Summary

Being an upper caste in India as per social hierarchy of caste system, I always failed to understand my privileges and did not try to understand how life is for underrepresented and marginalized sections of society. As I grew, I began to notice the division in society and discrimination against the scheduled castes. As I acknowledged and understood my privilege, I saw that there was discrimination all around me that made me question the claims of the dominant classes of equality and fairness in India.

I was constantly challenged by the plight and grievances of the scheduled castes in my social circle and wanted to understand the impact of caste-based reservation system that the government of India implemented long ago. I was curious to understand what was working or not and if there were differences being made in the lives of scheduled castes. I also wanted to generate an awareness in society on how lives of scheduled caste engineers have been impacted

after utilizing affirmative action program and how do they construct the meaning of their caste today. Also, another motivation to conduct this study was to capture engineers' personal stories on the change in their lives (if any) after joining upper caste jobs that were once not available to them because of the limitations on the occupations performed by the lower castes.

I understood this study within the qualitative inquiry using a case study to capture the life of select schedule caste engineers in India. To collect data from my seven research participants, I used three methods: in-depth one-on-one interviews, personal reflexivity journal, as well as documents that I reviewed while conducting the study.

To select participants for my study, I used purposeful sampling strategy, which enabled me to get participants with a specific criterion for my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All the participants belonged to scheduled caste communities, utilized affirmative action to gain admission to engineering colleges and entry to government jobs, were middle aged married men (n=5) or women (n=2) in the age range between 30-45 yrs, and had at least 10 years of work experience in the engineering field.

To analyze the data I collected first, I used the lean coding technique and then created concept maps to get themes and sub-themes of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, I used social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) to analyze the data.

Two major themes emerged from the analysis of the data, each broken into the two subthemes for social conditions and economic conditions. The first of them consisted of the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled caste engineers before their access to affirmation action. The second theme included the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled caste engineers after benefitting from affirmative action.

For the first theme, participants indicated that their life before obtaining affirmative action was that of social stigma against their caste. The upper caste and other members of Indian society held a negative image of their caste. Their last names identified the engineers who participated in study in a negative way and caused them to experience discrimination in the form of insult, microaggression, and lack of economic opportunities. There was a struggle to earn a livable wage, to provide food for their families, and basic education was very inaccessible.

For the second theme, participants indicated that their last name and the caste still played an important role in their lives even though they are working at well placed jobs now. They don't have any sort of social mobility as far as their caste is concerned. They are still seen as a lower caste after reaching at some of the top posts and designations of their jobs, which shows how the caste system's stigma is still lingering and enduring in the Indian society. Although participants reported improved economic conditions post-affirmative action, all of them maintained that the little respect they had was short lived and would be gone once they left their jobs. The improvement in the economic condition of the participants post-affirmative action shows that one of the goals of affirmative action which was to provide economic upliftment to the scheduled caste communities is slowly being met.

To analyze the above findings, I used two theoretical frameworks. The first theory was social identity theory, and the second theory was critical race theory. Social identity theory posits that there is a tendency in our society to divide itself into different social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These social groups are categorized as in-groups and out-groups. In my study, in-groups were the upper castes, and the out-groups were participants of my study also called as the scheduled castes.

The upper castes (in-groups) tend to discriminate against the scheduled castes (out-groups). Examples of discrimination against scheduled caste engineers were numerous, including social stigma, prejudice, microaggressions and other dehumanizing treatments.

Critical race theory, on the other hand, helped to analyze the ordinariness of racism happening with the scheduled caste engineers before and after utilization of affirmative action (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Based upon critical race theory, personal stories and lived experiences of the participants once shared could contribute to acknowledging the existence of discrimination and prejudice in Indian society.

Critical race theory also sheds light on the affirmative action and how the majority or the dominant classes feel that somehow, they are the victims. In my study context as per the participants and the documents that I reviewed including blogs and social media discussions, the upper castes feel that the scheduled castes have an unearned advantage, and it is unfair to them. Participants argued that in their interactions with their upper caste colleagues at workplace believed that admissions to colleges and entry to any government engineering jobs should be merit-based, and that affirmative action program should be eliminated from Indian society if it were to make any progress toward equality.

Implications of the Study

Findings from this study point to several implications. First, the improvement in the economic condition of the participants post-affirmative action implies that one of the goals of affirmative action, which was to provide economic upliftment to the scheduled caste communities, is being met. For example, a participant stated that the Constitution of India has helped scheduled castes in reaching where they are today. On the other hand, the negative experiences related to the social conditions of the participants post-affirmative action imply that

improvement in economic conditions and getting a decent job does not translate into social equality. Although scheduled castes engineers are now able to join professions that were once only available to the upper castes because of affirmative action, their social status has remained the same.

Second, this study also implies that caste system is an enduring reality within Indian society no matter one's education, economic, and social status. Despite the economic advancement the scheduled caste engineers experienced after their higher education, they are still considered lowest in the social hierarchy only because of their caste. Personal stories of the participants reveal that it may take centuries for India to become a casteless or a plural society. Indian society has based its caste system upon the occupation of a person for approximately 2500 years (Deshpande, 2008). Even though caste originated based on occupation of a person, participants expressed frustration on why caste is still driven by their birth. Participants said that they have little respect in society due to their jobs and that respect will be gone as soon as they leave their jobs. For example, one of the participants Mrs. Lata said that:

> I think that there is an improvement in the behavior of people toward me in society, but I also know that all the respect that I have earned is only because of my job and if my job is lost today, people won't give me any importance

Third, this study also implies the persistence of a myth denying caste-based discrimination in Indian society. Ordinariness of racism is one of the themes explained by critical race theory which alludes to the fact that the dominant classes (upper castes in our case study) does not accept that racism (casteism, in this case) exists as that works to their advantage. Participants acknowledged that upper castes want to maintain the social order and thus the status quo.

In fact, all participants addressed the existence of the discrimination against them. They all discussed this myth that discrimination based on caste has ended in India, adding that some of their upper-caste classmates used to say that they did not see castes at all, but at the same time used their caste names as a slur. Using someone's caste as a slur and then trying to pretend that there is no caste system, or that India has become a plural society shows that the dominant upper castes do not acknowledge that racism exists.

Fourth, another implication is that upper castes perceive affirmative action program as an injustice to them, which should be eliminated and replaced with a merit-based system. Participants argued that their upper castes colleagues tell them directly or talk among themselves that the scheduled caste engineers have an unearned advantage, and they don't deserve these jobs.

One of the participants, Jayant stated that "they say that eliminate the reservation quota but don't think about the discrimination our community people face on day-to-day basis. We still need support." Another participant, Diwakar, shared a social media discussion document with me on the topic of discrimination against the scheduled castes and as per the document, some upper castes started debating on the topic that reservation quota in India should be ended now and how it is not right thing to do. Diwakar shared his frustration that some upper castes do not even understand the real reason on why the affirmative action was provided to scheduled castes Diwakar thinks that people even need to understand basics of affirmative action before commenting in social media on injustice. Diwakar stated that "Reservation or affirmative action program is like poison served in a golden spoon…life is different if one utilizes affirmative action as people now think that we got something that we do not deserve, and discrimination continues."

In sum, the implications of this study are to the effect that scheduled caste communities' social conditions need to be improved and this can only happen if the other caste communities listen to the stories of the oppression from the scheduled caste members themselves. The Government of India and policymakers need to concentrate more on the social conditions and perform a qualitative analysis of the parameters that influence one's social status and then work on improvement areas. People of India also need to move away from the thinking that racism does not exist, begin to take it seriously, and try to understand the root causes of the current social conditions.

Recommendations

The implications discussed have a bearing on the recommendations to the concerned groups. These recommendations could be useful in creating a society in India that could generate respect for the scheduled caste community. To help improve the social conditions of the scheduled castes, I suggest several recommendations for the Indian government, for scheduled castes, and for the upper caste. I finally suggest a recommendation for future study.

Recommendations for Indian Government

The constitution of India has safeguards in place to protect the rights of every individual. As discussed by Pasricha (2011), "Equality before law is a basic Fundamental Right guaranteed under Article 14 of the Constitution" (p. 58). The Government of India could create numerous training programs on the concepts of privilege and bias that teaches dominant or upper castes about the ongoing reality of discrimination so that the dominant castes could come out of their thinking of ordinariness of racism and take this matter seriously. They could use this study to share the personal stories of the scheduled caste engineers to generate awareness on the ongoing discrimination among the upper castes.

The Government of India should continue providing affirmative action even though some sections of society feel that it is an unearned advantage to the lower castes. The argument is that after so many years of implementation of affirmative action, scheduled castes remain underrepresented and discriminated against based on their caste and so they should continue to be provided with equitable opportunities to join mainstream society. The Government's focus should be on the social conditions of the scheduled castes as this study clearly identifies the lives of schedule caste engineers still do not have a social equality and they repeatedly said that their economic growth does not matter to them as society does not treat them well. The affirmative action must not be abolished even though upper castes feel that it is not fair to them as it is important to know overall progress on the front of social and economic conditions of the lower caste population before government of India takes any step in that direction.

Finally, whatever programs, analysis, or campaigning the government of India could implement, it is up to the citizens of India to carry forward the burden of eliminating racism from society and treat scheduled castes with dignity and at par with other groups of society. Next, I discuss recommendations for upper castes and the scheduled castes.

Recommendations for Scheduled Caste Engineers

As critical race theory has suggested that naming one's own reality matters, highlighting the stories of scheduled caste engineers matter a lot so that collectively we could generate a wealth of awareness in Indian society. Scheduled caste engineers must gather courage to share their stories in social media, newspapers, and spread the message through various social justice platforms. Looking at the internalized viewpoints on racism and experiences of the participants, I recommend that they should remove the fear from their inside and raise their voice against racism via appropriate safe channels as it must not be acceptable by any society. It may not be an

easy task, but they have already started doing it by contributing to this study and that is a great start. They must confront the real issues of discrimination and raise their voices to make sure that the status quo on the social order is not maintained forever in India.

Overall, scheduled castes should join hands to raise awareness in their culture sharing groups by sharing their real stories and incidents. Those who are educated and well versed with social media should start social activist movements like Black Lives Matter whose mission according to the Howard University School of Law (n.d.) "is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes." Likewise, social activist movements could be started in India using social media to spread awareness on the existing laws that protect scheduled castes' rights and inform less educated lower caste populations of the process of lodging complaints so to combat discrimination.

Recommendations for Upper Caste Engineers

Dominant classes play an important role in curtailing racism in any society. Likewise, in India upper castes have a greater role to play when it comes to progress of society. First, they should acknowledge racism exists in Indian society and apart from various incidents that happen with scheduled castes that they read in social media and newspapers, this study can also provide evidence of the hidden racism in the form of prejudice, micro aggression, and humiliation. This case study can shed light on any myth that upper castes may have in their minds that racism does not exist or that it is a thing of past.

Upper caste engineers should read and tell the personal stories of scheduled caste engineers so that it can trigger a different worldview in their minds, and they are not thinking from their privileged point of view. As discussed, the process of narrating one's own reality

through storytelling could make an impact on both the self and the oppressor. Dominant groups live and form their own reality to satisfy their privileged positions in society, requiring some action to bring subconscious racism to their attention.

Participants discussed about barriers in advancement in their workplace as it relates to their annual appraisals and promotions. Upper caste managers and other leaders should be trained on unconscious bias based on the caste that plays out. Once upper caste engineer leaders have awareness of the possibilities of racism, they will be able to name it and then could take an action to combat it.

Participants have also shared concerns that their upper caste colleagues keep discussing about affirmative action as an unearned advantage and thus discriminate them based on caste. I recommend upper caste engineers to embrace the goals of affirmative action and acknowledge their privilege before concluding that the affirmative action must be abolished. This study has suggested that the discrimination has not been eliminated and it is part of the lives of scheduled caste engineers, so it is imperative that upper caste engineers participate in getting the social stigma related to the castes out of their minds. Upper castes should be fair to the scheduled castes and consider them at par with them and help to include them in the mainstream society.

As responsible citizens of India, everyone has an obligation to the Constitution to uphold to the laws against discrimination which is applicable to everyone including upper castes. I recommend that upper castes could help the cause by reporting incidents of racism, micro aggression, and humiliation as they see it happening in front of them so that other upper castes who do not acknowledge it also start thinking it. Also, once upper castes understand the ordinariness of racism, they will be able to go one step further in thinking to be fair to scheduled castes in their interactions as well as providing them opportunities at workplaces.

Recommendations for Further Study

My research was limited to scheduled caste engineers, and it could be extended to other professions like doctors and teachers as that would bring a different perspective on the topic. It will be good for government of India to consider multiple perspectives from different professions to strategize and frame policies and training programs to improve social conditions of scheduled castes who utilize affirmative action. Likewise, research can expand to other professions to understand the impacts of affirmative action on the lives of people in those areas.

My research is also limited to qualitative analysis and after looking at an improvement in economic conditions of scheduled caste engineers, I suggest a quantitative study could be done to find out on an average time needed for a family to finally get to a comfortable life with good opportunities and access to education. This type of analysis could help government of India to find out how affirmative action program could be improved to make sure families reach to a good economic level in lesser time for the sake of the country's progress.

Conclusion

In this case study, I investigated the lived experiences of the scheduled caste engineers before and after utilization of the caste-based reservation system in India. I conducted a series of in-depth interviews where the participants shared their real stories. Participants' stories revealed the level of discrimination faced by the scheduled caste engineers. Seven scheduled caste engineers—five men and two women from different states in India—participated in this study through in-depth series of interview questions. I also collected documents tailored to the situation of scheduled castes in India and compiled personal journals as the study unfolded. Caste based reservation system was put in place by the government of India to make sure that scheduled caste communities could be uplifted socially and economically. Experiences of the participants of the

study has captured the social and economic conditions before and after the affirmative action utilization.

Indeed, participants indicated that while their economic status is uplifted due to the program, the social status is still not at par with the upper caste. Although all participants shared same experience that they have improved economic conditions, they also maintained that their social life has stayed same or worsened as now people judge them that they have used an unearned benefit like affirmative action. This study has suggested the degrees in which the scheduled caste engineers encountered humiliation, micro aggression, and discrimination before and after they utilized affirmative action.

Scheduled caste engineers, after joining top engineering jobs at par with the upper castes are considered lowest in the social hierarchy and their last name and caste still drives their social treatment. Participants shared what they feel about the caste system in India and how it impacts them. Racism and micro aggressions are part of their daily life even after joining jobs that were never allotted to them as per the caste system social stratification in the past. Upper caste community still has dominance in the society that gives birth to the oppression of the lower caste communities.

Finally, I have come to learn firsthand that caste system has deep roots in Indian culture and participants shared it may take hundreds of years for India to be a casteless or a plural society. They shared a ray of hope and said it is possible but will be a long road ahead of us. The light at the end of tunnel and ray of hope came with lots of emotions from all participants who repeatedly said that all this discrimination is happening today and asked me if I could believe it. I would conclude by sharing one participant’s emotional statement that should challenge all upper castes:

I donate my blood every now and then, no one asks me my caste over there and by now my blood might have been given to so many people irrespective of castes. Why do upper castes not talk about caste while getting the blood and why do they ask me my caste wherever I go. Why don’t they understand? Just think about it.

REFERENCES

Adams, G. (1997). Racism, community, and democracy: The ethics of affirmative action. *Public Productivity & Management Review*, *20*(3), 243-257. doi:10.2307/3380975

Adams, M., Blumenfeld, W., Castaneda, C., Hackman, H., Peters, M., & Zuniga, X. (2010). *Readings in diversity and social justice*. Routledge.

Affirmative Action. (n.d.). https://mywage.co.za/main/decent-work/fair-treatment/affirmative-action

Affirmative Action. (2018). https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/affirmative%20action

Akerlof, G. (1976). The economics of caste and rat race and other woeful tales. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 90*(4), 599-617. https://doi.org/10.2307/1885324

Allport, G. W. (1958). *The nature of prejudice* (abr. ed.). Doubleday. (Original work published in 1954)

All India Survey of Higher Education. (2015). https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/AISHE2015-16.pdf

Al Jazeera. (2018, April 2). Dalits in India hold mass protests to demand rights. *News Al Jazeera.* https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/4/2/dalits-in-india-hold-protests-against-dilution-of-sc-st

Angen, M. J. (2000). Evaluating interpretive inquiry: Reviewing the validity debate and opening the dialogue. *Qualitative Health Research*, *10*, 378-395. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973230001000308

Arrow, K. J. (1973). *"The Theory of Discrimination" in discrimination in labor markets*. Orley Albert Rees (Ed.). Princeton University Press.

Atkinson, P. A. (2015). *For ethnography.* Sage.

Bagde, S., Epple, D., & Taylor, L. (2016). Does affirmative action work? Caste, gender, college quality, and academic success in India. *American Economic Review, 106*(6), 1495-1521. doi:10.1257/aer.20140783

Bahri, C. (2017, January 03). *Quota debate: Have reservations helped disadvantaged students in India get a higher education?* https://scroll.in/article/812136/quota-debate-have-reservations-helped-disadvantaged-students-in-india-get-a-higher-education

BBC. (2019, June 19). What is India's caste system? *BBC News.* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35650616

Butalia, U. (2006, October 2). Caste and quotas. *New Internationalist. https://newint.org/columns/viewfrom/2006/10/01/caste*

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE Publications.

DeGruy, J. (2018). Post traumatic slave syndrome. https://joydegruy.com/resources-2/post-traumatic-slave-syndrome/

Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York University Press.

Denzin, N, K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2011). *Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research*. The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (4th ed., pp. 1-19).

Department of Public Enterprises. (n.d.). *Brochure on Reservation Department of Public Enterprises*. Department of Public Enterprises, Ministry of Finance, Government of India. https://dpe.gov.in/publications/publications/brochure-reservation-scssts-and-obc

Deshpande, A. (2008). Quest for equality: Affirmative action in India. (Invited Article). *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, 44*(2), 154-163.

Desmond Tutu Quotes (n.d.). https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/desmond_tutu_106145

Discrimination. (n.d.). https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discrimination

Frisancho, V., & Krishna, K. (2016). Affirmative action in higher education in India: Targeting, catch up, and mismatch. *Higher Education (00181560)*, *71*(5), 611–649. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9927-1

Ghurye, G. S. (2016). *Caste and race in India*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Girard, V. (2018). Don't touch my road. Evidence from India on affirmative action and everyday discrimination. *World Development, 103*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.10.008

Gettleman, J., & Raj, S. (2018). Lower-caste fury shakes India, and hints at fiery election ahead. Retrieved May 14, 2018, from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/06/world/asia/india-dalit-protest.html

Government of India Act. (1935). Retrieved March 30, 2022, from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1935/2/pdfs/ukpga_19350002_en.pdf

Government of India. (2016). Annual Report 2015-16. Retrieved March 30, 2022, from http://ncsc.nic.in/files/Combine_1.pdf

Gutmann, A., & Thompson, D. (1990). *Ethics and politics* (2nd ed.). Nelson Hall.

Howard University School of Law. (n.d.). *The black lives matter movement*. HUSL Library. https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/BLM

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

How the Other Half Lives. (n.d.). Retrieved March 08, 2022, from https://web.archive.org/web/20060627065912/http://www.theotherindia.org/caste/who-are-the-obcs.html

Human Development Report. (2016). *Human development for everyone.* Retrieved March 25, 2022, from http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf

Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). http://pantheon.hrw.org/reports/1999/india/India994-15.htm#P2394_516084

Information for Study Participants. (n.d.). Retrieved March 03, 2022, from https://www.stthomas.edu/irb/forstudyparticipants/

Insights into Editorial. (2017). *Reimagining the OBC quota.* http://www.insightsonindia.com/2017/09/19/insights-editorial-reimagining-obc-quota/

International Dalit Solidarity Network. (2016, January 13). *IDSN Documentation Database*. https://idsn.org/links/?tag=india

Jain, H. C., & Ratnam, C. S. V. (1994). Affirmative action in employment for the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes in India. *International Journal of Manpower, (15)*7, 6-25. https://doi.org/10.1108/01437729410068008

Joshi, S. (2014). The Constitutional flaws of India's attempt to promote equality and a look at the United States Constitution as a solution. *Wisconsin International Law Journal*, *32*(1), 195-221.

Journeyman Pictures. (2016). *Breaking India's Unjust Caste System* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lUS2TA7Qna8

Klein, M. (2016). *Democratizing Leadership*. Information Age Publishing Inc.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a critical race theory. *Teacher's College Record, 97*(1), 47-68. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104

Laskar, M. H. (2010). Rethinking reservation in higher education in India. *ILI Law Review*, 25-53.

List of Scheduled Castes. (2016). http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/Compendium-2016.pdf

Mandal Commission. (n.d.). http://www.maria-online.com/finance/article.php?lg=en&q=Mandal_Commission

McLeod, S. A. (2008). Social identity theory. https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mittal, A. M. (2016, September 30). *A brief history of the caste system and untouchability in India*. The Logical Indian. Retrieved March 22, 2022, from https://thelogicalindian.com/story-feed/awareness/caste-system-and-untouchability-in-india/

Mundi. (2018). *Caste Oppression System in India* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8idvu5zJ8c

Nambissan, G. B. (2009). *Exclusion and discrimination in schools: Experiences of Dalit children (Children, Social Exclusion and Development No. 1).* Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.

Nirula, S. (2008). Equal by law, unequal by caste: The 'untouchable' condition in critical race perspective. Retrieved March 30, 2022, from http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Unequal_by_law.pdf

Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner. (2001). Total population, population of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and their proportions to the total population. Retrieved from http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/A-Series/A-Series_links/t_00_005.aspx

Oppression. (n.d.). https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oppression

Pasricha, S. (2011). *Caste based reservation in India*. Deep & Deep Publications.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice: The definitive text of qualitative inquiry frameworks and options*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Prakash, N. (2008). *Essays on effects of affirmative action: Evidence from job and political reservation policies in India* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (304604090)

Public Sector Undertakings in India. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://archive.india.gov.in/spotlight/spotlight_archive.php?id=78

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. (n.d.). Retrieved March 30, 2022 from http://in.one.un.org/task-teams/scheduled-castes-and-scheduled-tribes/

Srinivasan, K. (2013). Rise and fall of V P Singh - General Elections 1989 - Emergence of caste politics in large scale. Retrieved March 25, 2018, from http://www.primepoint.in/2013/10/rise-and-fall-of-v-p-singh-genral.html

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). *An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-37). Brooks/Cole.

Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology.* Cambridge University Press.

The Constitution of India. (1949). Retrieved March 25, 2022, from https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/COI...pdf

Thorat, S., Tagade, N., & Naik, A. K. (2016). Prejudice against reservation policies. How and why? Retrieved March 25, 2019 from http://www.dalitstudies.org.in/uploads/publication/1516705006.pdf

Tribune India. (2004). *Pioneer of anti-Mandal stir Rajiv Goswami dead.* Retrieved March 03, 2022 from https://www.tribuneindia.com/2004/20040225/main6.htm

Warren, E. & Supreme Court Of The United States. (1953) *U.S. Reports: Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483*. [Periodical] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep347483/.

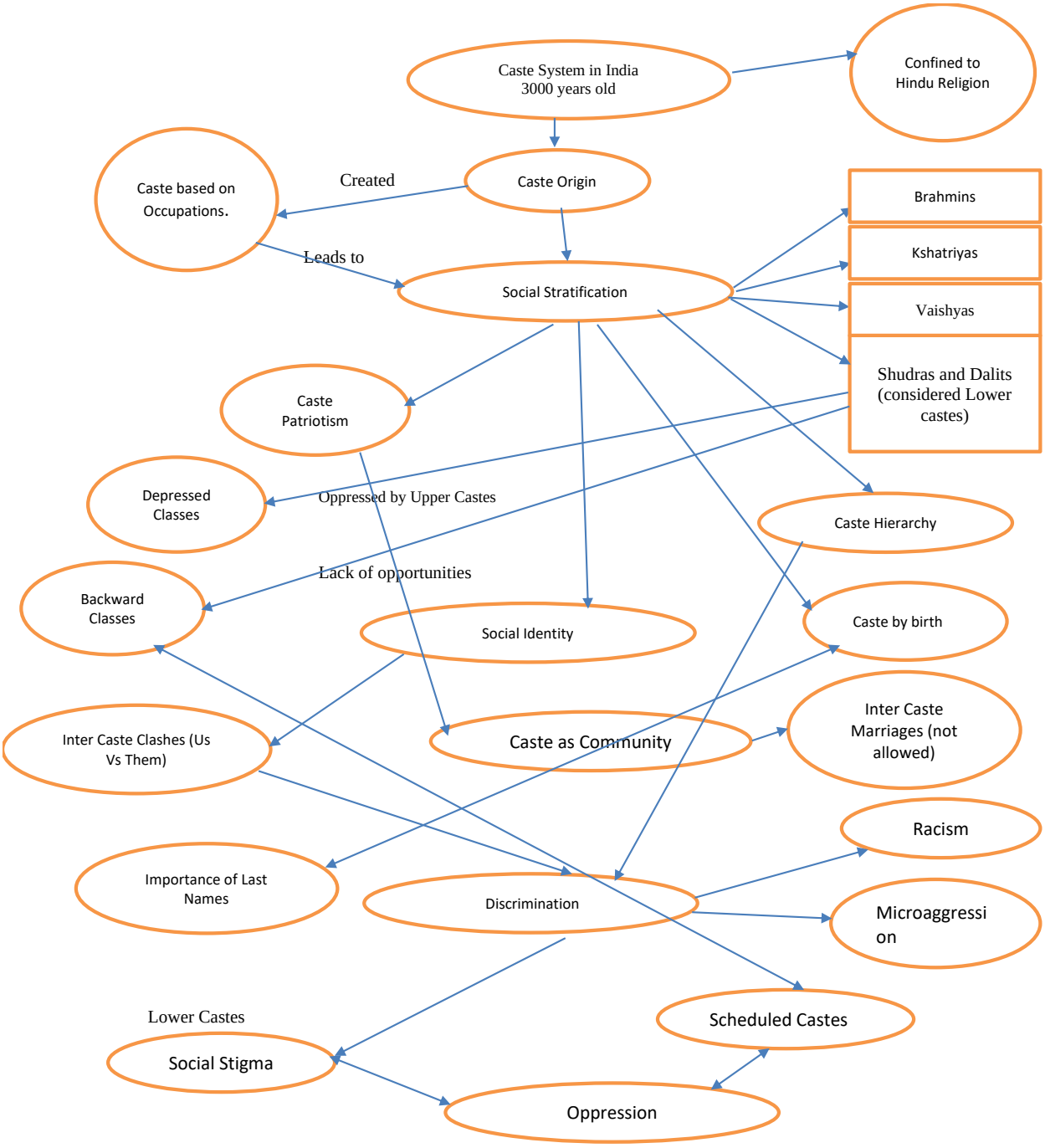
What is the Institutional Review Board? (n.d.) University of St. Thomas. Retrieved March 30, 2022 from https://www.stthomas.edu/irb/

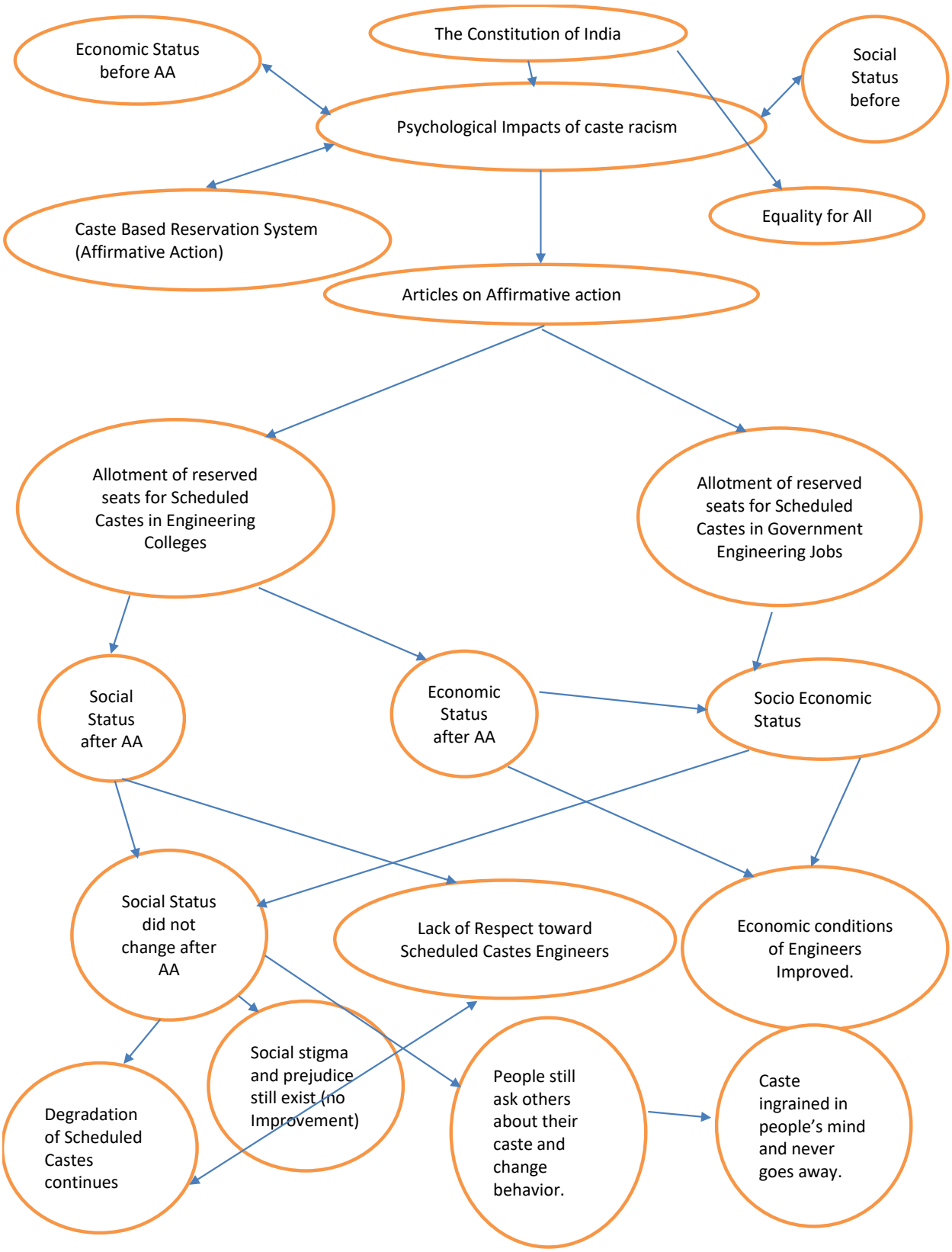
Writings and speeches of Babasaheb dr. B.R. Ambedkar. (n.d.). http://www.drambedkarwritings.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/Volume_17_01.pdf

Yin, R. K. (1981). The case study as a serious research strategy. *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, and Utilization, 3*(1), 97–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/107554708100300106

Appendix A

Coding Map




The Constitution of India
Economic Status before AA
Social Status before
Psychological Impacts of caste racism
Caste Based Reservation System (Affirmative Action)
Equality for All
Articles on Affirmative action
Allotment of reserved seats for Scheduled Castes in Engineering Colleges
Allotment of reserved seats for Scheduled Castes in Government Engineering Jobs
Social Status after AA
Economic Status after AA
Socio Economic Status
Social Status did not change after AA
Lack of Respect toward Scheduled Castes Engineers
Economic conditions of Engineers Improved.
Degradation of Scheduled Castes continues
Social stigma and prejudice still exist (no Improvement)
People still ask others about their caste and change behavior.
Caste ingrained in people's mind and never goes away.

Appendix B

Interview Questionnaire

Nine general and open-ended interview key guiding questions

1. How did your experience of utilizing affirmative action impact your social conditions?
2. How did your experience of utilizing affirmative action impact your economic conditions?
3. How do you describe the changes you have noticed in social conditions comparing pre-affirmative life and post-affirmative utilization?
4. How do you describe the changes you have noticed in economic conditions comparing pre-affirmative life and post-affirmative utilization?
5. How have you been affected physically and psychologically by caste based racial experiences?
6. How have caste system and social stratification based on caste in India impacted your life before affirmative action
7. How have caste system and social stratification based on caste impacted your life after affirmative action
8. What are some of the aspects that explain the caste-based experiences that you encountered?
9. How did your caste-based experiences affect your worldview?

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interview Question	**Participant Response**	**Reflective Notes**

Appendix D

IRB Letter of Research Approval

From: Sarah Muenster-Blakley <no-reply@irbnet.org>
Sent: Monday, February 22, 2021 10:33 AM
To: Sharma, Kamal <shar3795@stthomas.edu>; Bongila, Jean P. <jpbongila@stthomas.edu>
Subject: IRBNet Board Document Published

Please note that University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board has published the following Board Document on IRBNet:

Project Title: [1677900-2] Impacts of Caste-Based Reservation System on the Lives of Scheduled Caste Engineers in India: An Ethnographic Case Study
Principal Investigator: Kamal Sharma

Submission Type: Amendment/Modification
Date Submitted: February 21, 2021

Document Type: Decision Letter
Document Description: Amendment Approval
Publish Date: February 22, 2021

Should you have any questions you may contact Sarah Muenster-Blakley at muen0526@stthomas.edu.

Thank you,
The IRBNet Support Team

www.irbnet.org

Appendix E

Informed Consent Questions

Three questions about participant's understanding of participation in the research (Informed consent)

1. What is your role as a participant in my study?
2. What do you understand by observation of confidentiality as a participant in my research?
3. Could you explain to me the implication of your voluntary participation in my study?

Appendix F

Consent Form

Research Participation Key Information

Impacts of Caste-Based Reservation System on the Lives of Scheduled Caste Engineers in India: An Ethnographic Case Study

What you will be asked to do:

Participants will be asked to attend interviews.

The time commitment is about 2-3 hours, and the study will take place virtually via Zoom Audio calls or via telephone

Participating in this study has risks:

While no risks are associated with this study, the participants may feel occasional discomfort when sharing their personal life stories and experiences that involve oppression, discrimination, or shame

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

You are invited to participate in a research study about Impacts of caste-based reservation system (affirmative action program) on the lives of Scheduled Caste Engineers in India. The title of this study is "Impacts of Caste-Based Reservation System on the Lives of Scheduled Caste Engineers in India: An Ethnographic Case Study". You were selected as a possible participant and are eligible to participate in the study because you have utilized India's affirmative action program to either get admission at a college and/or have secured a job post-college education utilizing the program. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether you would like to participate or not.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- Attend two to three interviews with me (researcher) where you will be asked seven to eight open-ended questions on impacts of the caste-based reservation system (affirmative action program) on your lives. Interviews may be half an hour long and total time you may have to spend in interviews may vary from 2-3 hours depending upon what you would like to share on the topic. The interviews will be recorded for only audio. You do not have to have to share any video of yours at any point of time during interviews. I will initiate that Zoom phone meeting or Telephone call and provide you with the clear instructions to join the meeting in advance so you could have enough time to prepare for it.
- These interviews as stated above will be conducted via my university's ZOOM meeting audio tool. You will need access to internet to use this tool. If you do not have internet access, you may participate via telephone call or any other online communication tool like WhatsApp (a Facebook online tool for communication from convenience of your phone). I will provide clear instructions about these meetings ahead of time.

- You will also be requested to share any documents that pertain to your experiences that are public in nature and do not have any identifiable personal or confidential information. Example of documents can be your blogs, tweets, or articles from public websites or newspaper publications etc. that you feel are relevant to the topic.

What are the risks of being in the study?

While no risks are associated with this study, the participants may feel occasional discomfort when sharing their personal life stories and experiences that involve oppression, discrimination, or shame.

Here is more information about why we are doing this study:

This study is being conducted by Kamal K Sharma - a doctoral student at University of Saint Thomas, Minneapolis, USA. This study was reviewed for risks and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impacts of the Indian caste-based reservation programs (in other words, affirmative action) on the personal and social life of the Scheduled caste engineers who benefitted from it. It also intends to examine the level of discrimination those engineers have faced prior to and after the award of the reservation programs. Similarly, the study aims to capture the changes the participants have experienced in their personal, professional, and social status due to their access to the affirmative program in India. More specifically, I plan to learn from the recipients of affirmative action how this policy program impacted their occupational status, and their working conditions, the changes it led in their families and in the caste system as a whole. My goals involve learning about the experiences of engineers and how they interpret their caste status after the change in their education and profession.
Following is the research question that guides my case study: How do Scheduled caste engineers in India who participated in an affirmative action program describe the impacts of this program on their professional and personal lives?

The following are sub questions that support my study:

- What level of discrimination did participants face prior to joining the reservation system or affirmative action program?
- How do participants construct the meaning of their caste today?
- What changes have participants experienced in their social status as people of the Scheduled caste?

The goal of my case study is to generate awareness about the impacts of the caste-based reservation system on the lives of Scheduled Caste engineers and discuss how these programs changed their social interactions over a period of a generation. I plan to analyze the program's original goals and compare them with the actual reality as described by the Scheduled Caste engineers who participated in affirmative action. Data for the case study will be collected from you in the form of audio interviews (1-3) sessions depending on how much you wish to share with me on the topic.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed. However, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only I as a researcher or my guide of the study will know your identity as a participant.

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

We believe your privacy and confidentiality is important. Here is how we will protect your personal information:

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. You will be able to choose what you share and when you share it. I will store the Zoom audio recordings of the interviews in a secured server provided by University of Saint Thomas. I will **not** keep any personal copy of the audio recordings in my personal laptop. I will only keep the identifiers of these audio recordings with me in a personal diary. These identifiers will be random numbers that will not be understood by anyone except me. Identifier information will be destroyed after research is over.

The records of this study will be kept as confidential as possible. In any reports I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. The types of records I will create include:

- Audio recordings, transcripts, master lists of information, and computer records – The information as stated above will be stored only in University's secured server where only I can login using a username and password.

All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years once the study is completed. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas have the right to inspect all research records for researcher compliance purposes.

This study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the research with no penalties of any kind.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with me (researcher) or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will be destroyed unless it is already de-identified or published and I can no longer delete your data. You can withdraw by sending me an e-mail at shar3795@stthomas.edu or call me at my cell phone number @+1(605) 728 9541. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Who you should contact if you have a question:

My name is Kamal K Sharma. You may ask any questions you have now and at any time during or after the research procedures. If you have questions before or after we meet, you may contact me at shar3795@stthomas.edu or call me at my cell phone number @+1(605) 728 9541. My advisor's name is Dr. Bongila, Jean P and his phone number is +1 651-962-4799. Information about study participant rights is available online at https://www.stthomas.edu/irb/policiesandprocedures/forstudyparticipants/. You may also contact Sarah Muenster-Blakley with the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns (reference project number 1677900-1)

STATEMENT OF CONSENT:

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. **I give permission to be audio recorded during this study**.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_____

Signature of Study Participant **Date**

_____

Print Name of Study Participant

_____

Signature of Researcher **Date**

UNIVERSITY OF St.Thomas