Conclusion:
Towards Understanding the Dalit Middle Class

The central objective of the present study has been to understand nature of the emerging Dalit middle class in Hyderabad and to examine its ideology and identity patterns. It was attempted to identify the changes brought about by the social and economic mobility among the Scheduled Castes individuals with specific focus on those who have joined ‘white collar’ jobs and other independent professions such as law, medicine, journalism, etc. The research focus of the present study has been to discern the process of changing social identities of these individuals. The study uses the category ‘Dalit middle class’ to grasp the changing social identities of individual Dalits who have been able to enter into realms of modern life. In this context the attempt was made to look at how caste and class contexts intersect in the articulations of their self-definition and politics. The study has also been aiming to understand the role of the Dalit middle class in the construction of Dalit identity and ideology on the one hand, and on the other, to comprehend their influence on the Dalit movement and the larger Dalit social life itself.

The emergence of Dalit middle class is distinctly unique from the general middle class that is largely constituted by the ‘upper castes’ or the ruling classes or the traditionally propertied. It was largely based on ascription for the upper castes, which could easily translate their access to resources to form/enter middle class. Whereas, given the discriminated social status and lack of resources and opportunities, Dalits and other ‘lower castes’ could not enter the middle class until the enabling social environment was created by policies of the government in post-independence period. The provision of access to education and occupations in the modern spheres to the Dalits enabled them to aspire for middle class position.

The emergence of middle class in India is generally attributed to the British who created a section of educated from among the natives to be employed in middle level bureaucracy to run the administration. In that process, the literate ‘upper castes’ were recruited into these ‘new’ occupations during the initial stages itself and thereby they
In the direction of enabling more numbers of marginal social groups to have access to modern education and employment, in the post-independence period, the Indian State provided reservations for them. Thus, for the first time the Dalits and other marginalized sections who took the benefits of reservations entered modern occupations at all levels. As the social background and orientations of these new entrants are different compared to the ‘upper castes’ who dominated the middle class, the former are generally considered as ‘new middle class’ in India. In the case of Dalits, who traversed from ‘untouchable’ status to ‘attaining middle class positions’, seem to possess a distinctive identity and ideology that is necessitated by issues like self-respect, dignity and under development of the Dalits in general.

Theoretically middle class is a non-caste phenomenon, emerging contrary to the traditional ranking of communities. The middle class as a new phenomenon - attracts individuals from various caste groups and provides them with a privileged economic status and lifestyle, akin to the economic status and lifestyle thus far enjoyed only by the ‘upper castes’.

Here, emerges the question of discontentment of upper castes towards the new recruits who are unduly enjoying the privileges of upper castes. It results in caste discrimination in a new non-caste location – the middle class. As a result, the new recruits from the lower sections revive their community in self-defense. Such continued intolerance on the part of ‘upper castes’ towards the upwardly mobile individuals from the lower castes, forces the latter to fall back on their own community identity. Thus, the lower castes and the Dalits articulate their traditional (community) identity in a modern context (middle class). They articulate it as a reaction to the attitudes of the upper castes. Given the caste system which is being in place, it has continued to play a discriminative role in the modern context. This has been clearly brought out by this study wherein Dalits are facing problems in workplace, social relations, and neighbourhood.
It is in this context that the need for looking at the economic mobility as well as political ideological formations among the Dalits arises even if it is in the form and level of an individual, and which is apparently unconnected. The process of induction of individuals from non-middle class families into a class that is considered to have achieved much that is otherwise not possible for many other Dalits. In this connection it is important to understand the transformation and progress among the Dalits. It is very useful to analyze the ideology and identity formation processes among the middle class Dalits who are reportedly had been removed from the Dalit reality of suffering, subjugation and thereby also not eligible to represent the Dalit masses, as held by both Dalits and the caste-Hindus, is significant in more ways than one. While the Dalit masses observe (to some extent from their experience) that the middle class Dalits have been separated from their roots and do not feel for their community any longer, the caste Hindus, on the other hand, perceive a threat in the mobility of Dalits in general and the existence of the Dalit middle class in particular. The Dalit Middle Class, thus, faces opposition from the caste-Hindus for closely networking amongst them and growing independent, advantaged and well placed unlike the poor Dalits. This animosity gets further aggravated when the Dalit middle class organizes itself, for their own cause or for Dalits in general.

As mentioned earlier, in the introductory chapter, the present researcher had earlier undertaken research titled "Intersecting Identities: A study of the Dalit Middle Class in Hyderabad", as part of his M.Phil programme. It would be pertinent to reproduce presently, the findings of that study. The latter had discovered that:

1. The "ex-untouchables" or members of the "Scheduled Castes" employed in middle level government jobs or modern professions are all the time aware of their dual identities.
2. While their immediate context and life style is predominantly urban and middle class, they can not easily escape their caste identity.
3. More importantly, though they are acutely aware of their past and the disabilities still experienced by the members of their caste/community, there is also a tendency among them to look for other sources of identification.
4. The fact that a good number of them chose nation over their caste as a primary identity is an indication of this fact.
5. However, it is not to suggest that they want to forget their caste identities, but for the members of the Dalit middle class, self-identity is perhaps a much more difficult question than it was for their fathers and grandfathers.

6. They have to negotiate with multiple and intersecting identities more than those from the "mainstream" middle class background have to do.

7. It was found that such mobility empowered them to form a 'new' Dalit middle class alongside of a general middle class.

8. The lifestyle, thinking process and political leanings of the upwardly mobile Dalits are different from both the Indian general middle class and Dalits in general.

9. It was also observed that middle class Dalits have a certain kind of political consciousness that facilitates formation and sustenance of Dalit ideology and identity.

This apart, studies conducted by other researchers working on the same theme were explicated at length in the chapters concerned with the review of literature pertaining to Dalit middle class and its identity and ideology. The findings of these studies, which were also discussed in detail earlier, can be summarized thus:

1. The middle class Dalits are from a few scheduled castes
2. Fathers’ occupation decides children’s occupation
3. Social mobility into the middle class takes place over two generations (not directly from the traditional occupation to a modern/middle class occupation)
4. Neighborhood of middle class Dalits is predominantly Dalit, of the same economic group (middle class)
5. More the social and economic status, the more upper caste friends
6. Higher the economic status, more the family friendships with upper castes
7. High social status draws Dalit middle class away from their own community
8. High professional Dalit middle class do not give great importance to getting ‘Sanskritised’
9. Untouchability is a psychological barrier, that depends not on own experience but on other’s experiences as well. It keeps Dalit middle class away from the Hindu society.

90 Largely, the two empirical studies on the Dalit middle class (Eckeharde Kulke, 1976, Nandu Ram, 1988).
10. Attachment towards Ambedkar among the graduates (younger generations) is decreasing.

11. Untouchables continuously have to identify themselves as ‘untouchables’ in order to get jobs, promotions.

12. Dalit middle class status ties between partial acceptance and rejection, between integration, frustration and aggression.

13. This dilemma leads them to ‘we’ consciousness.

14. Dalit middle class has close contacts among themselves.

15. Caste still is a relevant social dimension of status consciousness among middle class Dalits who otherwise attempt to overcome barriers (which means they were following Ambedkar’s notion of segregation and confrontation).

It is in light of the above, that the findings of the present study ought to result in a conclusion. The rest of the chapter would be devoted to this task.

**Social Background**

The social background of middle class Dalits, particularly the respondents suggests that, compared to their present socio-economic status, their paternal family’s socio-economic background was low. The education, occupation and income levels of the respondents were higher compared to their paternal families. There was a visible upward mobility in the case of respondents. At the same time, their paternal family’s low socio-economic status had a bearing on their upward mobility.

The Dalits who experienced educational and employment upward mobility were largely concentrated in Government service, autonomous institutions, Government teaching and research institutions, public sector units, independent professions and private sector. In the present study, they are broadly classified as employees and professionals. Compared to Dalit men very few Dalit women have entered into modern professions and occupations and the same is reflected in the sample. One thirds of respondents were second generation employed, nearly half of them had come from agricultural background families, and while very few had their fathers pursuing few other modern occupations.
Education is the means for achieving social and economic mobility and middle class status in general, and which is the same for the Dalits as well. In the case of current constitution of Dalit middle class, education was a deciding factor for membership. It was evident from the sample that in certain occupations, technical educational credentials were a prerequisite to obtain/achieve it. The respondents' education profile ranges from matriculation to PhD. As part of reservations in employment in government sector, the Dalits are provided with concession in minimum qualification for eligibility. However, in all occupations and professions, the respondents of the present study possess minimum and in some cases additional educational qualifications. None of the respondents seem to have utilized such concessions.

Middle class Dalits predominantly come from few scheduled castes. In correspondence with the general pattern of Dalit population in Andhra Pradesh, the Dalit middle class in the state, especially in Hyderabad, was largely constituted of the two numerically dominant castes namely Madiga and Mala. As numerically dominant, these two major communities accessed all mobility options and formed more than 85% of the Dalit middle class.

Among these upwardly mobile Dalits, marriages were arranged with partners, not only within but also outside their community, with friends and acquaintances acting as mediators. In the case of love marriages, marriage with a partner from outside the community was the norm, despite a considerable number of love marriages occurring with partners within the community. The pattern of marriage among the respondents illustrated that while arranged marriages were the norm, love marriages too were prevalent among the upwardly mobile Dalits.

The economic status of respondents' paternal family played a major role in shaping up the future of the respondents. This was evident in many respects, their educational level, career options and current economic status. An analysis of the role of respondents' family economic status on the lives of the respondents revealed that, to a great extent the respondents have experienced economic mobility compared to their families. Majority of the respondents identified them to be in the middle class proper (i.e., middle-middle class), and their paternal and maternal families in lower middle class and poor categories.
In all instances, there was upward mobility among the respondents compared to their paternal and maternal families. The respondents noted an improvement in their own family economic status compared to their paternal and maternal families.

The educational profile of the respondents' parents and grandparents suggested that majority of the respondents were first generation educated. In few instances, wherein either the parents and/or the grandparents were educated, the respondents' had benefited in terms of resources and guidance with respect to their education and career. Second or third generation educated respondents were highly educated in comparison to the first generation educated respondents. This indicated that Dalits had access to education only in recent times. Apart from that, Dalit men had the privilege of being highly educated in comparison to Dalit women. The educational profile of the respondents' fathers, mothers and grandparents showed that the majority among all the three categories were predominantly illiterate. The pattern of occupation too corresponded with that of education, placing fathers over mothers and grandparents. Similarly, Dalit men were better placed in modern occupations compared to Dalit women.

Dependents

Middle class Dalits, being the most economically successful compared to their ancestral family, other relatives, friends and acquaintances were dependent on the respondents for various needs like shelter, economic support, career advice, recommendation, etc. An overwhelming majority of respondents from the present study reported that among other forms of help, they had given shelter to paternal family members as well as other relatives under their roof at some point of time or the other.

The dependency patterns of the respondents' paternal family showed that, while in some instances they had lived with the respondents and had been economically dependent on them as well, in other instances, they lived separately, but were nonetheless dependent upon the respondents for the satisfaction of their economic needs. In many instances, it was the paternal family members, i.e., parents as well as siblings, who were dependent on the respondents.
Siblings played a crucial role in terms of either contributing to the upward mobility of the respondents or becoming dependent on the respondents for their economic needs. There were no instances where both parents and siblings being dependent on respondents. In no instance, siblings were dependent on respondents for economic needs alone. Their dependence was in terms of shelter as well as economic needs largely by unmarried siblings, who were pursuing studies and looking out for employment. A comparison in terms of respondents’ gender and dependency by their siblings showed that, both male and female respondents have siblings as dependents on them, irrespective of their own marital status and having own family.

In most cases, the dependency was not only due to the ‘need factor’ but also due to the relatively better economic status of the respondents compared to their parents or siblings. There were instances where respondents, who were relatively well off financially, had more than one sibling who were solely dependent on them. Higher the occupational status of respondents (read income), higher the dependency of paternal family members on them. In the case of less represented professions, like Doctors and Journalists the number of dependents was also less. On an average, 5-7 respondents from each occupation or profession reported such dependency.

There were few other dependents from among close relatives, distant relatives, acquaintances and friends from the respondents’ native place for both economic needs as well as for shelter. Most of the dependents from others category were students pursuing studies, appearing for government exams, searching for employment, etc. Many respondents had provided economic assistance to relatives and friends on need basis and had sheltered some relatives in the past. However, currently there were not many relatives and friends staying with them.

The practice (out of interest and/or as responsibility towards the ancestral family) of sending part of their income to native place was found among a few respondents. However, such a practice is in decline now. Except few, majority of the respondents do not have stakes in these lands as they are the most economically well off in their families and have given up their share in them for their siblings’ or parents’ subsistence needs. In the absence of lands in their native place, many respondents have had to shoulder the economic dependence of their paternal family. A few others
showed interest in family-related agricultural activities by providing financial inputs sporadically but also expected returns from such investments.

Aspirations regarding children's future

Aspirations regarding children's future are reflective of their own achievements and their aspirations for future generations. Higher the occupational status and income higher are the aspirations for their children. Along with stability, high income and social prestige there are other expectations from children's career. In the case of those social groups, which achieved certain level of social and economic mobility, their children are expected to either achieve more or keep up with their own level. Thus, employment in a similar or higher occupational category was a normal expectation of children's future.

Significantly, the respondents who wanted their children to take up occupations similar to theirs were located in government or public sector jobs. Irrespective of occupation and profession, majority wanted their children to be settled in secure occupations like Government service. Among all occupational categories, the major tilt was towards Government job or an independent profession that was secure and remunerative. Other options like business or settling abroad are still a distant dream for the Dalit middle class given their relatively lower level of achievement with respect to economic and social mobility.

Reservations utilization

Without reservations in education and employment, almost none of the present members of Dalit middle class would have made it into the middle class at all. Even in the case of those respondents who had not availed reservations, their earlier generations might have utilized reservations. In the present study, almost all respondents had availed of reservations at various stages of their life viz., education and employment.

Career: Trajectory and Problems

As the average age of the respondents of the present study suggests, many of them had 6-10 years of work experience. Intriguingly, the comparison between years of
service and years of unemployment among the respondents shows that, majority of the respondents in all occupational categories had been unemployed at some point in time after completion of studies. Majority of the respondents had directly entered into the present job/profession after completing their studies. Nearly half the respondents had remained unemployed for varying periods. Overall, changes in job/profession by the respondents had occurred in the case of more than half of the respondents.

**Experiences of caste Discrimination**

Middle class Dalits, who hail predominantly from a rural background, have experiences of varied forms and intensity of caste discrimination. Having been removed from such a social and economic setting, the middle class Dalits may or may not perceive caste discrimination in their present setting. Those who perceive caste discrimination might be having sufficient basis for the same or it could be because of their experience that they perceive it larger than its original proportion. Thus, their present social setting prompts them to act against it or tolerate it.

Caste discrimination experienced by the respondents at the workplace and discrimination experienced in career growth (in terms of denial of promotion, career advancement, etc.) shows that some felt that they were facing caste discrimination from their superiors or from their colleagues and both superiors and colleagues. On the other hand, respondents had experienced discrimination related to their career growth in various forms like casteism, personal rivalry/jealousy non-caste reason like groupism or all of them. However, though in both these instances, majority of the respondents did not perceive caste related discrimination, of those who felt discriminated on the basis of caste, as this had a bearing on their work and personal life, thus limiting their mobility. It was observed in the case of majority of the respondents that, such experiences had led them towards collective action (through formation of SC/ST Welfare Associations to fight such problems).

**Help received from others in education and career planning**

Friends and other well-wishers also play a significant role in the lives of upwardly mobile Dalits along with their paternal family. Their contribution towards upward
mobility of the respondents in their student days and formative stages of their careers was very significant in more than one way. Influence of the persons who helped them, would not only influence their careers or upward mobility, but their social relations in their new location, the middle class. Nearly half of the respondents have received help from some persons (other than family members) during their studies and before start of their work careers. In all such instances, there was more than one person who provided help to the respondents. No respondent had reported benefiting only from a single individual.

The help was in various forms such as financial support during their studies, career guidance, and recommendation for a job and introduction that would facilitate their professional advancement. While persons from the same sub-caste extended financial help and persons from all communities facilitated career guidance, recommendation and introduction. Persons from similar occupational background provided financial help and recommendation, persons from high occupational status have largely provided career guidance and in the case of various occupational background persons' it was largely introducing them to newer career prospects.

**Economic status**

Economic status of the middle class Dalits is not in congruence with their income. Unlike the most members of the general middle class, most members of the Dalit middle class would not benefit from a comfortable economic foundation. Middle class Dalits solely dependent on the income they earn from their present occupation or profession.

Income and expenditure pattern among the respondents suggested that they were largely distributed in income groups ranging below Rs. one lakh to Rs. 2-3 lakhs per annum. Most of them were located in the former group. In most cases, respondents were the sole earning members of the family and main source of income being their occupation or profession. Their lives were organized on the incomes they earn from their occupations. Comparatively, employees have larger incomes and majority of professionals, especially, those in NGO sector, legal and journalism fields were concentrated in below Rs. one lakh income category. Among the professionals,
doctors were well placed economically owing to the importance of the profession and also due to their employment.

Considering the fact that many of the respondents were first generation of economically upward mobile in their families, they have financial and other responsibilities to support their paternal family, and their expenses exceed their income. Except very few, almost all respondents fall in the range of an annual income of Rs. 1-2 lakhs. Among them, a considerable number have income below Rs. one lakh per annum.

Major chunk of expenditure was towards household expenses, expenditure towards assets creation, on children (for their education, etc.) and other needs formed a negligible percentage. Savings and insurance for emergencies were a common phenomenon among the regular income groups. The respondents were, almost all, had some savings and/or insurance schemes subscribed. There was not much of variation in this practice among different occupational groups except that the number of schemes and amount saved/insured were more among salaried than the professionals who have irregular income. Respondents have habit of putting in a portion of their earnings in various savings schemes, shares and chit funds. With majority, opted for private savings schemes like chit funds and some in investments in shares that are flexible and more attractive compared to other institutionalized savings sources like Government savings schemes and banks. Insurance schemes, the respondents prefer, are in the public sector with large number of them subscribing to LIC followed by other health schemes with a view to meet with any medical emergency.

**Residential locality / Neighbourhood**

The respondents of the present study, who are having a middle class income and lifestyle, though share the common social background with the people living in poor localities, have chosen middle class localities for residential purposes. Majority living in the poor localities are from socially disadvantaged sections, largely the Dalits. The members of Dalit middle class, at least those who are locals, some had their own relatives living in poor localities. So far, it is other communities, who have
possession of the middle class and posh localities and Dalits are the new entrants into such localities, predominantly composed by other communities. In this context, their arrival at such a locality and most importantly their experiences in their neighbourhood.

All, except two respondents, lived in middle class locality. Even those two have shifted from a poor locality to a middle class locality in the last five years. This could be because majority migrated to city, for either education or employment that necessitated them to stay in a middle class locality. Unlike in the past, majority of Dalits migrated to city were illiterate and sought employment in unskilled sectors, the new migrants were educated and employable in modern occupations. In the case of predominantly second or third generation migrants, their families have migrated long back and witnessed economic mobility; therefore, they are now placed in a middle class locality.

A comparison between ownership of house and neighbourhood showed that in either cases of the respondents with an own house or those living in rented houses; they are mostly concentrated in either non-Dalit locality or a locality with mixed population compared to exclusive Dalit localities. From among their paternal families, majority of the respondents were first migrants to Hyderabad city who arrived largely due to their education or occupation. They had to find a place to live on their own in the City. Majority of them live in rented houses. Only 1/3 of them have own houses.

**Consumption pattern**

Owning assets is an important cultural marker for the middle class. It also reflects their consumption patterns and life style. Consumption pattern among the respondents show that, majority of the respondents have a moderate tendency towards consumerism. Those respondents who do not have to shoulder economic responsibilities of their paternal families are comfortably living with a moderate consumption pattern, which corresponds with their income.
Landholding pattern

Non-locals or the first generation migrants to the city do not have landholdings in the city, except land acquired by some of them for housing purpose. Almost equal numbers of respondents have or do not have landholdings.

Except few, majority of the respondents do not have stakes in agricultural lands at their native place as they are the most economically well off in their families and have given up their share in them for their siblings’ or parents’ subsistence needs. In the absence of lands in their native place, many respondents have had to shoulder the economic dependence of their paternal family. A few others showed interest in family-related agricultural activities by providing financial inputs sporadically but also expected returns from such investments.

Lifestyle

Each social and economic class has a distinctive lifestyle. Members of a class follow the normative-material practices of that class and generally adhere to the class character. The educated Dalits, after getting into an occupation/profession that provides them with a middle class income naturally take to middle class lifestyle, until the circumstances force them towards their own community circles. Depending on the result of their initial attempts to interact with others, they either assimilate in the general middle class or get alienated and move towards forming their own Dalit Middle Class.

Few lifestyle aspects like consumption pattern (food habits and dressing); usage of a particular accent, tone in language or usage of English; religious practices; making or leaving out friends and acquaintances; family outing for cinema, eating out, etc., are analyzed with an assumption that there would be a change in their lifestyle with their entry into the middle class, especially in the case of those who come from a poor economic background. Though, most of the respondents are not alien to these lifestyle practices of middle class, even those who come from rural and poor backgrounds too experienced or witnessed them during their education, well in advance to make themselves acquainted with the middle class lifestyle. For majority
of the respondents changes in these lifestyle aspects are not sudden occurrences and have taken place over a period of time gradually.

There was a noticeable surge in terms of qualitative changes in the respondents’ lifestyle after entering into their present occupation/profession; these were largely related to food habits and dressing among the respondents and language among respondents. Interestingly, these two aspects either witnessed an increase in terms of quantity and quality or remained same.

**Interpersonal Relationships**

Interpersonal relationships at the workplace were mostly related to collaboration in work, forging of alliances other than friendship, camaraderie or acquaintance in various occupations and professions were generally formed on caste lines. In some instances, they were direct and openly visible and in others, they were discreet and hard to prove.

**Social Relations at workplace and neighbourhood**

Social relations in terms of friendship with colleagues from different socio-economic backgrounds in everyday interactions of their attempts to rise above caste barriers. Regarding personal friendships, the Dalits exhibited no particular preference for their own community; they have friends from all castes. In the process of naming five close friends at the workplace, the respondents informed that they had friends from all communities; nevertheless, their closest friends were Dalits. On everyday basis, in their work as well as personal needs, they interacted with a few colleagues whose interests were similar to their own. As part of their professional vocation, they interacted with people from all communities and thus had friends across all communities. However, proximity of such friendship varied between friends from own and other communities. In some cases in which the respondents had to work in a group or had a collective work responsibility, they seem to enjoy the partnership of persons from other communities. Having friends from other communities was not a problem for majority of the respondents, in a few instances, however, they did have difficulty in seeking out friends from other communities.
Occupational position and age seemed to pose no barriers in forming friendships across various gender, class, caste and age groups for the respondents compared to gender, caste and religion. Respondents' friends in office/workplace belonged to various occupational categories and age groups. This indicated the kind of commonality they had with middle class members from other communities. Social integration had taken place as far as friendship was concerned. However, these social interactions were individual in nature and did not involve their families and were not an indication of the assimilation of different communities. These relationships were basically secondary in nature.

On the other hand, choice of friends in the neighborhood was marked by certain limitations, compared to the office or workplace. Forming friendships on mutually agreeable terms in the neighborhood, suiting all their interests was difficult compared to office or the work place. As family level interactions involved social and religious occasions, their preferences lay towards their own community rather than other communities.

The very fact that, many of them had non-Dalit friends at the office and the work place and not as many at the family level suggests that, the middle class Dalits do not intend to pursue it in haste. Social relations are mutual, largely sustained by reciprocity from both the sides. In the case of social relations between Dalits and non-Dalits, there is a gradual progress in terms of the numbers of Dalits and non-Dalits seeking friendship and trust from each other.

**Interaction with own community**

The most scathing attack on middle class Dalits by various scholars has been about 'forgetting roots' and not caring for their own community after moving up in the economic ladder. It is generally felt by almost all the middle class Dalits that they were not making their best efforts to empower the Dalit masses.

Dalits' position becomes delicate when they get embedded into the middle class. They try to retain close community based connections with their Dalit colleagues on the one hand and the other acquaintances living in the city, on the other hand. Those
who have strong familial bonding in the rural areas try to retain them as well. Since their assimilation into the general middle class is uncertain, many middle class Dalits seem to be giving priority to their social relations within their own community.

Majority of the respondents visiting their native place also visited the homes of persons belonging to their community in the city, who were not related to them. Similarly, majority of the respondents whose visits to their native place were rare also made very few visits to the homes of people belonging to their community in the city.

**Interaction with “successful” Dalits**

Middle class Dalits, especially the respondents were successful Dalits themselves in a sense. Compared to their parents’ and grandparents’ generation, the respondents had achieved significant social and economic mobility. They are considered successful by the poor Dalits. It is interesting to note that the standards set for success by the middle class Dalits included achievement in terms of political leadership, high rank bureaucratic positions and economically successful business/enterprise ventures. Respondents named persons who had achieved such success in various fields, who were known to them personally. Majority of the respondents named a few individuals, who were known to them personally and/or with whom they interacted on a regular basis in this regard. The persons thus named were commonly those who had made it big in the fields of government service and/or as political leaders.

The successful Dalits, named by the respondents, who had achieved success in social, economic and political fields, were not their own relatives, in majority of the cases, they were not known to them since childhood. Similarly, they did not belong to their native place and/or to their present occupation. Majority of the respondents considered these individuals as having achieved a higher degree of social and economic mobility compared to their own. Most of the respondents interacted with them regularly. It indicates that such “successful” Dalits have a strong psychological influence on the respondents for emulation as role models. In case the respondents cannot aspire to achieve such “success” themselves, in all probability, their children would be encouraged to do so.
Initiatives for Development of Dalits

Individual and collective activities for development of Dalits, in which respondents had participated, show that the respondents were involved in many initiatives for the economic and educational benefit and moral encouragement of the Dalits, which had as their objectives, the development of the community.

The activities in which the respondents were involved in range from financial help in their individual capacity and demonstration of their solidarity to playing an active role as part of an existing collective body. However, not all preferred being part of already established organizations and some of them had launched new individual or small collective efforts. This is in consonance with the views expressed by some of them that, in a collective form, the Dalit middle class has not been able to accomplish much. Hence, their individual efforts were most important for the development of Dalits.

The individual/collective efforts aimed at development of Dalits, that had been initiated by the respondents or involved their contribution varied from participation in meetings to organizing them, from personally extending monetary support to mobilizing financial resources, from membership in an association to launching such organizations and heading them. It is quite interesting to note that many respondents believe that the smallest of gestures on their part in terms of responding to local issues also would contribute to the development of Dalits.

Self-description of personality type and expectations from others

Self-description of respondents in socio-psychological terms brought out their personality in individual terms as opposed to the community or group identity. In this regard, their own personal traits and the personality traits they liked in others were analysed. The respondents, in more or less similar numbers, described themselves as composed, serious or jovial personality types. Similarly, the personality traits they liked in others were related to behaviour/attitude, morals and discipline/nature. When the respondents' self-description of their personality type were contrasted with the personal qualities they appreciated in other persons, respondents who described themselves as composed and jovial types of persons accorded more importance to
morals and the respondents who described their personality type as serious rated good behaviour as being the most important quality that was appreciated by them.

Identity patterns

The identity choices of respondents as belonging to multiple social groups and performing various social roles, the analysis revealed that the highest number of them had an urge to be recognized as an individual with no specific group identity, this category included respondents who identified themselves in terms of a secular identity. Others, around respondents, preferred to identify themselves as Dalit, to identify themselves in terms of their sub-caste identity, those who identified themselves in terms of their occupation were Interestingly, no one preferred to be identified as an individual purely belonging to middle class. For them middle class was a given identity that led them nowhere since such a clear identification with only the 'middle class' would lead to their alienation from other communities and rejection by the Dalits. In the present context, the taking up of a middle class identity as an alternative to their community identity was not helpful to the respondents in any way. The reasons provided for ranking a particular identity over others were more in terms of reiteration of their identity preferences rather than those of an explanatory nature.

Ascribed Identity

The respondents' perceived that the identity ascribed to them by their Dalit and non-Dalit friends and acquaintances was largely dependant on the identity of the 'ascriber' (identity provider) himself/herself. While their Dalit friends and acquaintances identified the respondents in terms of being essentially Dalits, others saw them as persons belonging to the middle class. However, in both the cases, this did not imply the negation of their Dalit identity.

Such ascription of identity could be understood in two ways. Firstly, the members of the Dalit middle class were being accepted in the society by non-Dalits on an equal footing primarily due to their middle class status and secondly, the Dalit identity itself was being accepted in the society, thereby middle class Dalits were primarily identified as Dalits. However, a congruence of both the identities was also possible.
Status differentiation with others

With reference to status, the differences respondents perceived between themselves and the poor Dalits, the other middle class Dalits and the non-Dalit middle class were largely related to education, economic status and social status. In relation to poor Dalits, they perceived education and economic status as major status differentiators and in comparison to other non-Dalit middle class; they perceived social status as the sole differentiator. In the case of other middle class Dalits, there were no differences except minor variations in education levels and lifestyles, as they shared the same socio-economic location. However, their articulation of status differentiation with reference to the general middle class was in terms of the latter’s cultural and social capital. As articulated by many respondents, their income and education levels and lifestyles were similar to those of the general middle class. However, in terms of commanding social respectability and also acceptability, they perceived themselves to be lagging behind compared to the general middle class, which was largely composed of caste-Hindus.

Criteria for identifying Dalits

The respondents felt that social ‘castification’ had made the Dalits vulnerable on all fronts. The respondents felt that social discrimination ought to be regarded as a major criterion for identifying any of them as Dalits. However, the number of those who considered economic and political disadvantages as the main criterion was significant whereas some of them proposed that a combination of all these factors ought to be taken into consideration.

Progress made by the Dalits since independence

There are divergent positions on the issue of progress made by Dalits since independence with reference to development in social, economic and political spheres. Perceivably, there is very little progress on all these spheres in terms of uniformity, quality of progress, its effectiveness and the expectations attributed to it.

The respondents felt very strongly about the mode, process and pace of progress made by the Dalits since independence. Their views were reflective of the collective notions of the community concerning the progress or quite contrarily the lack of it.
Their views also represented the aspirations for progress in a much more systematic manner than it was being pursued currently. While some merely listed the kinds of changes that had affected Dalits in a positive or negative manner, others embarked on the task of precisely pinpointing the lacunas.

Status of Dalit women

Both male as well as female respondents unequivocally felt that when compared to Dalit men, Dalit women were in a disadvantageous position. Except one respondent, who felt that Dalit women were in an equal position compared to Dalit men and in a disadvantageous position in comparison to other women, all others felt Dalit women were undoubtedly in a disadvantageous position. Such disadvantages were expressed in terms of the additional problems they faced within the family and in the society.

Additional problems Dalit women face within family and in society

Both male and female respondents felt that Dalit women need not be simplistically categorized into either of those identities as ‘Dalit women’s problems’. The problem of doubly disadvantaged question, they felt, ought to be dealt with as one question than two because caste and gender were interrelated questions. The important identity for Dalit women was an exclusive neither ‘Dalit’ nor ‘woman’ identity but a composite identity of Dalit women.

Despite the existing disadvantaged position of Dalit women at various levels, there was a growing awareness about the importance of Dalit women’s education, employment and role in making among the middle class. The same was reflected in the views expressed by the male as well as female respondents.

Except few, majority of respondents were in favour of equal or more importance for women in education, employment and role in decision-making. The respondents stressed on the rectification of all existing inequalities, with emphasis on equal importance to Dalit women. Among the three issues: education, employment and role in decision-making were ranked in that order.
**Dalit movement**

The most interesting aspects of the Dalit movement today were broadly categorized by the respondents into four aspects: two positive and two negative aspects. Among the positive and interesting aspects, most of them dwelt upon the Dalit movements' facilitation of unity among the community members and fighting for the rights of the Dalits. Similarly, the negative but interesting aspects as perceived by the respondents included and disunity among the practitioners of the movement.

**Dalit Leaders' contributions towards development of Dalits**

Leaders from the community heading the Dalit movement and the political sphere were identified by the respondents. A total of 31 contemporary Dalit leaders were identified by the respondents. They are spread across various fields from top-level bureaucrats in government service to leaders of mass Dalit movements to political leaders. Their contribution was assessed mainly in terms of spearheading the Dalit movement and winning various socio-economic and political rights for the Dalit community.

**Greatest personalities of the 20th century**

The greatest Indian personalities of the 20th century, according to the respondents, belonged to the fields of politics and social service in terms of their commitment and achievements towards the Dalit cause and in general. The greatest personalities according to the respondents were Dr. BR Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Kanshiram and Mayavati. Along with these, few other leaders from national movement, Dalit political movements, scientists and achievers in various other fields were also mentioned by the respondents.

The most important issues in the 20th century, according to the respondents, were socio-political movements in relation to Dalit rights, compared to the realm of politics and development. It is evident from their naming/identification of the greatest personalities of the 20th century that the persons who had strived for social change and Dalit rights were their favorites rather than individuals who had contributed to the
area of politics and development. However, majority of the respondents believed that the greatest personalities identified by them had contributed to both these fields.

Membership in social/political organizations

The respondents in the present study were members of Dalit organizations and Political parties working with Dalit ideology. All employees were members of SC/ST employees' associations in their concerned organizations. Most of the respondents among the independent professionals were members of more than one Dalit organization/association. Majority of respondents from the officer cadre were members of Dalit organizations/political parties. Among clerk cadre, bank employees and university faculty, all belonging to Government/public sector institutions, more than half have membership in organizations. Among the professionals, only NGO professionals were members of such organizations, whereas doctors, advocates and journalists did not possess memberships in any Dalit/political organizations.

Effective model(s)/strategies for the overall development of Dalits

Six pre-identified models/strategies that would assist the Dalits in their overall development were provided to the respondents for ranking them in the order of their preference. They were: 1) reservations, 2) socialist revolution, 3) cultural change, 4) economic development, 5) urbanization and 6) political power.

The explanation offered by the respondents for according rank 1 to a particular model or strategy was analysed. In their opinion, the most suitable model/strategy for the overall development of the Dalits should be a permanent solution than an immediate measure or gradual progress.

Reservations

All the respondents, irrespective of occupation and gender, had a common view on the first two issues in terms of continuing with reservations and further extending it to the private sector in the changing scenario of shrinking opportunities in the public sector. The division of opinions was reflected only in the case of reservations for the creamy
layer Dalits and extending them to Dalits who had converted to other religions like Islam and Christianity.

**Political options before the Dalits to achieve equality**

The Dalit movements and various political mobilizations of the Dalits have been in existence for a long time. On many occasions, they have worked in collaboration with other organizations and political movements. Of them, an overwhelming majority felt that it was essential to align with other likeminded communities and/or political parties in the pursuit of socio-economic and political equality. On the other hand, few felt that other communities or parties could not be relied upon completely to support the Dalits and hence, the only option left before them was to fight alone for their rights.

**Issues / measures related to Dalits that are known**

Except one respondent, all the other respondents had high levels of awareness on many issues related to Dalits. The overall awareness about various atrocities committed upon Dalits, the special economic measures provided to Dalits, reservations in various fields and the legal measures banning untouchability are an indication of their constant engagement with such issues. Further, many respondents also suggested a few necessary changes for the effective implementation of those measures.

**Prioritization of socio-economic and political issues**

Many socio-economic and political issues are a cause for concern among all Dalits in the present times. Some of these issues are articulated by the Dalit middle class in response to the problems faced by the Dalits. Such issues usually evoke a lot of interest in the members of the Dalit middle class who engage with them extensively. In that process, the middle class Dalits also prioritize these issues. In this regard, an attempt has been made to understand their priorities in relation to such issues.
For many Dalit identity / self-respect is more important than the problem of economic inequality. All those who accorded first rank to Dalit identity have given second rank to economic inequality and vice-versa. Others ranked social, economic and political equality, caste discrimination, problems like unemployment, poverty, landlessness and illiteracy among Dalits and not to issues related to conversions to Christianity, Buddhism, etc. This revealed that majority of the Dalit middle class were engaged with the question of self-respect and identity rather than other social, economic and political issues. They were indeed seriously contemplating issues concerned to identity and ideology in a much more practical way.

Opinions on general issues

Two sets of statements dealing with (1) globalization, reservations and corruption and (2) caste and Dalits were presented to the respondents for their views and comments.

Though the priorities of the government were changing in favour of privatization and thereby reducing employment opportunities for Dalits, the respondents largely felt that the principle of social justice could not be done away with at this point of time. Similarly, they contested other notions like globalization leading to the eradication of the caste system, merit being the sole criterion in job selections and the notion that the reservations system had increased the scope for corruption. An overwhelming majority of the respondents strongly disagreed with these notions. On the other hand, very few had agreed with these notions.

Perceptions on issues related to caste and Dalits

The basic idea here was to assess the respondents’ perceptions about the contemporary nature of caste and its consequences for the Dalits. Issues like Brahminism, purity and pollution, casteism and communalism, achieving Dalit unity through inter-community marriages amongst the Dalits and additional burdens that the Dalit women faced in comparison to Dalit men were presented to the respondents for their opinions.

Of these statements, only the notion that Brahminism was all pervasive was agreed upon by almost all the respondents. In contrast, the other two general issues
pertaining to caste were contested by the respondents. They feel that notion of purity and pollution were still being observed in urban life and casteism and communalism are equally evil. The perceptions related to the Dalits, viz., ‘Dalit unity through inter-community marriages’ was agreed upon almost all and the issue of Dalit women facing additional burdens compared to the Dalit men was contested nearly half the respondents.

**Summation**

The very process of emergence of Dalit middle class necessitates uniqueness in its location, characteristics and politics. Unlike the general middle class, which is formed on the lines of hierarchical structure of the society with asymmetry based on ascription as its central characteristic, the Dalit middle class is constituted largely thorough competition among individuals characteristically based on achievement. In the formation of Dalit middle class a vivid upward mobility of the very best, and often more talented among the Dalits takes place.

The commonality of shared traits, similar background and a collective future propel the individual recruits of the Dalit middle class hover together. Similarly, the external environment, particularly their interaction with the caste-Hindus has a bearing on their integration into the middle class.

The very emergence of Dalit middle class is attributed to the reservations policy. It runs contrary to the expectations of the independent Indian State that prioritized the goal of achieving integration in society over quicker development of disadvantaged groups, thereby choosing reservations system over community based ‘special development packages’. Thus, reservations policy was originally aimed at individual based upward mobility among the Dalits, with an intension to integrate them into the ‘mainstream’. The very emergence of a Dalit middle class suggests that, it is distinctively separate from the general middle class, in its own identity and politics. Often, it is opposed to the ideals, values of the general middle class; the same is manifested in its own priorities and politics. As its social composition, formation process and shared values and beliefs indicate that the Dalit middle class is ordained to be distinct from the general middle class.
The ideals, values and goals nurtured and developed by the Dalit middle class suggest that it is developing a grand vision of achieving socio-economic and political equality for the Dalits on par with others. The very fostering of a separate identity from the general middle class is a product of a protest ideology that has been shaping up through centuries. The protest ideology that was articulated by Ambedkar is now being received by the middle class Dalits. Thus, Dalit middle class is interpreting, reshaping and developing a more comprehensive Dalit ideology. It is being shaped by the common experiences and collective beliefs as Dalits belonging to middle class.