CHAPTER-III
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1. Literature Review

The existing studies on social mobility may be classified according to the subject or units of analysis such as group, family and individual and the domain, such as economic, social and political, upon which study on mobility concentrated. Such domain specific studies, again, can be further particularized into educational, income or occupational, ritual or cultural, religious conversion induced mobility, constitution induced mobility through job-reservation etc. Several other issues such as political mobility though Panchayat and land reforms, emergence of new class of Harijan Elite, Dalit atrocities, village politics and social change etc. evoke considerable attention in developing the concept of social mobility. Again, since the caste structure in Bengal differ widely than found elsewhere in India hence the review of literature on social mobility require a regional prospective also.

The oldest and still most frequent approach is the study of corporate or caste-group mobility by comparing castes in terms of their positions in secular order. This approach suggests that significant mobility occurred in some regions of India prior to the twentieth century (Ghurye 1961; Srinivas 1966; Mukherjee 1970, Barber 1993) and even as early as the sixteenth century (Stein 1968) or perhaps, before the ‘modern era’ (Marriott 1968). More recently, the Dalit Movement, peasant ‘mobilization’, and other social forces have given rise to some remarkable cases of mobility, as exemplified by the mass conversion of Mahars (Patwardhan 1968) and the rise of Nadar caste of South India from a position of being ‘most defiling and degraded of all caste’ to a position of being the ‘one of the most economically and politically successful communities in the South’ (Hardgrave 1960). In contrast, there is remarkable downward mobility of the Jagidars and Zamindars-the rural aristocracy-in some villages of Rajasthan.
following land reforms (Sharma 1974). Anant (1972) in his ‘changing concept of caste in India’ indicated the existence of the pernicious manifestation of caste discrimination and any deviation from set norms is thwarted with violence by caste Hindus. Several studies showed how the Dalit are being harassed and discriminated by caste Hindus when they demand for equality with them (Singh 1967, Gough 1970-73, Radhakrishna and Kumar 1989, Chitnis 1977, Shah et al 2006). Aiyappan (1955) in his empirical study argues collective effort, some economic advancement and lastly physical power and courage are important for group mobility. Betelle (1966/1996) in his village study at Sripuram in Tanjvur district found that centre of power had shifted from the Brahmans to non-Brahmin but the position of Adi-Drivida remained same.

A second approach to the study of social mobility in India is the use of families as the unit of analysis, and ascending changes in their status over the time. Attwood (1979) using the data of land ownership in 1920 and in 1970 found that twenty percent of families experienced upward mobility and forty percent of the families experienced downward mobility. Parvathanma (1984) found that despite constitutional measures and policy formulation, the existential condition of Dalit is agonizing and discriminatory and in fact, has deteriorated than pre-independence days. They experience violence from caste Hindus against any attempt of social mobility. Singh (1987) studied the Dalit of eastern Uttar Pradesh taking Chamars, Pasis, Mushars, Doms, Beheliyas, Kanjars, Nats etc. as reference group and conclude that Dalit are still lagging behind the caste Hindus in economic and educational front. Chetty (1991), Rao and Babu (1994) found that a good number of Dalit families benefited due developmental schemes but their integration into mainstream society would require long time. In fact they live as a separate community in terms of their socio-economic status. Similar findings are discerned in the study of Gupta (1958), Sinha (1960), Bhatt (1975), Abbasayulu (1978), Mallik (1979), Khan (1980), Mehra and Others (1984). Alexander (1968) has shown that the educational achievement has been one of the determining
factors of social mobility among the Pulaya, a Dalit jati of Kerala. Rao and Rao (1951) have found conversion to Christianity has definitely brought an upward mobility among the Dalit. Epstein (1962), Parmer (1978), Lapoint and Lapoint (1985) argued that industrial growth and urbanization contributed favourably to social mobility. Sharma (1996) in his study in Rajasthan found both the process Sanskritization and modernization are visible at family level but same level of mobility is not visible at corporate level.

A third approach is the use of the individual as a unit of analysis. Most of the studies focus on occupational or other economic change and measure inter-generational mobility by comparing heads of households with their fathers (Gist 1954; Nafzinger 1976; Singer 1968). Singh (1976) studied the pattern of occupational mobility among the Dalit and espoused that the modern forces have accelerated the process of upward mobility but if they lag behind, the reason has been surely that of their socio-economic deprivation as well as denial of religious, educational opportunities by the caste Hindus. The most precise of these studies is that of Ramu and Wiebe (1973) which compares the occupations of male workers in the Kolar Gold Fields, an urban-industrial area of Mysore, with those of their fathers, when both were about 30 years of age. In a few instances data on occupational mobility are supplemented by data on educational mobility (Ramu and Wiebe 1973, Singh 1976). Driver and Driver (1987) studied social mobility under rural and urban prospective and found that educational and occupational structures are open to persons of quite diverse social origin. Prakash (1989) finds that the Dalit, who have entered into different Government service through the policy of reservation experience upward mobility to a greater extent. Issacs (1965) has found that in several cases the children belonging to Dalit group, despite of constitutional safe guards, are discriminated in educational institutions. Nijhawan (1971) and Mehra et al (1984) argued that education along with the constitutional safeguards causes occupational mobility among the Dalit. Doshi (1980) argues that illiteracy causes the Dalit to stick to traditional occupations that hinders
upward mobility to Dalit. Kuppuswamy (1956) and Rangari (1984) in their study on Dalit students found considerable change in attitude, which help them in bringing about a positive change in them. Wankhede (1999) in his study on Dalit government employees of Delhi espoused that despite of constitutional safeguards Dalit continue to suffer from a series of old and new deprivations and discrimination, invisible to and unperceived by the general people.

No doubt certain amount of social mobility has occurred among the Dalit over a span of time. Such change and mobility in religious, educational, economic and political spheres has been regarded as channels utilized by the educated castes to raise their caste status (Mohar 1959; Patwardhan 1968; Lynch 1969). Both upward and downward mobility of limited degree can be seen today among the Dalit (Schermerhorn 1978; Sharma 1973). Such mobility has both positive and negative consequences (Roy Burman 1970; Saberwal 1972; Parvathamma 1973; Bhatt 1974). Thus, recording positive consequences of upward mobility among these castes, it has been guessed that there will be no ‘Harijan’ problem in coming two or more generations at least in urban Punjab. ‘To be sure, there will poor Harijans but they will merge into the poor of all castes’ (Saberwal 1973). But such a generalization may be an overestimate of mobility among them results in two types of problems. Firstly, the upward mobile Dalit finds it very difficult to get fully assimilated in the subsequently higher castes or classes which often resent and condescend upon such effort. Secondly, upward mobile Dalit are, to some extent cutoff socially from the masses of the Dalit and are treated as alien by the people of both the categories. In fact they have been considered to be in the state of ‘semi-limbo’ (Isaacs 1965).

The Varna structure in Bengal largely resembles the structure of South India-a top layer of upper caste ‘bhadralok’ largely Bengali elites consisting of mainly Brahman, Kayastha, Vaidya separated from vast ‘chotolok’ largely agricultural labourers and small tenants. Mitra (1953) argued that most of the Bengal castes are occupational group drawn from various racial groups after the
extinction of Buddhist Pala kings. At the lowest rank, the asat castes (aspisyā or untouchable such as Namasudras, Bagdi, Bauri, Dom, Chamar) are descendents of natives of Bengal, who, unlike Adivasis, were gradually ‘aryanised’ (Dutta 1969). Bengali society throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries remained broadly divided into the Hindu and Muslim communities. In that sense, the inner division of the Hindu society tended to be perfunctory (Bandhopadhayay 1998). Niharranjan Roy in his ‘Bangalir Itihas’ (1966) found that in the pre-colonial Bengali society, with the expansion of settled agrarian economy, the linkages between caste and class became more visible—-with those providing physical labour, loosing status to those who refrained from it. Sarkar (2004) argues that in Ballal Carita, a medieval text of uncertain province and date implicitly admits that the caste order was far from immutable, but quite open to State intervention. Such secular aspect of caste formation was further developed in the seminal work of Sanyal (1981), where he argued; based on occupational specialization and not just ritual differentiation, several sub-castes emerged in pre-colonial Bengal through a constant process of fusion and fission. In Bengal there is evidence of continuities of corporate mobility from the fourteenth to the twentieth century (Inder 1970; Sanyal 1981).

In Colonial period, Sibnath Shastri’s ‘Jatibheda’ published in 1884, provides an impressive historical account of multiplicity of jatis as a degeneration compared to early Vedic time. In Bengal, the colonial bureaucracy enlisted Dalit communities not much in according to their ritual status, but more in terms of their economic status (Mitra 1953). Sinha (1959) in his study of BhumiːKshtrya jati in southern Manbhum found the acculturation process of social mobility in caste structure. Based on comparative study of two Navasakha castes such as Sadgope (agriculturist) and Tilis (traders), Sanyal (1971) argued that collective occupational shift and ownership of land helped them in controlling rural production process and thereby enhance social power and prestige. Following the pattern of Sanskritization, the upwardly mobile families of these castes patronized
the Brahmins, constructed temples and adopted other ritual symbols to legitimize their new found status and wealth. Therefore, the incentive of corporate social mobility originated both under traditional, pre-modern, modern circumstances and from the achievement of each group a sense of corporate solidarity both from internal and external prestige evinced leads to breakaway from the present castes and form new castes with higher social status. Regarding the caste specific study of social mobility, the study of Sekhara Bandyopadhyaya (2004) on Namasudra caste during colonial period, Cosimo Zene (2002) on Chamar (or Rishi) caste in eastern Bengal and Satadal Dasgupta (1996) and Arild Engelsen Ruud (2003) on Bagdi caste in Bengal is worth mentioning.

Due to fluidity in caste structure in Bengal, social mobility is found to be common in Bengal. Bose (1986) in his study of economic relation in western part of Bengal found a tripartite system, which he termed as ‘the peasant small holding-demesne labour complex’, consisting of a few major landowning castes- bhadralok, often high or at least clean castes, fairly a broad section of owner cultivators-chashis or agricultural castes such as Mahisya, Sadgop, Aguri etc., and large number of landless labourers-chotolok or low caste people. In fact, such economic relations roughly correspond cultural divisions of rural Bengal, which finds salience in this study. Chakraborti (1986) in his study affirms such binary opposition between bhadralok and chotolok, which are concomitant to the agricultural operations. Of the three aforesaid socio-cultural groups, bhadralok and chashi functioned as the models for cultural reforms process. Ruud (1999) in his study argued that the CPI (M) provided a path for upward social mobility for groups of poor people or chotolok. Other factors, which contributed for upward social mobility are economic reform, land distribution, political mobilization have generally benefitted the rural poor. Davis (1983) while mapping ‘politics of inequality’ found that caste is not purely attributional (behavioral customs ascribed by birth) or interactional (rank achieved in daily practices) but rather transformational. The concept is further crystallized in his distinction between
'gramer kaj’ or village politics and ‘sorkari kaj’ or government politics. The social mobility proceeds, perhaps, in dialectics between ‘gramer kaj’ and ‘sorkari kaj’. Bhowmick (1969) conducted study on occupational mobility of caste structure in rural market. Dutta (1983) found that the upper castes dominated non-manual group experiences more social mobility compared to scheduled tribe and Muslims. Lieten (1992) conducted similar type of study, where he compared social and political mobility between Bagdi and Muchi (Chamar) jati in reference to Panchayat.

3.2. Existing gaps
The existing conceptual view points about mobility are singularistic and do not encompass the totality of mobility taking place today in caste system. None of the literature explores the issues of mobility holistically at different level in order to find out which unit actually move or does not move. The social mobility at family level, which is the primary focus of this research study, basically depends upon the attributes of the family concerned without necessarily being determined by the rank of a caste. Since, all the families belonging to a caste do not possess a common set of attributes enabling them equally to have mobility therefore accentuates a ‘class’ like differentiation within hitherto same social group (Leach 1960). On the contrary, individual mobility implies enhancement or degradation of status of an individual without necessarily affecting the social position of his family and caste to which he belongs. Education and Sanskritization are two main factors responsible for mobility at individual level. Reference group theory helps in analysis of mobility at individual level. The group or corporate mobility aims for collective striving in regard to mobility to socio-cultural customs or matters regarding pollution-purity. Sanskritization is found to be important analytical tool, which helps in understanding corporate mobility. But, in political sphere Sanskritization is misfit for political analysis in village community. It does not necessarily reduce ‘economic inequalities’, nor does it challenge caste hierarchy. However, it symbolizes an increase sense of
awareness among the non-privileged sections. Changes within and between the caste does not necessarily constitute mobility within caste system, unless one accepts mobility as the only significant kind of change in Indian society. A more meaningful form of mobility should entail changes in ritual hierarchy than the enhanced power position of a particular caste. In fact, none of the theories underpinning mobility explains holistically functional or dysfunctional consequence of social mobility. Further, most of the studies relating to Dalit lack empirical verification in proper theoretical and methodological perspective. Their evaluations of social mobility among these castes are guided by generally a number of measures adopted under the policy of protective discrimination and not by proper assessment of benefits derived by beneficiaries. The folly lies in grand generalizations about the adoptive and gradual changes taking place among these castes at both micro and macro level. Therefore, study on social mobility in caste structure required to be explored at different levels such as family, group and individual.

Most of the studies are confined themselves in finding of the broad trends of social mobility of Dalit but study on the complex interaction with the village politics and negotiation for understanding the potential for mobility contained in Panchayat is seriously lacking. Such studies neither focus on the process and extent Panchayat as an institution helps the Dalit for social mobility irrespective of their wealth, education and occupation. In fact existing studies are constrained in identifying the variegated trajectories of generational movement of different jatis. In other words, the existing literatures did not explore whether the greater participation of lower castes in Panchayat pushes the government policy to address the concern of poor and thereby their social mobility.

On acquiring social mobility Dalit likely to acquired a better socio-economic status than that in the earlier times and thereby achieved social mobility in the class structure. So, they are likely to forge a new pattern of social interaction and relations with people in their social life irrespective of caste and
community considerations. There are men in the lower castes that have either been upwardly mobile earlier or are upwardly mobile now, or are getting equipped for upward mobility in the foreseeable future (Saberwal 1972). People of this category might have acquired ‘psychic mobility’, if not social mobility per se, due to non availability of resources for them. However, the mobile Dalit are said to avail of maximum facilities meant for the whole community thereby forming a category of elite, or neo-Brahmans or new middle class (Parvathamma 1973; Sachchidanand 1977). They are no doubt socially mobile but the degree and direction of mobility are not clear as is evident from a number of studies. Thus it becomes imperative to measure the precise degree of their social mobility in class structure.

With changes in their socio-economic status, the mobile Dalit likely to develop a new interaction pattern with others of similar socio-economic status. Similarly the pattern of their interaction with people of their own and other castes of relatively lower socio-economic status may also change. They may even perceive some changes in the behavioral pattern of individuals of other castes and communities towards them. But these studies failed to discern the impact of their social mobility on their interactions and relation with their non-Dalit acquaintances. Hence, this study also intends to find out their interactions and relations with the people of their own caste and other Dalit who have not been able to avail the opportunities provided by the government for their advancement. Further, it intends their perception of changes in their behavior non-Dalit towards them and changes in their own behavior with people of their own and other Dalit who lag behind in social mobility.

Though the constitutional measures help the Dalit in to achieve higher class status but it does not guarantee in any improvement in the caste status. The mobile Dalit might have achieved better class status due to changes in their social, economic, occupational and interaction patterns. But it is not known whether it facilitates to alter their caste status. It is thus important to examine the changes, if
any, taking place in their caste status, the determining factors and indicators of such changes and congruity between their achieved (class) status and ascribed (caste) status. The neo-mobile Dalit adopt the behavioral pattern of either certain individuals or groups and categories as a reference group for their social mobility and identification (Mandelbaum 1972). They also try to associate themselves with their referents but at the same time find it difficult to merge their identity fully with that of the referents due to structural constrains and objective reality. But the existing literatures did not locate their positive and negative orientations to and adoptions of reference individuals and groups for their social mobility and status identification. Hence, this study intends to examine the determinants of their selection of reference groups and individuals.

The benefits of protective discrimination may bring the Dalit in a position, where they are unlikely to get socially acceptance in new place in caste-hierarchy. Yet there may be four possible levels of their status identification: (a) they would likely to identify themselves at their own caste level; or (b) they would likely to claim a status superior caste by improving their caste status; or (c) they would likely to be satisfied with their improved status in class structure without caring much for their status in caste structure; or (d) they would likely to identify themselves at the non-caste-class level. More precisely their status identification could be ethnocentric in which they may or may not claim the superior rank of their own caste in caste hierarchy due to their improved status in class hierarchy and identify themselves with their own caste fellows. Or it may be contra-identification where they may try to establish their identity contrary to the ethnocentric one (Paranjpe 1970). In contra-identification, they may identify themselves either with members of other especially upper castes or classes, or outside of both the folds. In other words, they may not believe in any identification whatsoever in the stratification system and may have a frame of reference of non-stratification identification.
3.3. Rationale of the study

The issues raised above are very important, both substantially and conceptually. However, this study of social mobility was limited to an analysis of economic, social or cultural and political mobility of Dalit in rural Bengal but it intended to describe mobility at all the levels such as individual, family and corporate, which in fact, removed the ambiguity about the units that moved or did not moved. It also helped in delineating the extent of mobility and also the quality and quantum of mobility. The distinction between caste and non-caste structure also became relevant in this context and their interrelationship would be understandable. Against the backdrops of the social mobility studies in Western Societies, where the achievement criteria like education, job, income etc. are included in understanding mobility, a study of complete social mobility in India should have taken into account, besides the achievement criteria, the major framework of caste and other primordial categories of social relations. Most of the studies of social mobility in India have undermined the importance of ascriptive ritual as a criterion of mobility by emphasizing achievable aspects aspect of status such as education and occupation. (Bhatt 1971). Thus comprehensive study of social mobility, especially among Hindus in India, is possible only if the effect of changes in social, economic, religious and political spheres on the caste system is considered.

The existing studies on social mobility focused on two issues-such as openness or fluidity of society and of equality of opportunity and relationship between mobility pattern and social structure involving the range and consequence of variations for social organizations. But there exists a third issue, namely ‘concerns to psychological and social-psychological consequences of mobility or immobility’, which so far evoked a minor interest (Matras 1984). This research study covered all such issues of social mobility in rural West Bengal, which witnessed more than three decades of Left rule. The caste system in West Bengal is not abolished but due to sweeping land reforms and social movement
led by the Communists, Dalit in Bengal are not as vulnerable as found elsewhere. However, this did not limit the scope for exploring how political mobilization of the hitherto excluded group leads to the upward mobility in traditional caste structure forming the backbone of Dalit self-respect and dignity in the state. In these contextual events, the inclusiveness of Panchayat for promoting ‘active citizenship’ appeared to be very important as it provided an ideal ground to test the conceptual frames of social mobility empirically. Again, given the debates about changing nature of caste in contemporary Indian society and the impact of economic changes on the caste situation, this study assumed significance. It shaded light on the differential nature of intergenerational mobility among various jatis of Dalit community.

The study is relevant both theoretically as well as applied points of view. Studies conducted on social mobility and status identification covered relatively open societies where mobility in one sphere was directly related to mobility to others. However, in societies, where social stratification has been relatively rigid, mobility in one aspect does not lead necessarily to mobility in other aspects. Therefore in a society like India, a comprehensive understanding of social mobility is possible only through an examination of cumulative impact of number of dimensions on a primordial structure like caste or other social organizations. So is the case with status identification. Therefore, an examination of related independent and dependent variable likely to provide an insight into dynamics of social mobility and status identification, which in turn may provide a theoretical understanding of social mobility in a less developed society like India. At the applied level, the present study helped in identifying the aspiration and expectations of the mobile Dalit. In other words, it may provide an indicator for measuring desires and efforts of the Dalit for elevation of their status either in the caste or the class structure or both. It also helped in identifying the built in constraints in the constitutional and legal measures and the limitations of administrative actions in fulfilling the expectation of Dalit.
The study pinpointed the dysfunctional gap between the mobile Dalit, who are said to extract frequently the benefits of the privileges and facilities meant for the Dalit as a whole and those persons or groups who lag behind in this regard and are less mobile or even immobile. It highlighted the traditional social and ritual distances and the barriers of some types lying between the Dalit and non-Dalit. Such inquiry is important, firstly, as the constitutional measures adopted under the protective discrimination policy provided an opportunity for the Dalit to improve their status but it did not guaranteed an improvement of their status in the caste hierarchy. There is only one implied expectation in the constitutional measures that after improving their caste status the Dalit would assimilate themselves with the people of the other castes and communities. In such a situation, it is interesting to note the improvement in their status in class and caste hierarchies. Secondly, the Dalit are traditionally deprived of the privileges in the caste hierarchy. After improving their socio-economic conditions, they might not be satisfied with their enhanced status in class hierarchy. Instead, there would be a strong urge among them for achieving a better status in the caste hierarchy also. It was therefore significant to examine whether they have been succeeded in acquiring a better status in the caste hierarchy. If the answer is negative, then has it led them perceive their status in the status summation schemes in Indian society especially in the caste system?