Persisting Effects of Social Origin and Social Capital Inequalities on Choices of Higher Education Courses in India

Researchers still attribute the socioeconomic background of disadvantaged class students and the resources they possess in the form of social capital as deciding factors of their higher educational choices in India. The present study is undertaken to gain understanding of the associations between factors of student social background, social capital possessed, and their decisions of choosing a higher education programme. Social capital is studied in this study as a resource which makes accessing higher educational opportunities easier. The data for the study was collected using a socioeconomic and educational status schedule and a validated social capital scale. Five hundred and twenty-three scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribe (ST), and other backward class (OBC) students, categorized as backward community in India, pursuing higher education programmes, responded to the study. The results show that the social origin of students played a significant role in determining their choice of higher education courses. However, there was no significant difference in the social capital scores of students who entered various courses. Results indicate that social origin inequalities might be addressed by ensuring that benefits to backward classes are given based on their socioeconomic status by revisiting the reservation policies of Government of India.

Keywords: social origin, social inequalities, backward class students, higher education, professional education

Introduction

A persisting and problematic connection between social origin factors and pursuing higher education and occupation has gained attention of researchers internationally. Researchers have pointed out the existence of strong connections between individual’s social and economic background and their school performance (Bourdieu, 1973; Mare, 1981; Blossfeld & Shavit, 1993). Results of modern stratification studies very clearly establish the influence of the socioeconomic background of individuals on educational attainment and pursuing of higher education (Bidwell & Friedkin, 1988; Jencks et al., 1972; Sewell, Hauser & Featherman, 1976).

There is a growing understanding that the effect of family background on student attainment is problematic, internationally. This is similar in most other modern nations, where in family background is consistently associated with educational access (Hout, 2004). Raftery and Hout (1985), Lynch (1985), and Whelan and Whelan (1985) expressed their apprehensions on differences in the methodology used in assessing the extent of inequality in different countries and the references they used for comparisons. Raftery and Hout (1985) noted
that as long as family background remained salient for educational selection, one could not fairly describe the process as one based on merit. “Despite its certain dependence on meritocratic criteria, such as past academic performance, the access to tertiary education continues to be determined by the ascribed status” (Voicu & Vasile, 2010, p. 6). Clancy and Goastellec (2007) show that the focus on equality of access rather than access based on inherited merits, decreased the inequalities but could not eliminate them. “For instance, even if some types of qualitative inequalities between women and men were preserved, the social change made the quantitative inequalities disappear” (Shavit, 2007, as cited in Voicu & Vasile, 2010, p. 6).

Inequalities in accessing higher education thus seems a perennial problem in most societies. Inequality, in one form or the other, is a universal phenomenon. Indian society is highly stratified where some groups of society are highly privileged over the others. It has been agreed and recommended by social reformers and political leaders at the advent of independence itself, to give equal educational opportunity to the disadvantaged groups of society even if they are given special privileges (e.g., positive discrimination). Thus, many provisions were included in the constitution of India for ensuring preferential treatment of the disadvantaged and minorities in educational and occupational opportunities and to eliminate discrimination towards them on the grounds of religion, race, caste, gender, and social class.

Problems of Backward Class Communities in Accessing Higher Education Courses in India

The educational status of backward class people has shown some improvement through these years. There is an increase in the average years of education among scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, and other backward class people (Deshpande & Ramachandran, 2014). Educated parents of all these three groups try to give their children equal or higher education than them. The educated older generations are trying to give more education to their new generation (Deshpande & Ramachandran, 2014). The educated earlier generations have taken initiative to dominate over educational advantages and possess it for their community (Nambissan, 1996). Though considerable advancement is made in the educational status of backward classes, their enrolment in more competitive higher educational courses is still weak. “Disadvantaged entrants may be less likely to enrol at more prestigious institutions or in more advanced courses” (Forsyth & Furlong, 2003, p. 206). The Government of India has taken several crucial steps to improve the presence of backward class students in Higher Education, especially in more lengthy and prestigious courses in further education. Several governmental and non-governmental institutions have been established for the welfare of backward class students. All the backward class students who are enrolled in government, aided and government recognized private institutions, or any higher educational courses, can access funding from the government. As
Sonavane-shelke (2015) points out: “The Government has reserved seats for SC/STs/SBCs in all areas of education. Special scholarships and other incentives are provided for SC/STs/SBCs candidates” (p. 39). Moreover, Self-financing institutions for higher education in most high demand fields of engineering, medical, and management have made educational loans a trend in India. Since they normally charge unaffordable fee, students approach public and private sector banks for educational loans (Pushpan, 2012).

Apart from this financial support from the state, backward class students have privileges through reservation policies and relaxations in fee, age, and eligibility criteria. These factors have made considerable advancement in the higher education of backward class students in India. However, backward class students are still experiencing several barriers in accessing higher education, especially, in accessing more competitive higher educational courses such as medical and engineering degrees. The participation of backward classes in higher education remains in a pathetic state due to several reasons in spite of these financial support, reservations, and relaxations.

Traditional socioeconomic backwardness of lower-class students hampers their access in higher education (Chauhan, 2008; Deshpande & Ramachandran, 2014). In India, a student from a privileged social background has a much higher chance of accessing higher education than his or her unprivileged peers. Halsey et al. (1980) observed, “Class differences play a crucial role in getting access to each stage of educational courses” (p. 91). Since the participation in education is compulsory up to secondary school level and choices of programmes are very limited up to higher secondary level, education does not take a divergent turn up to higher secondary level in India. However, after higher secondary level the programmes for higher education are so expanded that one cannot easily be enrolled in a programme of his or her choice. The reasons are diverse, for example, the tough competition to get admission and higher fees for more prestigious professional courses like medicine and engineering. Accessibility to these courses is limited largely to the privileged based on their social background. Some advanced or prestigious degrees, in subjects such as medicine, are only awarded after courses lasting five or more years (Forsyth, 2003). The length of these courses is another hurdle for these students. This makes the completion of courses difficult for the students from disadvantaged backgrounds even after accessing the courses. Their probability of dropping out is high.

Social Capital

Social capital is not a much-discussed concept in educational research in India. Lin claims that “social capital is defined as resources embedded in one’s social networks, resources that can be accessed or mobilized through ties in networks” (Lin, 2001, as cited in Rostila, 2010, p. 3). Social capital is developed in our relationships, through doing things for one another and the trust that we develop in one another (Catts & Ozga, 2005). Social capital has
been applied rather loosely in contemporary research (Crosnoe, 2004). The measures of social capital can be developed in relation to family, neighbourhood, community organisations, and school (Catts & Ozga, 2005). Social capital is a resource which makes the access to opportunities easier, whether it be educational or occupational. Better social capital means more chances of accessing preferred higher educational courses. The advantageous and helpful situations that the backward class students possess from their family, social networks, society, and educational institutions in terms of accessing professional, paramedical, and general courses of higher education are considered as social capital in this study.

Choice of Higher Education Courses (More Prestigious/Less Prestigious)

The dependent variable in this study is the choice of higher education courses by backward class students. The choices are categorised into three based on its nature and extent of prestige attached to it.

Professional Courses

Medical courses coming under Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS), Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS), Bachelor of Ayurveda Medicine and Surgery (BAMS), and Engineering courses coming under Bachelor of Engineering (BE) are considered more prestigious professional courses in this study.

Paramedical Courses

Undergraduate programmes, diploma programmes, and certificate programmes in nursing, lab technology, blood bank technology, pharmacy, and health inspection are considered paramedical courses. These courses are placed between the more prestigious and less prestigious category.

General Courses

Undergraduate programmes in arts and science courses like Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com), and Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) come under general courses of higher education. Undergraduate programmes in Language studies, religious studies, cultural studies, social science, and humanities courses like Anthropology, Economics, Geography, History, Human rights, Philosophy, Political science, Sociology, Psychology, and social work, Liberal science courses like Physics, Chemistry, Botany, Life science, Zoology, and Mathematics are coming under the umbrella of General Education. These courses are considered less prestigious in the present study.
Purpose of this study

Researchers still attribute the socioeconomic background of backward class students in India as a deciding factor for their access to higher education. As a result, it has been very challenging for the state to bring disadvantaged youngsters to higher education, since it is difficult to work on the social background factors of marginalised students. This is especially true due to the closed nature of Indian social system. Several studies show that backward class people are still far behind the privileged sections of the society in their participation in higher education, especially in the most prestigious and high in demand courses of higher education like medical and engineering (Sundaram, 2010). It is found that there is a general tendency for students from disadvantaged categories to not choose more prestigious courses like medicine and engineering for their further education due to reasons like the length of course or fear of failure, cultural or financial difficulties. “The most prestigious universities and courses in England and in the world, remain dominated by students from the most privileged family backgrounds” (Marginson, 2016, as cited in Callender, & Dougherty, 2018, p.11). It is reported that students from disadvantaged backgrounds undergo extreme pressure to complete lengthy, more prestigious courses, for example, in more highly valued subjects, such as Medicine (Forsyth & Furlong, 2003, p.3). Again, this is indicative of social injustice, they are forced to waste the resources acquired after years long struggle. This study thus explores into this connection of socio-economic factors with student’s choice of higher education courses. Studies have shown that social capital plays a significant role in mediating the relationships between socio economic status and other related variables like health and wellbeing of adolescents or educational performance (Menahem, 2011; Addae, 2020). The positive influence of social capital is generally considered and treated as a protective gear against effects of socioeconomic inequalities. Possession of a reservoir of social capital that can be sourced out of networking in family, school, friends or the society can be used as a substitute when the SES is found influencing a person’s life negatively. James Coleman, a sociologist interested in the role of social capital in human capital creation and educational outcomes, defined social capital by its function. “It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common; they all consist of some aspect of social structure and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Coleman, 1988, p. S98). Bourdieu, a French sociologist, was one of the first authors to analyse systematically the properties of social capital, defining it as “the sum of resources, actual and virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

In contrary to the fact that social origins of people cannot be easily altered for helping them to achieve, it is possible to influence the social capital possessed by them. In this context, it may be important to study the social capital of students to understand if social capital plays a protective role in the
choice of higher education courses influencing the connection of SES to some extent.

Methodology

Five hundred twenty-three backward class students from professional, paramedical, and general courses studying in different higher educational institutions of Palakkad district of Kerala state participated in this study. Out of the total sample, 229 students belong to scheduled caste (SC), 32 students belong to scheduled tribe (ST), and 262 students belong to other backward classes. This sample was drawn from 7 professional colleges, 6 paramedical colleges, and 6 general education colleges. Two stage stratified sampling method with probability disproportional to the size of the population is adopted in this study. In the first stage of stratification, the total population is stratified into three strata based on the educational institutions they have enrolled, that is, professional, paramedical, and general colleges. In the second stage of stratification, the population of each stratum is again stratified into three strata based on the social group they belong to, that is; Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and Other Backward Class. Disproportionate allocation of population is used in the stage of stratification due to the higher enrolment rate of SC, ST, and OBC students in General Colleges compared to other educational institutions. Since the proportion of Other Backward Class students, Scheduled Class students, and Scheduled Tribe students is varying in higher degrees, the disproportional allocation is used in the second stage of stratification. Data were collected directly from the respective classrooms using the questionnaires. Chi-square test is used to study the association between social origin factors and students’ choice of courses of varying prestige. ANOVA is used to understand if the social capital scores of students who have chosen different degrees of higher education differ significantly.

Tools Used in the Study

Socioeconomic and Educational Status Schedule

The data on background variables used in the study were collected using a questionnaire to understand the socioeconomic and educational background of students who accessed various higher education courses. It consisted of information related to the caste background (SC/ST/OBC), parental income, parental education, and parental occupation of the students. The students were directly contacted in the school for collection of data, physically.

Social Capital Scale
An effort was made to construct a comprehensive measure for social capital by subsuming the most important dimensions of social capital based on previous studies. As shown in the literature, social capital is viewed as a multidimensional construct including both trust and reciprocity as important functions of the building and maintaining an individuals’ social capital (Putnam, 2000, as cited in Magson et al., 2014, pp. 205-206). Previous literature revealed a trend prevalent among researchers about the dimensions needed to be subsumed in the broader concept of social capital. Most studies reviewed perceived social capital in terms of family, school, and neighbourhood social capital (Huang, 2008; Lindfors et al., 2017; Takakura et al., 2014). “Both social capital in the family and social capital outside it, in the adult community surrounding the school, showed evidence of considerable value in reducing the probability of dropping out of high school” (Coleman, 1988, pp. S118-S119). The relationship people hold with others around them help them in times of need. Quality of relationships help people to come together to collectively resolve problems and achieve outcomes of mutual benefit they face in common (Stewart-Weeks & Richardson, 1998). These relationships constitute what is called social capital through different dimensions. Putnam (2000), Woolcock (1999) and Woolcock and Narayan, (2000) view social capital as a multidimensional construct in their studies. The Results of a factorial analysis resulted in a four-factor model with Family, Peer, Neighbour, and Institutional social capital as major constructs (Magson et al., 2014). Based on the literature reviewed, social capital scale for this study was constructed and validated with indicators categorised into characteristics related to three dimensions.

Family Social Capital

The indicators of family social capital consist of parent child relationship, intergenerational closure, parental education, parental expectation and parental involvement.

Networks Social Capital

Participation in different organisations and clubs, relationship with relatives, neighbours, and friends and peer group influence are the major indicators included in the dimension of network social capital.

School Social Capital

The indicators of school social capital include teachers’ expectations and influence, parental school involvement, involvement in co-curricular activities, type of school, school climate, and parental influence in school activities and policies.
The reliability of the constructed tool was established through the Gutman-Split Half Method. The reliability value of Cronbach’s Alpha was found to be 0.83 and that of Guttman Split Half Coefficient was 0.76.

## Results

### Social Origin Inequalities and Choices of Higher Education Courses

The association test was conducted to understand if social origin inequalities exist in choosing courses of varying prestige and the results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Association Between Factors of Social Origin (Income, Parents’ Education and Father’s Occupation) and Student Choice of Higher Education (Professional, Paramedical and Arts/Science Courses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Choice of higher educational course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 5000</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5000 – 15000</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15000 – 25000</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 25000</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to secondary</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher secondary</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to secondary</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher secondary</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parental Income

The chi-square test reveals an association between the backward class students’ choice of entry to professional, paramedical, and arts / science courses and their parental income. The results further reveal that the students belonging to a higher income category have chosen prestigious higher educational courses like professional and paramedical courses in large numbers. Among the students whose parents have monthly income less than ₹5000, majority of the students (62.7%) are in arts/science colleges, only 11.8% students have chosen professional courses and 25.5% students have chosen paramedical courses. In the ₹5000 - ₹15000 income category also, majority of the students (41.1%) are in arts/science colleges, 36.2% students are in paramedical institutions and 22.7% are in professional colleges. In the third category, where parents have monthly income between ₹15000 and ₹25000, majority of the students (39.1%) have chosen to enter prestigious professional courses, 34.4% students have chosen paramedical courses and 26.6% students have chosen to enter less prestigious arts & science courses. It can be noted that in the last category of students, whose parents have monthly income of more than ₹25000, only 16.1% students are in arts & science colleges whereas majority of them (74.2%) are in prestigious professional colleges. A strong influence of income is also an indication of inequalities existing in accessing higher education.

Father’s Education

Chi-square test reveals that the fathers’ education and the choice of higher educational programmes their children accessed were associated significantly. It means that the more the education of fathers, the more is the chance of their children to be admitted in courses that are more prestigious.

While the majority of the students (48.5%) whose fathers are illiterate pursue arts & science courses, 30.3 % students are studying professional courses and 21.2% students are studying in paramedical courses. Among the students whose fathers are educated up to high school, 53% students are in arts & science colleges, 27.8% students are in paramedical institutions and 19.2% students are in professional colleges. Among the students who had their father’s educational status as higher secondary passed, 20.3 % students are pursuing arts & science subjects, 44.1% students are studying for paramedical degrees, and 35.6% are studying for professional courses. An explicit change is observed when fathers’ education raises up to graduate level. Among the students whose fathers are educated up to graduation, 71.4% students are pursuing professional courses, 21.4% students are studying for paramedical courses, and only 7.1% are enrolled in arts & science colleges. In the last category, where fathers are postgraduates or professionals, a large number of
students (63.6%) have chosen professional courses, 18.2% chose paramedical courses, and 18.2% chose arts and science colleges.

Mother’s Education

Chi-square test reveals that mothers’ education and higher educational programmes their children chose were associated significantly.

Cross tabulation table shows that among the children of illiterate mothers, 53.8% have chosen arts & science courses, 19.2% chose paramedical courses, and 26.9% chose professional courses. In the case of students whose mothers have education up to high school, 57.3% are in arts & science courses, 26.7% are in paramedical courses, and 16.0% are in professional courses. Out of 80 students whose mothers are educated up to higher secondary level, 47.5% students have chosen to enter professional courses, 38.8% students have entered paramedical courses, and only 13.8% students have chosen arts & science courses. Among the 47 students whose parents are graduates, 68.1% have chosen professional courses, 21.3% chose paramedical courses, and only 10.6% have accessed arts & science courses. Among the total sample, only 2.7% students have their mothers educated up to post graduation or any professional course. Among these students 28.6 % are in professional courses, 57.1% students are in paramedical courses, and 14.3% students are in arts & science courses.

Father’s Occupation

The chi-square test reveals that the fathers’ occupation and higher educational programmes their children chose were associated significantly. It means that, when parents have jobs that are more prestigious their children are likely to be admitted in more prestigious higher educational courses.

Cross tabulation table shows that, among the students whose parents have manual or semi-skilled or last grade jobs, 18% have chosen professional courses, 29.9% have chosen paramedical courses, and majority of them (52.1%) chose science courses. Out of 87 students, whose parents are engaged in either small scale or large-scale business 46% have chosen professional courses, 27.6% have chosen paramedical courses, and 26.4% have chosen arts & science courses. Among 48 students, whose parents have clerical, teaching or professional jobs, 58.3% students have chosen professional courses, 18.8% students have chosen paramedical courses, and 22.9% students chose arts & science courses.

Social Capital Inequalities in Choices of Higher Education Courses

ANOVA was used to understand if social capital inequalities exist in choosing higher education courses of varying prestige and the results are presented in Table 2.
The results show a variation in the social capital scores of students who entered medicine, engineering, paramedical, and arts/science courses but this variation is not significant (0.139). It means that the social capital scores of backward class students who entered professional courses such as medical and engineering are not significantly different from the social capital scores of those who have chosen paramedical and arts/science courses. The table also shows that social capital does not differ significantly in the case of paramedical students and the students of arts or science. Since the scores do not show the variation as significant at 0.05 level, it may be interpreted that the students possess more or less similar levels of social capital.

Social Capital Inequalities Among Backward Class Students

Since no significant difference was observed among the students on social capital scores while choosing various higher education courses, another test was conducted to understand if social capital inequalities exist among the students based on their backward class status and the results are presented in Table 3.

The results show that the difference in the social capital scores of backward class students with respect to their social class is significant (.039). Thus, it may be understood that the students who entered various higher education courses from different underprivileged class backgrounds possess different levels of social capital. In order to provide a comparative picture of
the social capital possessed by the different groups, a multiple comparison is done using a post hoc test. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Multiple Comparisons of Social Capital by Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>ST - .482</td>
<td>2.125</td>
<td>.820</td>
<td>-3.69</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OBC 2.568*</td>
<td>1.018</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>-4.66</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>SC - .482</td>
<td>2.125</td>
<td>.820</td>
<td>-4.66</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OBC 2.086</td>
<td>2.108</td>
<td>.323</td>
<td>-2.06</td>
<td>6.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC</td>
<td>SC -2.568*</td>
<td>1.018</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>-4.57</td>
<td>-.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ST -2.086</td>
<td>2.108</td>
<td>.323</td>
<td>-6.23</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05

Post hoc results show that the divergence in the social capital scores of scheduled caste and other backward classes is significant (.012). Thus, there is a variation in their possession of social capital. However, the significance value of .82 shows that the SC and ST students possess similar levels of social capital. Further, this holds true even in the case of OBC students and ST students. The social capital levels are not significantly different for them.

Social Capital Inequalities in Choices of Higher Education Courses among Scheduled Caste Students

Since a significant difference in social capital scores were observed between Scheduled caste students and other backward class students, a further testing was done in order to understand if such differences existed among the individual community groups while accessing higher education courses and the results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA: Scheduled Caste Students by Professional, Paramedical and Arts/Science Courses (Social Capital)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>793.952</td>
<td>396.976</td>
<td>3.579</td>
<td>.029*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>25064.799</td>
<td>110.906</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>25858.751</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05

The results show that there is a significant variation in the social capital scores of scheduled caste students with respect to their chosen courses of higher education (.029). Thus, it may be understood that even among the SC students the social capital score varies with respect to their decision of entering higher education. In order to provide a comparative picture of the social capital
possessed by the different groups, a multiple comparison is done using a post hoc test. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Multiple Comparisons of Scheduled Caste Students by Professional, Paramedical and Arts/Science Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paramedical</td>
<td>-5.053*</td>
<td>2.022</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>-9.04</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/Science</td>
<td>-1.359</td>
<td>1.760</td>
<td>.441</td>
<td>-4.83</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>5.053*</td>
<td>2.022</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>9.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/Science</td>
<td>3.694*</td>
<td>1.684</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>7.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts/Science</td>
<td>1.359</td>
<td>1.760</td>
<td>.441</td>
<td>-2.11</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paramedical</td>
<td>-3.694*</td>
<td>1.684</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>-7.01</td>
<td>-.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05

Post hoc results show that the divergence in the social capital scores of scheduled caste students is significant. Multiple comparison shows that the social capital scores of SC students who entered medical and engineering courses differed from that of SC students in paramedical courses. Similarly, the difference in the social capital scores of paramedical and arts & science students of scheduled caste communities is significant (.029). However, the difference between the social capital scores of professional and arts & science college students of scheduled caste communities is not significant.

Social Capital Inequalities in Choices of Higher Education Courses among Other Backward Class Students

In order to understand if social capital inequalities exist among other backward class students based on their choice of higher education, an ANOVA was conducted and the results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. One-Way ANOVA: Other Backward Class Students by Professional, Paramedical and Arts/Science Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.567</td>
<td>25.283</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>26476.853</td>
<td>102.227</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>26527.420</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show that the social capital scores of other backward class students based on their higher educational courses does not vary significantly. It means that the other backward class students who have chosen to enter different higher education courses possessed more or less similar levels of social capital.
Factors Predicting the Choice of Higher Education Courses

Test Used

Multinomial Logistic Regression (MNLR)

This test was employed in order to understand the predictive capacity of independent variables on students' choice of higher education courses. Social capital has not been entered as an independent variable since the ANOVA test revealed that social capital was not influencing the choices of students to choose a higher education course. The dependent variable, choice of higher education course in this study has three categories; a) choice of professional courses of higher education, b) choice of paramedical courses of higher education, and c) choice of general courses of higher education. The independent variables entered in the model are a) parental income, b) educational qualification of father, c) educational qualification of mother, and d) job status of father. Chi-square test revealed significant association of all these independent variables. The independent variables, education of father, and occupation of father were automatically excluded in the final model. The results of Multinomial Logistic Regression are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. MNLR Model Fitting Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model fitting criteria</th>
<th>Likelihood ratio tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-2 Log Likelihood</td>
<td>Chi-square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept only</td>
<td>920.644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>637.334</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square value of 283.31 is significant. So, it can be understood that the model significantly predicted the outcome variable.

Goodness of Fit and Pseudo R-Square

The results of test for goodness of fit for the model are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. MNLR Goodness-of-Fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>664.542</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td>552.705</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05

Here the deviance statistic says that the model is a good fit of the data (p = 0.849). But the Pearson test indicates the opposite, namely that predicted values are significantly different from the observed values (p < .001). This differences between Pearson and deviance values can be caused by slightly over dispersed data. The computed dispersion parameters for Pearson and deviance statistic are 1.130 and 0.939 respectively and they are not particularly
high to be concerned. The results also show two other measures of $R^2$, first is Cox and Snell’s measure (.418) and the second is Nagelkerke’s adjusted value (.474), both values represent decent-sized effects. The results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. MNLR Pseudo R-Square

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cox and Snell</th>
<th>Nagelkerke</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.418</td>
<td>.474</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MNLR Likelihood Ratio Test

Table 11. MNLR Likelihood Ratio Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Model fitting criteria</th>
<th>Likelihood ratio tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-2 Log Likelihood of reduced model</td>
<td>Chi-square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental income</td>
<td>665.495</td>
<td>28.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers’education</td>
<td>648.317</td>
<td>10.982</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** $p < .01$

The likelihood ratio tests presented in Table 11 reveal the significance level of different predictor variables in the final model. Out of the four predictor variables taken to execute the test, two variables significantly predict the outcome variable. These are a) parental income, and b) education of the mother. The variables, education of father, and occupation of father were excluded in the final model and it can be concluded that these two variables do not significantly predict the outcome variable, that is, backward class students’ choice of entering professional, paramedical, and general courses of higher education.

MNLR Parameter Estimates

The individual parameter estimates are presented in Table 12. These parameters compare pairs of outcome categories.

Table 12. MNLR Parameter Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses of higher education</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>95% Confidence interval for odds ratio</th>
<th>95% Confidence interval for odds ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Odds ratio</td>
<td>Upper bound</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>-1.116</td>
<td>.821</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education of mother</td>
<td>.626**</td>
<td>.216</td>
<td>1.225</td>
<td>1.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of school</td>
<td>.826***</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>1.512</td>
<td>2.285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Choice of Professional Courses of Higher Education versus General Courses of Higher Education

Education of Mother

For choosing professional courses relative to general courses, the Wald test statistic for the predictor, mothers’ education is 8.420 at $p < 0.05$. That means mothers’ education significantly predicted their children’s choice of entering professional courses relative to general courses of higher education. The odds ratio in the table above indicates that for a one unit increase of educational credentials of mothers the odds of children to get admission to professional courses compared to general courses increases by a factor of 1.87 under the condition of other variables in the model being constant. In other words, as the education of mothers increases the chances of children to choose a professional degree course for their higher education also increases.

Income

Parents’ income significantly predicted their children’s choice of professional courses, $b = .759$, Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 24.209$, $p < .001$. The odds ratio tells that as parents’ income increases by one unit the odds of children to choose a professional course for their college compared to general courses increases by a factor of 2.135, given the other variables in the model are held constant. In other words, as the parents’ income increases the chance of children to choose a professional degree courses also increases.

Choice of Paramedical Course Compared to General Courses

Education of Mother

For choosing paramedical courses compared to general courses, the Wald test statistic for the predictor, mothers’ education is 7.960 at $p < .05$. That means mothers’ education significantly predicted their children’s choice of paramedical course over general courses. The odds ratio tells that as mothers’ education increases the odds of children to choose paramedical courses compared to general courses increases by a factor of 1.759. In other words, as the education of mothers increases the chance of children to choose paramedical courses also increases.
Income

Parents’ income did not significantly predict whether their children chose paramedical courses, $b = .197$, Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 1.945, p > .05$. It means that parents’ income is not a significant predictor in the choice of children to enter paramedical courses.

Discussion

The study revealed that the students whose parental income is low had a tendency to choose general courses of higher education and those who have more parental income chose professional courses of higher education. It means that the students having wealthy parents are more likely to choose professional and paramedical courses whereas children of parents having less income find it difficult to take a decision to choose professional and paramedical courses of higher education. Studies related to income inequality reveal that students from relatively low-income families are persistently under-represented in the most selective institutions of higher education (Pallais & Turner, 2006). Deshpande (2006) states that higher education is biased against poor and lower castes who suffer disadvantages in society. Parents having more income make it easier for their children to choose prestigious courses of higher education like medical and engineering. It is found from the study that there is a significant association between parental education and children’s choice of professional, paramedical, and general courses of higher education.

Also, the majority of students whose parents have education up to graduation and above have chosen professional courses whereas the majority of students with their parents having no education or education up to high school level have chosen arts and science courses. Similarly, the majority of students whose parents are professionals or teachers or clerks chose professional courses whereas the majority of students whose parents are in manual, semi-skilled, or last grade jobs have chosen arts and science colleges. This means that the social background has a significant role in choosing higher educational courses. The more the income and education of the parents, the better is the chance to get their children admitted to prestigious courses such as medical and engineering. The chance for getting to choose professional courses depends on the occupational status of the parents as well. If the parents are in more organised jobs like teaching, managerial work and other professions, their children are more likely to be admitted in professional courses.

Further, educational and occupational status of fathers are not the predictors of their choice of degrees. Mothers’ education and children’s academic achievement were found significantly associated in the results of several other researches (Halle et al., 1997). Educated mothers are more ambitious about their children and they can support their children in all stages of education. When mothers are educated, the children get a high-quality home environment, and the time spent between the mothers and children will be more
effective (Abuya et al., 2013). Mothers’ educational credentials contributed towards school achievement of their children (Glick & Sahn, 2000). Education of mothers plays a significant role in the language, cognitive, and academic development of children (Magnuson et al., 2009). Educated mothers usually tend to accrue various types of capital due to their exposure through reading and other kinds of interaction with the societal agents, and they use the advantages of such capital in order to help their children to achieve in school and find success in life (Harding et al., 2015). The support given by mothers to their children from early stages of education until they access higher education help the children to score higher grades in all stages of education and this makes it easier for them to access prestigious courses of higher education like medical and engineering. The analysis showed that fathers’ education and occupation do not significantly predict the choice of children to enter professional or paramedical or general courses.

Parental income also predicted the likelihood of student choices to enter professional or paramedical or general courses of higher education. Choosing professional or paramedical courses is dependent, to a greater extent on parents’ economic status. Parental investment for the higher education of children is related to social, cultural, and economic status of the family. Many researchers have found direct relationships between parental income and children’s higher educational prospects (Steelman & Powell, 1991). Since it is tough for the low-income parents to finance education of their kids on more prestigious and thus highly paid higher educational options, such students tend to choose either to drop out of higher education or choose a course that is low profiled.

The results of social capital scores of students in terms of their likelihood of choosing the courses revealed mixed results. Scheduled caste and other backward class students significantly differ in their social capital scores in terms of their choice of type of courses. Similarly, there is a significant variance between the students who have entered professional courses and the students who have entered paramedical courses in their social capital scores. No difference is visible between the social capital scores of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students. It means that both scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students are having similar levels of social capital in terms of their course choice. The social capital of students who have chosen professional courses does not differ significantly from that of arts and science courses. It may indicate that social capital might not be an important factor in choosing higher education among professional and arts and science college students. However, in the case of selecting paramedical and professional courses, social capital plays a significant role. It can be understood from this result that the influence of social capital among backward class students in terms of accessing a higher educational course is comparable to scheduled tribe and other backward class students. It might be a reflection of the reservation and positive discrimination policies of Government of India.

Social capital is chosen to be studied in this paper to understand if it can play a protective role when the SES influences are very high when it comes to
making a decision about the type of courses (prestigious/ less prestigious).
There is very little that policies can help to reduce the intensity of connection
between SES and other educational variables. But social capital can be
developed by supporting the students to intensify their relationships and
networking. Social capital is understood and worked on as a useful theoretical
perspective for understanding and predicting several important outcomes help
people to work towards desired goals (Putnam, 1993). Since the results on
social capital are mixed in this study, it is not very clear if a focus on social
capital will help the students to choose more prestigious courses. Further
researches are required to generalise this result.

Limitations

The study was conducted on a sample of 523 backward class students who
chose any of the professional, paramedical or general courses of higher
education in higher educational institutions of Kerala, a southern state of India.
If the study was conducted on a wider sample, for example including a sample
from other states as well, it would have given more generalizable results.
Analysis of the concept ‘social capital’ is still in the process of evolution in
India. Social capital of different communities may be different due to the
differences in social, cultural, regional, political, and religious factors. In this
study, the tool ‘social capital scale’ was used to measure the perceived social
capital of backward caste students which is self-reported. Perceived social
capital may be different from actual social capital. For instance, when the
students respond positively about the parental support for accessing higher
education, this parental support will be in varying degrees to each student
based on the education, experience, skills, and general awareness of the
parents. However, measures of perceived social capital, like the one we use
here, are widely accepted in the educational field (OECD, 2016; Mullis &
Martin, 2017).

Implications and Recommendations

The study revealed that the parental income, parental education, and
parental occupation were significantly associated with the student choices of
prestigious or less prestigious courses. Parental income and educational
credentials of the students’ mothers also turned out to be predictors of their
choice. Thus, it is clear that there exist social origin inequalities among the
backward class students. Furthermore, there are no state regulations to ensure
that the reservations and relaxations given by the government to improve the
participation of backward class students in higher education are utilised by
deserving sections of backward classes based on their family background.
Based on the findings of the study, it could be suggested to categorise
backward class prospective students based on their economic, and educational
status, so as to ensure that the benefits given to backward classes are given to
students who are underprivileged in terms of their socioeconomic situations. The state could open more professional and other higher educational institutions in the public sector so as to facilitate students from low-income families choosing such courses. At present the majority of these institutions are in the private sector and they charge very high fees. Schools could conduct awareness and guidance programmes to help prospective students in applying for and accessing different types of existing higher educational courses, especially for students of backward classes and their parents. Although the results of the present study on social capital are mixed, there is evidence of differing social capital among Scheduled caste and other backward class students. It is recommended that there should be efforts at home, school, and the society to help the students to maintain and strengthen their networking which would in turn help them to seek and utilise information on various opportunities in higher education.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study tested if there was any connection between the social origin factors and social capital with the likelihood of students choosing more prestigious or less prestigious courses. Further studies could test these connections with their accessing higher education courses by collecting data both from enrolled and not enrolled students after completing their class 12. This study did not include the data on how many students among those who enrolled have successfully completed the courses. A study on dropped out backward class students from higher education could also be conducted to investigate the successful participation of backward class students in higher education. The study of the association between ‘social capital’ and educational access has not yet become a serious subject of educational research in India. Deeper analyses of the different dimensions of social capital are required to understand the influence of social capital on the choices of different higher educational courses by backward class students. Tools and techniques could be developed to study the social capital effectively in different contexts. Further studies may also use mediation techniques to have an understanding of the role of social capital in such research.

References


Pushpan, B. (2012). A study on performance status of educational loans to economically weaker sections of the society by the commercial banks in pathanamthitta, A district


