



University of Warwick, School of Law & Centre for Education Studies

# A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Educational Success in Haryana

## February 2018 Visit Report (Abridged Version)

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## 1. Summary of Visit Activities

Ann Stewart arrived in New Delhi on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> February morning and Emily Henderson and Anjali Thomas arrived on the Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> February. The team held a **planning meeting** on the afternoon of the Saturday. They were joined by Nikita Samanta (second PhD student on the project), in order to confirm details of the fieldwork and meetings with the Project Partners and Research Advisory Group.

On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> February, the team met the **project partners** at the Habitat Centre in Delhi (**see item 2**), which was followed by the first meeting with the **Research Advisory Group** (**see item 3**) and a networking lunch.

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> was dedicated to the **training of the PhD student researchers** who were to assist with the pilot study data collection. The training was hosted by Ambedkar University Delhi and was preceded by a networking lunch with Dr Sunita Singh, head of the Education Department. In attendance were project team members Ann Stewart and Emily Henderson, project partner Nidhi Sabharwal, project PhD students Anjali Thomas and Nikita Samanta, Consultative Group (CG) members Sharmila Rathee and Renu Yadav, and three PhD student researchers.

On Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> the team split into two groups in order to travel to Site 1 (Ann Stewart, CG member Renu Yadav, two PhD student researchers) and Site 2 (Emily Henderson and Anjali Thomas, CG member Sharmila Rathee, one PhD researcher). The **pilot research** was then conducted in the two colleges (**see item 4**).

The team made a formal **visit to BPS University** in Sonipat on Friday 16<sup>th</sup>, where they were hosted by CG member Manju Panwar. The group met with the Registrar, presented the project to a training session for lecturers, had an informal discussion with a group of students, and had an informal networking lunch.

Ann travelled back to the UK on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup>. Emily and Anjali facilitated the second **Consultative Group Meeting** which took place at the University of Delhi on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> February, hosted by CG member D. Parimala (**see item 5**).

Emily and Anjali also visited NIEPA on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup>. They had an informal networking lunch with project partner Nidhi Sabharwal and CG member Manika Bora, and met with Professor Varghese, VC of NIEPA and head of the Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education, to update him on project developments.

## 2. Key Points from Meeting with Project Partners for the 'Fair Chance Foundation' Project

Ann Stewart started the discussion by welcoming the partners to the meeting. This was followed by a project progress report presented by Emily Henderson. This included discussion of the planned stages of the project including updates on the development of the blog and

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project website; updates on the recruitment of PhD students; and the plans for the Pilot study.

The meeting moved on to discuss the plans for the Pilot Study in detail, including sampling methodologies and strategies in selection of districts and colleges and the plans to recruit participants for the questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Interviews. There was a brief discussion on ways to maximise the diversity of participants in such research while acknowledging that, at this early stage in a pilot project, the data collection process has to be flexible and react to the context and conditions in the field.

This was followed by a brief update from the two PhD students. Anjali Thomas received some insights from both the project partners. One project partner suggested that studies on higher education from Brazil and South Africa could be very useful as these countries' histories of higher education expansion often follow similar patterns as India. Another partner mentioned that Youth Studies and Higher Education might be useful areas to look into.

The last segment of the meeting discussed the proposed visit to Warwick by members of the consultative Group. The team shared its interest in inviting Sharmila Rathee and Renu Yadav from the consultative group along with Nidhi Sabharwal in October, when both the PhD students recruited by the project would be at the University.

### **3. Key Points from 'A Fair Chance for Education' Project Research Advisory Group (RAG) Inaugural Meeting**

The meeting commenced with a welcome from Ann Stewart, followed by an introduction by each of the participants. The team then provided a report on the project which covered conception and funding of the project and the research questions which are guiding the project. The team outlined the relationship between Fair Chance Foundation and the University of Warwick, and the research objectives which address issues of gender and access to higher education in Haryana and raised the question as to what might be a possible programme of action which might bring about significant social impact and positive social change.

There was a discussion of why the project chose to focus only on access. The response was that access to higher education is an area which needs scholarly attention and the literature review, conducted prior to the commencement of the current project as part of the project development stage, by Nandini Manjrekar and Manish Jain, provided the rationale for this focus in Haryana. Furthermore, the discussions that occurred at the scoping meeting at which the literature review was presented had explored the significance of students' biographical narratives at a significant point of transition in their educational journeys. Clarifications were sought as to what the project meant by its reference to higher education, asking which types of higher education were included. The team justified the focus on government colleges (as opposed to a range of HEI types) by pointing to both the academic rationale of a direct link between state institutions and education policy, and practical reasons relating to limited resources in terms of time and funding.

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The meeting discussed the role of the consultative group. The team explained that the group contained a rich mixture of experience and disciplinary expertise. The project partners and RAG members highlighted the multifunctional nature of the group – and also a forum through which academicians and research students from different disciplines can network and develop together. The Project team also stressed that the Consultative Group was a great help in building local relationships and testing out the pilot tools.

The team proceeded to share other communication strategies used by the project including the website, and the blog details were shared with the group. Group members were invited to send in blog entries from their students and peers. The project team stressed their strong desire to work as collaboratively as possible and their commitment to an action research model of research.

The objective of the pilot research was to bring together some preliminary findings to shape Anjali Thomas' study and the wider development of the project. The discussion included how the pilot stage of the project will be focussing on government colleges as sites of local higher education. This stimulated a discussion on the different kinds of higher education in India and Haryana (including distance education), and how access to higher education is often affected by other social factors and educational histories. Some of the RAG members were also curious as to why the study only focussed on those who managed to get into colleges and not those who did not. The team reasoned that the project's strategy was to look at the life experiences and factors that enabled students to enter colleges (i.e. the 'success' factors) and then to identify the factors that hindered others. The team reiterated that the focus at this point was to gain an understanding with a certain degree of depth, rather than developing a broader picture. The team also shared their funder's interest in making a visible impact and developing workable policy suggestions.

The discussion moved on to the planning of the pilot within time and resource limits, and how districts were shortlisted. The briefs which were used to select the districts and the criteria used to select the sampled districts and colleges were discussed in detail. The objectives of the Pilot study are to create a comparative institutional case study which involves a questionnaire survey of students in both the sampled colleges; two FGDs; and Interviews with two men and two women students in each college. The RAG members enquired about the sampling strategy in selecting respondents for the survey and participants for the FGD and Interviews.

The discussion concluded with the project team explaining that the data from the pilot will also lead to a report and academic publications. A special note of thanks was recorded to Julie Mansuy the Warwick research administrator for all her help and involvement in the planning and preparations for this pilot study and meeting.

The meeting concluded with a group photograph and a networking lunch.

## 4. Notes on Fieldwork Undertaken at Two Government Colleges in Two Districts

### Site 1

The college was founded in the 1950s and is the oldest college in its district; it has been affiliated with three different universities over time. This college is situated in a small town. Regarding its courses, the College offers undergraduate courses in Arts, Science and Commerce as well as postgraduate courses in Geology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Zoology, Botany, Geography, English, M.Com. BBA, BCA & B.SC (Computer Science). There is a total number of over 3,000 students (c. 2,500 boys and c. 700 girls) at the college. The sport facilities for girls at the college include a table tennis court, a badminton court, a gym, a basketball court, a volleyball court, as well as a 400m track. There is another college in the same town which is women-only, but only some disciplines are offered; the study college therefore includes women in those courses not on offer in the women's college.

There are scholarships awarded for SC and Backward Class students, merit (c. 40 students plus c. 20 for girls' education merit), and descendants of freedom fighters (c. 5 students). In discussion with the college representative, he indicated that they did not fill their allocated scholarships each year. The government has sanctioned c. 130 teachers for all streams. At present there are c. 30 permanent faculty members. There are c. 60 staff employed on a contract basis, and c. 40 of whom are women.

The data collection was done in 3 main phases. Phase 1 was the distribution of questionnaire to approximately 125 students (girls and boys although due to the composition of the college there were more young men than young women available to participate). The group consisted of students from Arts, Science and Commerce streams. Phase 2 was the focus group interviews with 5 young men and 5 young women, which took around 40-45 minutes. Finally, phase 3 consisted of the individual Interviews, with 2 young women and 2 young men, and each lasted for around 35-40 minutes. There was also an interview with a senior member of the college.

### Site 2

The college was located in a relatively small town and was founded in the 1960s, with the Haryana Government taking over governance in the 1980s. The college is transitioning from co-ed to women-only. The college has been given a grade of 'B+' GRADE by NAAC, and offers subjects in arts, commerce, and science, for BBA, BCA, MCom awards. The college has two adjoining campuses separated by a road. One of the campuses used to be an old government school building. Both the campuses have small lawns but no sports ground, though in one of the campuses there is a small boxing ring. In the main college campus there are separate wings for science, commerce, geography, computer science and arts. This campus also houses the administrative block, the library and two of the three computer labs in the college. The third computer lab is situated in the campus across the road.

The college is currently composed of c. 1,500 female and c. 500 male students with a total of over 2,000 people studying at the college. The administrative staff shared information about the different scholarships with Anjali. They informed Anjali that all the SC students receive about Rs14,000/- per annum and all the BC students receive Rs. 2500-7500 per annum as

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scholarship from the government. They also disburse scholarships to c. 20 students for being University toppers or Meritorious students (from class 12 examinations) from the government. The Deputy Superintendent shared that they also give Rs 2000-6000 per annum scholarship to 7-8 students who are descendants of freedom-fighters. They also made it a point to make Anjali note down that girls don't have to pay any tuition fees. They also shared that they have an 'Earn while you Learn' government scheme in the college for poor students. The 'Earn while you learn' scheme is a UGC programme operating in some central universities, some state universities, where HEIs provide part time work for students. There seemed to be a lack of awareness among students of the gender cell and the career cell.

The data was collected through a questionnaire-based survey, a focus group, and individual interviews. The sample size for the survey was 118 students (composed of Arts: 35, Commerce: 50; Science: 33), the focus group discussions lasted for approximately one hour with a sample size of 10 students (5 Female for one FGD; 5 Male for one FGD), and the individual interviews lasted 45-60 minutes with a sample size of 4 (2 Female; 2 Male). The FGDs and interviews were conducted by PhD students who had attended training. The study also included an interview with a college representative which lasted approximately 40 minutes, and this was conducted by CG group member Sharmila Rathee, with Emily Henderson in attendance.

Regarding the data collection tools and procedure, all the tools were pre-tested with some students to ensure the clarity and were discussed among research team members before administration. One of the difficulties for the survey was to find a 50:50 gender ratio for the questionnaire sample as the number of boys were lower in most of the classes, due to the College transitioning to an all-girls college.

### 5. Key Points from Second Consultative Group (CG) Meeting

The meeting started with D. Parimala welcoming everyone to the second consultative group meeting for the project. Emily Henderson (chair) thanked D. Parimala for hosting the meeting and proceeded to thank Julie Mansuy at Warwick and Members of the Project Team, the Project partners, the RAG, Anjali and Sharmila, Manju, Renu and Roma for their help in the planning and successful execution of the Pilot study.

The chair shared the project flyer and other updates with the group. The group was updated on the progress made in the recruitment of PhD students, the RAG and their feedback, the Pilot study, the development of the website and blog for the Project, Moodle and a summary of activities conducted by the team during this visit. At this point, the chair distributed the meeting agenda and certificates of participation to all the participants.

This was followed by presentations by Anjali Thomas and Nidhi Sabharwal on the International and Indian perspectives on Higher Education respectively. After Anjali's presentation, there was a discussion about intersectionality as a very useful theory but one which can lead to simplistic patching together and sealing of different dimensions like caste, class and gender. Nidhi Sabharwal's presentation also elicited much discussion. It covered concerns over diversity and inclusion both inside and outside the classroom, the history of development of different academic disciplines, and the students they attracted and how

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these affected social policies. A group member suggested that we pay attention to institutional perspectives and how institutions choose to describe themselves; there was discussion of the question of representation, and how institutions project their reputation and nature.

The chair proceeded to give a brief description of the Pilot study and invited Renu Yadav and Sharmila Rathee to share their experiences and observations in the two data collection sites. Sharmila and Renu were asked questions together after their respective presentations. There was a discussion about the sampling of two colleges in two different districts.

This was followed by a brief discussion on the processes and priorities which were used by young women and men to choose their undergraduate colleges. Regarding choice, it was found that while most students were not very clear as to why they chose a particular discipline, there was more clarity on why others did not come to college. It was also found that there were gendered differences on the way in which choices were made. While young women's decisions were influenced by factors such as distance and young men had broader opportunities, the decisions were usually made on the basis of recommendations from informal alumni networks and extra-curricular activities, with a special focus on sports. A group member referred to 'selective clarity' regarding student choices, i.e. having clarity on some aspects of college choice, but not others. Choices and priorities seemed to be reflecting social and gendered differences in educational trajectories of college-going youth in Haryana.

A group member raised an important question regarding the use of questionnaires; in her study some of her participants wrote identical answers in the free text answers. This point was gratefully received and the team stated they would look out for this in the questionnaire analysis.

In the concluding segment of the meeting, the project team invited the group members to contribute to the project blog with their own experiences or thoughts. It was clarified that the blog would publish work in English, Hindi and other Indian languages and that it would be peer reviewed by the PhD students (Anjali and Nikita) under the supervision of Emily Henderson.

At the conclusion of the meeting, D. Parimala invited and guided the group to lunch at the University Guest House.

## 6. Summary of Next Steps

The next steps for the project are as follows:

- Processing and analysing of pilot study data
- Conference presentations at the 'Dis/order' conference (University of Warwick, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2018) and the Centre for International Education and Development conference (UCL Institute of Education, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2018)
- Anjali Thomas (PhD student) upgrade examination preparations and fieldwork preparation
- Planning for the UK visit in Autumn 2018
- Nikita Samanta (PhD student) arrives in October 2018