Conference Report

A Fair Chance for Education: Problematising Access and Mapping Gendered Pathways to Higher Education in India (15th-16th July 2021)

Hosted by the University Warwick and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS Mumbai) and funded by the Fair Chance Foundation

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Accompanying resources for the project

In addition to this report, other resources about the project are available on the project website: www.warwick.ac.uk/haryana. This includes various Project Outputs such as project reports and presentations, as well as other information about the project and the people involved.
The project can also be found on Twitter and Instagram as @FCFHaryana.
The project Team can be contacted at fcfharyana@warwick.ac.uk

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Introduction

'A Fair Chance for Education: Problematising Access and Mapping Gendered Pathways to Higher Education in India Conference' was jointly organised by the University of Warwick and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Mumbai, and was funded by the Fair Chance Foundation (FCF). The conference took place via Microsoft Teams on Thursday 15th July 2021 and Friday 16th July 2021 ([see the full conference schedule](#)).

Background

'A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Educational Success in Haryana' is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research project led by the University of Warwick School of Law and Department of Education Studies. It is a five-year research project that seeks to examine the gendered factors that shape educational choices for young people in Haryana, India. The project investigates gendered social relations and gender differences in choices, obstacles, and opportunities for young people as they progress through the education system to Higher Education (HE), and we are also developing a programme of outreach activities that can bring about positive social change.

Through this conference, the project team aimed to share findings as well as discuss conceptualisations of access, gender, intersectional inequalities, unequal choices in HE in India. We aimed to bring together practitioners, academics and researchers from across India and internationally to discuss the various facets of HE in India, with a focus on gender, access and choice in HE, HE policy and methodologies to research access to HE. We aimed to add to and encourage robust knowledge production and sharing within Indian HE research.

Themes of the conference

- Problematising access, choice, affirmative action, widening participation and outreach activities within HE
- Gender, social class, Dalit communities, religious minorities and access to HE
- Families and communities and educational pathways to HE
- Policy on HE and gender
- Methodologies for researching gender and HE

Organising committee

- Anjali Thomas, University of Warwick
- Julie Mansuy, University of Warwick
- Nandini Manjrekar, TISS Mumbai
- Ann Stewart, University of Warwick
- Emily Henderson, University of Warwick
- Nikita Samanta, University of Warwick

FCF Project Team

- Ann Stewart, Principal Investigator, School of Law, University of Warwick, UK
- Emily Henderson, Co-Investigator, Education Studies, University of Warwick, UK
- Anjali Thomas, Post-doctoral Fellow, Education Studies, University of Warwick, UK
- Nikita Samanta, PhD Student, School of Law, University of Warwick, UK
- Julie Mansuy, Research Co-ordinator, School of Law, University of Warwick, UK
- Nandini Manjrekar, Project Partner, School of Education, TISS Mumbai, India
- Nidhi Sabharwal, Project Partner, CPRHE, NIEPA, India
- Manish Jain, Project Partner, School of Education Studies, Ambedkar University, India

Rapporteurs (who kindly volunteered to take notes during the conference)

- Ka Ying Wong (Jessica)
- Jasdeep Kaur
- Emine Sheykhametova

Conference Schedule

The participants marked in light grey in the schedule were unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances.

Day 1: 15th July 2021 (Thursday)

Session	Duration	BST	IST	Activity outline	
Introduction	30mins	09:00-09:30	13:30-14:00	Welcome Address (Prof Shalini Bharat) and Introduction to the FCF project and sessions today (Ann Stewart).	
FCF Presentation	1h	09:30-10:30	14:00-15:00	Emily Henderson, Anjali Thomas, Nikita Samanta, Ann Stewart, Nidhi S. Sabharwal – *Presentation of Fair Chance for Education Project Phases.*	
Break	15mins	10:30-10:45	15:00-15:15	Break	
Session 1	1h	10:45-11:45	15:15-16:15	3 Presenters with 15 minutes each and a final 15 minutes for discussion	
		Theme		**Gender and Intersectionalities**	**Rurality**
		1		Shikha Diwakar – *Caste, Gender, and Class in Higher Education in India-Dalit Women Standpoint*	Jaya Kritika Ojha and Tatsama Motilal – *Perceptions of Rural Girls on Higher Education in Thar Desert of Western Rajasthan, India*
		2		Madhuparna Karmakar – *Gender Inequality and Caste Discrimination in Indian Public Universities: Lived Experiences of Dalit Female Students*	Nabanita Samanta – *Multi-layered Marginalities of Rural Women in India and Navigating Access to Higher Education: An Autoethnographic Exploration*
		3		Karan – *Experiences of Dalit-Bahujan Students in Higher Education: Aspirations, Negotiations and Access to (English medium) Education in India*	Sailu Karre – *Pathways, Networks of Rural Students to Urban: Experience of Marginalised Students in Urban Educational Institutions*
Break	30mins	11:45-12:15	16:15-16:45	Break – For optional networking session in breakout rooms.	

Session 2	1h15	12:15-13:30	16:45-18:00	4 Presenters with 15 minutes each and a final 15 minutes for discussion	
		Theme		**Gender and Access**	**HE Policy (Affirmative Action/ Widening Participation)**
		1		Anagha Tambe, Gunjan Wadhwa, Swati Dyahadroy, Sneha Gole, Maria Tsouroufli, and Ourania Filippakou – *Demystifying the Success of Gender Parity in Higher Education in India*	Rounak Bose and Akmal Ahmed – *Reservation as an Affirmative Action: Contesting the Economic Reservation of Upper Caste students in Indian Universities*
		2		Manisha – *A Bourdieuan Analysis of Access and Participation of Dalit Women in Higher Education*	Akhila Padmanabhan – *Higher Education in Kerala: An Analysis of different developmental phases and Role of Non-State Actors*
		3		Sonal Raghuvanshi and Shireen Yachu – *Public but Elite - Problematising Access in Higher Education Institutions in India Through an Intersectional Lens*	Deepak Kumar Swain and Rajesh Kumar Karna – *Inclusive Higher Education and Scholarship as a Means of Affirmative Action: An Indian Experience through a Gender Lens*
		4		Chand Mahal Ruby and Ruhail Andrabi – *Marginalization and Inequality: How do Muslim Women Navigate Access to Higher Education in Contemporary India* (Presented on Day 2)	Nandita Banerjee Dhawan, Dina Zoe Belluigi, and Grace Ese-Osa Idahosa – *Higher Education Policies on 'Gender Equality': Standpoint of Women's Studies in India*
Conclusion Day 1	15mins	13:30-13:45	18:00-18:15	Announcements for Day 2 and thank you note.	

Day 2: 16th July 2021 (Friday)

Session	Duration	BST	IST	Activity outline	
Welcome Back	15mins	09:00-09:15	13:30-13:45	Introduction to Day 2 (Emily Henderson).	
Session 1	1h15	09:15-10:15	13:45-14:45	4 Presenters with 15 minutes each and a final 15 minutes for discussion	
		Theme		**Gender and Intersectionalities**	**Online HE and Covid 19**
		1		Zinat Aboli – *Negotiating Mobility: Muslim Women and Higher Education in Mumbai*	Juhi Sidharth and Chaitanya Ravi – *Remaking Higher Education?: The Socio-political Implications of Online Education and the Indispensability of the Physical Campus in India*
		2		Mridula Kaintura – *Trans* Inclusive Education: Role of Higher Educational Institutions in Shaping the Personhood of Trans and Gender Non-Conforming Individuals*	Mounica Sreesai, Rebecca Rose Varghese, and Trishita Shandilya – *Stuck at Home: Navigating the Academic Lives of Female Students during COVID-19*
		3		Preeti Koli – *Dalit Girls as Speaking Subjects and their position in Higher Education*	Gargi Gayan and Sukmaya Lama – *Examining the Idea of Choice and Access in ODL*
Break	15mins	10:15-10:30	14:45-15:00	Break	
Session 2	1h	10:30-11:30	15:00-16:00	3 Presenters with 15 minutes each and a final 15 minutes for discussion	
		Theme		**Choices**	**Family and Community Involvement**
		1		Dhriti Dhaundiyal and Shruti Dhaundiyal – *Colouring Outside the Lines: Analysis of Gender and Socio-economic Background in Design Education*	Seema Marmath – *Exploring Complexities of Women's Access to Higher Education: A Study in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan*
		2		Lalramdini Sailo and Nithiya Amirtham S. – *Gender Parity Index in STEM Disciplines in Higher Education in Mizoram*	Yashashwani Srinivas – *Community Initiatives in Dalits Colonies: Pathways to Higher Education*

		3		Meenakshi Gautam – *Gender, Medical Education, and Specialization in India: Preference and Choice*	Vandana – *Kinship Network and Access to Higher Education: Exploring Dalit Students' Journey to Pursue Science Stream in Delhi University*
Break	30mins	11:30-12:00	16:00-16:30	Break – For optional networking session in breakout rooms.	
Plenary Session	1h15	12:00-13:15	16:30-17:45	**Keynote panel:** Rekha Pappu (TISS Hyderabad), Chayanika Shah, Nidhi Sabharwal (NIEPA), Nandini Manjrekar (TISS Mumbai) – 15 minutes each addressing gender and access to HE. Chair: Disha Nawani (TISS Mumbai).	
Conclusion	15mins	13:15-13:30	17:45-18:00	Vote of thanks.	

Introductory Session

The conference commenced with a welcome address by Prof Shalini Bharat, Director, TISS Mumbai. Prof Bharat highlighted that access to HE is a concern in India and across the world. She explained the educational context of India and referred to the Gross Enrolment Ratio recorded in India and to the Indian Government's New Education Policy (2020) commitment to double current enrolment in India. Increasing inclusivity and addressing disparity is a concern not only in India and but also within developed countries such as the USA. In spite of gender parity, there is a need to use an intersectional lens to understand inequalities in terms of young people's access to HE. Although the national enrolment figures in India represent an achievement of gender parity between male and female undergraduate student enrolment, this masks some persistent inequalities. It is important to consider inequalities based on social class, caste, religion and the rural-urban divide. Prof Bharat also pointed out that gender parity is a concern in different post-graduate and research courses.

Although there has been improvement in enrolment of women and enrolment of students from marginalised communities such as the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes over the past years, they continue to be under-represented in terms of their overall proportion of the population in India. Prof Bharat thus appreciated the project's initiative to map pathways towards access to HE and to look beyond enrolment and parity figures to understand persistent inequalities. This perspective is needed to achieve equity in HE in India. She was also appreciative of the aim to share and examine the strengths and challenges experienced by students accessing HE. She considered that this perspective revealed important implications for the development of policy and practices which aim to increase inclusive and equitable access to HE.

FCF Project Presentation

After the Introductory Session, the Conference opened with a presentation on the FCF Project ([see presentation slides](#) and [watch presentation recording](#)).

Emily Henderson, Anjali Thomas, Nikita Samanta, Ann Stewart, Nidhi S. Sabharwal – Presentation of 'A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Educational Success in Haryana' Project Phases and Findings.

This session commenced with a brief presentation by Ann Stewart about the Fair Chance for Education project, the structure and stages of the project, the particular social context of Haryana, and the project's academic focus on pathways into higher educational choices, gendered inequalities, regional inequalities, and limitations.

This was followed by a brief presentation by Emily Henderson and Nidhi S. Sabharwal on the first phase of the project which mapped the educational trajectories and choices of students who are accessing government colleges in Haryana. This part of the presentation expanded on how and why students are accessing government colleges in Haryana. The initial phase of the study confirmed research from other parts of the country which identify government colleges as frontiers of HE where a majority of students are first generation students to access HE. It was observed that students and families in Haryana preferred to enrol in colleges that were closest to home and which were connected through relatively more frequent and safer commute options. Educational trajectories and choices involved a significant involvement of families, and this was not supported by significant institutional outreach activities and sources of information. These two facets are explored in the second and third phases of the study.

This was followed by a brief presentation by Anjali Thomas on the second phase of the project which featured her doctoral research exploring the role played by families in the gendered educational trajectory of undergraduate students in Haryana. This part of the study explored how the family is a key gendered site. It mediates how different family members support, inform, inspire, and steer educational choices by being reflexively engaged in making educational decisions within their particular gendered norms and practices. It revealed that the ways in which families make gendered educational choices are simultaneously influenced by social class, caste, and degrees of rurality. This has implications for how policymakers and institutional leaders plan and execute outreach activities aimed at improving access to HE.

Nikita Samanta presented the third phase of the project which featured her doctoral project which explores institutional outreach activities and her ethnographic observation of the organisation and outcome of 'taster' days in two government colleges. Her research established that there is some limited informal outreach activity by college faculty and staff through their own interest and personal social networks. It was observed that colleges were cognizant of the importance and potential of outreach activities to address inequalities in access to HE. Among school students who participated in the taster days, the study observed limited social and cultural capital in terms of information and experiences of HE. An

overwhelming majority of students reported that the taster days were very helpful for them when they were making educational choices and applying to different higher education institutions (HEIs) and courses.

Anjali Thomas' and Nitika Samanta's doctoral studies, which inform the second and third phases of the project, recommend outreach through a combination of different media to fulfil the accessibility requirements of a more diverse set of students and families, and a more open application and enrolment process to contribute towards making HE more inclusive and accessible.

Ann Stewart concluded the presentation with a brief overview of the key findings of the first three phases and the present impact phase of the project. The impact phase involves presenting these findings in a Policy Brief, which will be shared with different stakeholders in Haryana, and the development of an Outreach Activity Resource (a 'toolkit'), based on the taster day explored in the third phase of the study. The impact phase also comprises two workshops in Haryana in 2021 and a national workshop in 2022. This presentation was well received by the participants of the conference and there was a brief discussion about different aspects of the project such as the representation of young Dalit women among the student body in Haryana.

Parallel Sessions

The conference was divided into four sessions, with two themes running in parallel during each session (for a total of eight themes across the conference).

DAY 1

The first day of the conference had two sessions, each of which had two parallel sessions where papers discussing rurality, gender and intersectionalities, gender and access, and HE policy (affirmative action and widening participation) were presented.

<u>**Session 1A: Gender and Intersectionalities**</u>

Madhuparna Karmakar (School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University) – Gender Inequality and Caste Discrimination in Indian Public Universities: Lived Experiences of Dalit Female Students

On its way to becoming a truly democratic space, the public university in India has followed the constitutional policies of reservation, thereby giving access to students from marginalized sections of the society. This has enabled young women from the SC/ST/OBC communities to pursue higher education resulting in the improved Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for these communities. In order to understand the complexities and nuances of gender and caste differentials better in university spaces, the paper focuses on the casteist and exclusionary experiences faced by young dalit women who fight poverty and migrate from rural areas to gain admission into higher education institutions.

I use findings from my PhD research where I have conducted qualitative interviews with female students from marginalized communities (SC/OBC) studying in two public universities in West Bengal. The presentation aims to unveil their unheard voices, stories of immense struggle and grim realizations in their bid to overcome challenges to attain empowered identities in university campus. I will narrate how a 'look down' gaze from the 'privileged' in the university chases them as they find themselves as 'misfit' in the academic space with endless conceptual deficiencies and lack of cultural capital. These young women struggle to overcome language and accent limitations while they push themselves to build a 'good' appearance and 'comfortable' body language to 'fit' in the elite university campus. As they simultaneously face non-cooperation, lack of support and violence from their respective families, the multiple pressures affect their academic performances, confidence and self-esteem resulting in their suffering from mental health issues. The paper thus discusses whether the access to higher education enables these young women to overcome the above challenges in their attempts to pursue their dreams by fighting against power hierarchies, intersectional inequalities, patriarchal and casteist norms, both within and outside the university.

<u>Notes on Paper</u>

This paper provided an insight into the experiences of Dalit women in HE, including their reasons for entering HE, challenges of integration, and socio-economic identity. The findings illustrate that Dalit young women can gain confidence and challenge patriarchal norms when entering HE. However, negative experiences were also noted. Many Dalit women stated that while some of their classmates sympathised with them regarding their barriers and challenges, others may not treat them with 'dignity' as they prescribe to caste-based discriminations and prejudices. Many universities do not provide further opportunities and care to the Dalit young women as they believe they are 'slow students.' Participants discussed that their caste could be often identified according to their surname and appearance. Therefore, the paper has illustrated the negative experiences of Dalit women in Indian Public Universities and has provided an insight into experiences of caste-based discrimination.

Karan – Experiences of Dalit-Bahujan Students in Higher Education: Aspirations, Negotiations and Access to (English medium) Education in India

English education is seen as an instrument which will help Dalit-Bahujans to emancipate and empower themselves linguistically and help them fight against injustices and oppression borne out of the caste system. Thus, it is a way to achieve equity and social justice, however the lack of institutional support often confronts Dalit-Bahujan students and pushes them to become non-beings in the classroom. The lack of facilitative pedagogical structures in higher education not only excludes the disadvantaged communities, but also impinges upon democratization of knowledge and process of knowledge production. While English education is considered as a tool for social mobility and emancipation on the one hand (Faust & Nagar, 2001; Ilaiah, 2013; Ilame, 2020), on the other it is used to maintain the social structures of caste, class and gender (Mohanty, 2017; Manjrekar, 2003; Paik, 2016; Ramanathan, 1999). In this context, the present study attempts to understand the everyday experiences of Dalit-Bahujan students in higher education.

This study explores the following questions: How do students from Dalit-Bahujan backgrounds experience English medium education? How does socio-economic background of Dalit-Bahujan students influence their access to/participation in higher education with respect to English medium education? How does gender and caste intersect with this experience? How does university facilitate the inclusion of Dalit-Bahujan students in providing quality English education? How was the consideration of prior schooling and socio-economic conditions of students, particularly Dalit-Bahujan students taken into account by the university while instituting English as a medium of instruction?

This study has been conducted in an English-medium higher education institution based in Delhi, India. It is a qualitative study based on an in-depth interaction with Dalit-Bahujan students to understand their everyday experiences and in-depth interaction with university bodies to understand the institutional mechanism, especially for the inclusion of Dalit-Bahujan students. The findings of this study reveal the experiences of marginalization in higher education and considerable gap between the socio-economic backgrounds of the students and institutional knowledge and pedagogical structures. Further, the findings on intersection of

gender and caste reveals the unequal access to English medium education in a society where boys from upper caste-class backgrounds get easily into English medium education institutions and their education is favoured as compared to girls. While on the other hand, boys and girls from lower caste backgrounds either get into state run government schools or low fee charging private schools. Given the unequal access to education situated in the schooling context of Dalit-Bahujan students and the marginality of caste, class and gender, the linguistic challenges become more visible when they reach higher education, however, at the same time Dalit-Bahujan students experience English medium education as a way to achieve equity and social justice in society.

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Notes on Paper

Karan explored Dalit-Bahujan students' experiences of access and participation in English medium HE. The qualitative study illustrated that Dalit-Bahujan students felt inferior and marginalised in their university as other students were relatively more comfortable conversing in English. Dalit-Bahujan students found it difficult to converse in English, which prevented them from forming and maintaining friendships as they did not have 'common' leisure activities, including watching English-language TV series and cinema. Furthermore, Dalit-Bahujan students experienced issues with accessibility and resources to English medium education due to their prior schooling. Participants described how, as first-generation learners, often from a government school, they did not have access to English literature. In contrast, upper-caste students often attended private English-medium education. Many Dalit-Bahujan students felt they had to compete to prove their capability to others as they were not given scholarships to access HE to maintain their sense of personal dignity and value. The findings also show that participants did not obtain resources to participate in HE, and an intersection of caste with class and gender was found. Dalit-Bahujan students explained that there was a restriction on movement for girls and women, and that girls mostly attended government schooling. Additionally, some women did not access HE as marriage remained a concern. Therefore, the paper illustrates that Dalit-Bahujan students might feel alienated in their educational space due to their prior education and discrimination due to their caste; however, English medium education can also be a tool for liberation.

Session 1B: Rurality

Jaya Kritika Ojha (Central University of Rajasthan) and Tatsama Motilal (Desert Resource Centre, Rajasthan) – Perceptions of Rural Girls on Higher Education in Thar Desert of Western Rajasthan, India

Western Rajasthan is a land of sand dunes. The toughest terrain of India is harsh, challenging and unfriendly for its inhabitants. According to the UNDP and the Census of India-2011, Rajasthan suffers from a low sex ratio of 926 females per thousand males. Rural desert community of Rajasthan is feudal and is a very complex social fabric for young girls. Girls are usually confined to their homes and have strict boundaries, restrictions and rules to follow. They are not 'allowed' to move alone freely, decide for themselves, make choices, talk openly, and participate in community functions.

The patriarchal system, the gendered socialisation and social relations do not encourage girls to have a sense of agency. The long and continued efforts of development organisations, civil society, government, media, policy arrangements, local institutions, the influence of globalization and digital age have impacted the desert communities as well. Girls are getting education, being sent to schools. The change in desert culture and beliefs are visible but women are still considered as secondary and play subordinate roles in families and communities. The form of subservience has changed but does exist.

A case study approach was followed and data was gathered through focused group discussions and in-depth interviews with the participants. The paper analyses the perceptions of rural desert girls on pursuing higher education, their choices and decision making to select the streams to study, the subjects/ courses of their choices to enhance their capabilities and opportunities in life. It aims to understand the meaning and sense of freedom for them. The study also looks into the factors and obstacles of learning ecosystem that determine, hinder and/or facilitate pursuance of higher education like educational infrastructure, facilities, parental support, incentives, social acceptance, peer pressure etc.

Notes on Paper

This presentation analysed the aspirations, perceptions of freedom and agency of women in the given rural context. It subsequently discussed the prospects and obstacles of HE pursuits among women. Some of the most popular career pursuits include the Police Force, Medicine, Education, Public Service and Administration. On the other hand, some women preferred to undertake vocational courses for financial gains. However, due to a lack of information, it was found that their interests might not often align with those required by their desired profession. In realising their vocations, the participants expressed interest in distance learning as their family would frown upon the notion of 'sending girls away from home'. As for their sense of agency and freedom, an urge for mobility was obvious. Women expressed mobility desires which range from 'going out with friends' and 'going to the city to do college' to international experiences in world-renowned cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Hong Kong and London. Yet oftentimes, the possibility of such was subject to parents' permission which was in turn constrained by gendered socialisation within families and the wider rural communities. Such

patriarchal and feudal mindsets have been the major obstacles for the participating women's pursuit of HE, especially as they were expected to cater to a plethora of gendered responsibilities, behaviours, and roles. On the other hand, teachers were significant and inspiring role models in shaping women's perceptions and aspirations. It therefore suggests that an ecosystem of learning filled with creative and collective spaces would be vital to help women in rural areas to realise their capabilities, confidence, and decision-making skills.

Nabanita Samanta (University of Hyderabad) – Multi-layered Marginalities of Rural Women in India and Navigating Access to Higher Education: An Autoethnographic Exploration

Despite significant strides for gender-mainstreaming in the education policies of India, the sphere of higher education continues to grapple with substantial gender disparities. Moreover, gender while coalescing with other intersecting forms of inequalities exacerbates the prevailing disparities. For instance, as far as higher education is concerned, there is a striking rural-urban divide which adds a new layer to the gendered pathways to higher education. This paper through an autoethnographic account will attempt to weave the analysis of gendered pathways to higher education by means of some personal sketches.

The social texture of rural India (with due consideration to the fact that rural India is not a monolithic category and there remains substantial heterogeneities) starting with widespread son preference and/or 'meta-preference', commonplace trend of early marriage, stringent restrictions on women's mobility, gendered division of labour, informal social norms dictating standard expectations etc. poses significant barriers for rural women to venture into the terrain of higher education. Policy perspectives while taking a birds-eye view often fail to account for nuanced particularities of social context that leave significant imprints on the educational trajectories and experiences of (in)accessibility. This paper, drawing reflections from personal anecdotes, will attempt to lay bare some of these less-acknowledged barriers afflicting the rural women in India. While for rural regions lack of adequate educational infrastructure has long imperilled access to education, several social determinants hold much sway, for instance most families in rural areas lack formal experiences of higher education due to which the educational trajectory of first-generation learners remain laden with multi- layered marginalities. Through a critical gaze imbued with self-reflexivity, this autoethnographic exploration will aim at dilating the pinhole of specific and subjective experience of my own into a wide lens on the broad picture of rural India and the prevailing gendered pathways to higher education.

Notes on Paper

The research was inspired by Nabanita's personal long-standing struggles in accessing HE as an only daughter born and raised in a remote village of rural West Bengal. She has first-hand experience of the lack of exposure to 'large social sciences issues', the subsequent inferiority complex, as well as aspiration denial due to lower class affiliation, financial constraints, and lack of socio-cultural capital within the family. Her presentation discussed the intersectionality between gender and rurality in terms of HE access. Gender discrimination in rural India has been at the root of the issue, with the prevalent mindset of 'son preference' resulting in tragic

female foeticide, infanticide, and low sex ratio. The preference for sons means marginalisation of daughters, manifested in the saying 'parayadhan' and that 'bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another's courtyard', less prioritised education for girls, and early marriages. The scholar thus advocated valuing the intrinsic worth of girls and resocialisation for girls to avoid perpetuated assumptions about females' subordinate status. The presenter added that she had not seen anyone playing a particularly positive role in enhancing aspirations. Other barriers included inadequate public transport which restricted mobility, poor education quality to catch up with the standard in colleges, as well as information gap among first generation learners. The presenter therefore suggested institutional improvements in rural India, such as availability of HEIs, public transport, and information dissemination.

Sailu Karre (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai) – Pathways, Networks of Rural Students to Urban: Experience of Marginalised Students in Urban Educational Institutions

Studying in urban higher educational institutions and cities become prioritised in contemporary society across caste, class and gender. In this context, the students' from rural marginalised background desire to study in the city was explored in terms of their social networks, pathways and source of motivation that lead to migrate to urban education. To understand this phenomenon, the study has used the concept of social and cultural capital which Pierre Bourdieu conceptualised as capital. The study was conducted as part of M.Phil. research in one of the prestigious undergraduate educational institutions in Hyderabad. The objective of the study is to understand the rural marginalised students (RMS) experience of studying in an urban educational setting. It found that rural female students' experience is different from male in the urban educational setting. The female students' experience of being from a rural background attaches multiple layers of stigma and marginalisation, cultural inferiority and isolation which impact on various academic and non-academic activities in the college.

This study found rural-language, slangs spoken, dialects, terminology, peer group formation shape the identity of the rural students in the urban educational space. The challenges of (RMS) male and female with respect to various power dynamics, language, male domination, culture of diverse students have been analysed with help of theory mentioned. The data has been analysed with the George Simmel concepts of Metropolis as Mental Life to understand how rural students encounter urban space within educational settings. It has attempted to understand rural student's educational attainment with the help of social and cultural capital concepts to understand their upward mobility. This study has used the qualitative research methodology and narrative approach in which purposive sampling technique was used for selecting the respondents. An in-depth interview guide was used for interviews with sample of 17 students of final year UG courses of male and female, castes and class from rural background.

Notes on Paper

This presentation was rooted in a literature review regarding migration from rural areas to cities among Indian youths. It is qualitative research adopting a narrative approach with thematic analysis. The major findings of the research shed light on the vast distinctions between the

rural and city students in socio-economic and cultural terms manifested in their outfits, material comforts, and language (expressions). The big gaps between the two demographics had resulted in domination, mockery, and alienation of the former by the latter. Students with a rural background therefore have been reluctant to participate in cultural events. Despite these disadvantages, rural students remain academically meritorious and self-motivated. In terms of gender, there was parental gender discrimination in the prioritisation of educational provisions to their sons over daughters. Even within education institutions, conventional gender roles were embedded. This can be observed during incidences such as assigning gender-based chores like sweeping floors to female students.

Session 2A: Gender and Access

Anagha Tambe (Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre, Savitribai Phule Pune University), Gunjan Wadhwa (Department of Education, Brunel University London), Swati Dyahadroy (Savitribai Phule Pune University), Sneha Gole (Savitribai Phule Pune University), Maria Tsouroufli (Brunel University London) and Ourania Filippakou (Brunel University London) – Demystifying the Success of Gender Parity in Higher Education in India

The last two decades have witnessed profound transformations in the field of higher education (HE) in India, in terms of expansion, privatization and internationalization. Notwithstanding gender gaps in literacy, the overall participation of women in higher education has shown steady improvement and a tapering gender gap. While gender parity in higher educational access continues to receive increasing emphasis in the dominant international development discourse, it raises questions and necessitates situated understanding about the narrowing gender gaps in HE in India. As such, this new visibility of women in HE seems to be more obfuscating than revealing. An ongoing research study, being undertaken by our team from Brunel University London and Savitribai Phule Pune University, India and funded by the British Council, aims to interrogate this seeming visibility of women which appears to mark not a decline in sexism, but rather its resurfacing in more contentious and elusive forms. We illustrate this by reviewing major policy initiatives that govern the field of HE and drawing on the achievements of the UK HE sector, specifically in terms of gender equality, along with discussing the mixed- methods and participatory action research methodology of our study. We attempt to muddle the celebratory narrative of gender parity by illuminating different dimensions of gender equality and investigating multiple marginalities which exist in the socially differentiated Indian context and impact achievement of gender equality goals. This, we hope, would inform the New Education Policy, 2020. In this presentation, we problematize the question of gender equality by pointing out diverse issues that require attention, namely access and leadership, retention and completion, campus climate and curriculum, and employability and progression. We argue for a more contextualised and nuanced understanding of gender and gender equality to understand the forms of social inequities and exclusions in education and their intersections with gender.

<u>Notes on Paper</u>

The paper explored gender parity in HE to examine gender inequality and gendered intersections to build on best institutional practices and HE policies. The invisibility and silences around gender in policy are highest at the HE level, even though there is gender discrimination and issues of patriarchy at universities. The study is using feminism and feminist perspectives on gender generally and in education specifically. Dalit women, with multiple marginalities, struggle through various obstacles to access HE. The investigation is using the lens of 'justice' and 'well-being of HE' to study gender parity. Gender parity remains an issue at different levels in HE in India despite the official report on closing the gender parity gap and the visible increase in higher women enrolment in the recent two decades. Student retention and completion of HE are the main focus of the research to develop an understanding of how the intersectionality of the caste, social status and gender lead to the failure of gender parity representation in HE. A longitudinal dimension of the study is considering the relationship with Covid-19 as the educational space has changed. The study is viewing the multiple marginalities as the space for critical vision, not just discrimination. It is also highlighting the need for navigating the spaces of HE to talk back to the Education system.

Manisha (Jawaharlal Nehru University) – A Bourdieuan Analysis of Access and Participation of Dalit Women in Higher Education

Studies on inequality in education usually focus on a single dimension of exclusion like poverty or gender. Focusing on the access and representation of Dalit women in higher education institutions in India, this paper argues that the intersection of caste, class, and gender affects their pathways of education. An analysis of the quantitative data shows us that the dropout rate at the school education level is higher among Dalit girls than other girls and Dalit boys. They are less likely to continue to higher education. The enrolment rate, though increasing for both, is still lower among Dalit girls than Dalit boys. The number of Dalit women in central, private universities and institutes of national importance remains low (AISHE, 2017-18). The paper undertakes a Systematic Literature Review of quantitative and qualitative studies on Dalits and higher education. It also includes online narratives and blog posts to draw from the experience of Dalit women in education (Kumar V., 2018; Kumar, 2017). Using the theoretical framework of 'capital, habitus and field' by Pierre Bourdieu, this paper understands how social inequalities are reproduced in education (Bourdieu, 1986). It looks at the problem of access and participation from the perspective of Dalit woman. The habitus of the Dalit families does not possess the necessary social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital required to navigate the 'field' of higher education. The lack of cultural capital (inter- generational wealth, education among family members, language, dressing sense, way of talking, skills, tastes, parental guidance, English medium schooling), social capital (lack of contacts and networks in higher education), and the symbolic capital (caste identity), which the institutions of higher education rewards, is a significant factor behind unequal access to higher education (Paik, 2014; Jagadeeswari, 2014; Pappu and Satyanarayana, 2018; Ovichegan, 2013; Harinath, 2013).

<u>Notes on Paper</u>

The paper explored Dalit female students' post-enrolment experiences of HE. Since there is a significant increase in Dalit women accessing HE, there is a need to look at their experiences. The study found that many Dalit women experience unequal access to social and academic space and face discrimination from university staff, students, and administration. Many Dalit women experience alienation and humiliation due to caste-based prejudices. Many upper-caste students feel superior to Dalit female students and label them as 'incompetent.' Dalit women students share that their caste is identified according to their appearance, such as clothes. Therefore, Dalit female students are excluded and experience discrimination in their university space due to their caste. There are several social elements of language, which are being actively used to discriminate and discourage Dalit women. While there is physical access, it is difficult for them to proceed and succeed in an academic environment, so the equality being offered is very formal while many practical inequalities prevail.

Sonal Raghuvanshi (Centre for Advanced Studies in Policy Research, India) and Shireen Yachu (Centre for Advanced Studies in Policy Research, India) – Public but Elite - Problematising Access in Higher Education Institutions in India Through an Intersectional Lens

Inequality has been the story of any analysis in the Indian parlance, and higher education spaces are not an exception to this. A host of privileges associated with individual identity, be it gender, caste, class, etc., and their intersections determine opportunity structures, questions of access, and participation. Thus, an assessment of these factors is vital from both an instrumental point of view (i.e. labor market outcomes) and the lens of social justice. Against this backdrop, we aim to study the three clusters of 'public' but 'elite' institutions in India, namely the coveted Indian Institute of Technology, the Indian Institute of Management, and the National Law Schools. The project would be anchored on the analysis of affirmative action and anti-harassment policies on the parameters of access, diversity, inclusion, representation, and belongingness. The project is conceptualized on a long-term track that would be empirically informed and phenomenologically driven towards redefining access to knowledge production.

Preliminary data suggests that these institutions reproduce the existing inequities and become spaces where privilege is rewarded. The majority of the students in these institutions come from metropolitan, urban and semi-urban spaces, who, due to the force of this social reproduction, remain obtuse and tone- deaf to students from diverse backgrounds, which is against the conceptualization of a public university. Through this study, we would like to understand how social identities are solidified as they become the central point of communication vis-a-vis students from marginalized backgrounds against the flawed logic of merit. And how constitutionally mandated affirmative action policies like the quota system or anti-harassment policies with punitive codes are only one step forward to the actualization of social justice, and further require active attempts at creating a level playing field for students from various marginalities.

<u>Notes on Paper</u>

The paper explored multi-layered issues of access in HEIs with an intersectional approach and identified the role of shame and the facade of equality. Discrimination and caste-based segregation in the HEIs are publicly covered by the media. Public institutions, which aimed to create equality and to increase the quality of education, in reality are the enablers for the 'elite' caste only. These issues are embedded in many details like the language being used, opportunities created, etc. which shape the experience of learners. The study looks at daily activities to understand student experiences and how the policies in place make provisions for equality. The difference of experience of the lower and upper-caste groups is one of the focuses of the research. Structural support is an essential instrument for marginalised communities. The study examines the existence and effectiveness of structural support. The observations suggest that policies are just formal documents that are not effective in practice. It was found that elite universities are reproducing social inequalities, and the experiences of students suggest that institutions reproduce the existing inequalities.

Session 2 B: HE Policy (Affirmative Action/ Widening Participation)

Rounak Bose (University of Hyderabad) and Akmal Ahmed (University of Hyderabad) – Reservation as an Affirmative Action: Contesting the Economic Reservation of Upper Caste students in Indian Universities

The Economically Weaker Section (EWS) reservation that was implemented in 2019 reserves 10% quota for economically backward sections from upper-caste unreserved categories, and stands in direct opposition to the SC/ST/ OBC reservations offered to the Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi population of the country. The economic criterion in the quota negates the object of affirmative action while invalidating the fundamental factor of social stratification in India, i.e., caste, which we shall investigate and problematise in our paper. While the SC/ST/OBC bodies are severely marked in educational spaces and the classroom becomes a differential space of participation, the EWS students remain unmarked entities while enjoying benefits of reservation in the overwhelmingly upper caste ecosystem of the classroom which evokes pertinent sociological concerns. This differentiation contextualised in the relationship of caste and gender, further adds to the marginalisation of Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi women who are at the greatest risk of visibility and (non)symbolic violence in juxtaposition to the rest of the classroom. Using Bourdieu's theoretical framework, we shall interrogate the disjunctive manifestation of symbolic, social and cultural capital which enables the homogenisation of the EWS category students with the larger General candidature populace, in contrast to the hypervisible SC/ST/OBC category students who find it difficult to negotiate academic spaces in similar ways. While situating the upper caste consciousness, especially that of upper-caste women who are historically posed as the gatekeepers of caste endogamy and Brahminic ideology, in the context of reservations in different political epochs of the country (post-Mandal to post-EWS) and problematising the Indian Marxist economic-deterministic interpretation of reservations, we will explore in the paper, how that has evolved with convenience at the onset of EWS reservations. We shall be employing the narratives of EWS, and SC/ST and OBC category students in higher education classrooms in public institutions as our tool to establish congruity in our research.

Notes on Paper

The main argument of the paper was that the Post-Matric scholarships scheme had failed to reach out to its targets, especially girls, in their access to education on the Merit-cum-Means based scholarship. There had been a glaring mismatch between the rising demand for HE and the financial status of the beneficiaries. Such a mismatch was attributed to the bottom-up policymaking approach. The presenters shared that their intersectional analysis led them to observe that upper-caste women were involved in different ways in classroom violence. Dalit women were not perceived as students or researchers, but just by their caste identity. The researchers shared that bodily agency was practised by upper-caste students and that there need to be more conversations about how the upper-caste students occupied space.

Akhila Padmanabhan (Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum) – Higher Education in Kerala: An Analysis of different developmental phases and Role of Non-State Actors

This paper presents historical trends in the higher education development and exclusions created in terms of access to higher education of Kerala. Contrasting the recent global trend of increased private participation in higher education, private actors play a significant role in the higher education development in Kerala from 1900s. The recent policy initiatives taken by the government emphasize their actions towards a knowledge-based economy by restructuring the education system particularly higher education sector. In this context, it is important to understand and address the existing problems in higher education development. Building on the theoretical framework of the role of the state and different actors in educational development, the paper addresses two purposes. First, it attempts to understand the process and phases of higher education development in Kerala with special emphasize on the role of state and non-state actors. Second, it aims to address how higher educational policies impacted the participation of women in higher education sector. The Study makes use of historical data sources, All India Census Data and Kerala Economic Review for the analysis. Unlike the existing studies which discuss the exclusionary trends in Kerala's higher Education after 1990s, the research identifies decades of unplanned linear expansion of higher education institutions with decreased quality of education and widened inequality in social and economic opportunity. While analysing the policy discourses of higher education development, it is observed that the nature of private capital and the policies of non-state actors which was philanthropic initially, later became market oriented. This has created widespread inequality in terms of unequal access to educational institutions and disciplinary choices. When analysing gendered implications of state and non-state engagement in HE, it shows that women's access to higher education was initiated and popularised by the non-state actors in the early phase when state was reluctant to start higher educational institutions for women. The low enrolment of women in STEM subjects and their higher enrolment in 'traditional women centred courses' resulted in low employability.

Notes on Paper

The presenter explained that the non-state sectors, characterised as religious groups, associations, and enterprises, had highly privatised and massified the HE sector in Kerala. According to the scholar, the developments addressing equal access to HE for different

genders has undergone three phases. The first saw extremely rare cases of girls' admission to HE with most women enrolling in traditional vocational training in home science, sewing and teachers' training instead of sciences or engineering. In the second phase, co-educational HEIs were popular and there were more opportunities for girls in acquiring HE due to scholarships and discounted school fees. In the third phase, women became the more dominant gender group in the total enrolments for undergraduate courses. However, more men are enrolled in BCom and STEM subjects whereas more women are concentrated in BA and BSc.

Nandita Banerjee Dhawan (Jadavpur University), Dina Zoe Belluigi (Queens University Belfast), and Grace Ese-Osa Idahosa (University of Johannesburg) – Higher Education Policies on 'Gender Equality': Standpoint of Women's Studies in India

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are positioned as key drivers of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of them being SDG5, the global drive to address gender inequality, and another SDG4, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

The University Grants Commission (UGC), responsible for promoting and coordinating university education in India, has long taken steps towards these. These include policy interventions, including the quota system, to enable changes to the composition of students and staff; and the institutionalization of anti-hegemonic scholarship, including Women's Studies Centres (WSCs) in the late 1980s. Objectives of WSCs were (i) to question the dominant systems of knowledge and social formation within the existing educational system and (ii) to make the HEIs accountable to the social concern against injustice, marginalization and oppression of women.

From their inception, these Centres have been awkwardly positioned within universities' intellectual traditions, institutional identities and notions of social justice, with minimal infrastructure and fluctuating financing. However, at national level the role of the 163 WCS was affirmed in the UGC guidelines as "help[ing] India achieve her UN Sustainable Development Goal of Promoting Equality and Empowerment of Women". Misalignment in national policy discourses have been a constant feature of the sector, with the most recent emerging in the 2020 National Education Policy, where the role for Women's Studies is omitted entirely.

Set against this backdrop of complex and competing discourses about access and gender justice, was a mixed method study of universities of India and South Africa conducted in 2019. This paper reports on how the implementation and reception of policies of access and gender mainstreaming, intersect with the politics of participation for marginalized academics. We draw particularly from the insider perspectives of the academic staff of WCS in the 4 higher education institutions in India, to point to the ambiguities, messiness and contradictions of endeavours to achieve 'gender equality' at this level of quality education, including policy-implementation gaps, perverse incentives, broken pipelines from student populations, and the production of the 'New Middle Class'.

<u>Notes on Paper</u>

This presentation began with an examination of the relationship between HE and the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs), with the former being positioned as key drivers of the latter. Given this, there had been a mass expansion of Women's Studies Centres in India, with the aim of helping India achieve its SDGs in promoting equality and empowerment of women. A key research question of the paper was 'how does the implementation and reception of policies of access and gender mainstreaming intersect with the politics of participation for marginalised academics and disciplines?'. It stemmed from the realisation that merely allowing access for the marginalised groups may serve only as a social control tool but not lead to social justice. This is manifested in the experiences of academics specialising in Women's Studies. While the number of Centres has increased along with claims that the universities were free from gender discrimination, the academics within were often labelled as 'immature' and 'disloyal'. They were thus excluded from prominent committees and promotion opportunities. The situation was particularly serious within the lower professoriate. The case and argument of Dr Maroona Murmu also presented to explain the 'academic untouchability' and the institutionalised oppression against the Dalit and Adivasi communities within academia. The presenter shared that gender knowledge has now become a mechanical category so as not to address the deeper systematic issues and that Women's Studies are becoming very meritocratic which undermines sensitivity to the larger picture of gender in pursuit of power and authority. The beautiful institutes would be made nothing more than a façade or ticking the boxes of 'being gender sensitive'.

DAY 2

The second day also included two sessions with two parallel sessions each, which discussed gender and intersectionalities, choices, family and community involvement, online HE, and the impact of Covid.

<u>Session 3A: Gender and Intersectionalities</u>

Zinat Aboli (Mithibai College, University of Mumbai) – Negotiating Mobility: Muslim Women and Higher Education in Mumbai

World over and in India too there has been some enhancement in access to education by women in the last few decades, but disaggregated indicators show that women from certain strata, regions and religions lag behind others. Educationally, Muslims constitute one of the most backward communities in India causing concern. Muslim girls and women lag behind not only their male counterparts but also women belonging to socially and economically disadvantaged sections such as SC, ST, and OBC. This gap further widens when it comes to higher education.

Muslim women's educational attainment is low and their relative position is deteriorating even in cities like Mumbai. Factors like economic affordability, early marriage, religious orthodoxy, lack of appreciation of modern and higher education in economic mobility, low expectation from investment in education are responsible for the same.

There has been lack of any detailed study of factors that determine the access, choice and mobility of Muslim women in higher education in the country, and specifically in Maharashtra. There have been some reports, which have thrown some insight on the educational mobility and access to higher education. However, detailed investigation of factors, barriers or determinants has not been done. In this context the present study attempts to fill the gap by investigating the gender and community group-wise inequality, access, and mobility of Muslim women in Mumbai. The study, among others, will use discourses and theoretical strands related to Liberal Feminism, Capabilities Approach and Intersectionality theory. This study is based on the structured interview of more than 2000 college-going women from different communities and income groups in Mumbai.

Notes on Paper

There has been a lack of research surrounding the educational mobility of Muslim women in Mumbai. Muslim girls and women lag behind their male counterparts but also behind women belonging to privileged groups. Within a liberal feminist theoretical framework, the factors that determine access, choice, and mobility of Muslim women in HE, were examined in Mumbai, Maharshtra. The study found that factors including travelling long distances in public transport, early marriage, and household responsibilities all influence access and completion of education. Muslim women suffer from the dual burden of discrimination and deprivation as Muslims belong to a socially deprived community. Muslims in Mumbai usually are enrolled in traditional streams of education, including BA and B.Com. The data also shows a significant relationship between families' annual income and education, especially the father's and mother's education: it influences the girls' choice of accessing and participating in HE. Zinat Aboli discussed socialisation and how parents' education is influencing Muslim men's perception of Muslim women's education. For example, Muslim men 'allow' education, but the distance to the HEIs limits mobility, and Muslim mothers support their daughter's education as they missed the opportunity themselves.

Mridula Kaintura (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai) – Trans* Inclusive Education: Role of Higher Educational Institutions in Shaping the Personhood of Trans and Gender Non-Conforming Individuals

The recent National Education Policy, 2020 discusses the inclusion of transgender children in the education system and has proposed the constitution of a 'Gender-Inclusion Fund'. However, the policy does not discuss any mechanism against the discrimination that trans and gender non-conforming individuals face because of their gender identity and thus, it tends to overlook the structural barriers that impact the access of trans and gender non-conforming individuals to higher education.

The study attempts to understand the role of higher educational institutions in shaping the personhood of trans and gender non-conforming individuals. It explores how the educational institutions and university spaces define/confine the mobility and access of trans and gender non-conforming students. The study conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ten research participants and undertaken empirical data analysis. It focuses on the individuals

belonging to the middle-class urban background who are pursuing higher education from different universities based in India.

Drawing from the experiences of trans and gender non-conforming individuals in different educational institutions, the findings discuss how families of trans and gender non-conforming individuals are a crucial factor that draws them to the university's spaces. The institutionalized discrimination, the surveillance of gendered behaviour affects the academic performances of the students which in turn affects mental health, forcing discontinuance of education and makes these spaces inaccessible and unattainable. On the other hand, the inclusivity of trans and gender non-conforming individuals takes place through gatekeeping of the class, caste and other identities markers.

The study concludes that the discourse on inclusion and visibility of transgender students in educational institutions needs to examine the larger structures of caste, cisnormativity and gender binary. Further, the interventions and sensitization need to be at the administrative, infrastructural, and pedagogical levels that will affirm one's transgender identity and personhood.

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Notes on Paper

The study explores the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in HEIs. The 2020 National Education Policy of India discussed the inclusion of transgender children in education and proposed to constitute a Gender-Inclusion fund. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with transgender and gender non-conforming students. Many participants aspired to access education and were motivated to attend HE as they wanted to expand socio-economic boundaries, seek belonging and identity, and undergo gender-related transitions. Students are also negotiating HEIs' gender-segregated built environments, policing of gender behaviours, classification interactions and invisibility of transgender and gender non-conforming people in student affairs. Participants explained that they move out of families for HE due to their aspirations. They also move out of families with the strategy and expectation to gain a secure place to live. Participants explained that their experiences of being in HE could make them feel isolated and alienated. They may experience low self-esteem and confidence, and their HEI may be discriminative. Due to their experiences, some participants explained that they often want to drop out of their education.

Preeti Koli (Ambedkar University, Delhi) – Dalit Girls as Speaking Subjects and their position in Higher Education

Women's entry and participation in the higher education institutions continues to be significantly unequal, challenging and a tale of multiple struggles and more so for girls from dalit communities. Based on my own location of self-identified dalit women, this paper interrogates the dominant methodologies to study meaning of access, histories and narratives of dalit girls in higher education institutions from Phule-Ambedkarite feminist perspective.

Drawing on Audre Lorde's classic call to develop methodologies by the marginalised "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house", this paper aims at presenting preliminary ideas about developing a methodology to research gendered-caste issues in Indian context (Lorde, 1984). Guru (2002) has forcefully argued how the distinction between the 'theoretical west and empirical east' acquired a caste dimension within the Social Sciences in India between 'theoretical brahmins and empirical shudras'. It shapes the research such that it preserves the objective facet, instantiating the research "to be done" on the social beings and hence, presents them as 'data'. This paper attempts to develop a critical paradigm from the perspective of Phule-Ambedkarite feminist lens by utilizing a specific methodology of social sciences i.e., narrative inquiry. It suggests that such a methodology may be developed with participation of the self-identified dalit women activists located in higher education spaces who are involved, engaged and contribute to the anti-caste movement by reflecting on their day-to-day experiences. The basic premise of this method will be to create the spaces for them to come together and work in a shared manner in order to make them very much part of the research process. Such a method may challenge the "master's tools" themselves. In addition, this paper will try to present how reflexivity can be used as an important tool of research in social sciences. Hence, the nature of social sciences that is very much governed by social beings will be thought through in this paper by exploring various ways in trying to research in an anti-caste manner.

Notes on Paper

The paper aimed to develop the methodology to research gendered-caste experiences of Dalit women. The paper took a feminist perspective and was influenced by the researcher's positionality as a 'Dalit women', which impacted her career choice as she experienced casteism and sexism. Caste privilege and education intersect with each other as men and women, from excluded castes and classes, enter HE for the first time. Dalit Feminist theory is adopted for the study, and the framework centres on anti-caste feminism to elucidate and address the mechanism in which caste inflicts patriarchy. The counter-narrative methodology has been chosen for the study to call into question the validity of accepted views.

Tea Break and Networking Session

***Chand Mahal Ruby (Jamia Millia Islamia) and Ruhail Andrabi (Jamia Millia Islamia) – Marginalization and Inequality: How do Muslim Women Navigate Access to Higher Education in Contemporary India (*This presentation was re-scheduled to the tea-break due to the presenters' network issues).**

Muslims constitute 14.2% of India's population with Hindus forming the majority. This minority is also at the margins in terms of socio-economic and political factors. It is also reflected in the educational attainment levels of the community. Only 3.6% are able to attain graduation (Ranganath Misra Commission, 2007). Various measures have been taken since the colonial era to increase the enrolment of Muslims in higher education which have shown snail paced differences. Scholars have argued that various barriers like institutional pre-requirements, geographical, dispositional and financial cost act as hurdles to participation in Higher Education. In this paper, we take a departure from these studies as such findings largely

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collapse the distinctions between the class, religion, space and political marginalisation. We situate the inaccessibility of women education with its dependence upon Muslim identity, violence against Muslims and Islamophobia. Especially how Muslims' identity has been perceived since the rise of Hindu fundamentalism and the wave of ethnic nationalism which now dominates the political climate of India (Jaffrelot & Chatterji, 2012; Chatterji et al., 2019).

The paper takes departure from these existing observations by situating the inaccessibility of education in its dependence upon Muslim identity and Islamophobia. The findings of the paper are drawn from our inferences and observations of our research fieldwork and location of being Muslims from lower caste and class, respectively. The paper focuses on varied variables which in combination restrict the access and equity of Muslim women in India. We specifically focus on the rise of islamophobia, gendered discourses of religion and the political underrepresentation permeating the gender disparity. The paper finds a culmination of different factors from the poverty to honour to gender biases to accessibility to Islamophobia play role in curbing the access of Indian Muslim women to attain higher education.

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Notes on Paper

The paper found that although the growth of access of Muslims to HE is increasing, the level of female Muslims is lower than Sikh and Hindu women. Muslim women's access to education is influenced by social and political factors, including marginalisation and mobility. Muslim women have limited access to HE participation due to the following factors: high drop-out rate, economic power, poor transportation, socio-economic background, geographical background such as living in rural India, and gender bias. The factors stated also influence Muslim women's mobility to HEIs. Therefore, Muslim women's participation in HE can be limited by political and social contexts.

Session 3B: Online HE and Covid 19

Juhi Sidharth (FLAME University) and Chaitanya Ravi (FLAME University) – Remaking Higher Education? The Socio- political Implications of Online Education and the Indispensability of the Physical Campus in India

Online education has emerged as the preferred form of education in the COVID- 19 milieu. Proponents of online and blended education forecast a reduced reliance on the university's physical campus while providing comparable learning outcomes at affordable cost. This paper asks if online and blended learning can be effective in educating and equalizing India's highly stratified and unequal society. Should the comparison between campus-based and online education be restricted to the traditional questions of access, cost and learning outcomes or

should it also include broader developmental goals of caste equality, women's empowerment and social cohesion that are relevant to India?

The paper begins by reviewing the literature on higher education in India and highlights the role of traditional universities with physical campuses as spaces that bring diverse students into close contact, promote constructive campus politics and empower Indian women with a liberal milieu which promotes greater autonomy. Framing theory is used to organize the contemporary discourse on online and blended learning in India, and Contact theory highlights the irreplaceable benefits of the physical campus.

The contemporary media and state discourses on online and blended learning in India are analyzed and consolidated into an 'access-outcome' frame. The paper concludes that the locational and interactional benefits of campus life for female students are profound in a patriarchal society such as India with largely fixed gender roles and stringent control over female sexuality. Online learning in higher education could deprive young women of campus life in a country where the college/university campus is one of the few public spaces where they are likely to experience an enhanced freedom of mobility, and opportunity to challenge gendered norms by entering into inter-caste and inter-faith friendships and relationships. Thus, online education could impede progress towards an egalitarian, inclusive society in India.

Notes on Paper

This paper explored the outcomes of the forced move to online education due to Covid-19. There has been a steady increase in HE enrolment from marginalized communities and young women. However, the goal is still far from being fulfilled. The uneven spread of colleges and institutes motivate educational migration across the country. The university campuses are one of the few spaces where people from different segregated communities can get together. Hence, for example, sharing a room with someone from a different social group at the university helps to foster better understanding among people. Campuses are also places for political protests and they have wider implications for changes in society. University campuses are also safe spaces for many women coming from different social groups. The presented paper was based on a review of the literature on the indispensability of the physical university campus in India and improving access to the HE. In this regard, online education was seen as a way forward. By 2022 better internet access is expected across India. This will offer flexibility and accessibility with HE as well as a positive impact on future employability. The presented paper also considered the negative impacts of the digital divide and technicalities of access to electricity, internet access and as well as the gendered barrier of the gendered division of labour at home. On the other hand, elite media, which is mainly in English, is in full support of online education and is categorizing it as a new form of educational culture.

Mounica Sreesai (Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad), Rebecca Rose Varghese (Centre for Public Policy Research), and Trishita Shandilya (Tata Institute of Social Sciences)** – **Stuck at Home: Navigating the Academic Lives of Female Students during COVID-19

Higher educational spaces provide women with opportunities to shape their identities, social lives, daily routines and other interests, hence acting as an emancipatory tool. Thus, studying the monumental impacts of the pandemic on these spaces and various aspects of women's subordination in the present scenario becomes crucial.

The previously public educational space entering home- the familial structure- exposes the gender disparity and inequity behind the seemingly 'neutral' educational structures that are by default disadvantageous to women, especially those from marginalised sections. The confinement of female students in the familial set-up with the incessant closing of university and college spaces due to the pandemic shows a grim picture of the future of female students' access to education. The endorsement of digitalisation of education in New Education Policy (NEP), 2020 and the recent proposal of a blended mode of teaching and learning (seemingly a step towards implementation of NEP) by the University Grants Commission indicate permanency in the online mode of education. While the ground realities of the digital divide are yet to be effectively addressed, female students, especially those from marginalised sections fall victims to double-layered discrimination. Along with issues of connectivity, the divide is vivid in terms of the disproportionate share of time in accessing digital devices (mobile phone, laptop) in comparison to their male siblings and other male members in households. The study, therefore, attempts to understand the lived experiences of female students in various higher educational institutions in India, who are now living or have lived for over two months with their families owing to the pandemic, i.e., challenges in continuing and accessing formal education in this precarious situation.

The quantitative and qualitative data from online surveys (conducted during the first and second waves respectively) and unstructured (virtual) interviews focus on the ascribed gender roles, the burden of household and care-work, and their perceived effects on education and daily routines. As per the findings, the pandemic-induced living conditions have increased their share of household and care-work, negatively impacting female students' routines and academic productivity and performance, further aggravating their physical and mental health (delayed menstrual cycles, increased anxiety, etc.). It was also found that the domestic workload for female students had increased disproportionately when compared to their male siblings who were able to focus on their academics, while women were left with lesser time and energy to invest in studies and extracurricular activities. Further, the intermittent dispersal of scholarships may force female students, who depend on them, and the lack of opportunity to focus on their future prospects force them to drop out or give into marital pressure from their families. The study thus addresses the problems of an education system that aligns with the needs of a certain gender more than the others and highlights the micro-level consequences of androcentric educational policy frameworks on women in Higher Education. Through this study, we hope to underline the necessity for gender-sensitive policies and inclusive designs of education that are not oblivious to its limitations.

Notes on Paper

The research focused on women pursuing undergraduate courses. The research findings indicate that the switch to the online model of HE delivery impacted the productivity of women. Managing time becomes different for women and men when stuck at home. Women are always balancing their time between family and academic responsibilities. This productionist approach affects women's mental health as the research outcomes demonstrated. This is due to a lack of agency and support from the family or other services, which could provide support with mental health. Women had a significant lack of opportunities to express themselves beyond the academic space due to online education. For women, therefore, access to education and extracurricular activities online became more of a luxury than a necessity.

Gargi Gayan (Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University) and Sukmaya Lama (Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University)– Examining the Idea of Choice and Access in ODL

It is believed that in a democratic society education bridges all the inequalities and higher education is the means to attain upward mobility. But in India, irrespective of the growth in the investment, in the sector of education, a continued disparity in distribution of educational facilities between different social categories like caste, class, ethnicity and gender as well as between the rural and urban areas was evident. Keeping this picture in mind, the first Open University of the country was established through which distance mode of leaning was introduced. In the similar lines, the first State Open University of Assam, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), was established with a vision to reach the unreached and generate an engaged and reflexive citizenship.

Open and Distance learning (ODL) is based on the philosophy of providing learners the choice to decide their place, pace and pattern of learning. But how choice is mediated in a socially segregated society needs to be carefully interrogated. In this paper, we argue that while Open and Distance Learning, characterised by "openness and flexibility" asserts to provide access to higher education to the "unreached" and offers a "choice" to the learners to pursue their dreams, yet the question of "choice" needs to be addressed critically. The study is based on qualitative data and it explores the dropout rates among the learners of KKHSOU, Assam. While the support services provided by ODL Institutions have made it possible for learning to the reach the doorstep of the learners, the structural barriers continue to hinder the learning process. Accordingly, the gendered experience in ODL has been explored in this paper through the narratives brought out during the interaction with the learners.

Notes on Paper

The focus of the research was on the Open and Distance Learning systems access in India based on the evolving experience of speakers as practitioners. Distance Education (DE) is claimed to expand opportunities. DE has shifted from teacher-centred to learner-centred education—audio and video conferencing and computer-mediated means played a great role in this. The issues of choice and access to ODL have also evolved especially for the people from marginalized contexts. These include factors like the internet as well as the online

resources in the lives of these students. During the Covid-19 breakout, the issues have become even more visible, especially for women. For example, while creating their online IDs, they provided male members of their family, and this resulted in significant information failure for these women. To understand the choice and drop out factors for women, as a part of this research, a survey was conducted, which found that generally young and rural area based young men chose HE. However, when it comes to women there is a significant discrepancy in choices as social circumstances prevented them from accessing HE. Lack of socialisation with peers impacted the dropout for many women. Women have also had additional challenges in balancing their family and academic responsibilities.

Session 4A: Choices

Dhriti Dhaundiyal (Doon University) and Shruti Dhaundiyal (Cambridge University) – Colouring Outside the Lines: Analysis of Gender and Socio-economic Background in Design Education

Formal design education in India began with the India Report, a manifest to set up indigenous design legacies and institutions that balanced traditional knowledge with modern outlooks and technology to support the aspirations of post-independence industrial India. The first institution of design education was set up in 1961 and in 60 years, the number of colleges and universities offering design courses stands at 1670 today.

Enrolment in higher education institutions in India has seen a shift with higher female enrolment. However, some courses remain strongly gendered. Design education was imagined as a composite field encompassing both technical and contextual social science studies. However, a distinction has emerged within the discipline between 'industrial' (for technical) and 'communication' (for visual) domains. This distinction is visible in twinning of industrial design with engineering and architecture while communication design is seen closer to fine arts and aesthetics, as not requiring technical expertise. This perception has precipitated a unique trend of gendered preferences in design subjects. While males continue to dominate the domain of industrial design, females prevail in communication design. Enrolment data from students supports the above hypothesis. It has been theorised that this delineation may be on the basis of conventions of society, faculty, learning styles and even course briefs.

Through this study, we analyse 5 years of admissions data from the design department of a public university in India to examine the current gender access in design education. Differentiating indicators of academic background, parental education and vocation, household income, residence (urban/rural), area of specialisation and class performance have been selected. We found that gender and family background have high correlation with selection of domains within design students, possibly perpetuating the gendered perception and enrolment in different domains. Further, we reflect on gendered pathways to higher education in design and its effect on the gender parity in design professionals practicing in the field.

Notes on Paper

This paper was based on a five-year research project which commenced in 2015 and focused on urban city areas and cities. Theories for 'categorising' female competency was adopted, including, a human capital theory and sex discrimination theory. A descriptive research design was adopted, and purposive and random sampling was conducted. Primary data was obtained from admission questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews were implemented. It was found that more girls participated in the course than males; in HE, there is high participation of women in communication design education. However, the number of boys in industrial design education increases. This highlighted gendered preferences and choices even within disciplines such as design.

Lalramdini Sailo (Mizoram University) and Nithiya Amirtham S. (Mizoram University) – Gender Parity Index in STEM Disciplines in Higher Education in Mizoram

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) occupy a vital ground in each area of life. The underrepresentation of females is observed across the globe in STEM disciplines (Marginson et al. 2013) and improvements are seen in many countries through affirmative actions (Cronin and Roger, 1999). Conducting a detailed research study on gender and STEM higher education in Mizoram, and analyzing the enrolment trend would be among the initial steps. Mizoram, one of the north-eastern states of India showed 91.33% (Male-93.35%; Female- 89.27%) literacy rate according to 2011 census of India (the latest) and took third place in terms of ranking of states and union territories. 94.43% of population in the state is under the scheduled tribe category of India (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011). The society is patriarchal in nature in Mizoram with the prevalence of stereotypical gender role expectations. It is essential to understand socio-cultural perspectives towards gender and higher education in Mizoram with a special focus, as it is observed that socio-cultural factors push women out of STEM pipeline in India (Kumar, 2009). The aim of this paper is to find out the gender parity index in enrolment pattern in STEM disciplines by analyzing the enrolment trend of students in STEM at the post-graduate and Ph.D. level in Mizoram. The yearly published annual report of institutions is used as the data source. The article focuses on five years trend for a clear perspective and comparison on the rise and fall in gender parity index in various STEM disciplines in Mizoram. The results will help us to explore further the inter-linkages with societal factors involved in gender and STEM higher education.

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Notes on Paper

The study highlighted that there is a need to encourage equal gender opportunities to learn STEM disciplines. The study sample included all students studying subjects in Mizoram, and a detailed study was implemented to measure enrolment. The Gender Parity Index was measured to compare enrolment in the STEM fields. The findings were quantitative and were categorised by subjects, e.g., chemistry. Findings enabled the exploration of factors that interlink the Gender Parity Index and STEM subjects.

Meenakshi Gautam (Delhi University) – Gender, Medical Education, and Specialization in India: Preference and Choice

The increasing enrolment of women in the discipline of medicine in India is a welcome trend. However, within medicine the maximum number of women are pursuing nursing which is seen as a low status female dominated occupation. A dispersal as well as concentration of women doctors can be seen in various specialities; women are overrepresented in gynaecology, obstetrics, and paediatrics whereas there are relatively few women as compared to men in specialties like orthopaedics, cardiology, urology, forensic science, neurosurgery, nephrology, gastroenterology and nuclear medicine (AISHE, 2019). What leads postgraduate women students to make specialisation choices is an unexplored area. The study conceptualises choice-making as a multi-faceted and strategic process that includes both 'revealed preferences' and making of actual choice, both of which need to be understood within specific contexts (Moen and Wethington, 1992; Sen 1997). The present study of women students in a government medical college in Delhi has highlighted the need to make a distinction between preferences and choices. The study shows that preferences of participants were broad and open and were relatively less gendered. However, choices were constrained and influenced by various structures. Family, educational institutions, and society at large constrained choices of women and forced some to make gendered choices.

Notes on Paper

The participation of women in medical education is growing significantly, and they are likely to specialise in obstetrics and gynaecology. A postgraduate qualification is essential for a career within medical education, which is an elite and exclusive education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with men and women students in medical education. Female participants were based in non-clinical, and male based in clinical subjects. Making a choice is complex, but students' choices are influenced by internship and entrance exams. Female students explain that despite experiencing opposition for choosing 'male' medical specialisms, women choose the field of their choice. Overall, the students who were not sure of their choice of specialism were first-generation students. Gendered considerations such as working hours of the specialist field also influence students' choice as some medical fields may not require long working hours.

Session 4B: Family and Community Involvement

Seema Marmath (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai) – Exploring Complexities of Women's Access to Higher Education: A Study in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan

The expansion of women's education across various communities in India has been a long, drawn-out process. While education for women gained considerable importance in the post-Independence period, an exploration into the gendered experiences of women's education in communities has received rather less attention. The current research is located within the Meena community which is one of the largest Scheduled Tribes in Rajasthan. While most research on the community is anthropological in nature, the current study aims to fill this gap by exploring the contemporary dimensions of women's higher education in the Meena community. In the Indian context, women's educational trajectories are shaped by the extent and quality of education that is allowed by the family and concerns around marriage are often central in deciding the 'kind' of education that is considered apt for women. In the present research, I locate women's education within the nexus of family and marriage which dominates the discourse among first-generation learners in the community accessing higher education. The fieldwork was conducted in the first women's college in the district of Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan in 2017. In-depth interviews and participant observation were the key methods to gather data from final year Meena women and teachers at the women's college. As ideas of 'acquiring complete education' have evolved within the community, a positive shift of this trend has been translated into women having higher rates of enrolment to institutions of higher learning. However, the actual participation rates in college remain critically low. One of the key findings has been the elimination of the classroom as a space of learning from the imagination of higher education among families who discourage their daughters to access college regularly. The access to higher education is thus complicated by various practices encouraged by families, the college and the community at large which are in sync with the demands in the marriage market where access to a BA degree is gaining more importance than ever before.

Notes on Paper

Often, the extent to which women have access to education is determined by the family. The research focused on the marginalised Meena community. The increase in the demand for educated daughters-in-law within the community has triggered growing access to HE. However, the quality of education is questionable. High levels of enrolment were observed in the women-only college in Rajasthan. However, the participation in the classroom was very low and eventually lead to the dropout of a significant number of female students. Within this context, city women are deemed to have the social and financial capital to access education, which village women did not have. The research has identified that colleges are generally viewed as an escape for women and a pastime, which discouraged city women from attending colleges. There is a certain degree of silence about low levels of women's participation, for example, hiding the numbers of everyday non-participation of women.

Yashashwani Srinivas (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai) – Community Initiatives in Dalits Colonies: Pathways to Higher Education

Caste entails exclusion from resources, symbolic and otherwise which is not merely accidental, but in its very essence (Viswanath 2014). This exclusion gets intense as we examine down the caste hierarchy. On that note, the Dalits, constituting the lowest strata are structurally excluded from various realms, thereby reinforcing caste and caste-based labour on them. Education is one such arena that historically excluded Dalit for centuries. Although during colonial times, social reform movements and constitutional provision enabled the Dalits the right to education, accessibility and affordability have remained as hurdles. Nevertheless, the last three decades have witnessed an increase in the number of Dalits in the higher education spaces. There exists significant literature on how Dalits have grown in educational spaces, especially in higher education, giving rise to alternative writing in academia and contributing to the larger happenings of Dalit assertion, consciousness and movement. However, the limitation lies in the fact that there has been barely an insight into the various mechanisms that enabled this.

This research is an attempt to study one such mechanism– the community lead initiatives in Dalit colonies, especially night schools run by local Dalit organizations. Though these initiatives operate with limited resources they have been instrumental in addressing two major aspects – education and employment, especially in the case of Dalit women, who battle a three- level alienation of caste, class and gender. Hence, this research is an attempt to understand the role and relevance of communitarian initiatives as a pathway to formal higher education, breaking caste and gender hierarchies, thereby building resistance and undoubtedly challenged marginality. Furthermore, the research makes an attempt to explore the contribution of these initiatives to the growing Dalit consciousness and movement (Omvedt 1994) in Karnataka between 1970 and 1980.

For this study, the researcher will deploy an ethnographic research design that will include semi- structured interview, archival research and focused group discussions from the members of her colony in Bengaluru. As a Dalit woman who is first generation who graduated from TISS Mumbai, the researcher attributes her education to these initiatives. Through this research she hopes to create a document of the understudied aspect of education in India especially, in the case of Dalits and also contribute to Dalit studies.

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Notes on Paper

The anti-caste movement is the focus of this paper. The anti-caste movement uses education as a way for liberation. This was institutionalised through women's education. The anti-slavery movement in the US has greatly influenced the anti-caste movement in India. This movement inspired the development of many schools and colleges in India as well as influenced major

policies around human rights and education in India. However, the post-colonial reality has made education a luxury for many communities in India. However, many Dalit women have entered education recently. The auto-ethnographic research focused on three periods of colonial, post-colonial and present-day India development of access to education by Dalit people. During the independence movement, there was a fear of losing access to education and occupation obtained during the colonial period. The first phase saw an increase of boys in education, which was seen as the opportunity for quality employment in the future. In the next phase (1970-90) Dalit rights were voiced as well as the voices of other castes. The access to education, healthcare and other benefits has changed. The post-1990 was the period when women finally could join public education under missionary schools sometimes. The first-generation graduates from the Dalit colony were women, not men.

Vandana (Centre for Women's Development Studies) – Kinship Network and Access to Higher Education: Exploring Dalit Students' Journey to Pursue Science Stream in Delhi University

Scholars interested in exploring the relationship between Dalit students' access to higher education, have largely restricted their focus upon studying the interpersonal relationship of adolescent, families, peer groups and teachers. They have highlighted that interpersonal relationships have a profound impact on their development. However, little is known around kinship ties and their role in the process. Thus, this article explores the relationship between kinship networks and Dalit students' access to college education in the University of Delhi. It raises questions: along with Dalit students' families, how do the kinship ties help them to negotiate, resist and challenge the blockages created by the nexuses of caste, class and gender? What have been the stories of their own journeys and trajectories of mobility? What kind of networks have they built over a period of time to strengthen their children's access to higher education? The findings of this paper are a part of the minor research grant received from ICSSR-IMPRESS in 2019-20. In the exploratory study, the data has been collected by conducting in-depth interviews of 20 Dalit students (both girls and boys) pursuing under-graduation degrees in natural science discipline from various colleges of Delhi University. It was found kinship relationships and their support has greatly influenced the upward mobility that the extended family members have achieved. Grandparents maintained cordial relationships with their siblings' families and their own family. This later on proved to be crucial in determining access. Kinship networks mentored the young students by influencing/shaping the choice of subject selection and schooling, nurturing aspirations for higher education and career, facilitating migration to study in cities, providing moral and emotional support, guarding against experiencing caste and gender-based discrimination and violence and building self-respect, dignity and confidence.

Notes on Paper

The presentation focused on the role of kinship ties in accessing education within the Dalit community. The interpersonal relationship has a profound role in Dalit access to education historically. The research identified that kinship ties played an important role in accessing HE through the mobility of castes to higher levels of occupations. The political affiliation of the families influenced the accessibility to education. Kinship relations also influenced the school

choice in Dalit families. To enter the school, students had to go through examinations and therefore the previous relatives could provide mentorship and guidance to the applicants. Role models of relatives set a model for application for technical disciplines for women. Kinship ties acted as effective instruments in facilitating access to education for many families from the Dalit community. Male children were given priority. Kinship role was more significant in Dalit women accessing the education.

Plenary Session

The second day concluded with a plenary session where four Indian academic experts discussed the theme of the conference. This session was chaired by Prof Disha Nawani from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. She briefly introduced each speaker and invited them to participate in this session (watch the plenary session).

Chair: Disha Nawani

Prof Rekha Pappu (TISS, Hyderabad)

Rekha Pappu is Professor and Chairperson of the Azim Premji School of Education at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Hyderabad, India. As a researcher, teacher and evaluator, she has been working for over two decades with institutions in the academic and the development sectors. She was the Coordinator and Director of Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad (1997 – 2003), and the Convenor of the Andhra Pradesh Social Watch (2004 – 2005) as part of which she edited the first Social Watch Report of Andhra Pradesh titled Rethinking Priorities: Making Policy as if People Mattered. Her more recent publication is the Handbook of Education Systems in South Asia for which she, along with Padma Sarangapani, is the Editor-in-Chief. The Handbook published as a Major Reference Work by Springer Nature in 2021 is in two volumes and contributes to an understanding of education systems in the South Asian region.

The research interests of Rekha Pappu are broadly in the areas of education, gender, development and social justice. In particular, she is interested in the areas of education policy, history of education, gender and education, childhood studies, as well as pedagogy and teacher professional development in higher educational institutions. Her publications in these areas have been included in anthologies and academic journals. She has led various research projects and impact assessments for the state and central governments, as well as various national and international organizations.

Notes on Contribution

The project is located in a very important site, Haryana, which has a very low sex ratio and high incidences of gendered violence, such as honour killing, and which at the same time reports a gender parity of one in terms of enrolment in HE. The FCF study is comprehensive and has looked at various dimensions of access to HE. The project moves beyond physical and geographical access to HE to look at micro details such as the processes through which young people gain enrolment in HE. The project report provides rich data about the students who enrol in these HEIs and how they are obtaining enrolment. The project is actively drawing attention to how intersectional factors influence enrolment processes and the nature and extent of family involvement in the educational pathways of young people. Prof Rekha Pappu argues that when we locate this study within the context of Haryana, North India, India, and

South Asia, it is also important to further explore the growing association of HE with marriage and how marriage influences educational choices and experiences.

In terms of the FCF project's aim to aid inclusive and informed access to HE, she suggested that there needs to be advocacy to increase state funding for HE which will cover outreach expenses, scholarship provisions, especially for students who wish to enrol in HEIs farther away from home, and residential facilities. She also suggested that there is a need to address the patriarchal mindsets of the HEIs, especially among the staff and faculty of HEIs. Prof Rekha Pappu stressed that access has also to be considered in conjunction with outcomes such as learning, successful completion, and social recognition, in order to positively change gendered social barriers and prejudices. She also pointed out that in terms of an increasingly massifying HE in South Asia there is a negative relationship with employment and workforce participation. She also expressed her opinion that the abstracts and papers being presented at this conference are very relevant and actively engaged in progressing scholarship on gendered access to HE.

Dr Chayanika Shah (Independent Researcher and Activist)

Topic: Understanding gender in education through the margins

Dr Chayanika Shah is an educator, writer, researcher and feminist activist. She has a doctorate in Physics and has taught Physics to graduate students at K. J. Somaiya College of Science and Commerce, Mumbai for two decades. Since then she has designed and co-taught post-graduate courses in Science Education and Feminist Science Studies.

Dr Chayanika Shah has worked and written extensively on feminist studies of science, the politics of population control and reproductive technologies, communalism, and sexuality and sexual rights, besides teaching physics over the last several decades.

Her latest research (2016 - 2019) was a multi-city study "Mapping discrimination based on non-normative gender and sexuality" housed in TISS Mumbai. As part of this, she and her team examined issues of discrimination and exclusion in higher education. One component of this research has recently been published as a book "Space, Segregation, Discrimination: The Politics of Space in Institutions of Higher Education" by Yoda Press.

Her other co-authored books are "No Outlaws in the Gender Galaxy" published by Zubaan, "Bharat ki Chaap" a companion book for the documentary of the same name and "We and Our Fertility: The politics of technological intervention".

Notes on Contribution

Apart from the FCF project, the papers in this conference have also expanded research in gender, access, and education. As a former faculty in a state-funded government college in Mumbai, where a majority of students were first-generation learners, the speaker has observed similar concerns. Dr Chayanika Shah has worked on several projects on gender and sexuality. HE is an important site as it is a space where young people are trying to understand

themselves. It is also a space that is highly contested and a site that is becoming increasingly available to students from different marginalised communities. Dr Chayanika Shah shared with participants a qualitative research project which studied HE and queer and trans students who were assigned male at birth and students' experiences of life on HEI campuses. This project also explored the experiences and perceptions of queer and trans teachers. It looked at institutional mechanisms to address sexual harassment which usually only covered sexual harassment of women within a heteronormative lens. The project examined the design of HEI campuses and their impact on inclusion and normativity, especially for those stakeholders who are on the margins of normativity.

This is an important concern as the campus is a site where there is a significant potential for opportunities, liberation from social prejudices and discrimination as well as a site where students learn to become successful in the enterprise of society. The faculty and staff in HEIs also represent society which contends with the transformative aim of education. In this situation the role of the institution becomes important. This requires the maintenance of a tenuous balance within classrooms. Since the institution is more powerful than individuals, the onus is firmly on the institution. Education through schooling and HE has a particularly heteronormative project in the way in which the masculine becomes normative. People who do not fit into this norm are considered the other. Within this paradigm, the feminine man is more ridiculed, rejected and violated than the masculine woman. The masculine woman might be included and perceived as successful. Masculinity in women is supported to the extent that it does not break the norm. This is observed in engineering institutions, where for a woman, being one of the boys is advantageous. The peer violence on young men and boys is endemic within this heteronormative project. Therefore, it is important to explore how the heteronormative is constructed within educational processes. The institution, therefore, has to recognise how spaces are gendered, especially residential spaces. Institutions have to focus on how to make gendered and gender-neutral spaces within HEIs.

Dr Nidhi Sabharwal (CPRHE, NIEPA)

Topic: Intersecting inequalities, gender and access to HE opportunities

Dr Nidhi S. Sabharwal is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education (CPRHE), National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi, India. Dr Nidhi S. Sabharwal has previously served as the Director at the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi. Dr Nidhi S. Sabharwal's current research projects include a multi-state study on student diversity and social inclusion in higher education institutions; an evaluation study of the coaching programmes for the socially excluded groups such as the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, the other backward classes and the minorities in Universities and Colleges and is key research partner in a 5-year project on gender and higher education in the state of Haryana, India. She is the co-author of Caste, Discrimination, And Exclusion in Modern India (Sage, 2015), co-editor of Bridging the Social Gap: Perspectives on Dalit Empowerment (Sage, 2014), and co-editor of India Higher Education Report 2016: Equity in Higher Education (Sage, 2018).

Notes on Contribution

Dr Nidhi S. Sabharwal addressed inequalities and HE. Since economic growth has been accompanied by widening economic and social inequalities, the role of education in achieving an equitable society is crucial, especially since gender equality in education is understood as a pathway to build gender equality in society. Access to education increases women's employability and wages and is a key driver in wellbeing spheres such as health, nutrition, and participation in public life. Several international conventions emphasise the importance of gender equality in education in terms of schooling and HE. As the HE system in India is expanding, the key expectation is that this expansion will be inequitable. Tackling this will involve providing students from marginalised groups and communities with supportive conditions, addressing barriers to access, and ensuring equality in educational experiences.

The policy focus on widening access to students from historically underrepresented communities has contributed towards improving diversity in the student population on HE campuses. In terms of gender, parity has been achieved at the national level, and equality of access has been promoted for students from disadvantaged communities through affirmative action measures such as the reservation of seats in public HEIs. Such measures have contributed towards improving women's access and participation in HE across different socially disadvantaged groups. As a result, within the emerging and diversifying student body, women from disadvantaged groups face multiple barriers which produce particular and compounded experiences of marginalisation and inequitable educational pathways. Although there has been a significant improvement in student body diversity, HEIs are underprepared to meet the intersectional educational needs of the changing student body. HEIs are now facing the need to promote inclusive, non-discriminatory, and equal opportunity, informed decisions, and participation in HE courses, programmes and activities. This includes providing consistent guidance on college planning and assisting students through every stage of entry into HE. This involves equal access and treatment within HEIs. At the point of entry, gendered inequalities intersect with social class, caste, and rural-urban differences to shape (a) access to information that helps navigate application and enrolment processes, (b) educational choices, (c) experiences of HE, and (d) outcomes. This is particularly limited for Dalit women from rural areas. This is exacerbated by the fact that the growing private sector of HE in India is concentrated in higher-cost engineering, medicine and management which are in greater demand. In the process of providing non-discriminatory access to HE, HEIs must find ways to provide better access to knowledge regarding enrolment, involve families in their outreach programmes, and ensure equal participation in curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Prof Nandini Manjrekar (TISS Mumbai)

Prof Nandini Manjrekar is Professor and former Dean at the School of Education, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Her teaching and research spans disciplinary and interdisciplinary domains such as sociology and social history of education, curriculum studies, gender studies, and contemporary studies of schooling, marginalisation and education, with a focus on social and political conflict that impact the experiences and aspirations of youth. Her research has largely focused on the micro and macro features of the contemporary political economy of education in the Indian context, with an explicit focus on gender.

Prof Nandini Manjrekar has been part of various national policy research and monitoring groups in education and also has had a deep engagement with civil society and non-profit organisations working with women, youth and community. She was a member of the National Focus Group on Gender Issues in Education (2005), and she has been a member of several review missions under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. She has published widely in journals and edited books and is a joint editor of Comparative Education Dialogue. Her edited volume, Gender and Education in India: A Reader was published in 2020.

Prof Nandini Manjrekar has served on the Executive Committee of the Indian Association of Women's Studies (2012-2014) and is currently President, Comparative Education Society of India. She was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as a Fulbright Fellow (1997-98) and has taught in the Women and Gender Studies Programme, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, USA (2005-2006). She has been a visiting fellow at the Georg Eckert Institute of International Textbook Research, Germany, (2018) and the German Historical Institute London (2016 and 2019).

Notes on Contribution

The different presentations in this conference reiterated that access is very limited as a category and there is a need to expand it. This has been observed in India and other countries. There is a need to historicise debates surrounding access. This is important, as all the papers in this conference have identified that discrimination has been persistent. There is a need to revisit the basic question regarding the aims of education, which are constructed historically. From the late-colonial period which involved education of relatively more elite women and ideals of a companionate educated wife, feminist literature on the education of women and the birth and development of the Indian state was accompanied by its own aims in terms of education of women, including certain classical ideas such as education as an ideological state apparatus and the emergence of the Indian nation-state. Early Indian feminist literature on the education of women was largely articulated by elite nationalist women who were the first generation of Indian women to access HE.

Prof Nandini Manjrekar traced certain key educational reports such as the Hansa Mehta Report (1964) which rejected the argument curricula be differentiated for men and women. This was remarkable as this preceded the first education policy in India which was drafted in 1968. The articulation by women on the education of women shifts with the decade of women (70s) and there was a significant stress on the relationship between education and development, particularly in terms of health, fertility, and population control. In the late nineties, there were many changes including the development of women and gender studies in HE and curriculum as subjects. However, their impact was very limited. There was a massive expansion and increasing entry of first-generation students accompanying the neo-liberal turn in the late nineties as the state is gradually withdrawing its budgetary investment in education. At the same time, there was an increasing articulation of dissatisfaction and consciousness of inequalities of gender and intersectionalities such as caste, social class, gender, and sexuality across campuses. Prof Nandini Manjrekar called this the ghost of the Birla and Ambani (two

leading industrialists in India) report in 2000, which has led to a clampdown on dissent within campuses. While families and institutions are important stakeholders in access, the way in which the state accommodates the politics of gender makes it easier to maintain and reproduce a system of domination and subjugation, despite increased women's enrolment and successful completion figures. Within the intersectional lens, we also need to take into account the historical context of educational developments and conditions of oppression. While access remains an important issue, the discourses surrounding the quality of state-funded and private HEIs are often detrimental. Within this context and dilemma, there is a need to examine how to move towards recommending educational projects of counter-socialising the (normative and status quo) socialisation by families and communities through education.

Conference Attendance

The conference drew a large number of attendees, with 113 delegates participating on Day 1 and 86 on Day 2. In total, 144 delegates participated in the conference across both days. This includes all present (i.e., speakers, chairs, and attendees) apart from the organising committee.

The team received very positive informal feedback from several participants following the conference.