

GENDER ON CAMPUS: INTERSECTIONALITY OF SOCIAL CATEGORIES IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Ph.D. Thesis

By

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GENDER ON CAMPUS: INTERSECTIONALITY OF SOCIAL CATEGORIES IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ANUSHA RENUKUNTLA



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I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **GENDER ON CAMPUS: INTERSECTIONALITY OF SOCIAL CATEGORIES IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION** in the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** and submitted in the discipline **OF SOCIOLOGY, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCINECES** , **Indian Institute of Technology Indore**, is an authentic record of my own work carried out during the time period from August 2021 to August 2025 under the supervision of Dr. Ashok Kumar Mocherla, Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Technology Indore.

The matter presented in this thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other institute.

R. A
10/3/25

(ANUSHA RENUKUNTLA)

This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my knowledge.

10 March 2025 (Dr. ASHOK KUMAR MOCHERLA)

ANUSHA RENUKUNTLA has successfully given her PhD Oral Examination held on **08 August, 2025**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ashok', is shown within a rectangular frame.

August 11, 2025 (**Dr. Ashok Kumar Mocherla**)

Signature of Thesis Supervisor with date

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SYNOPSIS

GENDER ON CAMPUS: INTERSECTIONALITY OF SOCIAL CATEGORIES IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Context of the Study

Gender as a socially constructed identity is significant in shaping experiences and regulating socio-political dynamics in all social institutions, such as family, religion, economy, politics, and education. Precisely speaking, how gender operates in society is totally different from how it does on higher educational institutions. Gender stereotypes and inequality in society are direct, familiar, and known social expressions/manifestations. But the idea of gender and associated stereotypes on university are covert and would not disappear abruptly. Rather, they take different form, content, language and means of politics to manifest. Therefore, analysing gender on campus must pay attention to more nuanced, subtle, and invisible forms of gender inequalities, that are crystalised in academic spaces, for university spaces claim to provide the theoretical equality to all genders.

Historically speaking, women were forbidden from seeking degrees in most universities across the world and even today seeking a role in academia continue to be a difficult task at every stage of academic life in general. Over time, women, and the belief that they belong in university spaces have become new normal in the academic system and the situation has considerably improved. Universities as academic institutions across the globe are seen as social spaces with the potential to transform the lives of individuals and society eventually towards the framework of sustainable equality by providing them level playing fields of career opportunities. In

India too, modern university education is considered a vital agency of social mobility that could bring about overall changes in the social hierarchy as well as economic status. In this context, modern Indian universities are broadly viewed as a ‘social institution of reform’ that could preclude categorical inequalities based on gender, race, class, caste, sexuality, ethnicity, and so forth.

The three waves of feminism and the theoretical perspectives of feminist scholarship are the core in women emancipation and the evolution of their educational journey worldwide. The revolutionary calls for equal rights of women in all spheres of society alongside men has started in Great Britain and it spread across all the continents. The three waves of feminism such as Liberal, Socialist, Radical, and post-modern feminism experienced strong establishment and gender-inclusive achievements in multiple social spheres that made the widespread presence of women students and their activism in university spaces possible. The genealogy of the feminist movement in India emerges as post-colonial feminism by critiquing mainstream Western feminism. Consequently, based on the intersectional social categories ‘marked feminism’ such as Dalit, Tribal, and Muslim feminism emerged as a prominent challenger to the mainstream Indian feminist movement.

Broader Statement of the Problem

The contribution of university education to the upliftment of the Indian nation on egalitarian grounds is immense. However, it is significant to critically explore the everyday social realities as the unequal gender power relations has their own manifestations. Indian university which is dominated by the traditional patriarchal structures and caste system holding the ideological continuity of the repressive praxis even in contemporary times on the lines of gender and intersectionality.

According to the All-India Higher Education (AISHE) survey 2021-22, the registered number of universities is 1,168 out of which 240 are central and

445 state universities. Colleges include 45,473, and standalone institutions number is 12,002. There are 23 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), and the National Institute of Technology (NITs) 31. Exclusively for women, there are 17 universities. The gross enrolment ratio of women increased to 28.5 percent by 2021-22 more than the male gross enrolment ratio whose percentage increased only by 4.6 percent. The enrolment ratio of scheduled caste females is 26 percent, the scheduled tribe percentage is 20.9, and the minority female presence is 38 percent. Thus, from 2015-22 the overall increase of scheduled caste women enrolment increased to 51 percent, 65.2 percent in the case of scheduled tribe women, and minority female students' percentage increased to 42.3 percent. The social category of trans students has not been added yet. The scenario of the overall presence of Indian women students in higher education is increasing and quite impressive when observed in terms of numbers. However, according to the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) 2024, the extent of gender-based gaps in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health; employment; survival, and political empowerment, India ranked 129 out of 146 countries which is alarming. Thus, it is the need of the hour to discuss the glass-ceilings institutionalized in the qualitative representation of women in all spheres and especially in universities. As social spaces have their own manifestations and power politics in reproducing the existing conventional regressive notions and praxis.

Coming to the context of women student lived experiences in university spaces contemporarily, the hashtag # trend is taking place across the world and in India expressing protests against sexual harassment through social media platforms. One such trend can be notable the # MeToo movement. Coined by Afro-American scholar Tarane Burkey in 2006 advocating black women's rights against sexual harassment. #MeToo denoted to the List of Sexual Harassment Accused (LoSHA) in India. A law student and Dalit feminist Raya Sarkar circulated a Google spreadsheet from an anonymous source and posted on Facebook listing out the names of male academicians

and scholars responsible for sexual harassment both in Indian and foreign universities in 2018 (Lukose 2018: 45). This was disturbing and raised consciousness for safe academic spaces for Indian women. The caste apartheid in Indian universities was also shared by young Dalit feminists on social media platforms. This shows the generational tension between older and younger feminists emerges from a politics of location shaped by struggles about caste and transformations of Indian university spaces (Lukose 2018: 46). In 2022, Muslim girl students are barred from attending college lectures as they wore hijab (head scarf) traditionally worn by them based on religion. It was stated by the college administration that wearing a hijab is against the college uniform code and when these female students protested, they were opposed by the administration and fellow girl students from other religions. The rape attempt by a professor on a female student at the University of Hyderabad in 2022 was a shocking incident. The deliberate attack on a Dalit trans woman student at the University of Hyderabad in 2024 by allegedly burning her clothes in hostel premises presents the atrocities based on transphobia in university spaces. Therefore, these scenarios in the contemporary higher educational spaces bring to light the fact that though the participation of women in educational spaces increased comparatively the rising issues against women based on their intersectional social categories such as Dalit, Muslim, tribal, trans and so forth need much more research to understand how far India reached in providing qualitative university experience to all students notwithstanding the categorical inequalities based on gender, caste, class, religion, sexuality, and so forth. This can be considered as the major research gap in Indian Sociology and the fields of Sociology of Gender, and Sociology of Education precisely.

Therefore, it is significant to understand how gender plays a key role in shaping Indian women's overall university experiences owing to their varied intersectional identities of gender, caste, religion, sexuality, first-generation status, and so forth. Presenting university campus as a social entity includes

both academic and non-academic spaces. Within the sphere of academic spaces comes classroom and laboratories. Therefore, critical analysis of these academic spaces facilitates scope for an alternative perspective on how shared academic spaces are becoming a site of marginalization in terms of institutionalizing the gender stereotyped notions and conduct. Along with academic spaces, non-academic spaces and on campus also are crucial in either promoting or hampering qualitative experiences of women students. Hence, deeper analysis on the non-academic public places on campus and non-academic organizational set up such as student political organizations is need of the hour to explicitly capturing everyday gender based social realities of women students and the manifestations of gender power relations. Thus, these interventions paves path for active gender inclusive university spaces.

Hence, this study enables dialogue between the fields of Sociology of Gender and Sociology of Education, where both the aspects of gender and university have not been given much importance. In India, overpowered by the hegemonic intelligentsia, the established conventional glass- ceilings and the nature of universities in embracing diversity and inclusivity come under contestation. Therefore, going beyond much glorified quantitative analysis on the presence of women students in universities, this study attempts to unravel the lived experiences of women students by demarginalizing the intersection of categorical inequalities based on gender, caste, first-generation status, religion, and sexuality. This is a framework of the enmeshed lived experience regarding inclusion, alongside exclusion and discrimination with a focus on gender and intersectionality. Thus, this study hopes to bring together important perspectives in the fields of the Sociology of Gender, Sociology of Education, Women's Studies, Social Stratification, Social inclusion and exclusion studies, Discrimination and Inequality, Intersectionality, and so forth.

Research Questions

1. How different is gender on university campus, from other social spaces in its form and content and what are the distinct ways of interacting with other social categories?
2. Are shared academic spaces, such as university classroom and scientific laboratories gender neutral? What are the everyday social realities of women students with multi-layered social identities?
3. Is first-generation status an important social category and how do first-generation woman learners navigate through university spaces?
4. How gender is manifested and inequalities are reproduced, in non-academic university spaces in contrast to the theoretical expectations of equality?
5. How politics of gender representation and tokenism in student political organizations, on campus continue to promote and institutionalise gender stereotypes?

Research Methodology

Formulated on the grounds of feminist research, this study engages with women students from varied social categories and narrates their experiences in the Indian university spaces. In terms of methodological procedures, this is an ethnographic study using qualitative research methods to analyse the data collected from the field. A mixed method design has been formulated and the purposive sampling method was used as a research strategy. Questionnaires, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions, documents, and audio recordings have been employed as tools for data collection. The fieldwork was carried out at a prominent university located in South India. About forty registered students of this campus from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and a sizeable number of women students from different student organizations were selected as respondents based on stratified sampling. Thus, personal narratives of women students in the university

including both academic and non-academic experiences based on their intersectional identities have been analysed to develop the theoretical perspectives of this thesis.

Chapterization of the Thesis

Focusing on university, gender and intersectionality, the outline of my doctoral thesis consists of seven chapters. Weaved along the lines of socially constructed identities and their intersections, introductory chapter presents the theoretical perspectives and methodological protocols respectively. The second chapter exclusively deals with the classroom experiences of the women students solely stressing on their intersectional identity. The third chapter capture the lived experiences of women research scholars in the one-gendered and Savarna-dominated scientific laboratories by stressing on the gender politics at play in the social formulation and dual oppression. Fourth chapter presents how caste acts as an important habitus on the university campus for students based on their familial educational background of first and generation status and their social mobility through acquired cultural capital. The fifth chapter is on the non-academic spaces of the university and the dialogue of women students with the hegemonic gendered public campus spaces. The sixth chapter is on university student political organizations. This presents how Indian women students fall in the same line when it comes to gender stereotypes and subjugation irrespective of the varying political ideological stances of student organizations accordingly, their potential in overthrowing the inegalitarian codes of conduct on university set up is explored. Final chapter includes conclusion, limitations, and future implications of the study. The overview of each chapter is discussed in detail briefly as follows:

Chapter One: ‘Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives and Methodological Procedures. An introduction with the historical background of women's entry into the educational setup through various strands of feminism is explained. Firstly, three waves of feminism are described followed by

intersectionality which describes black, queer, post-colonial, Dalit, Tribal, and Muslim feminist theoretical perspectives. The second section is on research methodology. Methodological protocols are explained which state the research design and sampling method, tools of data collection employed such as Questionnaires, in-depth Interviews, Documents, audio recordings, and Field Notes. Methodological challenges, data analysis, and ethical considerations are specified to give a detailed framework for the study.

Chapter Two: ‘Common Space and Uncommon Chronicles: Exploring the Narratives of Difference in University Classroom.’ This chapter problematizes university as a shared space that has been historically producing an uncommon chronicle of gender, and of other categorical inequalities in India. The encounters of Indian women students are negotiated deeper as the academic spaces have their codes of conduct and expected gender conformity owing to their socio-cultural context. Thus, the whole dialogue of gender is displayed through the lens of the intersectional framework of gender, class, caste, religion, sexuality, and so forth. The social dynamics of the classroom are dealt with by articulating the enforced culture of silence which seems to be limiting the agency of women students in general and disadvantaged women students in particular.

Chapter Three: ‘Laboratory as a Site of ‘Gendered Minoritization’: Accounts of Gender Discrimination and Exclusion on Indian Campus.’ This chapter proposes to examine and theorize the idea of ‘gendered minoritization’ on campus by looking at laboratory spaces as sites of silence and occasionally as a site of contestation. The laboratory space, which is predominantly male-dominated in its social composition, wherein women research scholars experience distinct forms of exclusion from social/academic networks, undergo covert and overt discrimination, and conflicts between personal and professional lives are critically examined. This chapter tries to capture the lived experiences of women research scholars in the supposedly one-gendered and caste-dominated scientific

laboratories by stressing on the gender politics at play. These laboratory spaces in their day today life seem to produce dual oppression based on gender and other social categories, which in turn are curtailing the rights and social agency of minority students on campus.

Chapter Four: ‘The Caste of Campus Habitus: Caste and Gender Encounters of the First-generation Dalit Women Students in Indian Universities.’ In this chapter, the importance of first-generation status as an important intersectional identity in shaping educational experiences along with other categorical experiences is analysed. The encounters of First-generation Dalit women students and how caste forms a habitus in empowering certain sections of students and marginalizes others has been examined in this chapter. The educational trajectory of first-generation Dalit women students, the unique challenges they confront in the process of learning, survival strategies of negotiations, and social agencies in contesting the conventional glass ceilings through the acquired cultural capital are significant lines of inquiries this chapter covers in detail.

Chapter Five: ‘Theoretical Equality and Empirical Discrimination: Gender Realities of Non-academic Spaces on University Campus.’ The chapter presents an in-depth overview of the women students in Indian university public places against the backdrop of gender. Compared to the meagre presence of women students in Indian universities in the past, there is a considerable increase in their number of women students in present times. However, in the empirical reality university education has its paradoxes. Non-academic spaces and how gender identity is negotiated by the women students which gives them a sense of belonging are explored by drawing important observations on how *public and private dichotomy* based on gender continue to persist on campus. To what extent women and ‘*other*’ gender identity students are accepted and included in non-academic student activities? And how do other social identities contribute to shaping the non-academic experiences and negotiations thereby?

Chapter Six: ‘Divided by Ideology and United by Gender Stereotypes: Debating Politics of Representation and Tokenism in Student Politics.’ By critically looking at student activism on campus this chapter aims to uncover the fact that student activism on campus has long been a masculine domain with a little or almost negligible presence of women student leaders in university politics leading to lopsided gender realities. Therefore, the nature and praxis of student political organizations in the university set-up have been presented by mainstreaming gender. How egalitarian are the student politics on campus is analysed for an inclusive university experience. Therefore, the deterministic perceptions of the masculine student political organizations and the journey of women students as members and leaders of the student political organizations have been discussed by analysing internal politics of representation and tokenism.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion: With these above-mentioned chapters, the institutional inequalities and lived realities in Indian higher education form the crux of the study by mainstreaming women students and the intersections of diverse social categories. At the end of the chapter, the limitations and future implications of the study are included widening the scope of the study. This thesis demonstrates the dichotomous nature of Indian university spaces on lines of inclusion and exclusion in terms of gender. Academic spaces in university have been critically examined on how notions of popular culture concerning gender are institutionalized, also demonstrates first-generation status as an important categorical inequality that shapes the academic experiences of first-generation learners. The idea of caste as a dominant campus habitus is analyzed with the help of first-generation students’ experiences. And within non-academic sphere, Student political organizations have been examined which have the potential to transform lives of individual and challenge conventional university structures. This thesis argues for the importance of examining gender dimensions in higher education and questions of education in the context of gender in sociological and anthropological literature.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

1. Renukuntla, A., & Mocherla, A. K. (2024). Divided by Ideology and United by Gender Stereotypes: Debating Politics of Representation and Tokenism in Student Politics in India. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 10 (2), 200-216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23944811241297136>.
2. Renukuntla, A., & Mocherla, A. K. (2023). The Caste of Campus Habitus: Caste and Gender Encounters of the First-generation Dalit Women Students in Indian Universities. *CASTE A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, 4(2), 336–350. <https://doi.org/10.26812/caste.v4i2.68>.
3. Renukuntla, A., & Gundemeda, N. (2023). Educational Endeavours and Unheeded Tales: Mapping Trajectories of Dalit Women in a University. *Sociological Bulletin* 72(4), 434-445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380229231196718>.

Forthcoming Publications

4. Renukuntla, A., & Mocherla, A. K. Laboratory as a Site of ‘Gendered Minoritization’: Tales of Gender Discrimination on Indian Campus’. In: Sariay Cheruvallil Contractor & Ashok Mocherla. ‘Minorities on Indian Universities. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. **(Forthcoming)**
5. Gundemeda, N., Renukuntla, A., & Najla, P. Secular Codes and Sacred Spaces: Negotiating the Spiritual Practices in University Campus of South India. Submitted to *Research in the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 34. **(Forthcoming)**

CONFERENCES

International Conferences

1. **Attended Royal Anthropological Institute 2024: Anthropology and Education Conference held at Senate House, London, June 25-28, 2024**, and Presented a Paper entitled 'Common Space and Uncommon Chronicles; Exploring the Accounts of Gender on Indian University Campus.
2. **Attended virtual workshop 'AHRC GCRF Minorities on Campus' conducted by Coventry University, Uk, December 14, 2021**. Presented paper titled 'Laboratory as a Site of 'Gendered Minoritization': Accounts of Gender Discrimination and Exclusion on Indian Campus.'

National Conferences

1. Presented a Paper titled ' Life in the Laboratory: Mapping the Experiences and Aspirations of Dalit Women in the University,' at the **46th All India Sociological Conference** (Online). Hosted by the University of Mumbai on 'Constitution, Citizenship, and Minorities: Mapping Seventy years of Indian Republic.' December 8,9, and 10, 2021.
2. Attended workshop titled **"Education, Nation Building, and Social Justice: A Study of Universities in India, funded by the Institute of Eminence (IOE)- University of Hyderabad**. The workshop scheduled on 27-28 January 2025 in the Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad. Presented paper titled:'

Dominant Habitus versus Acquired Cultural Capital: Navigation of
First-Generation Dalit Women Learners on Indian University.'

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives and Methodological Procedures

1. Historical Background and Context

Gender as a socially constructed identity is significant in shaping experiences and regulating socio-power dynamics in all social institutions, such as family, religion, economy, politics, and, undoubtedly, education. Education, in general, and university education, in particular, are considered the most inclusive institutions that challenge the existing inegalitarian social structures. Exclusively talking about women globally, their entry into educational institutions is a long-awaited struggle and a phenomenal achievement per se. To get a historical outline of women's emancipation and the evolution of their educational journey worldwide, the three waves of feminism and the theoretical perspectives of feminist scholarship are the nucleus. The revolutionary calls for equal rights of women in all spheres of society alongside men has started in Great Britain and it spread across all the continents.

To begin with, the word 'feminism' was coined by a French philosopher named Charles Fourier in 1837 with an aim and definition of economic, social, and political equality. The feminist movement and its theoretical conceptualizations can be understood namely in three waves. The first wave

of feminism commenced in mid mid-1800s to early 1900s by claiming women's enfranchisement and civil rights. The first wave of feminism was dominated by liberal feminists' ideology who argued for equal social, economic, political, and medical rights and stressed on right to abortion, equal pay, and professional recognition as men. In the context of education, the main goal of liberal feminism is securing equal opportunities. Liberal feminists propose to remove the barriers preventing girls from reaching their full potential. The three main themes of these feminist strands include equal opportunities, socialization, sex stereotyping, and discrimination. In the context of education socialization, sex roles, and sex stereotyping have been questioned. Girls and boys are thought to be socialized by the family, the school, and the media into traditional attitudes and orientations that limit their futures unnecessarily to sex-stereotyped occupational and family roles (Acker 1987: 423). Thus, liberal feminists laid the foundations for mobilizing women in all social institutions and education precisely with their political and theoretical stance. Liberal feminism conceptual framework attracted major criticism such as it is more of psychological reductionism where the victim is blamed for her socialization and lack of confidence instead of challenging the existing unequal social structures (Acker 1987: 425). Thus, as a response to the liberal feminism emerged socialist and radical feminism aiming towards change in social structures.

In the 1960s the second wave of feminism emerged which included both socialist and radical feminism. Influenced by the neo-Marxist trends in sociology, the theoretical perspective of socialist feminists focussed on how education is significant in reproducing the social inequalities based on gender within the capitalist society. It has been analyzed by theorists how education, by a variety of mechanisms, perpetuates and reproduces class divisions within the workforce. In sociology, socialist feminists' theories are a starting point for articulating educational institutions' role in reproducing sexual as well as social division of labor in the family and workplace (Arnot 1981: 69-91). This theoretical argument has overturned

the existing classical perceptions of education as something egalitarian. Thus, one can say that deconstruction theories have emerged that question the existing socially constructed inequalities theories and structures. Consequently, in the sociology of education emerged a shift towards 'an educational praxis with radical pedagogy' (Middleton 1984: 49), that stressed how educational institutions are reproducing and facilitating inequalities based on gender, class, and other social divisions. This feminist strand attracted major criticism from radical feminists who stated that socialist feminists' perspective implied 'economic determinism' (Culley and Demaine 1983: 170). Also, after a series of critiques from black women such as Amos and Parmer (1981), Carby (1982) socialist feminist writings on education showed collective consciousness that gender, race, and class intersect in multifaceted ways to shape the educational experiences of girl students. In response to the classical liberal and socialist feminism emerged radical feminism which is a champion of major radical changes in the education and university education explicitly.

Radical feminists questioned the male dominance over women in the patriarchal social structures. Their analyses do sometimes use a concept of 'reproduction' (Mahony 1985: 66) but what is being reproduced is male oppression which denies women complete access to knowledge, resources, self-esteem, and freedom from fear of harassment. It has been argued by radical feminists as Mary O'Brien (1983) states, 'it is not equality in knowledge, power and wealth, but the abolition of gender as an oppressive cultural reality' (13). Coming to the educational institutions set up major concerns of radical feminists is the male monopolization of culture and knowledge; and the sexual politics of everyday life in schools. Dale Spender (1980; 1981; 1982) states that what we know is dangerously deficient, it is decisions and activities of men presented in the guise of human knowledge and the contribution schools make towards gatekeeping processes by silencing women and their contributions for centuries cannot be undermined (cited by Acker 1987: 429). In the context of sexual politics in everyday

life, girls' students undergo multiple forms of discrimination in mixed-gender educational institutions and are subject to male violence such as visual, verbal, and physical sexual harassment every day (Carol 1985: 30). Thus, radical feminists consider patriarchy as a powerful pandemic universally which needs to be demolished. Biological reductionism or essentialism is the major criticism of radical feminists' perspective. Connell (1985), Murphy, and Livingstone (1985) challenged radical feminists' notions on the generalization of all women's experiences which vividly ignored the complexities based on class, race, religion, nation, and so forth. Despite the given criticisms Carol Jones (1985), Mahony (1985) Weiner (1986) suggested that radical feminist thought succeeded in legitimatized discussions of sexuality and sexual harassment which were ignored earlier. Revisions have been made in curriculums, and texts by generating pedagogical changes, especially in higher and adult education which proposed to develop non-hierarchical, less competitive, participatory teaching methods (Mahony 1985: 91).

In the university education scenario, the role of radical feminists' theoretical stance in establishing the women's Studies as distinct department is noteworthy. Women entered higher education after long struggles with the feminist movements. University students being the forerunners of the social movements initiated by the second wave of feminism, the consciousness of gender equality by challenging patriarchal educational institutions and their praxis has been discussed. Major issues faced by women became part of the university subjects thus, emerged women studies which has been neglected for years across the world nations. In this discourse, feminist analysis of knowledge and social movements was carried on within the universities in the form of Women's Studies departments with the task of consciousness-raising. This period witnessed increased progress in educational and employment opportunities for women which has been a male domain historically. Also, there came the establishment of legislation on abortion and equal pay (Sabbarwal 2000:

269). Thus, this phase of feminism experienced strong establishment and gender-inclusive achievements in multiple social spheres that made possible the widespread presence of women's student activism in university spaces in various countries globally. Later emerged the third wave of feminism which focussed on diversity and difference.

By the 1980s emerged the third wave of feminism/post-modern feminism which focussed more on diverse social identities intersecting with gender, unlike the early mainstream feminism of universality. The greatest invention of this phase is the word 'intersectionality.' Coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s as a heuristic term to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics (Cho, Crenshaw. et, al., 2013: 787). Through intersectional theory, the double oppression entailed by black women based on their social identity of race and gender is discussed widely in the women's movements and across various social sciences disciplines. In the third wave of feminism, mainstream feminism is accused of being white women's supremacy and their experiences in educational institutions ignoring the women of color and their experiences. Thus, emerged black feminism mainstreaming intersectionality of race and gender. In the discourse of politics and academics, black feminists claimed that black women's experiences were neglected and underrepresented in standard theories of race discrimination and women discrimination. Therefore, intersectional theory primarily focuses on overlapping identities. Black feminism emphasized the role of structures in constituting the conditions of life in which racially and economically marginalized women undergo multilayered and routinized forms of domination (Cho, Crenshaw. et, al., 2013: 797) in society and educational institutions. Mirza (1992) stated that nearly 40 years of sociological studies of race, black girls have been neglected (213). Black women's journeys into higher education are a passage into the "heart of whiteness" where a homogenous identity of the

black woman is created by the white gaze which perceives her as a mute visible object. Young black women set off into the white world carrying expectations of mythic proportions and their Odysseys believing it will transform their lives but separated from their cultural communities these young women's passages turn out to be isolated individual journeys (Casey (1993, p.111). In white-dominated higher educational spaces like universities women students of colour undergo multifold oppression. Black women are considered "space invaders" and there are several ways in which black bodies are constructed when they do not represent the "racial somatic norm" within white higher educational institutions (Puwar 2004: 51). Thus, black feminists such as Bell Hooks (1981), Angela Davis (1983), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), and so forth claimed for fair treatment and inclusion of black women students in educational spaces by challenging the curriculum which portrayed them negatively.

Originating based on race nexus with gender the intersectional theory problematized the nature of race, class, sexuality, religion, nationality, and so forth. The number of categories and kinds of subjects whether privileged or subordinated? Has been questioned by intersectional research as an analytic tool in addressing other marginalized communities and other manifestations of social power (Cho, Crenshaw. et, al., 2013: 787).

Grounded on the intersectionality of gender and sexuality queer feminism is one of the notable radical feminist stances. Queer feminists questioned the biological sex and socially constructed gender critically. The dichotomous existence of sex/gender either male or female which is heterosexuality and the norm that attracts the opposite sex/gender heteronormativity has been severely critiqued by the queer feminists through their political movement and theoretical perspectives. The work of leading second-wave feminists had a lasting impact on feminist critiques of heterosexuality. Queer theoretical frameworks offer to reconfigure critical perspectives on heterosexuality but also present challenges for feminist

frameworks and have provoked often polarised responses (Carrol 2012:2). Queer feminists critiqued the mainstream feminism by claiming that the feminist pedagogy and praxis did not go beyond the conventional orientations of sex/gender. Gender has become synonymous with women and mostly heterosexuals. Thus 'normative heterosexuality' lies at the surface of feminist sociology and the presence of gender identities beyond the heterosexual binary is rendered invisible (Kumar 2014: 3-4). Thus, emerged queer feminism by framing a transformative radical approach towards sexuality.

John Sholto Douglas used the word 'queer' for the first time in a letter in 1894 denoting homophobic abuse. Queer activists and scholars reclaimed their identity by forming a separate community in the late 1980s. To define this particular community they labeled LGBTQ, which includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender population, and the umbrella term for this group is queer. As stated by Narrain and Bhan (2005) queer as an umbrella term includes individuals who openly wear their sexual identity in opposition to the heterosexual identity and the ones who wish no labels attached to their sexual orientation and gender. Cis-gender white able-bodied male is considered the norm in patriarchy. Queer feminists through their queer feminism are opposing these traditional conformist patriarchal notions. Queer theory is concerned with questioning the binary structures by which sex, gender, and sexuality are conventionally understood, whereby all human persons are required to identify/be identified as either male or female, either masculine or feminine, and either heterosexual or homosexual (Carrol 2012:6). In sociology, deconstruction theorists such as Michel Foucault and his theoretical conceptualizations are grounding lines for queer feminist theories. The major works of Foucault namely, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1966), *Genealogy of Power* (1969), and *History of Sexuality* (1976), describe how sexual identities are produced historically. His works made discussions on sexuality and homosexuality open in the academic field and mainstream sociology particularly which has

been silenced for many years contributing immensely to developing theory. The works of queer theorist Judith Butler are crucial in queer studies. In her work 'Gender Trouble' (1990), Butler states that the cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist' those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender (23-4). Accordingly, queer feminism got established through their fierce theoretical stances and praxis. Equal rights for the queer community have been claimed by occupying the public discourse through their pride marches across world nations.

Queer theorists criticized the heterosexuality and heteronormativity and the prejudices and phobia experienced by the queer community in every domain of society in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life namely, family, nationality, the state, law, commerce, medicine, and education (Berlant & Warner 1998: 554-5). In the families dominated by patriarchal beliefs queer are considered abnormal beings which challenges everyday life in disclosing their identity and living independently with the preferred sexual orientation. In the context of education as a social institution, it is crucial to socialize students based on their sexual orientations and gender conformities which convey how girls and boys should behave, practicing gender roles, opting for gender-based occupations, and so forth. When it comes to the context of queer students and their experiences in educational institutions and higher education particularly, there is little empirical research examining the effect of classroom experiences on LGBTQ student learning, development, and persistence. Research on the influence of the classroom often suggests that the classroom climate can be unwelcoming to them (Orozco, Gonzalez, et.al, 2021: 189). It has been claimed by queer students that their identity gets erased in educational spaces (Duran & Thach 2018: 42). Duran & Thach (2018) and Dos Santos (2022), in their study stated that queer students undergo negative experiences in the university setting from their

staff, fellow students, and office staff which creates stress and conflict. Hence, queer feminism made possible the deconstruction of the binary sex/gender through their radical calls around the world. But, recognition of queer community as a distinct significant section of society and providing equal opportunities in all social spheres and educational spaces particularly is still an unachieved goal in the heteronormative patriarchal society.

Based on the intersectionality of ethnicity/nationality and gender emerged post-colonial feminism by Asian women and Indian women particularly. Critiquing the Eurocentric feminist approach post-colonial feminism emerged and advocated the existence of transnational women from the global south and the oppression they undergo concerning their ethnic diversity in mainstream Western society. Mohanty in her major work 'Under the Western Eyes' (1984), challenged the hegemonic mainstream feminist knowledge construction which largely ignored the decolonization theories. She argued that mainstream Western feminism considered only white women as the legitimate struggle bearers by unrecognized the women of the third world who are perceived as a split community with incoherent voices (61-88). Hence, concerning the socio-historical framework post-colonial feminists' movement challenged the mainstream Western feminist notions of universal sisterhood which disregards the differences among women based on race and nationality/ethnicity. Post-colonial feminists through their writings expressed how they are othered in the Western feminists' scholarship. It is claimed that racial knowledge is constructed about the other and the experience of being a "curiosity". Adorned and unadorned colonial women cannot escape the fantasies of the Western imagination and their desire for colonized bodies as a spectacle which is essentially an extension of the "desiring machine of capital" (Simmonds 1997:23). In the context of colonial women and their everyday experiences, Gayatri Spivak in her work 'Can the Subalterns Speak' (1988), stated that colonial women as subaltern is even more in shadow. She stated that the denial of black women's discourse from the mainstream is epistemic

violence. Spivak remarked " I had thought that the struggle for space in higher education was a "white woman's history, as indeed I thought that the suffragette movement was a white woman's movement. But I have been learning that history is about what gets chosen to be revealed by whom and when" (25). Thus, through their theoretical underpinnings post-colonial feminists laid the foundations for the feminist movement in India which has long been dominated by the traditional patriarchal structures since ages. The crux of post-colonial feminism in the Indian context lies in the Indian women's mobilization towards the feminist movement and its ideals. Therefore, the background representation of colonial and post-colonial history of how women were introduced to feminist ideologies and the feminist movements led by Indian women is significant in doing so.

Indian women's movement is largely diverse with multiple women's groups and organizations. Over the decades women's mobilization increased and their presence can be seen autonomously and in political parties of the congress, leftist, and communal-based political parties contemporarily. One should look at the fact specifically Western scholars that how deeply rooted the Indian women's movement is in both the colonial reform and nationalist struggles of the 19th century, which resulted in the first mass mobilization of Indian women (Kalpagam 2000, p. 645). With the influence of the colonial period and reform movements of Indian leaders, the question of Indian women swept in and feminist ideas started forming shape. In the pre-independence period, the major concern was on abolition of socially evil practices like the Sati system, child marriages, and radical shift towards widow remarriages and expansion of education to women. Therefore, in the pre-independence context, the activities of social reformers were considered the backbone of India's cultural pride which has been battered by colonial rule and the onslaught of Western culture. (Mazumdar 1994, p. 42). During the struggle for independence against British colonizers, the mobilization of

Indians by making them vocal was initiated. Within the nationalist discourse of representing India as 'mother India' that needed to be protected from the shackles of the British empire, women across the country were encouraged to actively take part in the anti-colonization struggle towards independence. While the earlier reform discourse rationalized the family, the nationalist discourse of the later period created the archetypal mother figure, "evoking deep, often atavistic, images through metaphor and symbol. The symbolic use of the mother as a rallying device varied. Women's power as mothers of the nation asserted Gandhian lauding of the spirit of endurance and suffering embodied in the mother (Kumar 1993: 2). Grounded on these imaginings of nationalism the right-wing ideologies on women emerged in the current scenario.

After independence, through the constitutional framework crafted by Dr. Ambedkar, discrimination against women based on sex is defined as a punishable offense paving the path for feminist ideals of equality. Nehruvian period of independent India is ideally considered to be more egalitarian with democracy, secularism, and a socialistic pattern of modernization eliminating all social evils including caste, religious fundamentalism, and discrimination against women. (Ghosal 2005: 799). By the 1970s- and 1980s-women's questions in the Indian social and political context were actively observed. Based on the recommendations of the United Nations a committee was set up on the status of women in India in 1971. The notable women feminist authors Vina Mazumdar and Lotika Sarkar were part of the committee. In 1973 it was placed in the parliament and published in 1974 titled 'Towards Equality'. Inequalities and discrimination entailed by Indian women socio-culturally, economically, and politically have been highlighted which is leading to the declining sex ratio of women and low education. This report can be seen as one of the pathbreaking contributions to promoting Indian women's feminism. Women's movement increased since 1977 in academics and administration as well leading to the emergence of gender studies in India that reflect

women's conscious engagement in politics of knowledge (Ghosal 2005: 800). Women's studies became a national movement that was in the embryonic stage in the mid-1970s. In the year 1981, the first National Conference on Women's Studies was organized in Bombay, and by 1982 the Indian Association for Women's Studies was established with an overwhelming response (Mazumdar 1994:48). Thus, the 1970s and 1980 can be seen as a revolutionary period in Indian feminism where many movements took place on gender issues and they got established politically and academically.

In India, manifestations of patriarchal domination vary from diverse categorical inequalities of gender, class, caste, religion, and so forth. The caste system being unique to Indian society is significant in shaping the experiences of women leading to multifold oppression based on the intersectionality of multiple social identities. Therefore, though the colonial period witnessed the spread of feminism and the rise of Indian women's movements, it has been limited to causes of elite backgrounds women. It has been criticized that that upper caste-Hindu, middle-class, urban educated women lone have been at the helm of the women's movement. This resulted in the domination of upper caste/class women's perceptions in the women's movement, often at the cost of women from marginalized communities. Therefore, the ignorance of marginalized women has compelled scholars like Anupama Rao to identify feminism in the colonial period as 'Brahminical feminism' (Ghosal 2005: 794). It has been argued that empowerment must be mutual to all women, but ancient or modern India was in the minority of women in the upper classes/castes sidelining women at the grassroots (Mazumdar 1994, p. 42). Thus, critiquing the mainstream Brahminical feminism in India emerged Dalit, Tribal, Muslim, and queer feminisms. Gail Omvedt (1990) states that women in general revolutionary movement are more than the radical feminist or traditional Marxist trends in India. Therefore, the articulations of awakening rural women are progressive (27).

Coming to the context of Dalit feminism, 'Stri-Purush Tulana' written by Tarabai Shinde in 1882 can be considered the first feminist critique on the patriarchal Indian families and homes which are not sacred as perceived by mainstream society and advocated for independent marriage rights for women. The growing grassroots process of 'Ambedkarisation' in the countryside has also played an important influencing role in mobilizing Dalit women. Studies reveal a tremendous growth in the consciousness of Dalits about the life and ideas of Ambedkar (Govinda 2006:187). Thus, Dalit women in rural areas were more aware of the structural inequalities and participated in social activism. When it comes to organizing the Dalit women in the country, the Dalit Mahila Federation was constituted. In 1945 in Nagpur. Consequently, the 'All India Untouchable Women's Conference' critiqued the agenda of the Women's organization and underscored the need for a separate organization of untouchable women. (Pawar & Moon 2000: 80). Sharmila Rege in 'Writing Caste/Writing Gender '(2006), described how caste identity consciousness developed in the 1980s. Bahujan and Dalit feminists criticized mainstream Indian feminism as unmarked feminism/Brahminical feminism which ignored the intersectionalities of caste, class, religion, and so forth with gender. Thus, Dalit standpoint feminism emerged embracing the marked feminism and questioning the casteless gender and genderless caste of mainstream feminist and caste movements. Over time consciousness of Dalit women against the Savarna oppression has been raised. Nirmala (1987), Pawar & Moon (2000) stated that many writings by Dalit women began to appear on lack of access to water, the humiliation suffered by Dalit students in schools, contraception as a responsibility of both male and female, inter-caste marriages, and so forth. In the 1990s several websites dealing with Dalit Women's issues gave impetus to the movement, namely, Dalit Women Caucus (DWC) and 'Savari' an online platform where Dalit and Bahujan women converse, Round Table India, and so forth were started. Young Dalit Feminists formed, 'Mahila Sansad later shaped a forum by the name 'Samavadini –

Dalit Stree Sahitya Maanch' a literary platform to bring the narratives of Dalit women. This forum marks the early beginnings of the Dalit Feminist Literary movement and a platform for the diverse voices from within the communities to emerge and present the Dalit Women's Standpoint.

Women at the grassroots level from disadvantaged backgrounds such as Adivasi/tribal communities were forerunners of feminist movements in India. Notably, the 'Chipko movement' meaning hugging the tree drew worldwide attention in the early 1980s. Against the deforestation in Uttarakhand, many women from disadvantaged backgrounds protested against cutting down forest trees which are their main livelihood. This, initiative by women at the grassroots in India grabbed attention at the global level and can be considered as a significant factor in developing the trend of ecofeminism in India. Tribal women took leadership roles during the famine agitation of Shahada in Maharashtra in 1972. Women got organized into groups and led revolutionary protests against domestic violence, rape, and economic exploitation of tribals by the upper caste/class population. These movements of tribal women transformed the symbols of Indian women's traditional place in the kitchen into weapons." (Everett 1993:23). Thus, many feminist movements were led by Indian women from disadvantaged backgrounds such as agrarian commercialization, polarization, increased urban unemployment among the educated, and dowry. This notes that the feminist movement brought together different kinds of attitudes toward women, from feminist to anti-patriarchal to anti-capitalist to utopian patriarchalism (Ray 1999:125).

Muslim women's feminism/Islamic feminism also is crucial in representing the feminist movements led by women from minority backgrounds in India. After the verdict of the Indian Judiciary on the Shah Bano case in 1985-86 that Muslim women cannot claim long-term post-divorce maintenance from their husbands by ruling out the Muslim personal law, Muslim women's consciousness was raised. This denial of Muslim women's right to

maintenance after divorce was a major compromise on the part of the state on women's issues during this period. (Ghosal 2005: 802). Consequently, Muslim women realized the fact that mainstream Indian feminism is dominated by upper caste/class Hindu women. They felt the need for a separate feminist strand of Muslim women for equality and seeking justice. Jones (2024) states, Islamic feminists in India as part of a 'robust international movement' including fellow female activists in Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, South Africa, and North America. Muslim feminism aspirations first, a claim to render gender struggles in Islam equivalent to gender struggles represented by historical feminism and entitles to know Islam and the encounters of Muslim women well enough to advocate solutions to their problems (Seedat 2013:42). As a result, many organizations all over India namely Awaaz-i-Niswaan (1987), Muslim Women's Rights Network (MWRN) (1999), Muslim Women's Forum (2000) Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, (2007), and so forth emerged campaigning the rights of Muslim women in terms of family, health, education, and so forth. Thus, Muslim feminists in India critiqued the mainstream Savarna-dominated feminism and claimed for narratives of minority women such as Muslim, Dalit, and Tribal communities. Thus, the genealogy of the feminist movement in India emerges as post-colonial feminism from critiquing mainstream Western feminism. Eventually, mobilizing women across the nation with their movements and organizational works established feminist epistemologies in a country that has a strong threshold of patriarchy. Consequently, based on the intersectional lines marked feminism such as Dalit, Tribal, and Muslim feminism emerged that challenged the mainstream Savarna feminism.

Moving to the education of Indian women there have been unending struggles as women were expected under the carpets of patriarchy. Dominated by patriarchal structures Indian women were mostly relegated to the domestic spheres for centuries with no agency in public discourse. During the anti-colonial movement, the nationalists/reformists took the

women question in society and education, particularly after James Mill observed Indian women through his writing 'Civilisational Critique of India' (1817). He showcased the downgraded status of Indian women in all social spheres, concluding that India is inferior in the hierarchy of civilization. Thus, reformists of national struggle-initiated measures to develop women's education in India. Though women's education received support in the new age construction of womanhood, it was the conventional image of woman as wife and mother, simply garnished by education and some Victorian womanly ideals borrowed from the West, that was projected as 'ideal' for the 'good' Indian woman (Chakraborty, 2009:88). East India company occupied with business agenda, the social problems of India society were not given heed as a result the surveys carried by Madras, Bombay, and Bengal presidencies showed no presence of women in the schools. Positive interest in Indian female education was shown by Charles Wood in his Dispatch in 1854 who advocated for female education in India and appreciated who actively encouraged the idea. Consequently, in 1882 the first commission of education in India that is the Hunter Commission was appointed by lord Ripon to evaluate the status of education. This commission report stated the progress of female education at the primary level but there is advancement in secondary and higher education. The commission came up with radical measures to support female education with government funds to all female schools and special financial assistance to the female schools that taught English medium education, and special prizes and scholarships were announced to female students for their educational advancement. Thus, Indian families encouraged their daughters to enter the educational setup the with efforts of Britishers, reformers/nationalist Indian men, in the 19th century.

By the 20th century college going women students increased with the effect of globalization trends and mushrooming of educational institutions with government subsidies. Chandramukhi and Kadambini were the first women graduates in India. Cornelia Sorabji was the first Indian woman to study law

abroad at Oxford University. Annie Beasant the Western feminist scholar active in the suffragist movement played a key role in forming the Women Indian Association in 1917. Margaret Cousins feminist of Ireland played a significant role in forming the All-India Women Conference in 1927 based on mainstream Western feminist ideologies and promoted the expansion of Indian women's education. In the context of educated Indian women, the accomplishments of Pandita Ramabai in Western India, Subbalakshmi in Madras, and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain among the Muslim women in Bengal are noteworthy (Chakraborty, 2009:89). By 1992 National Commission on Women was set up to deal with the issues like dowry, violence against women, women political participation, and so forth. The Radhakrishna Commission which is also known as the University Commission set up in 1948 under the guidance of Sarvepalli Radhakrishna is worth mentioning in the exposure of women's status at the higher educational levels and claims that women should have equal rights in university spaces as men. Thus, by the time of the 2nd century educated women emerged with university exposure.

Some of the progressive measures taken up by the government of India in promoting women's education and higher education particularly can be the five-year plans. The first five-year plan (1951-56) witnessed a shift from empowerment to welfare measures. Coming to the women's education welfare measures, the third, fourth, and fifth five-year plans consecutively from 1961 to 74 stressed more on the importance of promoting women's education (Pande 2018:10). As pointed out by Rekha (2025), by the 1990s the gap in women education slowly got filled up. The national education programs in 1992, The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) (2001), the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (2000), and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) (2004) schemes and National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) (2003), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015) and so forth promoted the compulsory women education largely in Indian context. Thus, to conclude women's presence in education in general and

higher education in particular can be observed, through various feminist movements and government interventions in the global world and India. This particular study aims to explore the Indian university which is dominated by the traditional patriarchal structures and casteist forces holding the ideological continuity of the repressive Vedic praxis even in contemporary times on the lines of gender and intersectionality.

1.2. Statement of the Research Problem

Gender inequalities and Gender biases persist in higher education. Only a century ago, women were forbidden from seeking degrees in most universities across the world. Women seeking a role in academia faced and continue to face difficulties at every stage, from admission to post-doctoral fellowships to hiring to tenure. Both women and the belief that they belong in universities have infiltrated the academic system and the situation has greatly improved. Universities as academic institutions across the globe are seen as social spaces with the potential to transform the lives of individuals and society eventually towards the framework of sustainable equality. In India, particularly university education is considered a vital agency of social mobility in the Indian higher education system. In this context, Indian university is broadly viewed as a ‘social institution of reform’ that could preclude categorical inequalities based on gender, race, class, caste, sexuality, ethnicity, and so forth. In this context though the contribution of university education to the upliftment of the Indian nation on egalitarian grounds is immense.

According to the All-India Higher Education (AISHE) survey 2021-22, the registered number of universities is 1,168 out of which 240 are central and 445 state universities. Colleges include 45,473, and standalone institutions number is 12,002. There are 23 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), and the National Institute of Technology (NITs) 31. Exclusively for women,

there are 17 universities. The gross enrolment ratio of women increased to 28.5 percent by 2021-22 more than the male gross enrolment ratio whose percentage increased only by 4.6 percent. The enrolment ratio of scheduled caste females is 26 percent, the scheduled tribe percentage is 20.9, and the minority female presence is 38 percent. Thus, from 2015-22 the overall increase of scheduled caste women enrolment increased to 51 percent, 65.2 percent in the case of scheduled tribe women, and minority female students' percentage increased to 42.3 percent. The social category of trans students has not been added yet. The scenario of the overall presence of Indian women students in higher education is increasing and quite impressive when observed in terms of numbers. However, according to the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) 2024, the extent of gender-based gaps in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health; employment; survival, and political empowerment, India ranked 129 out of 146 countries which is alarming. Thus, it is the need of the hour to discuss the glass-ceilings erected in the qualitative representation of women in all spheres and especially in universities. As social spaces have their own manifestations and power politics in reproducing the existing conventional regressive notions and praxis.

Coming to the context of women student lived experiences in university spaces contemporarily, the hashtag # trend is taking place across the world and in India expressing protests against sexual harassment through social media platforms. One such trend can be notable the # MeToo movement. Coined by Afro-American scholar Tarane Burkey in 2006 advocating black women's rights against sexual harassment. #MeToo denoted to the List of Sexual Harassment Accused (LoSHA) in India. A law student and Dalit feminist Raya Sarkar circulated a Google spreadsheet from an anonymous source and posted on Facebook listing out the names of male academicians and scholars responsible for sexual harassment both in Indian and foreign universities in 2018 (Lukose 2018: 45). This was disturbing and raised consciousness for safe academic spaces for Indian women. The caste

apartheid in Indian universities was also shared by young Dalit feminists on social media platforms. This shows the generational tension between older and younger feminists emerges from a politics of location shaped by struggles about caste and transformations of Indian university spaces (Lukose 2018: 46). In 2022, Muslim girl students are barred from attending college lectures as they wore hijab (head scarf) traditionally worn by them based on religion. It was stated by the college administration that wearing a hijab is against the college uniform code and when these female students protested, they were opposed by the administration and fellow girl students from other religions. The rape attempt by a professor on a female student at the University of Hyderabad in 2022 was a shocking incident. The deliberate attack on a Dalit trans woman student at the University of Hyderabad in 2024 by allegedly burning her clothes in hostel premises presents the atrocities based on transphobia in university spaces. Therefore, these scenarios in the contemporary higher educational spaces bring to light the fact that though the participation of women in educational spaces increased comparatively the rising issues against women based on their intersectional social categories such as Dalit, Muslim, tribal, trans and so forth need much more research to understand how far India reached in providing qualitative university experience to all students notwithstanding the categorical inequalities based on gender, caste, class, religion, sexuality, and so forth. This can be considered as the major research gap in Indian Sociology and the fields of Sociology of Gender, and Sociology of Education precisely.

Therefore, it is significant to understand how gender plays a key role in shaping Indian women's overall university experiences owing to their varied intersectional identities of gender, caste, religion, sexuality, first-generation status, and so forth. Presenting university campus as a social entity includes both academic and non-academic spaces. Within the sphere of academic spaces comes classroom and laboratories. Therefore, critical analysis of these academic spaces facilitates scope for an alternative perspective on

how shared academic spaces are becoming a site of marginalization in terms of institutionalizing the gender stereotyped notions and conduct. Along with academic spaces, non-academic spaces and on campus also are crucial in either promoting or hampering qualitative experiences of women students. Hence, deeper analysis on the non-academic public places on campus and non-academic organizational set up such as student political organizations is need of the hour to explicitly capturing everyday gender based social realities of women students and the manifestations of gender power relations. Thus, these interventions paves path for active gender inclusive university spaces.

Hence, this study enables dialogue between the fields of Sociology of Gender and Sociology of Education, where both the aspects of gender and university have not been given much importance. In India, overpowered by the hegemonic intelligentsia, the established conventional glass-ceilings and the nature of universities in embracing diversity and inclusivity come under contestation. Therefore, going beyond much glorified quantitative analysis on the presence of women students in universities, this study attempts to unravel the lived experiences of women students by demarginalizing the intersection of categorical inequalities based on gender, caste, first-generation status, religion, and sexuality. This is a framework of the enmeshed lived experience regarding inclusion, alongside exclusion and discrimination with a focus on gender and intersectionality. Thus, this study hopes to bring together important perspectives in the fields of the Sociology of Gender, Sociology of Education, Women's Studies, Social Stratification, Social inclusion and exclusion studies, Discrimination and Inequality, Intersectionality, and so forth.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How different is university campus from other social spaces in its form and content and what are the distinct ways of interacting with other social categories?
2. Are shared academic spaces such as university classroom and scientific laboratories one gender dominated? What are the everyday social realities of women students with multi-layered identities?
3. What is the impact of first-generation status in experiencing university campus which is regulated by dominant habitus and how intergenerational social mobility can be achieved?
4. How gender repressive attitudes are manifested and reproduced in the public social places of campus empirically in contrast to the theoretical expectations?
5. Is sprinkled representation of women students exhibited in student political organizations even contemporarily and what is being promoted politics of empowerment or politics of segregation in terms of gender?

1.4.Objectives of the Study

2. To articulate gender on university campus differently from other social spaces in its form, and content and its distinct ways of interacting with other social categories uniquely
3. To understand shared space of classroom and scientific laboratories as gender fields by emphasizing on the language of discrimination and culture of silence entailed by women students grounded on varied social location

4. Presenting dominant habitus versus acquired cultural capital in the dissensions and negotiations of first-generation learners whose educational status is a vital categorical inequality
5. To critically examine gendered non-academic spaces of the campus in terms of institutionalizing space socio-power dynamics curtailing the expected gender freedom
6. Exploring the nuanced nature and praxis of the student political organizations viewing female students as mere symbols of tokenism pertaining politics of segregation

2. Research Methodology

Formulated on the grounds of feminist research, this study engages with women students from diverse social categories and narrates their experiences in the Indian university spaces. Feminist research is a process for multiple voices, perspectives, and stories, while simultaneously shaping knowledge that can be shared with a variety of communities (Ropers & Winters 2011:680). Therefore, in terms of methodology, this is an ethnographic study using qualitative research methods to analyze the data collected from the field. A mixed method design has been formulated and the purposive sampling method was used as a research strategy. Questionnaires, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions, documents, and audio recordings have been employed as tools for data collection. The fieldwork was carried out at a prominent university in South India. About forty registered students of this campus from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and a sizeable number of women students from different student organizations were selected as respondents. Thus, personal narratives of women students in the university including both academic and non-academic experiences based on their intersectional identities have been analyzed to develop the theoretical perspectives of this paper.

1.2.1. Selection of the Research Field

Contemporarily, women and scholars on gender issues are accused too easily when speaking about discrimination, language of victimhood, and exploitation at the expense of empowerment and agency. Surprisingly, speaking out about gender discrimination, inequalities, sexual violence, and so forth implies a lack of agency (Lukose 2018:38). This insight speaks volumes on the current scenario, where the challenges faced by women in general and in educational institutions particularly are being overridden with the general assumptions that 'not anymore.' Also, discussing these issues is considered old-fashioned with no agency as times have changed. This understanding and the surging number of unfavorable instances of women students and women students from disadvantaged sections on university campuses in India is the grounding motivation for the selection of the research topic on gender and university education.

A prominent university located in Hyderabad was selected as the field site. Firstly, Located in Telangana state the Deccan part, Hyderabad is the capital of Andhra Pradesh and after bifurcation capital of Telangana. Founded by Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah in 1591 was a princely state until it got merged in the newly independent India in 1951. The region has a long history of women's revolution. Chakali Ailammas's fight against the Nizam is a notable revolution in the 1940s paving the path for the Telangana people movement. With the sixth largest urban economy in India currently, it is the fastest-growing metropolitan state in India. Hyderabad is the hub for technological advancement and has numerous educational institutions attracting the young population from all over the country. Central University of Hyderabad, Moulana Azad National University (MANU), English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Osmania University, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Hyderabad, Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad(IIT), International Institute of Information Technology (IIT), Hyderabad, Birla

Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) Pilani, Indian School of Business (ISB), Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), National Academy of Legal Studies and Research (NALSAR) Law college, Nizam Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS), and so forth are the major higher educational institutions in Hyderabad. Most of these institutions are in the top hundred in India as ranked by the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), by the Ministry of Education.

The university selected is one of the top three universities in India, and a premiere institution in South India. The campus has a diverse student population from all over Indian states and socio-economic backgrounds. The presence of women students also is on par with the male population to an extent. It has been ranked among ten higher educational institutions in India with quality teaching and research. According to global higher education analyst Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), this ranked top five in teaching Sociology in the world. Apart from academics, the university is known for student mobilization through political organizations on campus. There has been wide protest on several issues such as gender, caste, religion, sexuality, and so forth. Thus, with the vibrant academic and non-academic ambiance the university offers as an important site of learning in showcasing the dichotomous nature of university spaces in terms of both inclusion and exclusion.

1.2.2. Research Design and Sample Size

The Study followed mixed methodology using both quantitative and followed by qualitative methodological protocols. The explanatory sequential mixed method design has been formulated which has two phases. At first, the investigator/researcher collects and analyses quantitative data, and, then, qualitative data are collected and analyzed to obtain explanations of the qualitative results (Creswell & Clark 2007: 2011). Purposive and snowball sampling was used in the study as a sampling strategy. The purposive sampling method identifies individuals who are especially well-

informed or experienced in the context and are selected for the study. Eventually, through the snowball sampling process, individuals were identified through a chain of networks from the existing participants of the study. Therefore, forty registered women students from undergraduate, post-graduation, and doctoral studies from both social sciences and natural sciences disciplines have been selected as sampling strategies. The respondents were from diverse socio-economic backgrounds such as Scheduled caste, Scheduled Tribe, Muslim women students, trans students, and from other backward castes (OBC), and Savarna backgrounds. A considerable number of women students were selected from different student organizations namely SFI/AISA (All India Student Alliance), ABVP (Akhila Bharatiya Vidya Parishad), ASA (Ambekar Student Association), and a few were neutral in their political orientation. Also, women students who have stayed on campus for more than two years and are aware of ongoing issues at the university were selected purposively to get detailed data.

1.2.3. Tools of Data Collection

The study is aimed to understand the intersectional experiences of women students in university spaces to promote more inclusive campus environments. The research is sensitive to context and participants, attempting to adapt and adopt methods that ensure an understanding of the gendered experiences within social institutions. These tools of data collection are useful for eliciting and hearing the collective and unique voices and perspectives of participants and also for understanding gendered experiences (Ropers & Winters 2011:685). Therefore, the study employed a variety of data collection tools such as Questionnaires, in-depth Interviews, Documents, and audio recordings. These tools aided in a vivid

understanding of the field and the respondents of the study in meeting the objectives of the study.

a. Questionnaire

The questionnaire includes a series of questions to gather information about the details of respondents, their opinions, and so forth. In the study, the questionnaire was used to collect the details on the socio-economic, educational, and political orientations of the respondents.

The draft of the questionnaire was prepared before going to the field with multiple discussions and recommendations from my supervisor. Forty questionnaires were collected presenting the socioeconomic background, educational qualification, and political orientations of campus-based student organizations from the purposively selected respondents.

b. In-depth Interview

All research involves, as its basis, a relationship, an interaction, between the researcher and the researched (Stanley and Wise 1991:280). Therefore, by interacting with the respondents forty in-depth interviews were collected. Employing qualitative in-depth interviews with open-ended questions the lived experiences of women students based on their intersectional identities have been documented both in academic and non-academic contexts. By obtaining the consent of the respondents' flexible timings have been chosen for the interview. Mostly, after the daily class/work schedule the evening time has been preferred in the hostel premises. Since in-depth interviews have been adopted it was time-consuming and sometimes it used to last more than three hours. Due to time constraints, the interview schedules have been split into two or three sessions based on the availability of the respondents and their time. Traveling through the framework of the research questions, the respondents have been encouraged to narrate their

experiences freely without any interruption. When the discussion goes out of the topic, they have been guided into the topic without making it obvious. Thus, with the flexibility of the interview framework and engaged discussions detailed rich first-hand data has been collected.

c. Documents

Considering as the fundamental for any classified study, documents are principally regarded as evidence sources which include research works and reports, journals and publications, survey reports, contracts, and so forth. The studies conducted earlier and the reports of the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD), Surveys on All India Higher Education (AISHE) University Grants Commission, (UGC) reports, annual reports on the statistics of the University in its official website provided the second-hand information for the thesis formation.

d. Audio Recordings

As all the data collected cannot be written on the respective period, audio recordings act as an important tool for data collection. While conducting the in-depth interviews consent of the respondents is taken before recording. This step has been taken only after the respondents became comfortable sharing their experiences. Also, considering the ethics of research the responses have not been recorded if the respondents are not comfortable. The data collected through this recording helped in going back to the narratives of the respondents whenever needed to develop an accurate conceptualization. Some of the interviews conducted in vernacular language were translated into English while analyzing the data.

e. Field Notes

While analyzing the data collected through in-depth interviews, field notes played a crucial role in noting down the narratives. Field notes have been an important part of my fieldwork journey and I carried it every day in the

field site while talking to the respondents. As all the shared data cannot be remembered during analysis the field notes come to aid to document the narratives. I made it a daily activity to organize the collected in fieldnotes after the interviews in an order every day. This habit helped me in the long run to effectively articulate nuanced details of the narratives which were later used to analyse the data and develop theoretical conceptualizations.

1.2.4. Methodological Challenges in the Field

Accessing the field and contacting the respondents was not very challenging. Through snowball sampling many respondents were identified and women students who are well aware and actively engaged in the ongoing campus events and student political organizations were selected. It has been conveyed that as many students from various departments such as social sciences, psychology, public health, and so forth conduct research on-campus students through questionnaires, students on campus will not give much heed to this whole process. Consequently, my going with the proposal to conduct interviews was not impressive and I had to contact and convince the respondents by stating the importance of the study through multiple attempts. Interacting with the respondents and talking about sensitive topics such as discrimination, sexual harassment, and more importantly internal politics of the student organizations was quite challenging. After continuous assurance of confidentiality and multiple interactive sessions, the respondents shared their experiences. This made me realize the importance and challenges involved in building the trust of the respondents which makes a research/researcher more authentic and reliable. As the study is on gender and intersectionality of caste, class, religion, first-generation status, and sexuality, some respondents from upper/class backgrounds expressed their animosity when issues on caste or

sexuality were raised. This scenario made me very conscious to frame the discussion without making the respondents uncomfortable. Out of all, identifying and interacting with trans students on campus was the utmost struggle as their presence is very less already, and they were not comfortable in expressing their identity openly. Thus, it took an ample amount of time to identify them and obtain their consent for the interview. Sometimes the interviews became emotional rides as the past experiences of hostility and discrimination came up which was quite disturbing for both the researcher and respondents and the discussions were halted. Thus, conducting in-depth interviews was time-consuming but worth employing which helped in forming an ethnographic study with authentic first-hand information.

1.2.5. Analysis of the Data

The analysis of the data in the study involved thematic classification and organizing the data toward theoretical conceptualizations based on the objectives of the study. Firstly, by transcribing the responses and organizing them in a sequence the overview of the study has been framed. The collected data on academic experiences, first-generation status, and non-academic spaces. And student political organizations of the women students are identified and documented. Thus, after categorizing and coding the narratives chapters were developed with theoretical perspectives and the findings have been conceptualized into sections and subsections on the lines of gender and intersectional experiences of the women students on the university campus.

1.2.6. Research Ethical Considerations and Conflicts of Interest

The ethics of research has been followed strictly while conducting the study. I have submitted a reference letter given my supervisor stating my research work and the purpose of the visit to the university officials before entering the field. As the in-depth interviews enabled to collect the sensitive issues

from the respondents' oral consent has been taken. It has been clearly stated that participation in research is purely voluntary and it is for my doctoral thesis. The interviews were conducted without disturbing the daily schedule of respondents with flexibility of timings. Confidentiality and anonymity are assured while recording with the consent of the respondents. Pseudonyms were used in place of the real names of the respondents in the text. Thus, ethical considerations were followed in the study to benefit all those involved.

There are no conflicts of interest as part of the study.

Thus, Equipped with these theoretical questions and research methodologies this doctoral thesis aims to articulate what it means to be a women student in the masculinist self-fashioned university setup. Precisely speaking, how it feels to sail through both the academic and non-academic social spheres being a Dalit or Tribal or Muslim or Trans women student, and so forth in the Indian university campus from a feminist perspective. Therefore, the core agenda is to expose the dual nature of the so-called empowering bodies of campus to reimagine the egalitarian Indian higher education institutions in framing inclusive policies and promoting equality. In concluding remarks, the study unknots the overall experiences of women students by knotting their tales of discrimination and marginalization from bottom to top approach in the Indian university context.

1.2.7. Chapterization of the Thesis

Focusing on university, gender and intersectionality, the outline of my doctoral thesis consists of seven chapters. Weaved along the lines of socially constructed identities and their intersections, introductory chapter presents the theoretical perspectives and methodological protocols respectively. The second chapter exclusively deals with the classroom experiences of the women students solely stressing on their intersectional

identity. The third chapter captures the lived experiences of women research scholars in the one-gendered and Savarna-dominated scientific laboratories by stressing on the gender politics at play in the social formulation and dual oppression. Fourth chapter presents how caste acts as an important habitus on the university campus for students based on their familial educational background of first and generation status and their social mobility through acquired cultural capital. The fifth chapter is on the non-academic spaces of the university and the dialogue of women students with the hegemonic gendered public campus spaces. The sixth chapter is on university student political organizations. This presents how Indian women students fall in the same line when it comes to gender stereotypes and subjugation irrespective of the varying political ideological stances of student organizations accordingly, their potential in overthrowing the inegalitarian codes of conduct on university set up is explored. Final chapter includes conclusion, limitations, and future implications of the study. The overview of each chapter is discussed in detail briefly as follows:

Chapter one: ‘Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives and Methodological Procedures’ An introduction with the historical background of women's entry into the educational setup through various strands of feminism is explained. Firstly, three waves of feminism are described followed by intersectionality which describes black, queer, post-colonial, Dalit, Tribal, and Muslim feminist theoretical perspectives. The second section is on research methodology. Methodological protocols are explained which state the research design and sampling method, tools of data collection employed such as Questionnaires, in-depth Interviews, Documents, audio recordings, and Field Notes. Methodological challenges, data analysis, and ethical considerations are specified to give a detailed framework for the study.

Chapter Two: ‘Common Space and Uncommon Chronicles: Exploring the Accounts of Gender in University Classroom’. This chapter problematizes university as a shared space that has been historically producing an

uncommon chronicle of gender, and of other categorical inequalities in India. The encounters of Indian women students are traversed deeper as the academic spaces have their codes of conduct and expected gender conformity owing to their socio-cultural context. Thus. The whole dialogue of gender is displayed through the lens of the intersectional framework of gender, class, caste, religion, sexuality, and so forth. Thus, the social dynamics of the classroom are dealt with by articulating the enforced culture of silence limiting the agency of women students in general and disadvantaged women students specifically.

Chapter Three: ‘Laboratory as a Site of ‘Gendered Minoritization’: Accounts of Gender Discrimination and Exclusion on Indian Campus.’ This chapter proposes to examine and theorize the idea of ‘gendered minoritization’ on campus by looking at laboratory spaces as sites of contestation. The laboratory space, which is predominantly male-dominated in its social composition, wherein women research scholars experience distinct forms of exclusion from social/academic networks, undergo covert and overt discrimination, and conflicts between personal and professional lives are critically examined. Thus, it tries to capture the lived experiences of women research scholars in the one-gendered world and Savarna-dominated scientific laboratories by stressing on the gender politics at play in the social formulation and dual oppression based on caste that curtails the rights and agency of minority women students.

Chapter Four: ‘The Caste of Campus Habitus: Caste and Gender Encounters of the First-generation Dalit Women Students in Indian Universities.’ In this chapter, the importance of first-generation status as an important intersectional identity in shaping educational experiences along with other categorical experiences is stressed. The encounters of First-generation Dalit women students and how caste forms a habitus in empowering certain sections of students and marginalizes others has been articulated in this chapter. The educational trajectory of first-generation

Dalit women students, the unique challenges they confront in the process of learning, survival strategies of negotiations, and social agencies in contesting the conventional glass ceilings through the acquired cultural capital are significant lines of inquiries this chapter aims to cover.

Chapter Five: ‘Theoretical Equality and Empirical Discrimination: Gender Realities of Non-academic Spaces on University Campus’. The chapter presents an in-depth overview of the women students in Indian university public places Against the backdrop of gender, compared to the scattered presence of women students in Indian universities earlier, contemporarily there is a surge in their number quantitatively. However, in the empirical reality university education has its paradoxes. Non-academic spaces and how gender identity is negotiated by the women students which gives them a sense of belonging are explored by drawing important observations on how public and private dichotomy based on gender is existent on campus. To what extent women and other gender identity students are receiving university exposure non-academically? And how do other social identities contribute to shaping the non-academic experiences and negotiations?

Chapter Six: ‘Divided by Ideology and United by Gender Stereotypes: Debating Politics of Representation and Tokenism in Student Politics.’ By critically looking at student activism on campus this chapter aims to uncover the fact that student activism on campus has long been a masculine domain with a little or almost negligible presence of women student leaders in university politics leading to lopsided gender realities. Therefore, the nature and praxis of student political organizations in the university set-up have been presented by mainstreaming gender. How egalitarian are they as shown in the front line? Is analysed for a better university space. Therefore, the deterministic perceptions of the masculine student political organizations and the journey of women students as members and leaders of the organizations have been discussed by showcasing internal politics.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion. With these above-mentioned chapters, the institutional inequalities and lived realities in Indian higher education form the crux of the study by mainstreaming marginalized women students. At the end of the chapter, the limitations and future implications of the study are included widening the scope of the study.

Chapter 2

Common Space and Uncommon Chronicles: Exploring the Accounts of Gender in University Classroom

Introduction and Context

Gender plays a key role in shaping the experiences of women students on the university campus. Traditionally, women have been excluded from attaining education owing to varied socio-cultural and religious perceptions. Pursuing higher education in universities indeed provided sufficient exposure to ideas towards liberating women from the shackles of traditional patriarchal structures. In the 19th century, the first phase of feminism perceived that higher education for women is not only for knowledge acquisition but, might also prepare them for marriage, child-rearing, and community support (Howe 1977: 14). In the 1900s the suffragist phase is on drive for equality. It is argued that the education of women must be no different from the education of men (Thomas, 1965, p. 152). It is claimed that in the 1890s and 1900s women students were able to attend University lectures provided they had the personal consent and goodwill of the lecturers, also only certificates of proficiency were granted without degrees in Universities like Cambridge and London colleges, and so forth. Mary R. S. Creese (1991:275). In Smith College of Oberlin, women students were expected to carry out domestic chores in return for instruction (Conway 1972:242). These instances were hardly consciousness-raising and a radical phase of feminism emerged where male hegemony was challenged

critically. It is argued that higher education is within the purview of patriarchal knowledge, that is, history as males have seen it or known it, or science, with priorities established by males. Let this “received heritage” be refused which has its cultural bias (Howe, 1977:20). Thus, feminists such as Beauvoir (1949), Harding (1986), & Collins (1990), and so forth addressed and above all questioned the women’s subordination to men and portrait family and educational institutions as an important site of social reproduction which communicates the binary opposition of femininity and masculinity through socialization and gender stereotypes.

Black feminism emerged in the 1970s and 80s. It is claimed that though the marginalization of women in higher education has been challenged, it comprised white women's experiences solely neglecting racism. Feminists like Angela Davis (1981), and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argued that women of color face multi-dimensional marginalities based on gender, class, race, and other social divisions in higher educational institutions which needs deeper inquiry. It is argued that though white women are “second in sex to men,” they are “first in race to minorities” (Junn 2017: p.346). Accordingly, the term “Intersectionality” was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 and focused on diverse forms of oppression when gender and race intersect. Post-modern feminist theory incorporated the intersectional experiences of women based on race, class, caste, religion, region, and so forth. As stated by Spivak (1988) females as subaltern is even more in shadow in the Indian context as the persisting social inequalities present in the society, are being reproduced in the higher educational institutions such as universities, instead of eradicating them (p.28). Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India can be traced back to 1800-1990 through accounts of participation in various campaigns and struggles both historically and in the contemporary period. Mohanty (1986), in her essay “Under Western Eyes” critiqued the mainstream western feminism claiming that the differences of colonial women and their experiences has been overlooked. Post-colonial feminists such as Mohanty

(1986), Spivak (1988), Sumi Krishna (2007), Nivedita Menon (2012), Gita Chadha (2015), and so forth began to address the structural and cultural barriers that prevent women from being properly represented and excelling academically. Thus, with the historical patriarchal domination in India, its manifestations vary across caste, class, and region. In response, women have evolved a variety of coping strategies, and some women have struggled actively against their oppression (Everett 199: 18).

The university as a shared space that has historically been producing an uncommon chronicle of gender, and of other categorical inequalities, in India needs to be problematized. And how notions of popular culture concerning gender are getting institutionalized needs to be analysed. Hence, this article attempts to present the whole dialogue of gender through a different lens when observed through the intersectional framework of gender, class, caste, religion, sexuality, and so forth which will be discussed further

1. Classroom as Gender field on University

There have been long battles for Indian women's entry into university education. The Hindu tradition excluded women from formal education. Manu, the 200 BC lawgiver, declared women to be unfit for learning. The measures of control of female sexuality have undergone several changes since the post-Vedic period, yet there is an ideological continuity that affects women's higher education. Restricted to the private sphere traditionally and responsible for the honor of their families, female seclusion and gender segregation were historically social practices in India (Basu 1999: 4). The prominent sociological concern of securing a normal place in society for women, both as citizens and as women, and the crucial role of education and educational institutions was put forth by the university/Radhakrishna committee after independence in 1948-49. Women's participation in university education geared up after Globalisation and universities indeed provided women exposure to ideas towards

liberating themselves from the shackles of traditional patriarchal structures (Beteille 2005:3380). However, despite the achieved progress over the years, patriarchal oppressive attitudes continue to be major glass ceilings for women to climb up the academic ladder.

One of the respondents from the field stated as follows on how women students are perceived by faculty and fellow male classmates:

One of our faculty always says to women students that ‘our society has great traditions and values and the honor lies in women. Women are like flowers; they have to be submissive and cover themselves fully and put ‘Bindi’(dot on the forehead) which doubles their beauty. I prefer to supervise women students mostly as they will not talk back and follow whatever is told, unlike male students. He addresses female students as ‘ente’ and ‘pove’(calling disrespectfully). I was alarmed, as I thought university spaces would be more progressive and empower women students. More hypocrisy among faculty is seen who talk about equality at the forefront and expect women students to be meek¹.

One of the respondents narrates her experiences with fellow male classmates as follows:

Male students in our classroom call girl students ‘Chikni; (chick). When I gave a presentation, one of our male classmates said ‘Women should be beautiful, you look so ugly,’ I felt that am merely seen as a biological being instead of getting appreciated for the work done. If I counter their statements they say ‘Is she behaving like a girl? we have to teach her a lesson.’ I feel these men as more

¹ Sakshi narrated her classroom experiences on March 17, 2023 at 5 pm. (Real names in the narratives are replaced with Pseudonyms to maintain research ethics of privacy).

dangerous as they feel entitled to say whatever they want to girl students².

This explains how shared space of classroom is becoming a gender field. As explained by Bourdieu (1986), 'fields' are the various social and institutional arenas in which people express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital (cited by Gaventa 2003:6). Different fields are relatively autonomous but structurally homologous: all the fields are subsumed by the social field, which is in turn subsumed by the field of power notwithstanding university classroom settings. From the given narratives it can be understood that the classroom as a shared space has become a gender field where unequal structures are being reproduced considering males as natural occupants of the space and women being the other. Historical connotations of women being symbols of culture, purity, and honor persist even in contemporary times. With the existing gendered power relations, women students are subjected to a language of discrimination where they are ideally considered to be submissive, and regressive codes of conduct such as practicing certain dress codes, less interaction with opposite gender, are expected to limit their liberating experience of university. University education is the most legitimate means for sustaining or justifying the existing social order, as well as changing or overthrowing it to promote diversity and inclusion (Deshpande & Zacharias 2013: 16), Thus, university academic spaces are hampering women students in enjoying the freedom to explore new social relations and construct a new self-identity by justifying the conventional masculinist praxis.

3. Politics of 'Silencing': Social dynamics of University Classroom

² On April 12, 2023 at 2pm, the respondent shared about encountered humiliations in the classroom set up.

In universities, social location can be seen as an important factor for improved academic experiences. The caste system is unique to Indian society. For centuries Dalits have been considered untouchables and the Tribal population was excluded from the normal livelihood. Both the castes were not allowed to attain education historically until the movements led by leaders like Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Komaram Bheem, Kanshi Ram, and so forth.

Centres of excellence in India have not opened up their doors to the non-elite until recently and have been dominated by the monopoly of privileged sections (Deshpande 2006: 140). Owing to the dichotomous nature of both exclusion and inclusion, male students from upper-caste social backgrounds are privileged and women, Dalits, and tribes are excluded and systematically marginalized in institutions of higher education. Indian universities, therefore, operate as the 'gatekeepers to the upper caste kingdom in India' as pointed out by Tharu et al. (1998: 2702). The condition of Dalit and tribal women students is even worse, as they lack what Pierre Bourdieu (1986) terms, the three forms of capital, namely, economic, social, and cultural capital and occupy the lower rank in the hierarchy of caste due to which encounter unfavourable experiences on campus. Some respondents from the field stated as follows regarding caste discrimination in academic spaces:

Our department is dominated by upper-caste faculty. Coming from the Savarna caste, my M.Phil. supervisor always had a down look upon me and treated other students from privileged backgrounds well. He did not finalize the topic until final year. In every annual research committee meeting I received 'humiliations more than suggestions' in front of the whole department. I got traumatized immensely and added, that he kept delaying my thesis submission. Unable to bear the negativity, I complained against him to the Dean of Social Welfare as our head of department was reluctant to act.

That too did not work and I had to approach the Vice-chancellor to my sorrow he said, 'Your supervisor is a sensible guy, maybe your work is the problem.' I was clueless and finally with the help of student leaders at university I submitted. Now, I got Ph.D. admission but, none of our faculty are ready to be my supervisor. See the perks of being a Dalit woman scholar³

A tribal woman student narrated her experiences as follows:

My classmates are from rich backgrounds. I tried to be friends with some Savarna girls, but they ignored me as they felt I was not modern enough. Faculty also show favouritism to students from high socio-economic backgrounds. I always try to engage in classroom discussions actively. One of our faculty addresses students with their caste surnames. Knowing my caste identity, he humiliated me saying, 'Higher education is not everyone's cup of tea' when I attempted to ask some doubt. I felt dis -disrespected and cried a lot. With this incident, I preferred to be silent during his lectures⁴.

These instances present the politics of silencing, where educational institutions reflect and reproduce wider societal patterns in which they exist and sometimes become sites of policing, and regulation of wider social meanings (Sanjakdar 2011: 10). Historically marginalized sections are systematically barred from attaining a university education and particularly women students carry with them an intense burden of discrimination and exclusion in university spaces as gender relations are intricately woven into a system of hierarchical social relations and prescriptive codes of conduct determined by gender stereotypes. The intersection of gender and caste

³ Nayani stated how caste plays a key role in academic engagement during the interview conducted on 11 January, 2023 at 5 pm.

⁴ Animosity experienced by the fellow student based on the identity of caste is shared by Smitha at 3pm on February 04, 2023.

stands out as a double-layered barricade for these women students aspiring to pursue higher education. As pointed in 'Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches' (1979) "your claim to equality which hurts them. They want to maintain the status quo. If you continue to accept your lowly status ungrudgingly, continue to remain dirty, filthy, backward, ignorant, poor, and disunited, they will allow you to live in peace. The moment you start to raise your level, the conflict starts." Though these women students are self-empowered and challenging the oppressive Savarna forces they are not being allowed to carry academics with self-respect as the agency of the marginalized is/will not tolerated by perpetrators of casteism. Also, the unwelcoming attitude of the Savarna women students displays the intersectional differences among women that cannot be undermined by the notion of 'universal sisterhood,' as projected by mainstream feminism.

4. 'I am not into Religion but, I am made to feel as a Muslim': Religion and Classroom Space

Women in India do not constitute an undifferentiated, homogenous category. The identities of class, gender, and religious community overlap to create discrimination and inequality in most spheres of life in India (Saeed 2005: 118). Indian Muslim women are among the poorest, educationally disenfranchised, economically vulnerable, and politically marginalized groups (Saeed 2005: 136). Muslim gatekeepers seek to uphold the banner of "Muslim women" and to preserve the sexual and political honour of the community (Mir, 2009: 250). At the turn of the 20th century, the topic of female education was taken up by Muslim communities. Muslim women also participated in campaigns against female seclusion and legal discrimination and played an active part in the emerging women's movement. This trend suffered a setback due to the social, political, and economic upheavals in, during, and after the partition of India in 1947. In the post-independence period, minority institutions such as Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Millia Islamia were established to promote education

among Muslims (Saeed 2005: 130). However, the presence of Muslim women students in universities is not adequate even in contemporary times. Additionally, despite Indian universities proclaiming to be secular institutions, they undergo hostile experiences. Some of the respondents shared their experiences of being a Muslim women student as follows:

One of our faculty used to say 'all Muslims are terrorists' very openly in the classroom. In Sociology class, we have discussions regarding societal issues. My classmates will be surprised when I express my opinion, as they feel '*hijabi*' girls are regressive. Whenever we discuss among ourselves also, they say 'Your religion itself is oppressing women, what you can do for society to change.' On the other hand, some of our fellow Muslim friends see a girl who is not wearing a *hijab* as not modest and boys will be very particular about this and say it is '*haram*' (sin). It is our choice; I do not get why people want to question whatever we do⁵.

Regarding the experiences of being targeted and ridiculed based on religion one of the respondents' states as follows:

Though I am from a Muslim family background, I do not follow religion much and will not wear a *burqa* 'and; *hijab*.' On the very first day in the classroom, I was shocked when one of my classmates asked my name, and when I told 'Fathima,' he just went off silently without uttering a word. Unless I convey, most of my friends do not know my religion as I will be in normal attire, but after knowing, the only thing they talk to me is about Islam. They ask me whether *burqa*-wearing women will not feel hot inside, and shout the Muslim prayer phrase '*Allah-hu-Akbar*' (god is greater) whenever they see

⁵ At 6pm on April 26, 2023, Nafeesa expressed the double burden of being a Muslim women student in university academic spaces.

me. I get irritated thinking, 'I am not into religion but, I'm made to feel like a Muslim' ⁶.

These narratives of the women students present the how Muslim women students are minoritized within minorities with preconceived notions making them vulnerable to the religious animosity existing in the university spaces. Stereotypical judgments by faculty and classmates present how the dominant majority "gazes" Muslim women into performing one-dimensionally religious, stereotypical "Muslim woman" identities and the other traces the social awkwardness that often occurs due to self-consciousness about being stereotyped Muslim students' edited to match stereotypes of a Muslim imagined community (Anderson, 1983:2). Muslim male students trying to do moral policing in academic places exhibits Muslim gatekeepers urge to uphold the banner of "Muslim women" and to preserve the sexual and political honour of the community (Mir, 2009: 250). which does not change irrespective of the university education exposure and mobility acquired. The Hijab controversy is continuing to bother Muslim women students which vividly presents their tussled positionality between the mainstream and Muslim convictions. Thus, Indian Muslim women students are discriminated against based on categorical inequality of religion nevertheless their resistance against the unequal conduct leads to minoritization of the minorities.

5. Sexuality and Seclusion in the Heteronormative Classroom Set-up

Gender does not come from a rooted identity somewhere inside us, but it only exists through our actions and the actions of others in society toward us. 'Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed' (Butler, 1988: 527). Heteronormativity assumes a binary conception of sex (male/female), corresponding gender expression (masculine/feminine), and a natural

⁶ Fathima on 18 March 2023 at 8 pm shared her experiences of humiliations and insults based on her social identity of religion and gender.

attraction to the opposite sex (heterosexuality). This 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler 1990:5) renders alternative sexualities 'other' and marginal. Academic spaces have been described as 'hegemonically heterosexual' (Batsleer 2012:6), characterised as oppressive and tense spaces where 'heterosexuality is the ever-present, regulating influence in classrooms' (Ryan 2016:79). With these conservative heteronormative societal notions individuals who does not confirm to this category such as Queer are subjected to social exclusion in general and institutional discrimination in Indian university classrooms.

Queer includes those who openly wear sexual identities like lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender and those who use Indigenous terms like hijras, kothis, panthis to describe themselves. In addition to this, there are regional identities of sexual non-conformity, such as jogappa and jogtas (Karnataka) and ganacharis (South India). These are to be included in the movement if the queer movement has to make a mark (Narain and Bhan 2005; Pande 2004 and Menon 2007). Srivastava (2014: 378). The transgendered people have played an important role in ancient Indian culture over millennia. They were portrayed in famous Hindu religious scriptures such as Ramayana and Mahabharata. They were given imperative roles in the royal courtyards of Mughal emperors. Their downfall came only at the onset of British rule during the 18th century when they were blacklisted and treated as criminal elements in society (Agoramoorthy & Hsu 2015:1451). It was in 2000, that the public sphere was captured by the LGBTQ community through gay pride walks across the country. LGBTQ activism challenges the hegemony of the heterosexual state and demands to protect them and their fundamental rights (Srivastava 2014: 378). In 2014, India's Supreme Court made a landmark ruling by declaring that trans-gendered people must have access to equal opportunity in society. Thus, attaining a university education was made possible for the queer students. Overcoming the challenges posed by society, queer students entering universities has to face homophobic experiences. Some of the respondents from the field stated as follows;

Joining the university made me happy and excited as I know the first gay poet 'Hoshang' is from here. I am bisexual. Based on appearance I look like a cisgender male. Therefore, nobody knows about my sexual identity. Many of my classmates used to like me as I looked good physically, spoke many languages, and was active in classroom discussions. Once, I shared my sexuality with one of our classmates, she spread the news to all. From then on, everybody started seeing me strangely and boys used to run away from me. I felt excluded. I always wanted to wear a skirt and apply kajal (mascara) to my eyes, but I do it only in my room as I feel that people will see me even more strangely and faculty will get to know, that scares me as they are the ones who give me marks⁷.

One of the respondents shared regarding the humiliations entailed as follows:

I got over the fear of my sexual identity at the university level after struggling for years by attending queer programs. I was very open about my identity with my classmates but not with faculty as I know many are homophobic. Some guys in our class used to taunt me by asking random questions like do you like him? Even if I see a boy normally. They make me uncomfortable by asking about my sexual history such as how guys can be together sexually, how it feels like, and so forth. I stopped talking to them and self-isolated to avoid unnecessary conflicts⁸.

These experiences of queer students emphasize the conventional heteronormative academic ambience that led to seclusion from their cisgender classmates as it is considered the norm in everyday academic

⁷ Regarding the unwelcoming behaviours from fellow classmates in heteronormative classroom set up is explained by Jiva on 12 January, 2023 at 8 pm.

⁸ Kishan narrated the homophobic experiences in the academic spaces from faculty and classmates on 20 March 2023 at 5 pm.

environments. Therefore, the need of the hour is, as questioned by Judith Butler (1988), Are there masculine and feminine traits that come exclusively with the genes that make us male and female? Is anything really "abnormal"? Isn't every behaviour just a performance, meant to please someone or something? Has to be reimagined in the Indian academic spaces which are secluding the already suppressed section of students who are abandoned in their families, educational opportunities, and eventually basic human life. Thus, contemporarily the ongoing debate on queer students' presence in university spaces is meagre with added humiliations and discriminatory metaphors with major emphasis on idealising heteronormative academic spaces.

Discussion

While climbing up the academic ladder with their intersectional social categories such as gender, caste, religion, sexuality, and so forth constantly either try to forge alliances or cut across each other. The shared space of university classroom and laboratories are producing uncommon chronicles of gender by normalizing the conventional regressive attitudes and practices. Precisely university classroom can be viewed as a gender field where male students are perceived to be natural occupants and women students as 'cultural others. With the existing gendered power relations, women students are subjected to a language of discrimination, expected to be submissive, and certain codes of conduct on dressing and conventional social behaviors are expected in classroom set up. With the imposed institutional inequalities, the lived realities of women students based on intersecting identities depicts the multi- fold oppression they entail in academic spaces. The social dynamics of classroom are actively producing politics of silencing concerning intersection of gender and caste. The Dalit and Tribal women students deprived of gender and caste privilege are becoming major targets of humiliations and exclusion from faculty and fellow classmates. Culture of silence is being imposed curtailing their

agency against caste based discriminatory attitudes and praxis in classroom settings. Religious animosity is observed in secular university spaces which is minoritizing the already minoritized Muslim women students. Muslim women students are gazed in single-dimension of religious beings by classmates and faculty. They are subjected to humiliations based religious practices such as wearing *hijab* (head scarf) and are judged by Muslim male students for not practicing the same placing them in tussled positionality. Based on the intersectionality of gender and sexuality, queer students are experiencing homophobic classroom Ambience. They are treated as 'abnormal beings' in classroom spaces for wearing their sexual identity openly. With the homophobic attitudes and negative slurs from faculty members and classmates' queer students are prone to self-isolate leading to seclusion of the suppressed in conventional academic spaces. Thus, the Indian women students' differences based on their intersecting identities of gender, caste, religion, sexuality, and so forth are traversing in the patriarchal one-gendered academic spaces of university.

Chapter 3

Laboratory as a Site of ‘Gendered Minoritization’: Accounts of Gender Discrimination and Exclusion on Indian Campus

Introduction and Context

Education as a social institution is academically and theoretically viewed as one of the most inclusive social spaces in representing students from diverse social backgrounds, and also a vital agency of social mobility. The purpose of university education is the achievement of a particular expansion of outlook, turn of mind, habit of thought, and capacity for social and civic interaction (Newman 1996:15). Viswanathan (2000: 3597) observes that university has a close relationship to the liberal imagination. Therefore, universities as academic institutions across the globe are seen as social spaces with the potential to transform the lives of individuals and society eventually towards the framework of sustainable equality. In this context, education is broadly viewed as a ‘social institution of reform’ that could preclude categorical inequalities based on gender, caste, race, class, and ethnicity. Traditionally, women have been excluded from attaining education owing to varied socio-religious perceptions. Pursuing higher education in universities indeed provided them sufficient exposure to ideas towards liberating themselves from the shackles of traditional patriarchal structures. Beteille (2005:3380) observed that, in university education women students could enjoy the freedom to explore new social relations and construct a new self-identity. However, education as a social institution is not free from complexities/paradoxes of its own.

In the Indian context, the Nehruvian idea of a university stands for 'humanism, tolerance, progress, the adventure of ideas and the search for truth' (Tilak, 2015:56). It stands for the onward march of humans towards ever-higher objectives. If universities discharge their duties adequately, it is believed that all is well with the nation and the people. The university education has often been viewed as an effective channel to counter the existing paradigms of inequality and systems of social stratification in societies. As Beteille (2005:3380) argues that universities in India seem to have 'opened new horizons both intellectually and institutionally in a society that had stood still in a conservative and hierarchical mould for centuries. Universities were the first open and secular institutions in a society that was governed largely by the rules of kinship, caste, and religion in India' (cited by Guha, 2007: 564). The significant contribution of university education lies in both promoting and institutionalizing egalitarian ideas against the backdrop of the Indian caste system. But, its dichotomous nature of both inclusion and exclusion cannot be ignored. Women students on campuses are doubly vulnerable, as they have to navigate through the discriminatory patterns on lines of caste, gender, and class overloaded with cultural stereotypes.

Spivak (1988: 28) observes women as subalterns are even more in shadow in the Indian context as the persisting social inequalities present in the society, are being reproduced in higher educational institutions such as universities, instead of eradicating them. Feminists' writings in sociology by scholars such as Beauvoir (1949), Harding (1986), & Collins (1990), and so forth question women's subordination to men and portray family and educational institutions as an important site of social reproduction, and this social reproduction communicates the binary opposition of femininity and masculinity through socialization and gender stereotypes. Historically speaking, even though the participation of women in higher education increased but not sufficient to make substantial changes in the domain of gender and higher education in India. Women students presence in higher

education is inadequate, despite having numerous educational institutions. Even though women's participation increased substantially in higher education in modern India, it is certainly not on par with men whose participation is driven by gender stereotypes. According to existing popular notions, Indian parents are reluctant to invest in their daughters' education as they assume that their investment goes to the groom's family, so their education lacks productive value. Moreover, Indian parents were not ready to spend money on the education of their girl children as well as the dowry at the time of her wedding. (Chanana 2007: 590-598). The Dowry system is the prevailing social evil in Indian society despite its prohibition in 1961. It has deep-rooted cultural significance that even decides whether a girl child should be given birth or aborted. To overcome such strong stereotypes and deep-rooted traditional ideas, women who entered into higher educational institutions had to deal with multiple challenges. In the fields of STEM, the condition of female researchers is further vulnerable as their representation is smaller and the larger attitudes and practices of the scientific communities in laboratories have been associated with the discourse of what we prefer to call it the 'masculinist self-fashioning.'

Scientific activity has traditionally been portrayed as a masculine affair, where women are not represented enough. Science streams like Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Engineering, and so forth are categorized as pure sciences and hence more masculine in nature, whereas women are seen from a stereotypical lens as a group not capable of pursuing them. Such androcentric assumptions of science continue to persist in the scientific community as a glass ceiling against women who are aspiring for a career in STEM fields in India. Sandra Harding (1986: 36) argues that not only scientific practice is culture-bound but also man-crafted and thus, it is not immune to embedded inequities of gender, race, class, caste, region, religion, and language. In India, women attaining doctoral education involves a challenging journey due to existing patriarchal practices in the society where women are considered inferior and their agency is restricted.

In male-dominated scientific academic spaces, they experience exclusion from social networks, undergo covert and overt discrimination, and conflict between personal and professional lives. The representation of Indian women in scientific fields is very minimal. According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2019- 2020, the extent of gender-based gaps in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health & employment; survival, and political empowerment, India ranked 112 out of 153 countries, which is alarming. All-India Higher Education Survey 2020, reveals that there are only 6% women research scholars in Engineering and Technology and only a negligible 3% in other science streams. As far as Dalit women research scholars are concerned, the percentage is discouraging and almost negligible. Important National awards such as the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar in India were given only to 15 women scientists out of 416, this not only speaks volumes about the under-representation of women in science but also the politics of recognition and reward in India. Therefore, science and scientific practice in India has largely been 'one-gendered world'. As far as women from marginalized social backgrounds are concerned, the situation is even more challenging as they remain constant targets of both gender and caste discrimination. Dalit women face multiple forms of oppression in the hegemonic academic spaces, due to a lack of social, economic, and cultural capital which are necessary for any individual to make a decent living according to the Bordieuan model of education. Therefore, the dogmas and stereotypical notions stand as the major barricades for women students to excel in STEM fields.

Thus, the commonality of women scholars' everyday realities in the male-dominated scientific laboratories and the uniqueness of the Dalit women research scholars' lived experiences in the non-egalitarian patriarchal Savarna academic spaces. The masculinist nature and culture of silence in the scientific laboratories will be discussed further mainstreaming gender and caste respectively.

1. ‘Women cannot do Science’: Stereotypes, Ghettoization, and Dominant Patterns

Theoretically speaking, educational institutions reflect and reproduce wider social patterns of power and sometimes become sites of resistance, policing, and regulation of wider social meanings (Sanjakdar 2011:10). Social spaces of laboratories in Chemistry research in India can be seen as the markers of both discrimination and deposition, where the women scholars in general and Dalit women in particular are systematically ‘othered.’ The minoritization of women research scholars with their almost negligible presence in Ph.D. and clustering them into certain sub-fields is viewed as an obvious pattern. The unequal treatment based on the sexual division of labour apparently corresponds with the reproduction of gender prejudice in the universities, which ideally have the responsibility and potential to build gender-just environments. Laboratories as micro social spaces and universities as relatively larger social spaces, if not macro spaces, tend to feed into each other to establish unwelcoming environments for men in higher education.

Basic/Natural Sciences as branches of knowledge production often viewed as dominant institutional systems of knowledge production. The most revered/celebrated objective nature of sciences is called into question when observed through the lens of gender as a social category of minority. The projection of the scientific domain in universities as predominantly a male domain is self-evident through the unequal representation of women researchers in the scientific field. The field of Chemistry, for instance, is an overwhelmingly male-dominated domain in the Indian context, with a few exceptions.

Viewing Chemistry laboratories of a central university in South India from gender lines, in the year 2015-16, out of the total the percentage of women students was 25.35 %, and in 2019-20, it was 25.16 %. The proportion of women researchers is 31.2%, and the presence of men is as high as 68.8% by 2021- 22. This demonstrates the under-representation of women researchers who stand at less than half of what men represent. Thus, gender inequality with glaring sex ratio imbalances in the natural science streams is a discouraging factor that is observed even in contemporary times, despite the numerous State-sponsored schemes and policies trying to promote women's education. With minimal participation of women, and their segregation into certain sub-fields is not just a discouraging factor but an institutionalized pattern observed in contemporary India. It is evident from the field data that the participation of women researchers is lesser in science and undergoes multi-dimensional discrimination by being ghettoized into certain sub-fields within the larger umbrella science of Chemistry, which are branded to be feminine. This pattern illustrates the contradictory nature of universities by confining, or segregating, women researchers into presumably fewer challenging streams based on the misogynistic and unscientific assumptions around the idea of 'women as weaker gender'. Let us substantiate our arguments in the light of ethnographic data furnished below.

The percentage of female research scholars in the area of Organic Chemistry is 10.7%, Inorganic Chemistry stands at 32.1%, in Biological Chemistry is 32.1%, in Materials Chemistry is 14.2%, and in the area of Theoretical Chemistry it is 10.7%. This data illustrates the continuation of the earlier trend where the percentage of women in the stream of Organic Chemistry is very less with 10.7%, as it is considered 'masculine', which is more suitable for men than women due to its arduous work with chemicals. The presence of more women research scholars in Inorganic and Biological Chemistry with a percentage of 32.1% speaks of the 'feminization of the streams within the field of Chemistry,' some of these streams are considered

more feminine with less involvement of chemicals and not as strenuous as Organic Chemistry.’ This particular understanding presents us a narrative on the deepening of gender gaps in the area of Organic Chemistry within the general field of Chemistry. Hence, the abilities of the women scholars in Chemistry research are under-toned and are made to remain a minority within the research sub-fields that had normalized the male character as a de facto standard.

As mentioned earlier minoritization does not simply imply the lesser presence but also the collective discrimination they experience in science. Therefore, the untold stories of discrimination and exclusion are to be explored to bring more nuances into the analysis of gender discrimination in science and scientific laboratories. The following paragraph delves into untold stories of gender and caste discrimination meted out to the women researchers on campus.

The experiences of male and female researchers in university spaces are not homogenous. In the scientific laboratories of Chemistry, women researchers are marginalized just because of their gender ‘being female’ and therefore a certain degree of ‘behavioural conformity’ is expected from them. One of the aspects of this ‘behavioural conformity’ often manifests itself in the form of the sexual division of labour in laboratory spaces. Traditionally, the idea of ‘sexual division of labour’ refers to the attribution of specific gender roles to people, where men are considered ‘breadwinners’ and women as ‘homemakers. Consequently, men are projected as instrumental leaders and women as expressive leaders. Such conservative views facilitated the men to carry out different professions/disciplines to make money, whereas women were largely confined to the domestic spaces to provide care, nurture, and raise children (Parsons, 1959: 77). Given the deep-rooted influence of such traditional ideas on people and society at large, some of the aspects of the ‘sexual division of labour’ to make inroads into the laboratory spaces. One of the respondents articulates as follows:

In our laboratory, male researchers show reluctance to clean the rooms of the laboratory, and nor do they ever attempt to clean the instruments used for chemical reactions. They behave as though the laboratory is their house and expect women researchers to do the cleaning. I often get irritated when they keep everything messy and expect me to arrange it since I am a woman⁹.

The sexual division of labour, therefore, is an influential catalyst that manifests gender as a category of the minority in laboratory spaces and eventually on university campuses. Any deviations from the rigid perceptions of the sexual division of labour cannot escape from the stereotypes. In wet laboratories, cylinders and cans of chemicals that are heavy sometimes need to be carried out from one place to the other. Therefore, women researchers are expected to seek help from the men in their laboratories. When women researchers do their work on their own, they are branded as 'less feminine'. In the Telugu-speaking states of Andhra & Telangana, the phrase '*ammayi laaga*' (like a girl), is most commonly used which stereotypically conveys how a girl child should be. In all aspects, girl children are expected to be fragile and calm. Any deviance is regulated with the phrases such as 'sit like a girl,' 'talk like a girl', 'behave like a girl', and so forth. Therefore, the women researchers who contest the conventional patriarchal assumptions of gender in their respective laboratory spaces would end up being the victims of gender stereotyping in other social spaces on campus. are marginalized and humiliated.

By being uncritical of the sexual division of labour and stereotypical assumptions, university spaces are unfortunately mirroring the patriarchal society in which they present. Universities need to move away from being 'passive conformists' of the sexual division of labour to that of pertinent

⁹ In-depth-interview took place with Neha on December 15, 2021 at 11.00 am. Coming from the male-dominated stream of organic Chemistry, she expressed her dismay on the conventional practices of laboratories, where women scholars are expected to perform the gender roles of cleaning and sweeping.

'institutional agencies of social reform'. The following section delves into the intersectionality of gender, caste, and minority questions, to bring forth more nuanced insights from the laboratory spaces, to engage with dynamic/complex aspects of the gendered minoritization on campus.

2. Scientific Laboratories and Inegalitarian Praxis

Questions such as what does it mean to be a man or a woman in various university spaces? What does it mean to be a women researcher in laboratory spaces? What sort of social conditions on campus often produce and crystallize the idea of 'gendered minoritization'? How do we understand and analyse the 'double minoritization' that Dalit women researchers experience on campuses? Is examined in detail.

Every social space is characterized and expressed by its own culture, which tends to set the boundaries for imagined and embodied relations. The universities, being institutions of education, have particular 'normative ways of being' (Puwar, 2004: 116). Consequently, the social space of laboratories also has its own culture of double bind, having to deal with both inclusion and exclusion at the same time. There are stereotypes of women researchers in STEM fields that male faculty supervisors believe that women are less committed to science (Gupta & Sharma, 2002: 5-6). These irrational and preconceived notions find their place in chemistry laboratories and eventually pose hurdles to women researchers to access the laboratory spaces. Despite their scientific skills and willingness to pursue science, women researchers are largely left deprived and minoritized just by restricting access to scientific spaces. One of the respondents from the field states:

The professors in our department are reluctant to guide female research scholars due to their opinion that women students are less capable of doing research work, unlike men. Also, they think that female students may leave work halfway through due to romantic

relationships, the multiple responsibilities of marriage, and obligations to look after their families. So, they tend to prefer male scholars over female¹⁰.

Unwilling to acknowledge the scientific abilities of women scholars, imposition of restrictions on women scholars to access scientific spaces and the marginalization of women in general go hand-in-glove on Indian campuses. These social ideas and processes feed into each other actively in the reproduction of scientific spaces in higher education, which are overtly turned out to be masculine. Most of the established professors tend to choose all-male research scholars in their laboratories and it is not uncommon to come across some scientific laboratories having exclusively male scholars.

However, there are a few exceptions to this larger trend. There is one laboratory that has only women scholars. It is believed by many that these particular demands less arduous work compared to others. How this laboratory is viewed and how scholars who work with it are treated by their colleagues is a telling story of deep-seated gender structures on campus. One of the field respondents recollects her experiences:

Ours is the only laboratory on campus, which has all women scholars. We work collectively and do not feel subjugated unlike women scholars working with other laboratories wherein men are numerically dominant. We were looked down upon by colleagues and other faculty as incapable and less productive. Hence, we are being mocked and made fun of. These humiliations were not limited to students, even our supervisor was humiliated saying that his career would be over as he had all female scholars in the laboratory.

¹⁰ Vani who is around the age of 28, explained regarding the selection process of Ph.D. candidates in Chemistry department, and the preferential attitude of supervisors towards male scholars, which can be considered as the one of the strong reasons for the meagre proportion of female scholars in chemistry during the In-depth-interview that took place on January 04, 2022 at 4.30 pm.

It is depressing to hear such stereotypical comments made by colleagues and friends¹¹.

Against the backdrop of institutionalized gender stereotypes and discrimination meted out to women scholars, the myth of universities as egalitarian social spaces needs to be debated and contested contextually. Universities are increasingly strengthening the glass-ceilings against women scholars who are in effect minoritized based on gender. To add fuel to the fire, often the faculty supervisors expect women scholars to opt for less revealing dressing styles in the laboratories, which is in a way an assault on their personal choice. In the Indian cultural context, women are subjected to sexual harassment and character assassination pertaining to their dressing patterns. Wearing fully covered attires is considered ideal and a sleeve-less dressing style leads to judgements and frames a woman as ill-charactered. Therefore, with the conventional cultural significance women scholars in the scientific laboratories are judged based on their dressing style. Women scholars are expected to be in their traditional attire with less revealing of body. It is a popular stereotype that modern dresses would disturb the concentration of male scholars. Within the framework of gendered minoritization the condition of Dalit women scholars, who face multi-dimensional marginalities based on gender, caste, and class, is appalling. Dalit women research scholars are the most affected victims of social discrimination and exclusion in academic scientific spaces. Their intersectional identity of being a woman from marginalized social backgrounds makes them further vulnerable to the power politics of laboratory spaces and undergo double minoritization. The indifference towards Dalit women scholars is a deep-rooted challenge in Indian universities and more particularly in laboratory-based scientific endeavours,

¹¹ While conducting In-depth-interview on February 17, 2022 at 11.00 am with one of the scholars from that laboratory named Ramya aged 27, articulated about the perception of their colleagues and other professors on them and their laboratory, which she feels biased and discouraged.

wherein along with gender, caste identity becomes an added layer to their minority identity as a women scholar in the laboratory. The encounters of indifferent treatment from supervisors are explained by one of the respondents from the field:

My supervisor does not even notice my presence and never talks to me unlike other scholars with whom he speaks every day, and the only way of communication between me and my supervisor is doctoral committee report, on which he comments on my research work.' Once I heard comments from him saying, 'I may have committed some sin earlier may be due to which I have to teach to Dalit students who are equal to beggars. I thought of complaining but did not dare to do so as I know they have the power to ruin my career keeping in mind my poor economic conditions¹².

The above illustration demonstrates how the caste discriminatory attitude and exclusionary practices towards Dalit women scholars in the scientific academic spaces are twice-minoritized; firstly, as women and secondly as Dalit women. It is observed that a sense of inferiority tends to daunt the Dalit women scholars after experiencing inhumane caste discrimination by their faculty supervisors. The 'culture of silence' adopted by them as a survival strategy seems to have provided an unofficial license to perpetrate caste practices on campus. These narratives of women research scholars and Dalit women research scholars demonstrate how minoritization takes place in universities leading to denial of the minority rights and freedom to experience university spaces on egalitarian grounds.

Classification of scholars based on experience as juniors and seniors tends to establish another layer of discrimination in laboratory spaces. The

¹² How female scholars from marginalized scholars are treated by their supervisors as ineligible and how their work gets ignored is made visible with the narration of 25 years old first-generation, Dalit scholar named Renuka during the In- depth interview conducted on February 09, 2022 at 6.30 pm.

hierarchy of seniors and juniors among scholars is a serious challenge besides the power differences between faculty and research scholars in laboratories. The rigid structures of seniority and juniority in the laboratory spaces are strictly observed in practice, though many institutions claim to have rules in place to treat everyone equally. In some laboratories, often seniors are assigned to guide the newly joined scholars. Consequently, interaction between juniors and seniors is more regular than the interaction with the faculty supervisors. Women scholars, who happened to be juniors, who had to interact with male seniors, encountered complex forms of discrimination.

To borrow Foucault's vocabulary (1975: 201), Women scholars are made to remain 'under the 'surveillance' of seniors. Under these highly stereotyped environments, women scholars become easy prey for character assassination. A field respondent recalls her experience as a junior:

If my senior notices me talking to male friends from other departments, he complains to my faculty supervisor. He constantly observes where I am going and with whom I interact. Once he initiated an unwanted intimate conversation when I was working alone in the laboratory at night. I was disturbed and complained to my faculty supervisor. Instead of taking appropriate action, he was shifted to another laboratory as a solution to this problem. I feel highly insecure about working alone in the laboratory at night as he has free access to my lab even now. If I press for stricter action against him, I might be risking my entire academic career. When gender concerns are not taken seriously, just being 'silent' is the only pragmatic solution we have to deal with such problems in

laboratories. This is the condition of women scholars who stand up to gender discrimination and misogyny, she laments¹³.

The above incident demonstrates the hostile work environment for women scholars in science laboratories, wherein women scholars are viewed as 'outsiders' or 'others.' These capricious attitudes in essence discourage women scholars from actively participating in research activity. The narratives of character assassination and indecent behaviour with women scholars throw light on the fact that university spaces are not free from gender stereotypes.

On the other hand, the Dalit women scholars' experiences in the upper-caste dominated academic spaces make them realize they are the 'most Dalits,' intertwined with their first-generation status.

3. Affirmative Action and Intersectionality of Gender and Caste

The gamut of challenges that students from disadvantaged backgrounds confront in university spaces on lines of stigma based on affirmative action, caste stereotypes, class manifestations, family expectations, and personal relationships is immense. Irrespective of lacking parental guidance and low economic and cultural capital they accomplish to navigate into higher educational institutions like universities. But, being the minority among the mainstream students hailing from affluent families they come across undesirable experiences in university social spaces and this deepens when their identity intersects with other social categories such as gender, class, and caste. The intuition exclusionary practices of universities in general and chemistry laboratories, in particular, hinder their emancipation and

¹³Aarthi aged 25, shared her experiences of being a junior, and the inappropriate behaviour of her senior who took advantage of his seniority and tried to harass her. During the In-depth interview on January 08, 2020 at 3.00pm.

social mobility that needs contestation. After overcoming all the barriers and entering the male-dominated hegemonic educational institutions, Dalit women scholars are unfortunately seen as people with limited talents and knowledge by faculty supervisors, seniors, and colleagues based on their appearance and less polished English accent. Affirmative action has been an integral part of the education system in India to promote equal educational opportunities for minority groups based on gender, religion, caste, class, and disabilities. As a counterproductive tendency, students who use and benefit from affirmative action are stigmatized as '*quota students*.' Instances of humiliation expressed by a field respondent in her own words:

I am referred to as 'reservation batch/ category batch', by the non-Dalit scholars in our laboratory. My colleagues, who belong to an upper caste social background, view the presence of Dalit women scholars like me in the academic space as a mere consequence of affirmative action policy, popularly known as quota, and show total disrespect towards my academic excellence¹⁴.

In a way, slurring of humiliations loaded with caste stigma on Dalit women scholars in educational institutions is an everyday reality. For instance, Dalit women like Dani (1990), Sarvagod (1983), Pawade (1938), Pawar (1945), Kamble (1986), Rani (1998), Shyamala (2006), to these Dalit women scholars interviewed in 2022. Consequently, the gendered minoritization of Dalit women scholars based on caste status is taking place in universities even today. The insights and viewpoints of the Dalit women scholars on affirmative action are interesting. Regarding their opinion on reservation in educational institutions, one of the respondents from the field says:

Due to the compulsory reservation policy for the marginalized section at least some are pursuing higher education and getting good employment. Do you think the upper castes would have allowed

¹⁴ Ibid 12.

Dalit students to enter universities otherwise? When I heard debates on reservation and merit, I wondered, why these people would not question the age-old caste discriminatory practices against Dalits in the same way. When people realize this, I do not think there will be any hassle on reservations to marginal communities¹⁵.

These counter-narratives on reservation policy illustrate the agitation of the Dalit women scholars who challenge the notions of merit both historically and today. Minoritization of Dalit women scholars does not spare the domain of personal space. Caste and class continue to influence their personal spaces just to suppress them. Also, these instances certainly present how the nation dominated by oppressive patriarchal and casteist ideologies and praxis is continuously marginalizing minorities both in society and higher educational spaces as well

4. Alliance of Romantic Relationships and Caste Prospects

On Indian university campuses, along with academic gains, the students also have the perks of making new friendships for life and sometimes finding life partners through romantic relationships. On this note, the significant question that needs to be posed here is whether these romantic relationships unfold themselves naturally or do they have caste prospects. It is observed that elsewhere in society, in universities too Dalit women scholars are subjected to minoritization based on their caste identity in romantic relationships and nuptial ties. One of the respondents from the field says:

Caste is a major constraint while getting into romantic relations. I was shocked after knowing that in a progressive educational institution like this, students prefer members of the same caste to

¹⁵ Treating the Dalit women scholars as incapable and the intensification of their minoritization with the hostility experienced from men of other castes and men of their own castes is explained by Ramya a 27 years old Dalit women scholar from a university at Hyderabad, while taking her In-depth-interview on January 20, 2022 at 10 am.

love and even if students from different castes are in a relationship, most of them from upper castes break up when the topic of marriage comes for discussion. Though people say there is no caste discrimination in universities in India, it is visible in these circumstances like a bright star in the university admissions list¹⁶.

Endogamy (marrying within own castes) as a social institutional practice is a strong barrier between minority and majority that ensures the existence of powerful prejudices that reproduce political, social, and economic inequalities (Harris, 1959: 251). Dalit women being the most vulnerable in the hierarchy of caste culture are excluded primarily and their right to choose the life partner of their choice by inter-marrying gets curtailed with the unwelcoming environments existing in society at large, and replication of the same higher educational institutions such as universities. On top of it, expectations from the family to get married early on become an extra burden on the Dalit women from the first-generation learners.

The Dalit women scholars being a social category of minority in science laboratories seek refuge in religion for psychological and moral support to fight the marginalization and discriminatory attitudes. In the absence of neutral social spaces and no effective and meaningful counselling centres on campus, they tend to rely on the fellowship of religion and religious groups in universities. One of the respondents from the field highlights:

I get emotional support and motivation from religious prayers. I used to cry in front of the images of God in my room when I felt depressed. Belief in God and prayer more than anything gave me comfort during hard times in research. As I know no action will be taken even if I register a complaint against discriminatory practices in the university. The fellowship of evangelical groups on the university campus provided me mental strength to overcome the

¹⁶ 10 *ibid.*

pain and self-doubts when I had to face discrimination based on caste in my research career¹⁷.

Such characterization of religion as a mechanism of psychological healing and counselling in the everyday life of Dalit women scholars also characterizes universities as social spaces that perpetuate exclusion and non-egalitarian practices. These tendencies effectively become impediments for Dalit women scholars to have an inclusive campus experience. Their empowerment and self-agency is challenged by the imposed non-egalitarian notions that are safeguarded by the so-called secular state and university spaces.

Discussion

The universities in general and scientific institutions, in particular, continue to be lopsided social spaces in favour of men with the dualism of inclusion and mobility on the one hand and exclusion and oppression on the other. The lived experiences of discriminatory practices and systemic oppression of historically marginalized groups, with a particular focus on first-generation women learners, need to be analysed from the lens of ‘gendered minoritization.’ Women research scholars in general and Dalit women scholars, in particular, undergo the process of minoritization, driven by multiple social factors, facilitated by existing power relations. Being a double minority, Dalit women scholars encounter unique forms of exclusion and discriminatory attitudes. With the intersectionality of gender, caste, and class, the vulnerability of Dalit women in Chemistry laboratories gets amplified leaving no place for contestation and liberation from the clutches of casteist slurs. The multi-layered marginality of the first-generation learners from rural India further gets complicated in the process of making their own habitus on the campus. The stigmatized notions around

¹⁷ The author conducted In-depth interview with Ananya aged 25 on February 19,2022, timings from 4.00 pm at university premises.

reservation, encounters of romantic relationships, and pressure from family to get married consequently have negative implications on the academic performance of the Dalit women scholars on campus. Such negative implications in turn lead to a deepening of marginalization and a sharpening of double minoritization. University as a social institution has the theoretical potential to bring social mobility and agency in the lives of women and first general women scholars, but on the contrary universities are reproducing the structures of social inequality and curtailing their potential of emancipation of the marginalized and their rights. This dichotomous nature of both inclusion and exclusion of universities needs to be problematized to promote diversity in higher education that still carries the theoretical potential to promote sustainable equality and diversity.

Chapter 4

The Caste of Campus Habitus: Caste and Gender Encounters of the First-generation Dalit Women Students in Indian Universities

Introduction and Context

The concept of habitus and forms of capital proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) rightly enables us to understand the educational challenges and negotiations the first-generation students confront in their journey toward higher education. Bourdieu (1977) observes that the concept of cultural capital refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials, and so forth that one acquires through being part of a particular social class. The habitus is the physical embodiment of cultural capital that refers to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences. For Bourdieu, habitus denotes the “internalized structures” and “schemes of perception” in which the dominant social and cultural conditions are established and reproduced (Bourdieu 1977: 86). Hence, the habitus produces relationships of domination through its institutions, and one such social institution is a university campus in which the structural inequalities are recreated and normalized.

Across the globe, university education is seen as a social space that has the theoretical potential to transform the lives of individuals and eventually society towards the egalitarian paradigm by precluding the consequences of categorical inequalities such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity. The purpose of university education is the achievement of a particular expansion of outlook, turn of mind, habit of thought, and capacity for social and civic interaction (Newman 1996: 15). But, dominated by the hegemonic

intelligentsia that promotes the praxis of the dominant habitus, certain sections of students are privileged over their counterparts in the universities that are spaces mandated with the responsibility of countering unjust structural practices. Therefore, every social space is characterized by its own expressive culture, and the university as a social institution has its normative ways of being (Puwar 2004: 116). The codes of conduct on university campuses such as curriculum and pedagogy, evaluation of academic performance based on skills and knowledge, academic activities, the symbolic language used, mannerisms, dressing patterns, non-academic amenities, interactions, and so forth are produced/generated on lines of dominant culture, which effectively benefits students from affluent socio-economic backgrounds who merely need to re-conform to those established patterns. Interestingly enough, these social privileges are taken for granted, by those students who are in an advantageous position, as certain sets of social practices are normalized and considered objective in the context of universities. On the other hand, students who do not share similarities with the dominant habitus suffer from limited economic, social, and cultural capital and are perceived as the 'cultural other' in the academic spaces, and are in constant conflict with the dominant habitus on campus. Thus, educational institutions reflect and reproduce wider social patterns of power and sometimes become sites of policing, and regulation of wider social meanings associated with multiple cultural habitus that students bring along with them (Sanjakdar 2011: 10).

In the context of India, as Beteille argues, universities opened new horizons both intellectually and institutionally in a society that had stood still in a conservative and hierarchical mold for centuries. The universities were among the first open and secular institutions in a society that was governed largely by rules of kinship, caste, and religion (cited by Guha 2007: 564). Though the contribution of universities in promoting the nation towards progress is significant, its exclusionary practices against marginalized students such as allotment of a few admissions into academic programmes,

judging their skills based on identity, not recognising their academic performance, negative slurs, smear campaigning, name calling and so forth cannot be ignored. With the established conventional glass-ceilings, the nature of universities in embracing diversity and inclusivity comes under contestation. For Deshpande, the centres of excellence have not opened up their doors to the non-elite until recently and they have been dominated by the monopoly of the minority privileged sections (Deshpande 2006: 140). Owing to the dichotomous nature of both exclusion and inclusion, male students from upper caste social backgrounds are privileged and women, Dalits, and tribes are excluded and systematically marginalized in institutions of higher education. Indian universities, therefore, operate as the 'gatekeepers to the upper caste kingdom in India' as pointed out by Tharu et al. (1998: 2702). Deshpande (2006) observes, that elite higher educational institutions are hampered by caste apartheid, and students from lower caste backgrounds are denoted as deficient with preconceived assumptions, ignoring their inadequate educational training and lack of social and cultural capital. With these exclusionary practices in place, students from historically marginalized sections are systematically barred from attaining a university education. On the other hand, women students carry with them an intense burden of discrimination and exclusion on university spaces as gender relations are intricately woven into a system of hierarchical social relations and prescriptive codes of conduct determined by gender stereotypes.

Despite the deep-rooted, and patriarchal stereotypes and other social challenges, Indian women have succeeded in entering universities in pursuit of higher education in the past six decades or so. Though participation of women in higher education increased numerically compared to previous decades, even today the sex ratio of students on Indian campuses is still unhealthy and lopsided in favour of men. Feminist scholarship in sociology such as Beauvoir (1949), Harding (1986), & Collins (1990) contest the establishment of dominant habitus, the nature of women's subordination to

men on the one hand and portray family and educational institutions as an important site of social reproduction which communicates the binary opposition of femininity and masculinity through socialization and gender stereotypes on the other. Spivak's (1988: 28) observation of female as subaltern seems to be still in the shadows in the Indian context as university spaces continue to produce, and reproduce, both conventional and new categories of inequalities. Often, women experience undesirable social encounters in university social spaces that are patriarchally-driven and deepens when their identity intersects with their social status of being first-generation learners. First generation learners are those in their immediate families to attend college education. The condition of first-generation Dalit women students is even worse, as they lack what Pierre Bourdieu (1986) terms, the three forms of capital, namely, economic, social, and cultural capital which are necessary for any individual to make a decent living. Dalit women undergo multi-faceted oppression pertaining to their first-generation status as the dominant habitus is not devoid of gender and caste. Sukumar (2022: 12) observed that in the Indian context, caste or other social identities, vernacular medium of education, and rural/urban are determinants of social reproduction in university spaces. When it comes to the context of first-generation Dalit women students, on one side they are subjected to gender oppression from all men in general and men of their caste in particular. Additionally, they undergo indifferent treatment from upper castes, as well as second-generation Dalit women students. As rightly pointed out by B.R. Ambedkar, "Dalit woman is a most Dalit among Dalits." (cited by Swaroopa 1998). Experiences of Dalit women in higher educational institutions can be understood by the lived experiences of Dalit women in Rege's (2006) writing on caste/writing gender, reading Dalit women's testimonies. Shantabai Dhanaji Dani who is a known woman leader of the Ambedkarite movement in 'Ratrandin Amcha...' (For Us- These Nights and Days (1990) explains her experiences in higher education coming from a rural background, bearing a village stamp on her appearance,

eventually leading to humiliations on campus (Rege 2006). Kumud Pawade, a Dalit woman professor in Sanskrit explains the lived experiences of Dalit women in Brahmanical academic spaces and disciplines through her book *Antasphot* (Thoughtful Outburst 1981), ‘where women and Dalits have been denied the right to study Sanskrit, the fact that a Shudra woman learning Sanskrit challenged the Brahmanical caste ideology on campuses. This resulted in humiliation from her own faculty colleagues taunting and branding her as ‘government-sponsored Brahman.’’ Correspondingly, first-generation Dalit women students experience unwelcoming attitudes and are subjected to humiliation and discrimination in Indian higher educational institutions. The self-worth of students from underprivileged backgrounds gets negatively affected due to their caste status (Chadha 1997: 791–792).

Hence, this chapter is an attempt to unravel the lived experiences of contestations and negotiations of first-generation Dalit women students while navigating the university campus spaces, determined by the dominant habitus where caste acts as the strong cultural capital to certain individuals and marginalizes the other. The educational trajectory of first-generation Dalit women students, the unique challenges they confront in the process of learning, the significant role of non-academic spaces in reinforcing inclusion and exclusion, survival strategies of negotiations, and social agencies in contesting the conventional glass ceilings through the acquired cultural capital are significant lines of inquiries which this article aims to cover in the following sections.

I. Encounters in Mounting the Educational Ladder

The unique challenges experienced by first-generation students are not only influenced by their social status as first-generation learners, but also by other social factors such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, and region (Arch & Gilman 2019: 997). First-generation Dalit learners face structural challenges as caste identity influences their representation in schools (Nambisan 2006: 259). Therefore, it is imperative to understand the

social dimensions of their school education. In our present context, the educational journey of the first-generation Dalit women students has been explored which has a greater impact on their academic opportunities and psychological wellbeing as they advance on the educational ladder. As a respondent from the field says:

There was a primary school, meant for 1-5 grades, near the Dalit hamlet. There is no school for secondary education in our locality, so I went to the upper primary high school (UPHS) located in the colonies of upper castes. Going to school every day was the biggest hurdle, as the distance was almost one kilometre and we had to go by walk. As the washrooms were not available nearby open fields were used for nature calls which I feel embarrassed about. There is no availability of teachers for science subjects hence clearing board exams was a tough job. Due to the mid-day meals scheme attending classes in the afternoon was possible. After returning from school in the evening, being a girlchild I was obliged to do the household chores and often help my parents with the agriculture work. I hated Sundays in my childhood as we were taken to the agricultural fields and made to work the whole day with no time to study at home. Hence, until the time of intermediate (10+2), merely clearing the examinations was a major objective in my mind instead of focusing on scoring high¹⁸.

It is evident that the families of the poor status group are not able to provide improved home conditions and atmosphere for their children for better education, in comparison to others. The discriminatory practices and humiliation based on their social status in the educational spaces and among their peer group are part of the Dalit women students' everyday life from

¹⁸ During the In-depth-interview that took place on January 04, 2022 at 4.30 pm in university Vani shared her experiences of childhood.

childhood, which has a major toll on their self-confidence and mental health. As one of the respondents says:

Our school is towards the upper castes' households. As we pass by each lane drastic differences between our houses which are made of mud and their big houses with modern infrastructure can be noticed. My friends used to pass comments saying, 'These people are low in status as they consume beef in their houses. I used to feel embarrassed and almost left eating beef. When I visited their homes occasionally, their parents asked me to stand outside. These things got imprinted on my mind from childhood and [I] used to consider myself and my community inferior to others. I became quite cautious from then to stop being friends with people belonging to upper castes let alone visiting their houses¹⁹.

Hostile experiences and humiliation based on their caste status as 'Dalits' are exhibited which eventually haunts the Dalit students right from an early age where they do not even know what caste is. Hence, first-generation status accompanied by the intersection of gender and caste stands out as a double-layered barricade for first generation Dalit women students aspiring to pursue higher education. Despite lacking parental guidance, and low economic and cultural capital, they manage to navigate their way into university spaces. But, being the minority among the majority-driven mainstream students hailing from affluent families, they come across undesirable experiences in higher educational institutions which need to be scrutinized & analysed. The following section describes the phenomena.

2. Institutional Inequalities and Lived Realities

The manner in which first-generation women learners position themselves as women and Dalit women in particular, along with analysing how the

¹⁹ Kaveri narrated the hostility encountered from her classmates of privileged background on February 14, 2022 at 4 pm.

intersection of class, caste, and space determine their access to educational opportunities and adaptation to the university campus are issues of grave concern. This unravels the layered forms of discrimination encountered by first-generation students when converged with the social identity of gender and caste in university settings, where a particular form of caste habitus is institutionalized and broadly viewed as normal. The ingrained exclusionary practices of universities hinder the emancipation and social agility of first-generation Dalit women students at every level of the university hierarchy. The proportion of first-generation women research scholars at this university to the general population on campus is 42.86 per cent and the first-generation Dalit women research scholars is merely at 3.57 per cent. The ratio of second-generation women research scholars in the general population is 57.14 per cent, and 25 per cent is the proportion of second-generation Dalit women research scholars. Hence, it is evident that the presence of women research scholars from privileged caste backgrounds is almost equal in both first and second generations. However, a very small proportion of Dalit women research scholars are first-generation learners, which display their absence in urban-centric educational institutions with minimal representation. The chronicles of the first-generation Dalit women learners who stand out as marginalised groups in university academic spaces with no cultural and social capital are explained further which visualizes their impediments in the process of registering a certain degree of creating achieved status.

a. English as ‘Linguistic capital’ in Academic Engagement

Linguistic capital is conceptualized by Bourdieu (1986) as a component of social capital, which is one of the different forms of capital in society. Linguistic capital plays a crucial role in regulating individuals. This linguistic capital as a social tool shapes everyday life activities in the public realm, such as studying at higher education institutions and having membership in various speech communities (Bourdieu 1986:467). With the

effect of colonization and globalization trend English language as a medium of communication dominated the world and educational institutions particularly. Most of the universities in India follow English as a medium of instruction and consider it as a hegemonic asset. Narratives of the respondents on English medium instruction as follows:

My younger brother was sent to a convent as parents feel he is bread winner and I completed my schooling and college studies in vernacular medium. After coming to university only, I was introduced to English medium instruction. The English language is the biggest barrier to my academics and communicating with others. My English is basic and faculty used to speak sophisticatedly. Following lectures became tough. Over time, I developed an inferiority complex as my classmates used to speak fluently in English and ask doubts in class. I used to sit quietly and remain silent when faculty asked questions. I felt people might laugh at my unstructured vocabulary while engaging in classroom discussions. Due to these insecurities, I never dared to approach faculty to clear doubts and scored less on tests, unlike my classmates who were confident, maintained good terms with faculty, and ultimately had good academic records²⁰.

Thus, it can be observed that the English language as linguistic capital is an empowering resource for some students and disempowers others in accessing university education. Also, one cannot overlook the relationship between social categories of gender, caste, and English language in the Indian context. Sons are considered as the '*grihastha*' (owner of the house) by Indian households; therefore, they prefer to join them in English medium schools despite the hiking fee structures. On the other hand, daughters are considered 'passing birds' who will be married off, hence, vernacular

²⁰ On March 19 2022 at 5 pm, Rani articulated about the perception of non-English speaking students in academic spaces

medium education with no fees. Thus, patriarchal hegemony over English education can be observed. When it comes to the caste question, most of the privileged section of students are equipped with English education, unlike marginalized students who are subjected to discrimination and are considered low. Thus, it can be stated that women students and marginalized women students specifically are on the verge of receiving English medium education and become the major targets of institutional segregation and humiliations.

b. Denied Cultural and Social Capital

For the first-generation Dalit women students, availability of institutional assistance from the administration and faculty members is the major source of dependence. With no cultural capital, inadequate communication skills, and an English language barrier they tend to have less social capital, specifically, engagement and social connections with administrative staff, faculty, seniors, and fellow students. Additionally, non-institutional support such as recognizing their constraints and assisting them to overcome them by motivating faculty members, seniors, and colleagues, seems to be very minimal and almost absent.

One of the field respondents' states:

My parents know nothing about universities and higher education degrees like Ph.D. I must take the whole responsibility for my studies and explore the available opportunities. Doing a Ph.D. from a university is not a small thing and I have no idea about the admission process, selecting semester courses. The sight of a well-speaking administrative staff, faculty, and seniors was very intimidating for me to ask questions in English as I lacked proficiency. Also, they were not ready to talk to me which was quite evident in their hostile gazes. Due to a lack of awareness regarding

financial fellowships availability on campus, I missed a one-semester fellowship too. So, in the initial days of my stay at the university, I struggled a lot to adjust and get my things done as I felt uncomfortable with my language skills and seeking help from strangers²¹.

This instance presents how first-generation student lack both cultural and social capital. Therefore, their attempt towards ‘fitting in’ into higher educational institutions like universities is nothing short of a miracle which in turn affects their academics drastically. Thus, first-generation women learners lack the sense of belonging and self-isolate themselves.

c. Academic Space and Double Burden of Identity

Indian universities are dominated by upper castes who act as gatekeepers for academic spaces through their exclusionary practices and discrimination. Caste identity often becomes a source of rebuke and insult. Such caste-based insults and rebukes combined with poor economic and social capital, tend to push the first-generation Dalit women scholars beyond the boundaries of their tolerance. This is explicated by one of the respondents from the field:

Most of my fellow researchers refer to Dalit scholars like me as ‘reservation batch’. I feel ignored by both my supervisor and seniors. My thesis supervisor once stated, ‘I committed some sin earlier may be due to which am teaching Dalit students, who are equal to beggars’. He never spoke except to comment on the doctoral committee report. My seniors also consider me incapable and judge my subject knowledge irrespective of my academic excellence. I feel irritated when the male scholars from the Dalit community also try to dominate and pass orders taking the

²¹ Kavya narrated her experiences of lacking awareness on educational opportunities due to lack of guidance in the interview conducted on 15 January 2022 at 3 pm.

advantage of same caste identity. Women scholars from the upper castes and those who are financially better off tend to form their own groups and do not interact with people like me²².

The preconceived assumptions of faculty members and seniors that first-generation Dalit women scholars are deficient because of their caste identity persist in Indian universities. Dalit women scholars endure oppression not only from men of other castes but also from their own castes. Accordingly, women scholars from a privileged backdrop exclude Dalit women scholars based on their poor socio-economic background. This scenario contests the patriarchal practices of men in general and Dalit men in particular. First-generation Dalit women scholars, therefore, undergo a double burden due to the non-egalitarian practices of the university system.

3.Campus Culture and Retrieving Social Spaces

The unexplored accounts of first-generation students from marginalized communities provide us insights into the structural inequalities of Indian universities. Coming from a minority background and unequipped with sufficient knowledge and skills of the dominant habitus, the first-generation Dalit women students converse with unfamiliar and impertinent environments upon their arrival at universities. This is because the dominant group can exercise their dominance merely by conforming to the status quo, while the dominated must engage in rupture with their own habitus itself. The first-generation Dalit women students undergo a transition in their social environment, which is to deal with stereotypes and stigmatizations accompanied by pressures of family expectations which together negatively impact their academic potential.

a. Cultural Conflict

²² The double burden of identity in academic spaces is expressed by Kaveri at 4 pm on March 07, 2022.

Upon entering the universities, first-generation Dalit women scholars encounter a cultural shock, which is an experience a person may have when one moves to a new cultural environment that is different from one's own (Jhon et al., 2010: 54). With the transition in their life from traditional educational institutions to that of new university environments, the first-generation Dalit women learners experience isolation and 'feel out of place.' This phase of adaptation to the new social environments of the university campus has the potential to bring out new social agencies of first-generation learners, which in turn paves the means for an inclusive environment on campus. One of the respondents of the study from the field stated as below:

Getting admission into a prominent university in Hyderabad was the first independent decision in my life. I came to Hyderabad alone for the first time without even knowing the public bus numbers in the city. I kept staring at the tall and concrete buildings and the crowded busy bus stops. With the help of my relative in the city, I reached the university. The first sight of the university campus made me feel, 'Am I going to study on such a big campus with a wide area, all greenery around, and well-built departments and hostel.' I clearly remember my first day in our department which made my enthusiasm disappear in no time. I had the appearance of a village girl and everybody in the laboratory was well dressed and speaking in good English. The hostile gazes of people around me made me feel inferior and that made me isolate myself. Though I liked the campus, the unwelcoming attitudes of people around me made me feel displaced. In hostels too I was shocked to hear about girls

drinking alcohol, as I never encountered such things before back in my village²³.

The habitus of first-generation learners is mismatched with the socio-cultural life at university, as they belong to “the social strata that are far away from academic culture and who are condemned to experience that culture as unreal” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 922). Therefore, first-generation Dalit women are at risk for limited educational attainment with less social engagement in the campus culture and delayed adaptation. Non-academic spaces like hostels, shopping complexes, cafeterias, annual university fests, and so forth are vital in opening possibilities for the socialization of the campus culture. One of the respondents narrates her experience, as below:

Since the hostel rooms accommodated one person it was comfortable and I could stay as I wished. In the initial days, going to canteens and shopping complexes in the university was utterly uncomfortable. Fellow students used to sit there for hours and be involved in discussions, on the contrary, walking on campus roads also was scary for me. Therefore, accessing the facilities such as the gym and sports complex was far beyond my thoughts. For the first annual university festival, my sister paid a visit to the campus. On the third day, which will be the last, we both went to the open ground where students were dancing. We were shocked to see girls wearing short dresses and all boys and girls dancing together freely. After that, I never went to the fest again ²⁴.

These experiences display the concealed forms of how the dominant habitus operates on the university campus. With the deepening cultural mismatch,

²³ Renuka explained the mismatch of university environment and struggled navigation of first-generation learners on university campus in the interview conducted on 18 January 2022 at 6 pm.

²⁴ Madhu shares the concealed exclusive ambience existing in the university spaces on March 03, 2022 at 2 pm.

assimilating into the campus ambience is challenging for first-generation Dalit women scholars, as it demands delinking oneself from pre-existing habitus and obliging the new lifestyle. Along with these confrontations of first-generation status, insolences based on their intersectional identity, such as stereotypes based on appearance, dressing patterns, skin complexion, food habits, give an insight into the Dalit women scholars' minority ness in university settings.

4.Nexus of Physical Attributes & Cultural Stereotypes on University Campus

The antagonistic aesthetic notions of dominant culture tend to marginalize Dalit women based on the intersectional identity of women first, and Dalit women additionally. Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) argued the performativity of gender, which is a stylized repetition of acts as an imitation or miming of the dominant conventions of gender. The intersectional theorists have argued that they also are co-constituted with class, race, and ethnicity. Accordingly, Dalit women students are stigmatized based on their appearance, skin color, and dietary practices such as the consumption of beef on the hostel premises. One of the respondents from the field says:

Beauty plays a vital role in the way people treat us in academic spaces too. Based on my appearance and less sophisticated dressing style I was always considered an average student and disrespected by people who have no idea about my academic performance. There is a common understanding in society that if a person is dark in color, she/he belongs to the Dalit community, often seen in surprise if they are fair in their skin color, which is always linked to Dalit

identity. Additionally, I was looked down upon by my colleagues for eating beef and following other cultural practices of Dalits²⁵.

Thus, in academic environments, young Dalit women struggle with an inferiority complex due to the narrow definitions of beauty. There is a preconceived assumption in society that Dalits are dark in color and people will be surprised to see a Dalit with fair skin. These conditions throw light on the relation attached to caste and skin complexion, where it is assumed that all Dalits are racially black, and if any Dalit individual is of light skin tone, they are detached from their Dalit identity and are seen as the mismatch of their caste. Hence, the first-generation students are negatively stereotyped resulting in unfavourable university experiences that obstruct their academic performance. Additionally, the pressure of family expectations places a double burden on first-generation Dalit women scholars.

5. Dalit Women as ‘Most Dalits’: Daughters as Passing Birds

With the existing patterns of academic stress and hostile workplace environments, first-generation Dalit women scholars also endure marriage pressure differently. Traditionally, getting married is considered a higher ideal for a woman than attaining a higher education and getting employment, due to the existing patrilineal practices. For Dalit women, the pressure of marriage is increased due to their poor economic backgrounds. Marriage proposals begin at the early age of 14 years, and Dalit women learners are obliged to negotiate with families in every phase of their journey in higher education. This shows how the authoritarian and patriarchal social structures do not allow any free space for adolescent girls, particularly in certain sections that assign different reasons for the continuation of the practice of early marriages (Ghosh 2011: 307–326). In

²⁵ Being subjected to humiliations and unwelcoming attitudes Madhuri explained her navigation on 9 February 2022 at 7pm.

terms of the pressure of marriage experienced by Dalit women scholars, one of the respondents' states:

In the case of male children, parents beg them to study well, and, in our case, we must beg our parents to let us study. I felt my educational achievements were not valued when my parents were not happy regarding my Ph.D. studies and kept worrying about the delay of marriage. Their concern remains that, I was the only girl in our locality to attain higher education and remained unmarried until the age of 25 years. Also, if I have higher educational qualifications, they must search for a groom more than my qualification which in turn may cost them more dowry²⁶.

Hence, the first-generation Dalit women are the most Dalits among Dalits as stated by Dr. Ambedkar compared to their Dalit male counterparts who are considered as the breadwinners of the family, contrarily female as 'passing birds.' They do not often enjoy readily available parental consent to the continuation of higher education and are considered deviant from family expectations. Dalit women students always have to put in extra effort to convince parents before pursuing their higher education. Withstanding the systemic oppression based on their interactional identity of gender, caste, and family pressure, how they adapt and negotiate with university spaces will be discussed further in the following section.

6.From Excluded to Exceptional: Acquired Cultural Capital

Though the navigation of the first-generation Dalit women learners into hierarchical university academic spaces is extremely tough, it is their agency in adapting to those settings through the possible contestation and negotiations that makes their untold stories exceptional. First-generation Dalit women learners have developed their survival strategies to cope with

²⁶ Multi-fold oppression entailed based on gender and intersectionality is narrated Navya while conducting the in-depth interview on 08 February 2022 at 8 pm.

the patriarchal and casteist exclusionary practices experienced in the university. The responses are non-homogenous with both confrontational and strategies of ignorance. How they adapt themselves to the university and the students who partake in caste politics is noteworthy. Though the social environments of the first-generation Dalit women scholars are different from the university, they constantly contested the conventional regressive notions and adopted acquired cultural capital in the university settings. In university social spaces the first-generation learners are exposed to new social assets such as education, intellect, style of speech, style of dress, and so forth, which also enhance social interactions that eventually lead to acquiring cultural capital. This process depicts the potential of universities as an efficient social institution of reform in transforming the lives of individuals and society eventually towards the framework of sustainable equality. The transitional phase of the first-generation Dalit women scholars from the excluded to the exceptions involves certain negotiations and contestation. The resilient covert forms of questioning the casteist slurs undertake certain costs that are striking and must be analysed. One of the respondents says:

I was advised to hide my caste identity to be free from ill-treatment and discrimination in the department. When my colleague asked about the certificates that needed to be submitted for fellowship, I sent my certificates through the mail, which included my caste certificate. Another colleague of mine stopped me and told me, 'Do not send your caste certificate, they will get to know your caste and you will be looked down upon. In my lab other girls who belong to the Brahman community used to discuss among themselves, 'Why reservation is there, people must be given opportunities based on 'merit'?' When I argued with them, they stopped talking to me. So,

to avoid such instances, I used to keep earphones and ignore such comments²⁷.

The negotiations of the first-generation Dalit women learners can be tacit, whereas, for the privileged sections of students, their caste is a strong cultural capital and shields them from the vulnerabilities of the first-generation status. On the contrary, first-generation Dalit women students are advised to conceal their identity as Dalits to escape from the exclusionary practices and discrimination based on their social identity being a 'Dalit woman.' Therefore, the habitus of caste in university is quite evident and it makes the lower caste women experience the university spaces as hostile ones. These hostile spaces needed to be contested and those modes of contestation acquired cultural capital to survive on campus. The multiplicity of voices of first-generation Dalit women scholars in the process of challenging the institutional discernments and countering their structural inequalities are insightful terrains to examine. In a confrontational manner one of the respondents from the field says, I quote:

The first thing Dalit students need to learn is, 'they are not inferior to anybody' if the other caste people talk to us, then we must talk otherwise avoid them, if we are respected, then we should respect, if not, we should repeat the same. First thing, I will not feel inferior based on my caste identity and if someone tries to discriminate against me through words or actions, I will respond to them with a counterargument, 'why should Dalits be scared always?' ²⁸.

These instances arguably have their roots in the self-respect movement (1952) led by Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy to allow people to live a life of freedom from slavery. The perception that first-generation learners are not

²⁷ Sakshi explained her strategies of negotiation in the academic space being a first-generational learner from poor socio-economic background at 9 pm on 11 March 2022.

²⁸ Tanisha expressed her rage and contested the caste practices in academic spaces of university on 17 September 2022 at 5 pm.

merely passive recipients of institutional inequalities but are also active agents in challenging them and carving out channels of social mobility. Therefore, as stated by Phule and Ambedkar, education has been the major social agency in bringing change and giving a sense of self-respect in the lives of these first-generation Dalit women research scholars in the hegemonic structures of educational institutions such as universities. Education is considered the only hope for the Dalit community to redeem themselves from the clutches of caste-based discrimination and exclusionary practices. Therefore, as stated by Deshpande & Zacharias (2013: 16), higher education is the most legitimate means for sustaining or justifying the existing social order, as well as changing or overthrowing it. With the lived experiences of the first-generation Dalit women scholars in Indian university spaces, it is observed that gender is a significant aspect in countering the mainstream casteist paradigms in contemporary times.

Discussion

First-generation learners can accomplish a positive and intergenerational change by overcoming educational deprivation in the academic space. The journey of first-generation students highlights a unique trajectory of contestations and struggle from elementary education to the university level with poor economic and socio-cultural capital. Breaking the glass ceiling by way of reaching universities, Dalit women scholars of the first generation are subjected to institutional inequalities leading to undesirable university experiences of systematic exclusion. Being a minority among the university, the dominant campus habitus which is a new phenomenon to the first-generation Dalit women learners, poses an additional burden on their coping methods and capabilities. This vividly depicted the social phenomenon of the 'invisibilisation' of the privilege to the students belonging to the upper castes and the marginalization of the students from Dalit and other marginalized communities deepens with their intersectional identity of gender and caste. Thus, the first-generation status is as important

as other categorical inequalities in understanding discrimination and exclusion of the Dalit women students as they come from lower strata with low socio-economic and educational backgrounds in India. Besides, the first-generation Dalit women students undergo a transition in their social environment which is substantially radical to make themselves fit into university spaces. This process of coping and adjusting to the campus dominant habitus negatively impacts their academic performance, as the process takes time and a toll on them. On the other hand, irrespective of all the barriers, first-generation learners are exposed to new social assets such as education, intellect, style of speech, style of dress, and so forth, and also enhanced social interactions that eventually lead to acquired cultural capital, which sometimes helps them succeed in their academic endeavours. It is to be noted that campus habitus is not devoid of caste and gender structures and the formations of alternative cultural capital that facilitates inclusive university campus experiences and just social relations for first-generation learners.

Chapter 5

Theoretical Equality and Empirical Discrimination: Gender Realities of Non-academic Spaces on University Campus

Introduction and Context

Higher education specifically talking about university education is considered as a significant catalyst in promoting social mobility and change in the existing society globally. Ideally, the university is denoted as the most inclusive social space in representing students from all social backgrounds irrespective of their varied socioeconomic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. To talk about gender, despite the delayed and limited participation of women students in university education, it has been improving significantly owing to the feminist movements and social trends influenced by globalisation. Compared to the limited presence of women students in universities earlier, there seems to be a surge in their numerical representation in contemporary times. Andre Beteille (2005:3380) observed that in university education women students could enjoy the freedom to explore new social relations and construct a new self-identity. However, as a vital social institution, university education has its own paradoxes. Hence, there have been several sociological writings on the challenges women undergo in patriarchal academic spaces as these spaces continue to manifest characteristics of masculinist self-fashioning. Alongside, it is the need of the hour to explore the non-academic spaces and how gender identity is negotiated by the women students as they play a key role in getting adapted to the campus ambiance, creating social networks, and broadening social outlook through informal discussions outside the academic spaces, including making and meeting lifetime friends and partners. Thus, overall

non-academic spaces and social relations in those settings are viewed as less imposing for they generate a sense of belonging to the women students in comparison to academic spaces

Space as a social domain provides the locale through which meanings, subjective positioning, social implications for lived experiences are expressed (Raju & Paul, 2018: 129). Women students face restrictions in accessing certain public places and their access to public spaces at night is considered illegitimate in the male-dominated world ruled by patriarchal worldview, wherein men are expected to be in public and women in private spheres. Feminist scholars such as Kate Millet (1970), and Simon de Beauvoir (1946) criticized the public-private dichotomy which ensures the asymmetrical relation between genders and ultimately oppresses women with the patriarchal hierarchy. Inequality between the genders and the systemic discrimination that women face in a patriarchal system limits their movements and ability to negotiate public spaces. Therefore, as argued by Valentine (1989), it is important to study how women use or occupy public places, specifically since discourses of institutions, the media, family, and friends, aim to convince women that men take advantage of public places to commit violence against them in society and universities as well (cited by Condon et.al, 2007: 102).

In the Indian context, women have been subjected to multiple forms of oppression with the orthodox patriarchal socio-cultural practices. The physical movement to other places has been one of the significant considerations in restricting women from attaining higher education. With the wide opening of educational institutions and rampant urban growth, Indian women are seeking their rights to participate in all social spheres. By retaining the Indian values, the so-called '*new Indian women*' are practicing the ways of modern/western as well. Thus, they are ceaselessly trying to strike the balance between the public and private spheres (Munshi,2001:90). However, women being flexible in accessing public places are most often

the targets of character assassination and even subjected to physical violence. Public spaces on university campuses are broadly viewed by women students as unfriendly and even hostile spaces. The State, its functionaries, and university administration apparently believe that women might be better off avoiding these spaces. Thus, not only do the former not just abdicate but they also assume that nobody would want to access safety and loitering (Phadke 2013:51). Thus, wandering by women is seen as anti-social and less dignified for women in society. Both in Indian society and educational institutions women going out, other than their hostel residences at odd hours such as nighttime, is seen as a social taboo even today. As Sujatha Patel (2010) observes, 'women's physical access to public areas is regulated by a time scape that limits their presence during the evening and night, particularly out alone' (48). This limitation affects women's lives in numerous ways such as the right and access to education, paid work, and the freedom to move around (Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007: 1543). Many scholars such as (Paul, 2011; Phadke, 2005; Ranade, 2007) have pointed out that in the Indian context women are expected to be out in purposeful ways and not for pleasure-seeking activities. Thus, the ambivalence of the public and private sphere is strictly observed in the lives of Indian women students on university campuses as well.

Having a close relationship to the liberal imagination (Viswanathan, 2000: 3597), university education is the celebrated social institution of empowerment and sustainable equality. In this context, the important observation that needs to be made is to how does public and private dichotomy based on gender is present and sustained on university campuses? To what extent women and other gender identity students are experiencing non-academic spaces of universities? And how other social identities are contributing to processes of shaping non-academic experiences and negotiations for women students?

Building on these lines of inquiry, the first part of this chapter discusses the nature of gendered public places on university campus concerning public/private discourse. Everyday gender realities of women students are documented encompassing all forms of violence such as physical, symbolic, and emotional/psychological violence. The second part of this chapter deals with intersectionality of gender, caste, class, religion, and sexuality. Each section has its sub-sections which strives to capture negotiations of women students from disadvantaged backgrounds concerning non-academic spaces at university, politics of food and social stigma, and finally homophobic experiences of queer students in the hetero-normative public places of campus.

1. Public/Private Dichotomy and Gendered Non-academic Spaces

Feminist scholarship in general debates on the Public/private dichotomy is where the public sphere refers to the activities outside the domestic places that include arenas of public spheres usually controlled by men. On the other hand, the private sphere is related to domestic spheres i.e., family and household which are considered ideal for women. Therefore, the discourse and the distinctions between the private sphere (understood as the sphere of the familial and domestic) and public sphere (understood as including what other traditions have demarcated as civil society or State) have been central to feminist analysts (Phillips 2002: 72). Radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone (1970), Grace Atkinson (1969), Judith Brown (2000) and so forth have led feminist political struggle with a slogan i.e. “The personal is political”. The claim in the slogan appears as a radical denial of the difference between two central senses of private and public by highlighting an idea that self-regarding is thoroughly influenced by cultures and social norms (Gavison, 1992:18). Higher educational institutions such as universities are not exempt from being the product of the patriarchal society. Hence, sociologically outlining how gender gets negotiated in non-academic public spaces on university campuses is an interesting aspect to

analyse. Therefore, this section exclusively deals with the invisible glass ceilings that curtail the free movement of women students inside the campus. And the multiple forms of violence encountered by women students based on their gender identity as female in the male-dominated patriarchal non-academic public spaces will be discussed.

a. Theoretical Equality and Empirical Discrimination

University education is considered to be endorsing and institutionalising egalitarian ideas in society. In India, universities were the modern and secular institutions in a society that was governed largely by the rules of kinship, caste, religion, and so forth (Beteille, 2005:3380). Though there have been long battles for women to enter these universities, over time their presence increased. Theoretically speaking, Indian university spaces are regarded as gender neutral without any discrimination being practiced based on categorical inequalities. Women students have equal access to all the facilities on campus such as the cafeteria, hostel dining facilities, public lawns, cultural events, sports complex, and so forth. They can be part of any student groups, and express their opinions freely, though some universities have time restrictions for girls' hostels. There are no such time as odd hours, women can be on campus public spaces at any time of the day, even late at night. Thus, the list is too long and deeply social in nature. Indian women students have theoretical freedom with empirical discrimination in all forms of gender reality. This dichotomy remains one of the most debated social conditions of higher education in India. Respondents from the field expressed a constant sense of fear and insecurity in accessing male-dominated public places on campus. One of the respondents narrates her experiences of accessing public places on campus:

whenever accessing public spaces like canteens, grocery shops, or even a casual walk on campus roads, I would prefer to go with my friends in groups. We can access all places on the university campus without any restrictions like male students. However, I feel

extremely insecure and uncomfortable alone as these public spaces are mostly crowded by men. Sitting in groups male students notice every single detail such as how girls are walking, what kind of dress we wear, comment on our physical appearance, and judge us in all possible ways. This unwanted attention makes me conscious and nervous. Therefore, though I wanted to walk around freely on campus, I would not go out without friends. It is too frightening to face such situations alone.²⁹

This presents the covert public and private dichotomy based on gender on university campuses. Though all students can access campus non-academic spaces equally, the legitimate ownership is of male students who are perceived as the natural occupants. Contrarily, women students are perceived as the 'other' which makes them feel out of place. Thus, women students are deprived of a sense of belonging, unlike male students in freely accessing university public places. Non-academic spaces on campus turn out to be gendered with discrimination and constant hostile surveillance. Thus, women students lack the agency to explore the campus public places independently which makes them often evocative docile disciplined bodies (Foucault, 2005:136). Henceforth, it is evident that gender realities of non-academic spaces on Indian campuses lack the expected gender freedom.

b. 'Men will be Men': Leisure is not for Women

Public places on campus are not just sites of physical violence and gender discrimination. They are also in a way spaces with symbolic violence and psychological violence (Condon et.al, 2007: 121). Therefore, the conventional definition of physical and sexual violence needs to include mental and emotional violence as well. The daily lives of women are

²⁹ On 20 February 2023 at 5 pm, an in-depth interview was conducted with the respondent named Aarthi by the researcher.

structured with passive forms of violence that regulate controlling their movement and behaviour through a constant and unceasing sense of insecurity (Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007: 1543). Traditional Hindu orthodox connotations in Indian society glorify the concept of '*pativrata*' meaning a virtuous woman/wife who is loyal to her husband and stays within the domestic sphere, therefore regarded as ideal/good. The women who participate in public events with freedom are perceived as '*Kulata*' (unfaithful/slut) ultimately bad women. From childhood Indian girls are socialized to grow up as '*pativrata*' and their presence in public places is always under scrutiny. Accordingly, in university setup, public spaces where students have leisure time such as cafeterias and open lawns for students to sit and have gatherings are the major hubs for making female students vulnerable to unfavourable experiences. Though both genders are visible in these places, female students are the major targets of stigmatization attributed to the qualities of a 'good woman' who is not visible in public places and is subjected to all forms of violence. One of the respondents in the field shared her experiences of violence in public places on campus:

Girls like me can explore public spaces and roam around at any time only inside the campus. It is not easy in the outside world. Unfortunately, due to undesirable experiences, we have to sacrifice our happiness. Whenever I go to the canteen, I observe some random group of boys staring at girls inappropriately, and such behaviour is normalized. I feel this is a form of harassment as it is very disturbing and traumatises me. When I questioned my friend regarding such behaviour, he replied, 'Men will be men' and it is very normal. It is so disturbing to hear such insensible validations. Despite having all the facilities at the university, we cannot have a cup of tea peacefully

without being disturbed by such patriarchal behaviour of male students³⁰.

Thus, students continue to face challenges in having equal access to non-academic public places due to the misogynistic assumptions that women should not be in public. The conservative notions in the disguise of a cultural idea that 'men will be men' is indirectly or directly popularised by the mainstream media outlets, both print and digital. Such popular perceptions of culture and gender find readymade consumers in the form of university students. As a result, toxic masculinity traits are re-infused into the minds of students leading to derogatory verbal assaults and objectification of women's sexuality.

Universities have a vibrant atmosphere that encourages students to actively participate in cultural programs and college festivals. These cultural events meant for recreation make students integrate into the university system and develop strong associations eventually to minimise their academic stress. All students irrespective of their genders tend to participate actively and experience the university cultural festivals. But women students have the burden of being a 'good woman' on one side and the fear of sexual violence to explore these activities on the other. Women feel vulnerable to sexual violence, which to them constitutes a serious crime, what Ferraro (1996) called the "shadow" effect: the fear of sexual attack influences all aspects of their lives (cited by Condon et.al, 2007: 104). Many women students are of the view that these cultural festivals on campuses are sites of gender abuse. One of the respondents observes:

Cultural programs such as the freshers' party and campus annual fest used to make me excited as we would have an open dias to dance our hearts out the whole night with great music. Male and female

³⁰An in-depth interview is conducted with the respondent Keerti on 8 May 2023 at 9 pm in the hostel premises.

students all participate actively. Sadly, boys assume that female students who come to these programs are easy-going and they misbehave with them. When I was dancing one guy grabbed my t-shirt near my chest area taking advantage that he would not be noticed. Responding to such actions is not possible as I could barely see him in the crowd. I felt totally distressed³¹.

This makes us realize the fact that in a male-dominated patriarchal educational institution, leisure is not for women, and it remains a luxury. Though both genders are active in cultural activities at university, female students had to face the burden of discrimination and social stigma. Taking advantage of the crowded places and anonymity male students sexually abuse women students as there will be no evidence to complain. Indian universities are designed for all genders but sadly, women students are viewed as fish out of water. There is a sharp difference of gender experiences of public/private dichotomy in the university public places. Interestingly, the mainstream notions that men in public and women in private spheres are not directly evident in the frontline on the supposedly gender-neutral campus spaces but are experienced by women students in everyday reality covertly.

2. Social Spaces and Social Categories: an Unequal Alliance

Dominated by the unequal social practice of the caste system, Indian higher educational institutions are not immune to categorical inequalities based on gender, caste, religion, sexuality, and so forth. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds such as scheduled castes and tribes are subjected to institutional discrimination. Sociologists such as N.Badiger (2015), Deshpande (2016), Sukumar (2022), and so forth have discussed the caste discrimination and exclusion experienced by Dalit students in universities.

³¹ Regarding the experiences in cultural programs Ritika shared her experiences on April 6, 2023 at 7 pm.

To talk about non-academic spaces on university campuses, inequalities of caste and other social rankings are built into the public and private spaces (Butalia, 2012: 3). Every social space is characterized and expressed by its own culture, which tends to set the boundaries (Puwar, 2004: 116). With the existing politics of space, certain sections of students find it hard to fit into the university campus culture, women and specifically Dalit women students find it tougher than others. Regarding non-academic spaces on campus and caste experiences, one of the respondents expressed as follows:

In university spaces, students belonging to economically elite and socially dominant are more visible. They tend to hang out together for relatively longer hours having tea breaks and engage in social interactions and discussions among themselves. I think this is a luxury, that students like me cannot have with poor economic conditions. My non-urban appearance & less polished English language skills make me feel less confident in these spaces. Some students belonging to economically disadvantaged backgrounds tend to take up part-time jobs after attending classes with a primary motive to meet everyday expenses and support their families to the extent possible. Sometimes I feel that I am losing precious moments like spending leisure with my friends³².

The dominant presence of students belonging to privileged social background in public places on campus directs us towards the politics of concealed spaces. The role of 'habitus' which is socially ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that are necessary for an individual to make a decent living according to Bourdieu (1980: 81-93), is significant in accessing public spaces in society and university campus particularly. Lack of such dominant habitus of the mainstream/dominant students leads to sense of inferiority complex and self-exclusionary feelings. . Hence, alignment of

³² Kavitha explained her condition coming from poor socio-economic background at 4pm on 20 May, 2023.

class with caste cannot be separated in the context of India due to which taking care of mental health is considered a luxury as they lack minimum everyday requirements to survive. Compared to female students from disadvantaged social backgrounds, male students have an agency due to their gender as male and active participation in caste-based political organizations and discussions. Women students belonging to the disadvantaged background undergo multi-layered oppression based on their social location of gender and caste in comparison to their upper-caste women and the fellow male students from the same caste.

III. Politics of Food: Gender Cutting across Caste and Religious boundaries

Indian society is known for its cultural diversity but Hindu religious notions of certain food items are associated with the notions of purity/impurity. As observed by Claude Fischler (1988), for Samkhya philosophy, Indian food ingredients are categorised on lines of three distinct qualities i.e. *sāttvika*, *rajastika*, and *tāmasika*. Dairy products are classified as *sāttvika* and they promote perfection, discernment, and intelligence. Next, *rajastika* includes egg-fish-goat/sheep-chicken which are linked with vitality and force. Lastly, *tāmasika* is considered polluting and comprises pork, buffalo/beef, and wild animals. This classification illustrates the principle that the consumer acquires the quality of what he/she consumes (cited by Sebastia, 2019:113). Kancha Ilaiah (1996: 3) argued that Brahminical consciousness forgets that the beef-eating castes are also the cattle-rearing castes and their love and affection towards these animals is more intimate than those castes which do not involve themselves in rearing cattle, and yet construct a theory, of sacred bovine animals. There are wider debates and protests in support and against beef consumption in the country and university spaces as well. Dining facility in university hostels is one of the important socializing sites for students from different cultural backgrounds who have diverse food habits. Multiple and contradictory perceptions on food cultures

of each other seem to be generating tussles among student community on campus. As these differences are layered upon the existing stereotypes of caste and gender, Dalit women and Muslim women students are at the receiving end of food stereotypes. A woman student expressed her opinion against the idea of serving beef in hostel dining room, I quote:

In the university dining facility, we get all specials in vegetarian food. In non-vegetarian food, chicken, and goat meat (mutton) are socially acceptable. As far as I know, only less population will consume beef (either Buffalo or Cow). Campus dining facility is used by all and some students are not comfortable with the idea of serving beef in these places. Partly it is also to do with Hindu religious sentiments attached to 'Gomatha' (Cow as mother goddess). Not just the students, even the cooking staff in these dining facilities are having apprehensions and resentments over beef³³.

The idea of *Tamasika*, the polluted food consumed by impure people, and politics of cow and beef are very much prevalent on campus. In the midst of the growing opposition for beef consumption on campus, students of Ambedkarite organization are at the forefront of demanding beef consumption and its recognition as their cultural aspect. The beef (Buffalo) festival (*Pedda kōra panduga*) was organized in University of Hyderabad (UoH) in the year 2006, EFLU (English and Foreign Languages University) in 2011, and Osmania University in 2012. Despite these initiatives, beef remains a contentious meal as the Dalit students have not succeeded in introducing it into the menu of university dining facility (Gundemeda 2009: 132). Dalit and Muslim students view that they will not be served their

³³ On politics of food in university dining spaces Ankitha stated her observation on March30, 2023 at 11 am.

staple meat and on top of it they are humiliated based on their habits by fellow students.

Thus, politics of food on university campuses across India demonstrates that food habits of some social groups are treated as mainstream and considered pure. Those food habits are projected as accepted as normal and others are stigmatized and considered 'controversial'. Public humiliation of students who consume beef has gender dimensions that cut across caste and religion. In other words, women students are disproportionately targeted and humiliated by those who oppose beef consumption. Those diverse and peculiar experiences of women students belonging to Dalit and Muslim communities seem to be unfolding differently from other women students. These politics of food on campuses allow us to critically examine the mainstream feminist narratives of 'similarity and homogeneity in the lived experiences of all women'. Often these diverse experiences of Dalit and Muslim women students are left out from the mainstream feminist discourses stemming from higher educational institutions.

IV. Heteronormativity and Deviant Subjects on Campus

Queer includes those who openly wear sexual identities like lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender on their sleeves and those who use Indigenous terms like hijras, kothis, and panthis to describe themselves (Narain and Bhan 2005; Pande 2004 and Menon 2007). In the year 2000, the public sphere was captured by the LGBTQ community through gay pride parades across the country. It is often argued that LGBTQ activism challenges the hegemony of the heterosexual State and demands to protect them and their fundamental rights (Srivastava 2014: 378). In 2014, the Supreme Court of India made a landmark ruling declaring that trans-gendered people must have access to equal opportunity in society. Until this landmark judgement, many students were not comfortable enough to identify themselves as part of the LGBTQ community owing to backlash from other students and university administration. Historically, the queer are considered as a threat

to the heteronormative societies which believe that there are only two genders: male and female. As a result, the third gender is stigmatised leading to extreme forms of harassment and discrimination. Recent research (Ellis 2002; Hegarty et al. 2004) suggests that, at least in principle, equal rights for LGBTQ people are well reinforced. Nevertheless, homophobic/transphobic hate crimes are still common occurrences (Ellis, 2009:723) and in India it is even more pronounced as the queer community is not accepted socially. Though queer students gained entry into university spaces but their gender identity continues to be a major barrier in their everyday lifeworld. Queer students find campus environments less sensitive to gender realities. Therefore, the 'climate of fear' increases the chances of psychosocial distress, incidence of depression, anxiety, and subclinical indicators of social stress to queer students on campus (Ellis, 2009:727). A few students in the field were comfortable with disclosing their LGBTQ identity, precisely biologically male students. One of the narratives of respondents from the field is mentioned below:

Most of the students in university are not sensitized to gender. I observed both male and female students pass homophobic comments. In the university hostel I get antagonist looks whenever I use common washrooms. Some male students say they are afraid of me because of my sexuality as transgender. At the university dining facility one of the workers used to say my speaking style would be more feminine and imitate whatever I say. This made me feel humiliated in front of other students who gave indifferent gazes. I warned him not to make such comments but he took me for granted. After complaining to the hostel warden, he stopped doing so³⁴.

³⁴ Krishna explained what it means to be a queer student in the homophobic non-academic spaces at 3pm on May 8, 2023.

There are multiple dynamics and social complexities involved with identity questions of queer students on campus. Queer students are often considered deviant elements as they critique the existing normative heterosexuality and their existence in university spaces making a radical statement that gender is not a two-dimensional category. As a consequence, institutionalized notions of gender identity i.e. male/female in university spaces are turning hostile to these non-gender conformities the queer students seem to be following. Queer students undergo a multitude of oppression and demeaning humiliations based on sexuality and they are deprived of basic needs in university non-academic spaces. The unwelcoming attitude of female students also attracts attention as in how queer identity is cutting across gender. Thus, queer students are more vulnerable and subjected to discrimination in different spaces on campus. Hence, their experiences of homophobia in university spaces need deeper analysis as their very existence becomes a major concern leading to derogatory treatment and sometimes physical assaults. Furthermore, within queer community mostly trans/gay students who are biologically male are open about their gender identity in comparison to the trans /lesbian students who are female biologically. This showcases the fact that social acceptance/tolerance towards the gender preferences of students is even minimal in comparison to their counterparts which forces them to live concealed lives of their choice in higher education institutions

Discussion

University education ideally endorses and institutionalizes egalitarian ideas in society. Theoretically speaking, Indian university spaces are regarded as gender-neutral with no room for discrimination. but the empirical reality is in contrast with the invisible glass ceilings. Though all students can access non-academic spaces equally, the legitimate ownership is believed to be of male students who are perceived as the natural occupants. On the contrary, women students are perceived as the 'other' which makes them feel out of

place. Non-academic spaces on campus turn out to be gendered with women subjected to gender discrimination empirically with constant hostile surveillance. There is a sharp existence of public/private dichotomy in the university public places. Not only physical violence but also symbolic violence such as passing lewd comments, staring inappropriately, making gestures, hostile gazes, and so forth are major vicious acts that affect women students psychologically and violate their fundamental rights. In terms of politics of concealed spaces on campus, which are designed in a way that makes caste structures for instance 'cis upper caste male' as natural inhabitants and the disadvantaged feel excluded and misfit. Poor economic conditions of women students too determining their levels of social interactions, associations, and friend circles that play a major role in experiencing campus life. Hence, the alliance of class and caste cannot be separated in the social context of Indian universities. Additionally, imposition of the food beliefs of a social group upon other students is evident in the hostel's dining facilities. The idea of polluted food consumed by impure people is very much prevalent on campus and women students are primary target of such ill-treatment. The dissent of women students from historically disadvantaged communities regarding beef consumption highlights grave violations of their basic right to food and life with dignity. The overall experiences of women students and intersectional experiences of women students based on gender, caste, class, religion, and sexuality in non-academic spaces of universities make evident that gender realities are locked in with the dichotomy of theoretical equality and empirical discrimination with multiple social factors playing contextually meaningful roles.

Chapter 6

Divided by Ideology and United by Gender Stereotypes: Debating Politics of Representation and Tokenism in Student Politics in India

Introduction and Context

The role of students' political activism is immense in bridging the categorical inequalities on university campuses and in effect making them more egalitarian. Student activism is traditionally accepted as a desirable/legitimate element of the political system and this activism is believed to have a notable positive impact on society. In many developing countries, students lead organizations played an important role in independence movements and established a prominent place in the society's political narrative. Hence, student movements are viewed 'normal' in the political system (Altbach 1989:100). Social scientists such as Flacks (1967a), Westby and Braungart (1966), Keniston (1968), and so forth have defined student activists are the strata from economically, socially, and educationally privileged. In the political context of India, where income inequalities are noticeable, there is no doubt that student leaders are from more affluent families than the general student population (Altbach 1989:103). Eventually, there came leaders from lower socio-economic strata established their presence and challenged the non-egalitarian university spaces (Deshpande 2013b:16). Student political activism is associated with the national political parties which have their ideological orientations and so far, students' associations are considered as youth wings

of these national and regional political parties which primarily meant to cater to their political interests.

Student political involvement seems to have emerged with the nationalist discourse both in industrialized and colonized states. In 1848, Germany witnessed the first student movement emphasizing democratic rights and India witnessed major students' participation in the non-cooperation movement against the British colonial rule in 1920 (Altbach 1968: 255). Thus student-powered revolts occurred around the world through their activism. Emerging from nationalist ideals, student activism was active in contesting the monarchies of the state, civil rights, educational reforms, and so forth. Along with the national issues students were also involved in the academic and campus-based issues which are local in their outlook. Butler points out that in the era of neoliberalism, globalization, and decolonization, student movements are renewing their revolutionary calls for the promise of free education with no tuition fees, hence promoting equality, freedom, and justice (Butler 2022: 61). Along with politics, student activism also has cultural orientations. To be precise, the feminist movement first gained strength on campus and then spread itself to other parts of society. For instance, liberal attitudes concerning abortion, marriage, and the use of drugs were first widespread among university students and then spread to the broader society (Altbach 1989:105). Indian students through their activism successfully involved in the independence struggle, contested the monarchy of state, challenged identity-based discriminations, fought for reforms against commercialization of education, regulated institutional tuition fee structures, criticized sexual harassment, caste-based atrocities, and urged for quality food and basic amenities on campus.

However, the response of the state toward student activism is not homogenous across time and space. In post-independence India, there came a dramatic perceptual shift towards the student movement by the Indian state, which has been hostile (Jayaram 1978: 683). Students who were

considered anti-state were blacklisted and thrown out of university/ college by denying their admission which in a way led to depoliticization of students' unions/organisations across India. In many parts of India, student elections were banned, and student associations were forced to be purely 'cultural' in nature (Jayaram 1978: 687). The state which promoted activism initially, later with its antagonistic notions labelled student activism as hooliganism and even harassed students physically. This trend of antagonism against students' activism is observed even in the contemporary times in major universities like JNU (Jawahar Lal University, DU (Delhi University), HCU (Hyderabad Central University), and so forth where students are considered a threat to the state.

The politics of identity that emerged in the 1990s in fact paved a path to *new student activism*. Caste has become the center of public imagination since the 1990s which can be agreed as the 'momentous decade' where the lower castes asserted their identities in mainstream national politics (Deshpande 2013b:16). Thus, identity gained importance in both national and student politics in the 1990s and that trend continued in the form of response to the 2014 suicide of a Dalit research scholar Rohith Vemula from the Central University of Hyderabad.

By and large, the domain of student activism remained a muscular domain with negligible representation of women students. Feminist scholarship on women representation in politics critiqued the traditional masculinity and stated 'politics as a football game' (Dahlerup, 2006 :150) where women remain at the periphery. Historically speaking, the active participation of women in political movements dates to back to the 19th century. In the West, women gaining the right to vote in 1920 was a major achievement of the first wave of feminism. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the second wave of feminism which included the Civil rights movement, and the movement protesting the Vietnam War (Braungart, 1990; Carson, 1981; Fendrich & Turner, 1989; Keniston, 1968; McAdam, 1988, 1989). Many of these

women were the ones who attended colleges and were influenced by student activism in academic spaces (Stewart et.al, 1998: 1). In the 1990s the third wave of feminism also became more conscious of race. The term "Intersectionality" was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 and focused on diverse forms of oppression when gender and race intersect. Intersectional theorists voiced out ways in which people experience inclusion and exclusion, discrimination, disadvantages, their aspirations, and specific identities (Yuval-Davis, 2006:198). Kanter (1977a) argues that numerically dominant will control the group and its culture, while a numerical minority are reduced to symbolic representatives of their social category (cited by Childs & Krook, 2008 :727). This vividly depicts the condition of women in mainstream politics as mere symbols of politics of representation. However, there seems to be insufficient scholarly work around women students and politics of student activism on university campuses. In India, women students had to face the burden of patriarchal mindset in the families that poses multiple challenges in accessing university education. As stated by scholars such as Flacks (1967a), Keniston (1968), and Altbach (1989) student political organizations, leaders and members of student organizations are not just from affluent economic backgrounds but also come from disadvantaged social conditions. Student activists in Indian universities produced new symbols of hope and dissent by challenging the established structures of caste hegemony (Pathania, 2018: 17). For them, these student organizations foster political consciousness with counter-narratives by challenging structural and institutionalized oppression. Women students from disadvantaged backgrounds undergo multi-fold oppression in the everyday campus life based on gender, caste, and religious identity. Such experiences of discrimination are more pronounced if they are active in student politics on campus. Often student voluntary associations/organizations can be divided into three main types: *political, cultural, and social service* associations (Oommen 1974: p. 778). Though each category is important and seem to

have a compelling social value on campus, our study is confined to student associations that have cultural and political orientations.

1. Breaking the Glass-ceiling: Student Politics as Masculine Affair

Beteille (2005) observed that in university education women students could enjoy the freedom to explore new social relations (3380). In achieving this, one of the emanating aspects of the university is student political associations. Student associations are in some cases, student wings of the political parties. Often, very few students on the campus take an active interest in these political organizations, unless they are exposed to politics before or aspiring to become political leaders in near future. To aspiring political leaders, these organizations provide the much-needed opportunity to develop contacts with the wider political networks both in and out of the campus. Moreover, the political parties take the initiative in nurturing such organizations on campuses across India as the slogan "catch them young" is accepted by all parties as the main agenda to draw a maximum number of students into their political fold (Oommen 1974: 780) which has both social and personal motives. Active engagement and participation of women students is the need of the hour to safeguard their rights and experience university inclusively by opposing the repressive patriarchal structures and practices that are institutionalized. Against popular perceptions, women leaders can be role models in encouraging other women students to be future leaders. However, there are many misconceptions and restrictions on the active participation of women students in political organizations on campus making it a perpetual struggle. Some of the women students from the field who are not into any political organizations stated as follows:

From the beginning, I have been neutral without joining any political organization but I feel they are important for the welfare of students. I am not an active member because politics can distract my

studies. My parents are not in any political party; therefore, I have no exposure to student politics before joining the university. Additionally, women who are active politically are perceived and branded as ‘cheap & out of line’ for being vocal. Considering such negative connotations, I was unwilling to be a part of student political organizations on campus³⁵.

Another student explains the reason why she did not join any student political organization:

I am not into any political organization on campus. Never got the time to join any protest. Being a queer person, I am overwhelmed that a queer person is a prominent student leader on campus. However, there is a negative notion that women students working in these student organizations are used as pawns only to attract male students into organizations. These allegations are scary, and I never dared to join any student political organizations because of such negative notions³⁶.

These narratives of women students present that though they have constructive opinions on university student political organizations, there is a wide range of misconceptions and uncertainties, which act as bottlenecks for their participation. Being vocal and having political consciousness is considered an exclusive male domain. There are many negative connotations on politically visible women in campus spaces. Universities being a by-product of society, the presence of women in general and their active participation in student politics is not adequate to promote gender/women empowerment (Simmons, Lilly, 2010:349). As argued by radical feminists such as Millet (1970), Daly (1968), Firestone(2003), and

³⁵ This narrative is extracted from the in-depth interview conducted by the author with Rani on 30 January 2023 at 2 pm near the university library lawns in the field.

³⁶ The author conducted an in-depth interview with Madhu on 12 February 2023 at 11 am on university premises.

so forth men oppress women just because of their biological orientation as female, and the root cause of all oppression of women is patriarchy. Similarly, (un)popular perceptions about women students in political organizations fundamentally boils down to biological beings, where their modesty gets questioned, and are slut-shamed for being assertive of their rights. Women students in the political limelight are unpopularized by the negative comments which stand as a major barrier for them. The condition gets worse if their family members do not encourage politics. In doing so, student political organizations are marked out exclusively as a muscular domain. This misogynistic glass ceiling needs to be broken to increase the participation of women in student political organizations on university campuses. The lived experiences of the women students who volunteered to be part of students' organizations are articulated in the following sections.

2.Mainstream vs Marginalized: Narratives of Political Socialization and Political Mobilization

For most students and women students particularly, the university has been a major agent in raising social consciousness in challenging the unequal social practices existing under the carpet of patriarchy. Not just the ideological stance but various other factors contribute to strengthening the cadre of student political organizations. To begin with the admission process of the newly joined students, the role of the '*help desks*' of the various student organizations is vital in helping students with the admission process in guiding them towards the venue of admissions, taking required certificates, paying the tuition fees, applying for hostel accommodation, and so forth. Through these help desks, students get to know various student political organizations on campus. And the student organizations use this as an important strategic political platform to draw the newly joined students into their organizational fold. Besides helping new students early on in their university life, help desks act as a key factor in creating a positive impression about organizations and making students join them after

admissions. These gestures of help/support certainly play a role in expanding the support base among newly joined students, sometimes these gestures of help work in favor of student organizations beyond existing ideological boundaries on campus.

The second aspect is the phenomena of freshers' party which is a welcome ceremony for the newly joined students, usually organized by almost all the student organizations on campus. As all students gather in one place it is easy for the active members of student political organizations to access and identify the newly joined students who are active politically and interested in joining the organizations. During the admission process itself, the caste details of students will be obtained by the leaders of organizations and they influence new students based on their social identity. Upon identification of students interests and their political orientation in the initial days of the academic year, every day there will be a door-to-door campaigning in the hostels. Women activists will be campaigning in ladies' hostels and male activists in men's hostels respectively. This phase is crucial as the student leaders of respective organizations talk strategically with the students by knowing their whereabouts and any issues they are facing academically or otherwise. As far as women students are concerned, gender issues are significant as each organization propagates how they work for women's rights and safety by challenging the repressive measures of authorities such as time restrictions in student hostels, protest the sexual harassment, dress codes, and so forth. Therefore, they develop close connections and gain the trust of new students who get attracted mostly if they have no clear ideological orientations. Thus, they give out membership forms and encourage them to join their organizations. One more significant platform is the public gatherings, of academic and extra-curricular in nature, organized by the student organizations. Often, organizations conduct membership campaigns around these public events. In classrooms, student activists will distribute membership forms. Thus, these are some of the pertinent forms of creating membership by political organizations. These

events demonstrate how cultural aspects are used as anchoring points to strengthen student organizations by attracting new members into their organizational fold.

There are multiple student political organizations in the university driven by certain ideologies and collective ambitions. AICA (Students association inclined towards left ideology), APVP (Students association inclined towards right ideology), ABA (Ambedkarite Student Association), MTF (Muslim Students' association), DAU (Dalit Students association), BES (Bahujan Students association), and OBGF (Other Backward Castes students association)³⁷. Of late, the participation of women students increased considerably in political organizations, and are actively engaging in the political debates on campus in challenging the authoritarian impositions of the administration owing to new patterns of student admission into higher education. The social composition of students joining higher education institutions these days is undergoing major changes, and these changes are actively contributing to higher number of women students participating in student politics. Investigating these social patterns of student admissions into higher education in India can be a separate study. For the time being, we are focusing on how different student organizations with contrary political orientations could share and get united by the same gender stereotypes.

a.Divided by Ideology and United by Gender Stereotypes: Blurring Boundaries between the ‘Right and Left Wing’

Student organizations often mobilize their members to project unjust policies of the administration with the help of street plays, songs, public talks, roundtable discussions, and so forth. Though it is not uncommon to have women students representing their organizations in the university

³⁷ Pseudonyms are used for student organizations. From here, only names such as AICA, APVP, ABA will be mentioned in the text without giving abbreviations of these student political organizations.

student body elections, but it largely remained a strategic move just to win the student body elections. For instance, the AICA nominated its first female presidential candidate in 2014 and went on to win the elections. Demographically speaking, it has a diverse student group as its cadre with a smaller number of students from the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). The APVP has attracted diverse groups of student population with its nationalist agenda and conducts cultural programs by celebrating most of the Hindu religious festivals. APVP nominated its first woman candidate for the position of president in 2018 and won the elections that year. It is important to note here that these are nothing more than isolated incidents of strategic attempts to win the elections, hence does not represent substantial changes in favor of gender sensitivities on campus. Some of the respondents from these organizations narrates:

My father works at CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions); therefore, I have been familiar with left-wing politics and union work since childhood. After joining the university, my father's friends on campus introduced me to AICA. Being impressed by their active involvement in resolving the students' issues, I joined the organization in the initial days. As an extension of my privileged socio-economic background, I received support from the organization without having to go through uncomfortable experiences and eventually got elected as the first female president of the university in the 2013 student body elections³⁸.

Another respondent from the field states as follows:

As my father is in the army, I developed a strong sense of patriotism from a very young age. After joining the university, I did not affiliate myself with any political organization until the end of my second year. I was part of the drama club and got to know about APVP

³⁸ On 24 February 2023 at 3 pm, an in-depth interview was conducted with the respondent by the researcher.

through them. I only approached them to join the party as many of my close friends are working with this student group. I actively participated in their activities, along with my friends, and got an opportunity to contest for the post of GS-CASH (Gender Sensitization Committee Against Sexual Harassment) Representative in the 2023 elections from the APVP nomination³⁹.

Among others, it is evident that ‘political socialization’ at home and family influence continues to be one of the major agents of political preference among women students on university campuses in India. Robert E.Lane(1962) defined political socialization as the process through which individuals learn and internalize political values, beliefs, and attitudes. He argued that political socialization is influenced by various agents of socialization, such as family, education, media, and peer groups. Coming from privileged backgrounds which make them comfortable with “internalized structures” and “schemes of perception” that the dominant social and cultural conditions are established and reproduced (Bourdieu 1977:86). Thus, many women students in these organizations are exposed to ideological orientations early on with the family support enabling their involvement with the student organizations.

b. Political Conscientization of Ambedkarite Organization

In his book 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1970), Paulo Freire defined the term 'conscientization' which means raising critical consciousness against the oppressive praxis and challenging them by acquiring political and social outlook. On similar lines, the Ambedkarite Association (ABA) is triumphing with its daily efforts to make the university spaces more egalitarian and inclusive by raising the critical caste consciousness among

³⁹ An in-depth interview is conducted with the respondent on 4 May 2023 at 7 pm in the hostel

students. With its notable presence on campus, it has been fighting for the rights of marginalized students. One of the prominent stigmas they deal with on daily basis is the branding of Dalits as “quota students,” thus, creating a false narrative that Dalits lack the competence to be in university spaces. This has resulted in the construction of unjustifiable notions about Dalits being “Government’s son/daughters-in-law, beggars who need free help or son of God for having special treatment” (Sukumar 2008:17). To counter such caste-based discriminations and to assert their rights on university campus, ABA has mobilized students by organizing protests and academic talks on caste and inequalities in India. Historically, for the first time university has its students’ union president from a Dalit community in 2011 and queer president in 2023 from ABA. Field respondents have shared their reasons for joining the organization as follows:

A constant question in my mind used to be why there are not many women student activists at the forefront. Though ABA represents students from minority backgrounds like Dalits, Adivasis, and other economically backward communities, the participation of women students from these communities has strangely been almost negligible. In the initial days of my university stay, I was not a member of any association and had no idea of the existing student organizations. Coming from a Dalit community I thought I should join ABA as it follows Ambedkar's ideology and strive for the welfare of marginalized students. Therefore, in the second year of my Ph.D. I joined the association and after being an active member for three years I was nominated for the student body elections as their presidential candidate. I won the elections in 2023 and became the first female president representing the ABA in the students’ union body⁴⁰.

⁴⁰The respondent Kaveri explained her journey with one of the student organisations on 2 March 2023 at 9 pm in hostel.

Another student narrates her experience of why she preferred joining ABA on campus:

Got to know about various student associations after coming to university. Earlier, I knew Babasaheb Ambedkar as the one who drafted the constitution but, in university I got exposed to the works of Ambedkar in making society equal by advocating the rights of marginalized. Being a Dalit woman student, I faced many humiliations from my supervisor and ABA got my back. They raised a complaint without which I would have not submitted my M.Phil. thesis. Hence, I decided to join ABA and be an active member as they safeguard the rights of Dalit students on campus⁴¹.

Thus, it can be observed that young women students join student organizations and participate in political activities for a variety of reasons rather than mere ideological influences. Reasons include the need to engage in caste and gender issues, to promote equality, inclusiveness, to safeguard interests of diverse students, and to address local needs (Tony Nyundu et al., 2015:149). In student organizations like AICA, and APVP women students often come from privileged castes and classes who have been exposed to the respective ideologies from their families and are usually equipped with political capital as Bourdieu (1991) talks about. Thus, family as an institution not only plays a key role in the political socialization of women students but also restricts women students from it. In the context of ABA, students from marginalized sections tend to be active members. Women students from marginalized sections have no exposure to political organizations due to their disadvantaged family conditions with no socio-economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu,1985). Consequently, women students from marginalized sections evidently developed their political consciousness mostly through activities of student organizations. For them,

⁴¹ In an in-depth interview conducted on 8 March 2023 at 2 pm the respondent shared her experiences to the researcher

the organization is perceived more as a support system, in university spaces, that acts as a guardian of their rights and dignity.

3. Politics of Representation or Politics of Segregation: Student Union Elections

Elections play a key role in representing students from diverse backgrounds and intersectional identities. They pave the path for making the campus more inclusive and inspiring. A positive relationship between the students and administration tend to safeguard the rights of students and fosters university spaces with vibrant political atmosphere to shape the future leaders of the country. Despite the presence of liberal ideas and teachings that favor the promotion of gender friendly campus experiences, women students occupying positions of power/prominence in the student's union on regular basis is still a distant dream. Every single time when a woman is nominated, or not nominated, to a prominent electoral position there are complexities of multiple underlying informal and cultural contexts in which elections are typically held (Tilly 2007, cited by Manza, 2012:168). Therefore, a significant question that needs to be asked here is whether student organizations are promoting the politics of representation or the politics of segregation.

The office of the university election commission announces the prescribed dates for filing nominations, for withdrawal of the same nominations, finalizing the nomination of candidates, the first & last day of election campaigning, polling day, and finally counting day and announcement of results. The student union elections are a democratic measure for students to be representative of their fellow student community in universities, elected by them ultimately to safeguard their rights and serve their collective interest. The Student Union elections are conducted in September every academic year after the admission process is completed. Students contesting in elections for any position such as president, vice president, general secretary, joint secretary, cultural secretary, sports secretary, and

representative of gender sensitization committee against sexual harassment should be full-time regular students with valid semester registration. 75 percent of attendance is mandatory and there should not be any backlogs. The age limit for such students is 17 to 28 years. They should not have any criminal record and are not subjected to disciplinary action on campus. Final-year students of any program either graduation or Ph.D. are not eligible. Only one nomination is considered legible by each candidate. There is a nominal amount is collected as fee from the candidates along with their nomination forms. Regarding the selection process of candidates such as who makes decisions? what are the criteria for nominating a candidate? And how gender is negotiated? One of the women students who has been active in one of the student organizations says, we quote:

There will be an internal committee within each organization comprised of three to four male senior members and they along with other prominent and active members of the organization decide the names of candidates who would potentially be nominated from their organization to contest in the elections based on their political calculations and strategies. Though there will be a few senior female members involved in this important internal process of discussion, mostly male leaders will have the final say. If a particular member is active and has worked for the organization for more than two or three years, then they are seen as a suitable candidate for nominations. One must have more connections/networks on campus and create an impression that she/he can attract more votes with good communication and interpersonal skills to receive nomination to contest in elections⁴².

Another respondent narrates her experiences as follows:

⁴² On 12 April 2023 at 5 pm the researcher conducted in-depth interview with the respondent on university campus

There is a clear-cut gender segregation of positions that the student union has. Positions with more influence and higher social status are often viewed as positions meant for men. Positions with less influence and social status are attached to women students. These ideas are just an extension of patriarchal notions of our society. Therefore, nominations for positions like cultural secretary, and GS-CASH (Gender Sensitization Committee Against Sexual Harassment) representatives will be given to female candidates. Positions like the president, general secretary, and sports secretary will be mostly allocated to men and only in exceptional cases women candidates will be selected. That happens when senior leaders realize that there are no potential male candidates in the organization who are ready for elections. I am very active in sports and thought of contesting for the position of sports secretary in recent elections on campus. However, senior leaders in my organization offered the nomination to a male student and made me contest for the position of GS-CASH representative⁴³.

From these narratives, the patriarchal nature of the students' political organization is visible where the decision-making lies in the hands of male senior leaders, and prominent positions like president, general secretary, and sports secretary are not allotted to female candidates. The segregation of women candidates towards positions of cultural secretary and representative of the gender sensitization committee indicates compartmentalization of student politics in universities and its gendered forms of representation. In some cases, women candidates are made to contest the student union elections only for tokenism without giving any emphasis on the qualitative participation of women students with equal powers and importance. Additionally, nominations to prominent positions are given to women students only to use *women as a trump card*, especially

⁴³ 38 *ibid.*

when there are no potential male candidates. One must demystify the gender construction of what makes a male candidate with potential success in student elections. The ideal gender role of a man must be a strong, charismatic figure who can control and guide his subordinates, good at decision-making, more rational, maintains wide social networks, and renowned for good public speaking and appeasing skills needs to be critically examined. This pre-conceived notion hampers many women students from exercising their abilities to the full potential and participating actively in student politics which in turn may create inclusive space for more women leaders and gender-friendly university campuses across the country.

a. Women as Tokenism in Student Union Election Campaigning

A wide variety of political strategies go into the process of filing nominations in the student union elections. Alliances of organizations also take place to compete with their political opponent. Within the alliance groups, there will be multiple debates and discussions on which position should be allotted to whom. Organizations with larger student population in their fold tend to demand powerful positions like the *president* and *general secretary* and divide other positions such as vice-president, joint secretary, cultural secretary, sports secretary, and representative of gender sensitization committee against sexual harassment to other alliance organizations with relatively lesser student population. Once the intra-dialogue-making process is done between groups that formed alliances, then strategic plans will be executed at the time of filing nominations. If a particular organization nominates a male candidate for the position of president, then the opponent organization will prefer a female candidate displaying gender as a favorable factor to gain more votes on lines of gender identity. If there are two female candidates, contesting for the same position then categorical identities of caste, class, religion, sexuality, region, and so forth gear up the battle. In the recent elections held in 2023, the right-wing

organization nominated a Muslim woman for the presidential position against a Muslim male contestant of the opposition as a political strategy to attract more votes. Such are the strategic games of political unions that consider women and their categorical inequalities as tokenism instead of striving for gender empowerment.

Once the nominations are filed by submitting required documents such as valid semester identity card, date of birth certificate, attendance, and academic report, the final list of contestants will be announced by the university election commission. Next stage is the election campaigning. The standard time meant for campaigning is five to six days approximately. There are multiple guidelines given by the administration such as a limited number of posters and banners that candidates can use. Approval of banners and pamphlets by election commissioner, a maximum spending amount of seven thousand on each candidate, no bribing for votes, no use of communal and discriminatory language, no help from outsiders or parties, and so forth are officially announced by the university election commission. It all looks transparent and upright in theory, but things are fundamentally different on the ground. All types of malpractices, threats, intimidation, bribery, beating, and bullying are employed in the student union election process. It is an open secret that most of these organisations actively seek support from national/regional political parties depending on their political orientations (Oommen 1974: 792).

The manifestos of various organizations consist of their earlier achievements and plans. Left-wing organizations and Ambedkarite organizations' main target population is the social science and humanities students who actively engage in student politics. Therefore, they often propose for a demand to increase in financial assistance, gender-neutral washrooms, quality and diverse food and sanitary vending machines in women's hostels, and so forth. Natural sciences and commerce students are the targets of right-wing student organizations. They propose for the welfare

of the natural science department buildings such as renovating labs and maintaining the basic amenities, promoting cultural programs and festivals, and so forth. Therefore, distinctions by academic field and discipline need to be observed, with students in the social sciences and humanities in most countries more involved in political activities than those in the natural sciences and professional fields (Altbach 1984:2). On the other hand, natural science students too are actively involving in right-wing politics. There is a growing consensus among all the student organizations, across ideological differences, regarding *menstrual leaves* for women students to attract female votes. Ambedkarite organizations propose the allocation of reserved admission seats fairly, organized actions against caste-based discrimination in academic departments, and promotion of an inclusive campus environment for historically marginalized students.

Often women students are subjected to character assassination, and their modesty is questioned just for being vocal about gender issues on campus. Student organizations criticize each other in election debates, where they talk about their achievements, in social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp groups, and so forth. Women contestants in student elections are primary victims of cyberbullying and sexual harassment. All these narratives of women students experiences in university politics demonstrate that women students are seen only as objects of pleasure, shows the fact that women are still considered as the second sex as explained by Simon De Beauvoir (1949), where man is considered the default, while woman is considered the "other": Consequently, the internal dynamics within students organizations need to be scrutinized as they continue to display the male-dominated traits as the obvious characters of student organizations.

Hence, it can be understood that student organizations are more of politics of segregation than politics of empowerment where women students are represented as symbols of tokenism. Student organizations theoretically

have the potential to undo discriminatory policies and can be an important catalyst to promote principles of equality on university campuses.

IV. Institutionalizing the Language of Discrimination on Gender

Of late, the degree of participation by women students in political organizations is increasingly noticeable both in terms of quantity and quality. Some political organizations are popularly viewed as progressive and gender-friendly in their ways and means of doing politics on campus. Theoretically speaking, educational institutions reflect and reproduce wider social patterns of power and sometimes become sites of resistance (Sanjakdar 2011:10). Women students who are members of the students' political organizations and active in some leadership roles share their experiences as below:

Though student organizations say they are progressive and inclusive, they expect women activists to be submissive. The only extra qualification they have is the experience of doing groundwork such as how to file a representation and talking to the designated officials in the university administration, mobilizing students during the elections and so forth. Though I was president of the organization, I was bullied and humiliated by the other male members of my origination for no reason as they could not tolerate women being their leader. For instance, one of the active male members of my organization one day yelled at me loudly in front of all the members which made me cry a lot⁴⁴.

Regarding internal politics one of the respondents expressed as follows:

In some student organizations women activists are promoted, in a way, just to maintain their male cadre within the campus. Women students are slut shamed and misinformed by male members of their

⁴⁴ 39 ibid.

organizations. Additionally, if a female activist complains against a male activist regarding sexual harassment within the organization, there will be what we call internal stabilizers to solve the issue. Most of the time all the party members will try to convince the victim not to go public saying that 'we are in power/aiming for power in next elections and if this goes out our organization's reputation will be at stake'⁴⁵.

These instances explain how gender is being constructed politically and how the language of discrimination has been thoroughly institutionalized and normalized. The process of men dealing with groundwork and women involved in planning out activities to promote their organization showcases the sexual division of labor within student organizations, where men are projected as instrumental leaders and women as expressive leaders (Parsons, 1959: 77). The progressive and liberal students' political organizations are not as progressive as they appear or claim to be on paper. From these experiences of the women activists within the organization, it adds strength to the argument that "personal is political," as observed by radical feminists such as Firestone, Beauvoir, and Millet in the 1960s. The internal politics of organizations particularly promote the idea of condemning the acts of sexual assaults only in network circles and whereas in public they were forced into silence (Ray 1999:155). Among women students working with organizations, the privileged caste members do not hesitate to judge the capabilities of their fellow women students from the under-privileged background. Such perceptions of social ranking and stigma among women students often promotes elitism that drifts away from the burning concerns of the majority of women on campus (Mazumdar 1994: 50). These experiences of the women students from under-privileged backgrounds make evident Sharmila Rege's (2006) notion of 'genderless caste and casteless gender' within the university politics of students'

⁴⁵ 40 ibid

organizations. Hence, institutionalized language of gender discrimination seems to have been pervasive across universities in India. To overcome these institutionalized gender stereotypes on campus, women students continue to place their confidence on these student organizations, despite slow progress in that direction.

Discussion

In bridging the categorical inequalities and making university spaces more egalitarian, the role of students' political activism is critical across the globe. For most of the women students, university has been a significant agent of political socialization and mobilization in challenging the unequal socio-cultural practices largely promoted by patriarchy. However, there are many misconceptions and restrictions that act as bottlenecks for active participation of women students in student organizations. Misogynistic perceptions towards women students as mere biological beings act as a glass ceiling for their active involvement in student organizations and burdens the ones who come from family environments that do not encourage women to involve in politics. Despite persistent challenges, cultural aspects, such as language, region, and ethnicity, enabled women students to join student organizations besides ideological preferences. These cultural aspects are used as anchoring points to strengthen the student organizations by attracting newly joined students on campus. A significant number of women who worked with relatively larger student organizations have affluent/relatively rich family background and are equipped with languages skills, political awareness, and ideological politics. On the other hand, women students from under-privileged background gained political conscientization through the student activities by way of raising critical consciousness against inequality on university spaces. The student union elections of this campus inform us that women students occupying positions of prominence remain an unachieved goal in university politics. It is understood that 'politics of segregation prevails more than politics of

empowerment' where women students are viewed as symbols of tokenism. Through student activities, which are predominantly masculine in character, gender stereotypes are being reconstructed politically and the language of gender discrimination has been institutionalized and normalized in multiple university spaces. Thus, gender stereotypes are effectively foregrounding over political ideology effectively leading to declined active participation of women students in student political organizations.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The thesis critically analyses the idea of gender and the associated stereotypes on university campus that are more nuanced, subtle, and invisible. The crystallized forms, content, language, and manifestations of gender inequalities in both academic and non-academic spaces are explored that claim theoretical equality to all genders. Demarginalizing the intersectional social categories based on gender, class, caste, religion, and sexuality and presenting everyday social realities of gender on campus forms the crux of the study. The first section exclusively deals with the academic spaces in university that includes classroom and laboratories. Emphasizing on how notions of popular culture concerning gender are getting institutionalized in academic spaces the lived experiences of women students based on intersectionality of gender, caste, religion, sexuality, and first-generation status is discussed. Along with academic spaces the non-academic spaces on university campus also have their own gender relations and concealed forms of socio-political dynamics. Therefore, the second part of the thesis examines non-academic spaces and student political organizations in terms of gender.

Despite the achieved progress over the years, patriarchal oppressive attitudes continue to be a major glass ceiling for Indian women. While climbing up the academic ladder with their intersectional social categories such as gender, caste, religion, sexuality, and so forth constantly either try to forge alliances or cut across each other. The shared space of university classroom and laboratories are producing uncommon chronicles of gender by normalizing the conventional regressive attitudes and practices.

Precisely university classroom can be viewed as a gender field where male students are perceived to be natural occupants and women students as 'cultural others. With the existing gendered power relations, women students are subjected to a language of discrimination, expected to be submissive, and certain codes of conduct on dressing and conventional social behaviors are expected in classroom set up. With the imposed institutional inequalities, the lived realities of women students based on intersecting identities depicts the multi- fold oppression they entail in academic spaces. The social dynamics of classroom are actively producing politics of silencing concerning intersection of gender and caste. The Dalit and Tribal women students deprived of gender and caste privilege are becoming major targets of humiliations and exclusion from faculty and fellow classmates. Culture of silence is being imposed curtailing their agency against caste based discriminatory attitudes and praxis in classroom settings. Religious animosity is observed in secular university spaces which is minoritizing the already minoritized Muslim women students. Muslim women students are gazed in single-dimension of religious beings by classmates and faculty. They are subjected to humiliations based religious practices such as wearing *hijab* (head scarf) and are judged by Muslim male students for not practicing the same placing them in tussled positionality. Based on the intersectionality of gender and sexuality, queer students are experiencing homophobic classroom Ambience. They are treated as 'abnormal beings' in classroom spaces for wearing their sexual identity openly. With the homophobic attitudes and negative slurs from faculty members and classmates' queer students are prone to self- isolate leading to seclusion of the suppressed in conventional academic spaces. Thus, the Indian women students' differences based on their intersecting identities of gender, caste, religion, sexuality, and so forth are traversing in the patriarchal one-gendered academic spaces of university.

University academic spaces in general and scientific research institutions in particular, continue to produce lopsided social spaces in favour of men

with distinct characteristics. The dualism of inclusion and mobility on the one hand and exclusion and oppression on the other. It was apparent from the discussion of my chapter that deal with both academic and non-academic spaces. The lived experiences of discriminatory practices and systemic oppression of historically marginalized groups, with a particular focus on women students is analysed from the lens of ‘gendered minoritization.’ In scientific laboratories neutrality is being a myth with power differentials based on gender. The women students are minoritized with lower presence, ghettoized into sub-fields which are less challenging unlike their male counterparts, and androcentric assumptions are reproduced by assigning gender roles such as cleaning apparatus & sweeping labs. It is the context of each discriminatory practice which allows for more nuanced analysis of their experiences than generic intersectional social identities they carry with them. Hence, the stories of discrimination and dissent are multi-layered and multi-dimensional in nature. Being a double minority, Dalit women scholars encounter distinct forms of exclusion and discriminatory attitudes. With the intersectionality of gender, caste, and class, the vulnerability of Dalit women in scientific laboratories (for instance in Chemistry) gets amplified leaving no place for contestation and liberation from the clutches of caste stereotypes. The stigmatized notions around caste reservation, encounters of romantic relationships, and pressures from family networks to get married constantly have negative implications on the academic performance of the Dalit women students/scholars on campus. Such negative implications further deepen the process of marginalization on the one hand and sharpen the process of double minoritization, on grounds of caste and gender, on the other. Universities as educational institutions have the theoretical potential to realise social mobility and gender agency in the lives of women students, but on the contrary universities are reproducing the structures of social inequality and blocking the possibilities of emancipation for the marginalized. One could therefore see the co-existence of theoretical

equality and empirical inequality on university spaces. Women students have been navigating themselves through this dichotomous situation for decades. Promotion of diversity and pluralism at all levels of university may equip our educational institutions better to deal with social inequalities in India.

The journey of first-generation learners demonstrates how acquired cultural capital could break the social barriers of lacking dominant habitus and limited or no economic, social, and cultural capital in the domain of higher education. It is evident from the narratives of the context of first-generation learners that they could accomplish a positive and intergenerational change by the virtue of obtaining university degrees. For them, the only source of overcoming the generational deprivation is higher education as it proved to have an established track record of enhancing multiple livelihood opportunities. Breaking the glass ceiling by way of reaching universities, Dalit women scholars of the first generation are subjected to institutionalised inequalities leading to undesirable university experiences of systematic exclusion. Dalit women as a minority on campus have to deal with the dominant campus habitus, which is largely made up of characteristics driven by urban, middle-class, and upper-caste social world. Dalit women had to learn to deal with the dominant campus habitus in academic and non-academic spaces differently. English language as *linguistic capital* is an empowering resource for some students and disempowers others in accessing university education. In a way, the English language seems to be an essential element of ‘social capital’ in higher education and it remained one of the major hurdles for the ‘first-generation learners. There are multiple stereotypes developed around the proficiency of ‘English language’ on Indian university campuses. Women students in general and women students belonging to historically marginalised social groups in particular become the primary targets of institutionalised segregation and humiliation due to stereotypes around English language proficiency. In the process, it is the first-generation Dalit women learners

who find it an additional burden on their coping methods and capabilities. In other words, university spaces produced a social phenomenon called 'invisibilisation of the privilege' to the students belonging to urban, middle-class, and upper caste backgrounds and on the contrary, it also produced 'marginalization of the students' from Dalit and other historically deprived social groups. Thus, the first-generation status is as important as other categorical inequalities in understanding questions of discrimination and social exclusion of Dalit women students on campus. Besides their first-generation status, Dalit women students undergo a substantial transition in their social environment to make themselves fit into university spaces. This process of coping and adjusting to the dominant campus habitus seem to be negatively impacting their academic performance, as the process takes time and a toll on them. On the positive side, despite hurdles the first-generation learners are exposed to new social capital such as education, academic networks, English language, intellect, style of speech, modern dressing styles, and so forth. Though they are slow to adopt this 'social capital' but they seem to be receptive to such changes in their university life. This acquired cultural capital with enhanced social interactions with people from different socio-cultural backgrounds eventually helps them succeed in their academic endeavours. It is to be noted that dominant campus habitus is not totally devoid of caste and gender structures. Students belonging to first-generation status, Dalits, LGBTQ and so forth are actively engaged in the production of alternative cultural capital that facilitates inclusive university campus experiences and just social relations for first-generation learners.

To talk about non-academic spaces such as cafeterias, student hostels, recreation centres and so forth tend to produce their own forms of gender discrimination and exclusion. Though all students can have access to non-academic spaces on campus equally, but the legitimate ownership is of male students who are perceived as the 'natural occupants'. On the contrary, women students are perceived as the 'other' which makes them feel out of place. Notably, non-academic spaces on campus are increasingly turning

out to be gendered with women subjected to gender discrimination with constant hostile surveillance. There is a sharp difference of public/private dichotomy in the university public places. Besides the physical violence, symbolic violent activities such as passing lewd comments, staring at them inappropriately, making sexual gestures, hostile gazes, and so forth are some of stereotypical actions that negatively impacts women students' psychological health and also violate their right to have equal access to university spaces. University spaces are determined by what I call the politics of concealed space, which are in a way designed to make hegemonic forces like 'cis upper caste male' as natural inhabitants and the women, Dalits, and first-generation students as disadvantaged and misfit. The economic status of women students is leading to a cut down of social interactions, associations, and friend circles that play a major role in enriching the campus life. Hence, the intersectionality of class with caste cannot be separated in the social context of Indian universities. Apart from them, imposition of the food cultures of the dominant caste groups in university hostel menu. The idea of polluted food consumed by impure people is very much prevalent on campus and women students being major targets. Upper caste women students precisely though they have entered progressive university spaces are knotted with their family religious beliefs more which hampering their liberation from traditional shackles of Hindu patriarchy. Accordingly, the agitation of the disadvantaged section of female students on anti-beef consumption showcases the violations of their basic right to food and life with dignity. To talk about sexuality, queer students are considered deviant as they critique the existing normative heterosexuality and their presence and activism in university spaces making a radical statement that gender is not a two-dimensional category. Within the queer community, mostly trans/gay students who are biologically male are more open about their gender identity in comparison to the trans /lesbian students who are biologically female. The overall experiences of women students and intersectional experiences of women students based on gender,

caste, class, religion, and sexuality in Indian non-academic spaces make it evident that gender realities lack the expected freedom, at individual and group level, for all the students to participate equally in these spaces.

Among non-academic spaces, student politics through their activism is an important window through which one could analyze the nature of gender politics at play. Towards bridging the gap between categorical inequalities and making university spaces more egalitarian, the role of students' political activism seem to occupy a critical role. For most of the women students, university has been an active social agent of political socialization and mobilization in challenging the unequal socio-cultural practices largely promoted by patriarchy. However, there are multiple misconceptions and institutionalized restrictions that act as bottlenecks for women students to participate in student activism, organizations, and politics. Misogynistic perceptions towards women students as mere biological beings act as a glass ceiling for their active involvement in student organizations and hence disproportionately burdens those who come from conservative family environments that do not encourage women to participate in politics actively. Despite challenges, cultural aspects such as language, region, and ethnicity, enabled women students to join student organizations beyond ideological preferences. These cultural aspects are used as anchoring points to strengthen the student organizations by attracting newly joined students on campus. A significant number of women students who worked with relatively larger student organizations have affluent/relatively rich family background and are equipped with better English languages skills, political awareness, and ideological politics. On the other hand, women students from under-privileged background gained political conscientization through student activities by way of raising critical consciousness against inequality in university spaces. The student union elections of this campus inform us that women students occupying positions of prominence remain an underachieved goal in university politics. It is evident from the ethnographic data that 'politics of segregation prevails more than politics of

empowerment' where women students are viewed as symbols of tokenism. Through student activities, which predominantly remains a masculine exercise, gender stereotypes are being reconstructed politically and the language of gender discrimination has been institutionalized and normalized in multiple university spaces. Therefore, gender stereotypes are effectively foregrounded over political ideology effectively leading to declined participation of women students in student political organizations and campus politics. Though women students are divided by political ideologies with respect to student political organizations they are united by gender stereotypes. Thus, both academic and non-academic spaces on university campus are gendered and being sites of discrimination when observed through the lens of gender and intersecting social categories.

Though the number of women students enrolling for diverse academic programmes offered by Indian universities continue to increase year after year, but it does not bring forth any substantial changes in the quality of their active participation and engagement. Academic and non-academic spaces are common to all students on university campus but these shared spaces are being one gendered with the ideas and praxis of masculinist fashioning. Women students being minority in the mainstream patriarchal university spaces and considered space invaders and entailing multiple forms of oppression and subjected to gender stereotypes and discrimination based on varied intersectional social identities. Therefore, this is an area that needs to be improved in order to achieve the much-desired gender equality on campuses. The university spaces are to be scrutinized on the grounds of qualitative experiences of the women students in general and women students from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular by highlighting the intersectionality of gender, caste, religion, first-generation status, and sexual orientation.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study presents the dichotomous nature of Indian university spaces on the lines of inclusion and alongside exclusion in terms of gender by observing both academic and non- academic spaces. The limitations and future implications of the study can be observing multiple universities for the study to get a broad outlook which has not been possible with the limited time constraint and agenda to do a detailed ethnographic study. Also, a comparative study between universities and national institutes of importance can be an important research work in itself which presents the complex and different narratives of gender altogether varying in the academic infrastructure and social mobility. To conclude presenting narrative of both female and male students can bring forward nuanced gender meanings attached with gender in the university spaces.

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