

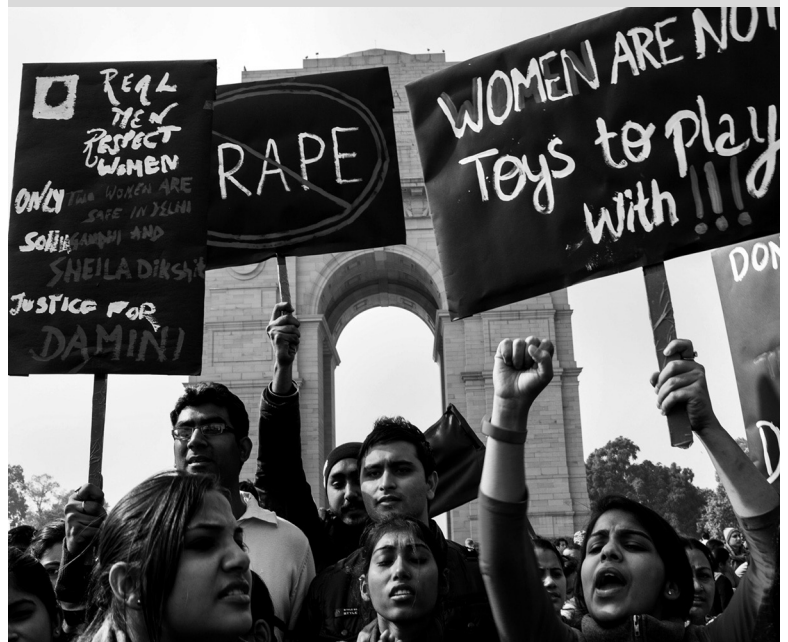
# IDS Bulletin

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## COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR ACCOUNTABILITY ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Editors Mariz Tadros and Jenny Edwards



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# 'Me Too' and the 'List' – Power Dynamics, Shame, and Accountability in Indian Academia\*

Adrija Dey<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract** In October 2017, Raya Sarkar, a law student of Indian descent, posted a crowdsourced list on Facebook of male academics who allegedly harassed women. India's academic world splintered and the #MeToo movement became a student movement emerging from campuses resisting a culture of widespread sexism, abuse, and violence which is rife in Indian academia. Some academics criticised the List for leaving out the names of accusers and specific details of the alleged incidents, raising questions about anonymity and accountability. However, the List also received extensive support as for decades survivors have tried unsuccessfully to get justice through the system following informal and formal complaint mechanisms, and it became a manifestation of years of frustration against institutions. Keeping the List at its core, this article explores ideas of due process, the need for intersectional approaches to fight sexual and gender-based violence in academia, and finally the ideas of institutional accountability.

**Keywords** #MeToo, digital activism, student movement, sexual harassment in academia, sexual and gender-based violence, India.

## 1 Introduction

Through the lens of the #MeToo movement in India and Raya Sarkar's 'List', this article explores power dynamics and accountability failures in relation to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Indian academia. In October 2017, Raya Sarkar, a 24-year-old law student of Indian descent, posted on Facebook a crowdsourced list of male academics in Indian higher education (HE) institutions who allegedly harassed women. India's academic world splintered and the #MeToo movement emerged as a student movement from within campuses where many students and staff finally had the opportunity to resist a culture of

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widespread sexism, abuse, and violence rife in Indian academia. Some academics and critics viewed the List as challenging as it left out the names of accusers and specific details of incidents, raising questions about anonymity and accountability. However, the List also received extensive support as for decades survivors have tried unsuccessfully to get justice through the system following informal and formal complaint mechanisms, and the List became a manifestation of years of brewing frustration.

Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) in writing about SGBV against women of colour coined the term 'intersectionality', arguing that we cannot fully understand experiences of women of colour in isolation and their experiences of violence and discrimination are often a result of intersecting patterns of sexism and racism. In the Indian context, it is difficult to speak about SGBV as a unified category of violence and an intersectional lens must be used to understand the violence that exists at the margins of different identities. For example, a *dalit*<sup>2</sup> woman or a Muslim woman, just by virtue of their caste or religion, may be more subject to violence than an upper-caste, upper-class Hindu woman (Chakravarti 1993). Patriarchal practices in India can also become extremely complex around notions of *izzat* (honour), leading to securitisation of the female body in the form of physical restrictions and boundaries. Since women's bodies are considered to hold the key to family pride, any harm to the female body is seen to have direct repercussions on a family's reputation. This leads to cases of SGBV going largely unreported or being hushed up (Kandiyoti 1988). This plays a big role in shaping the nature of violence on campuses. It is important to recognise the deep-seated misogyny and patriarchy that exist in Indian HE campuses which, on the one hand, propagate a culture of silence around SGBV through mechanisms such as victim blaming and shaming, and on the other, practise patriarchal protectionism by caging women within hostels,<sup>3</sup> completely undermining their agency as adult women.

The 16 December 2012 gang-rape<sup>4</sup> of a young university student in New Delhi started a new phase of feminist activism in India (Dey 2019a, 2019b). Thousands of people came out on the streets across India to not only demand justice, but also to raise their collective voices for women's safety in public spaces and legal reforms around SGBV. The protests that followed also demonstrated the significance of using digital technologies for gender activism, developing solidarity, creating shared identities, and raising consciousness (Dey 2019a). What followed for the next few years was a series of campaigns emanating from the gender politics of university campuses. Campaigns such as Pinjra Tod (Breaking the Cage) have used catchy hashtags to spread awareness and conversations about important issues such as women's right to public spaces and demanding the abolishment of curfew times for women's hostels within campuses. The feminist movement in India has used the public discourse around the

'breaking of silence' in cases of SGBV since the 1980s (Sen 2017). However, after 16 December 2012, this narrative was reinvented when young women across India started sharing their stories of abuse to create communities of solidarity (Dey 2019c). Hence, when the #MeToo movement started, Indian academic campuses were prepared and many of these communities of solidarity had already been formed. The anger that was already brewing found its perfect moment of political opportunity.

Beginning with the online debates post-Sarkar's List, this article explores three specific arguments: (1) the idea of due process, (2) the need for intersectional approaches to fight SGBV in academia, and (3) the ideas of institutional accountability. The article proposes that while the #MeToo movement may have had its drawbacks, it provided the opportunity to question the persistent silence in relation to power dynamics and SGBV in Indian academia. As many academics have pointed out, it must be treated as a moment of self-reflection by both HE institutions and the feminist community to reconsider what 'due process' and institutional accountability mean and how that can be addressed, keeping survivor interests at its core (Chadha 2017).

## 2 Methodology

The primary data for this research were collected from 40 semi-structured interviews conducted by the author between January 2018 and April 2019 with academics, students, and student activists in colleges and universities across New Delhi. The participants identified themselves as belonging to a diverse range of class, caste, gender, and sexualities. Participants also included survivors and women who came out with #MeToo allegations following the publication of the List. Many of the interviews were conducted through personal contacts and networks with students, academics, and activists. Following this, the snowball sampling method was used to identify and interview other participants.

Harding strongly urges researchers to be mindful of the importance of the experiences of women and states that these experiences can provide access to a social reality not otherwise available, providing 'a more complete and less distorting kind of social experience' (1987: 184). To gain insight into the social and lived reality of campuses, I conducted many of my interviews in an informal manner, spending time with the participants to establish trust and create a safe space for them to speak, often about very intimate experiences. Further, following the work of Clisby (2001), I used the term 'participant' instead of 'interviewees', 'the researched' or 'respondents' to establish a more equal and non-hierarchical relationship between myself and the people with whom the research was conducted. The idea of development of knowledge through meaningful discussions and collaborations with the participants was at the heart of this research and all aspects of data collection and analysis was conducted following a feminist approach.

### 3 #MeToo and the 'List'

When Sarkar's List was released in October 2017, potentially triggered by a letter published in the *Huffington Post* from Christine Fair listing academics who had abused her (Fair 2017), it led to instant controversy as the names included world-reputed Indian academics, including many well-known left-liberal Indian professors from academic institutions across India (Sanyal 2017). Some said that the List, as it came to be popularly known, was the product of a broken academic system that had failed survivors by not holding powerful sexual predators to account. However, many, including a group of Indian feminists, voraciously disagreed with the List and said that it devalued 'due process'. In an open letter in a blog called *Kafila*, known for its radical politics, feminist perspective, and critical analysis of contemporary events, and read widely by the academic and activist community, noted academic and feminist Nivedita Menon wrote,

As feminists, we have been part of a long struggle to make visible sexual harassment at the workplace, and have worked with the movement to put in place systems of transparent and just procedures of accountability. We are dismayed by the initiative on Facebook, in which men are being listed and named as sexual harassers with no context or explanation (Menon 2017).

The letter was signed by over a dozen acclaimed feminists.

Unlike #MeToo movements in other countries, the List in India did not attract the attention of the state or many of the named institutions. Some universities did address it by urging students and faculty to register formal complaints. However, as stated by a participant, none of the institutions carried out investigations against the named professors. Further, instead of this being a moment of shock and self-reflection, what ensued was what has been called a 'civil war in Indian feminism' causing major ideological rifts in the feminist community (Ghosh 2017).

Debates raged on social media. Many academics came out openly criticising the letter written by Menon (2017) for its tone and positioning. When young feminists needed support, they were confronted with a wall of bureaucracy with 'due process' thrown at their faces – a system that many had tried to access but failed. Young feminists interviewed for this research seemed specifically disgruntled about the fact that their feminist heroes, who always spoke about challenging the system, seemed to have 'changed their tone when it came to their comrades'.<sup>5</sup>

The call for 'due process' from older feminists follows the Justice Verma Committee report (Verma, Seth and Subramaniam 2013)<sup>6</sup> and the Saksham report (UGC 2013)<sup>7</sup>, which contained detailed recommendations for tackling SGBV within HE. Many of these older feminists were involved in these committees and spent their

lives helping survivors through both their research and activism. However, instead of the List building solidarities across divides, it showed the world the cracks in the Indian feminist movement.

Section 4 will explore the three most important debates highlighted by the List. To dismantle power dynamics in academia and develop a survivor-centred approach to dealing with SGBV that results in larger cultural changes, it is vital to understand the nuances of due process and accountability and that can only be achieved through an intersectional approach. These debates are not only specific to India but were also raised by the global #MeToo movement and are questions which academics, activists, and policymakers in HE across the world are grappling with.

#### **4 Analysis of the #MeToo movement in India**

##### **4.1 'Due process' versus 'naming and shaming'**

I want to start this argument by addressing the question of 'due process' – the words which tore the feminist community apart. Following the Vishaka judgement<sup>8</sup> in 1997, the University Grants Commission (UGC) advised all universities to establish permanent gender committees to develop guidelines to combat SGBV within their institutions. The UGC (*Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women Employees and Students in Higher Educational Institutions*) regulation was brought into force by an official gazette on 2 May 2016. This regulation mandated every university to have an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) with elected student representatives for the prevention, prohibition, and redressal of SGBV on campus. It also strongly advocated for all HE institutions to put in place support structures, infrastructural development (e.g. better lighting, transportation, toilets) and sensitisation mechanisms to ensure safety and accessibility for all students on campus. However, interviews conducted for this research across campuses in New Delhi show that few have working ICCs in place. Even if committees exist on paper, in many cases, they remain inactive.

During interviews, many students spoke of victim blaming, slut shaming, threats, and social stigma propagated by institutional authorities such as wardens, security staff, academic staff, and management when it came to reporting cases of SGBV. Some students explained how they had been advised by professors and members of the ICC not to file complaints.<sup>9</sup> Some others had been blamed by hostel wardens, professors, and members of management for their own harassment or in some cases told blatantly that what they faced 'cannot be termed as harassment'.<sup>10</sup> In other cases, parents were informed by wardens and management of their daughters' 'misconduct' when they tried to file formal complaints.<sup>11</sup> Pujari (2017) talks about similar experiences in her work with students and staff in universities across Mumbai. A petition issued by a women's collective called Pinjra Tod<sup>12</sup> in 2017 to the UGC, said:

Unfortunately, even nearly a year since its coming into force, the Regulation remains barely recognized by most universities and colleges across the country and almost nowhere implemented in its full scope... We are extremely dismayed to see that the UGC, having notified the regulation, seems to have taken no initiative to implement it, despite it being binding in nature and including a long list of actions to be taken by the UGC in case of non-compliance (Pinjra Tod 2017).

It is important to keep in mind that Menon's (2017) letter perhaps spoke of a specific kind of institutional mechanism. Menon herself and most other academics and activists who signed the letter are a part of the faculty at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), a public university and a premier centre of learning in India. In JNU, an independent, elected sexual harassment committee, the Gender Sensitisation Committee against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH), has existed since the Vishaka judgement, with both student and teacher representatives. People from across campus communities – students, and administrative and academic staff and workers – can file complaints to GSCASH if they face any form of SGBV. To maintain autonomy from the institution, the committee also consists of an external expert to oversee the enquiry process. GSCASH, being independent of the institution, also ensures that hierarchies in the university cannot influence its outcome or tamper with proceedings, even if the complaints are against someone in a position of power (Priyadarshini 2018). Once the enquiry is completed, the recommendations are passed on to the university administration. Apart from this, the committee also carries out sensitisation activities throughout the year. Many of the feminists who signed the letter have tirelessly fought to establish and maintain GSCASH for more than two decades.

It is not only academics and the feminist community in JNU; students across the board have shown immense faith in GSCASH. This was evident in 2017 when GSCASH was dismantled overnight by the university administration (Priyadarshini 2018). Both the students' and teachers' associations, across political parties and disciplines, rose in protest against the university's decision.<sup>13</sup> Despite being dismantled, GSCASH elections were still held and student representatives were nominated. GSCASH continues to function as a body that, regardless of being divested of all its powers, has been dealing with student complaints, supporting students, and conducting sensitisation workshops.<sup>14</sup>

However, many of the students who fought for GSCASH also supported the List.<sup>15</sup> These were not young feminists who devalued due process but were students who acknowledged that it did not always work the way it should because of power dynamics, hierarchies, and ideas of shame attached to any form of SGBV. While Menon's letter did acknowledge this – 'We too know the process is harsh and often tilted against the complainant. We remain committed to strengthening these processes' (Menon 2017)



– it largely did not address the power relations in academia that the List specifically highlighted. Even the Verma Committee (Verma *et al.* 2013) and the Saksham (UGC 2013) reports largely failed to acknowledge this issue, focusing mainly on student-on-student violence rather than staff-on-student violence.

While GSCASH as a sexual harassment committee and redressal mechanism may work, the letter failed to acknowledge that most universities across India do not have existing committees to address sexual harassment. Further, while most students from JNU who were interviewed spoke generously about GSCASH, there were others who spoke about their insecurity about registering a formal complaint due to fear of being victim blamed and lack of support from their peers. This fear was amplified in participants who came from a *dalit* background. An interview participant who identified as *dalit*, queer, and disabled spoke about her horrific experience of harassment in JNU. After she had spoken out about her experiences, she was completely ostracised by her peers. Others also blamed her harassment on her disability. She confided in her supervisor who, without her consent, 'gossiped' about her experience with colleagues in JNU and she came to be known in the department as the 'girl who was harassed'. Unable to cope with the social isolation and humiliation, she was forced to quit her PhD.<sup>16</sup> The presence of due process does not ensure that students and staff feel comfortable filing formal complaints.

Many academics also disagree about pitting 'due process' against 'naming and shaming' as both mechanisms are necessary and can work alongside one another (John 2019; Roy 2019). As Roy (2017) states, 'Indian feminism has always been more than simply seeking "due process" – it has been street plays, naked protest, acts of mindless loitering, and even a panty<sup>17</sup>'. The feminist movement has used both or more such mechanisms together to fight for justice and change. A good example of this is the activism against dowry deaths in the 1970s and 1980s. While some women's groups demanded a complete overhaul of existing laws on dowry, which at the time were immensely inadequate, others mobilised around tactics of humiliating the in-laws and husbands by shouting slogans and demanding punishment outside their homes (Gandhi and Shah 1992).

#### 4.2 The question of caste

Perhaps one of the most important debates raised by the List is the urgent need for the feminist movement to be more intersectional and look at HE spaces not only through a gendered lens but also through the lens of caste. Discrimination and violence related to caste, which is central to the experiences of *dalit* Bahujan Adivasi (DBA) women, even in relation to SGBV, are often ignored in the HE context. DBA students are not only absent from many of the spaces of critical debate in academia, but they are considered imposters only there because of reservation/affirmative action rather than their own merit. Hence, according

to Bargi, in the HE space, DBA bodies are marked twice, 'once as special bodies that are different from the general castes. Secondly, as illegitimate bodies with "undue privilege"' (2017: 3). Deshpande (2013) writes that upper-caste identity can be overwritten by professional identities of choice, but lower caste identity overwrites all other identities and becomes more indelibly engraved over time. These dynamics shape academic spaces and hence a DBA student's experience needs careful unravelling.

John (2019) describes the relationships between students and academics as more feudal than capitalist within institutions which are structurally patriarchal, sexist, casteist, and queerphobic, with the social composition of faculty being overwhelmingly upper-class, upper-caste, and male. In this context, the notion that DBA women have equal access and support to reporting mechanisms, is what Chadha (2017: 5) calls 'misplaced optimism', with DBA women often trapped between gender and a sense of loyalty to the caste group. DBA women are often forced to choose either one of their identities: seeking solidarity in the feminist movement which is largely dominated by upper-caste women, or in male-dominated *dalit* spaces where the gender question is trivialised (Ayyar 2017).

Children grow up in India in specific class- and caste-segregated social circles. Their options of schools and preliminary education are often a result of their social backgrounds. Hence, HE institutions and campuses are the first, and perhaps the only time, that people get the opportunity to break these social norms and coexist in the same social spaces. This makes universities the perfect space to challenge and critically engage with questions of caste, class, and gender. In the introduction to an edited collection called *The Idea of a University*, Apoorvanand (2018) states that in a highly stratified society such as India, where people are bound by various social norms, universities are perhaps the only space where young men and women can find the opportunity and the confidence to break social barriers. However, many of the participants interviewed for the research pointed out that discussions and intermingling seldom happen as students from different class, caste, and religious backgrounds often adhere to their own social circles. Hence, instead of challenging existing norms, many students end up propagating them.

Student activists from a DBA background interviewed for this research also point out that most feminist campaigns and movements on campuses are led by 'upper-class, upper-caste, anglicised women', who pay little attention to women from marginalised communities or rural backgrounds.<sup>18</sup> Historically, DBA women have been denied even the most basic human rights. However, their lived realities and oppression seldom forms part of the larger feminist agenda (Dhanaraj 2018). The lack of DBA women in leadership positions and their mostly complete absence in decision-making spaces has led to a lot of conversation around caste.<sup>19</sup> In these circumstances, the concerns raised by the List and

the urgent need for intersectional feminist politics in HE become ever so important. According to Roy,

With the List, *dalit* Bahujan Adivasi feminists decentered Savarna feminists, and disrupted, perhaps for the first time, nationalist framings of Indian feminism by revealing a vast terrain of multiple contestations and power relations. Rejecting their description as ‘millennial feminists’, minority activists framed the controversy around the List in terms of the power imbalances between Savarna and *dalit*, Bahujan and Adivasi feminists (Roy 2019: 7).

The List helped to bring to people’s attention some of these stagnant and often hidden debates, making the feminist movement perhaps more intersectional than ever before.

### 4.3 Institutional accountability

Apart from ‘due process’, the other term that has been much debated following publication of the List is ‘accountability’. However, in order to fully unpack this, there is a need to understand the current socio-political situation of universities which have been described as ‘battlefields’ (Apoorvanand 2018: 7). Since 2014, university campuses have witnessed continuous repression from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Indian government in the form of violence (Thapar 2016), charges of sedition (Mehta 2016), cancellation of scholarships for minority students (Pisharoty 2015), securitisation of campuses (e.g. CCTV cameras, extra guards) (Kidwai 2015a, 2015b), the banning of particular books (Jacob 2018), charges against faculty for dissent (PTI 2019), the banning of unions/elections (Mani 2019), along with an accelerated push towards privatisation (Apoorvanand 2018; Dutta 2016). This has been part of the government’s agenda of stifling dissent on campuses as some of the loudest voices of critique against the government’s Hindu, right-wing, nationalist agenda have come from academic spaces. Students involved in activism have been portrayed, both by the government and large sections of mainstream media, as ‘wasting taxpayers’ money’ based on the education and food subsidies they receive (Farooqi 2018). The notion that since public universities receive state funding, they are accountable to state bodies, has been heavily critiqued (Collini 2017; Jayal 2018). However, the government continues to demand this accountability from public university students as a test of their love for their nation.

Dutta, describing the current Indian HE sector, states:

The neoliberal university is less a space for critical engagement, debate and inquiry, and more a skills factory for the technocratic workplaces owned by transnational capital. In the neoliberal university the student is a product, packaged for the marketplace in marketing slogans and brand identities. Professors are measured in economic terms of productivity and efficiency and cast in the branding race (Dutta 2016).

We must also understand HE as a neoliberal space that fosters violence. In their research, Phipps and Young (2015) speak about the relations between neoliberalism and sexual violence in HE in the UK. They state that in the marketised university, education is reduced to a transactional exchange. Many of their research participants described violence such as 'casual groping' as part and parcel of academic life. The most cruel and shocking aspects capture the media and public consciousness, while the normal everyday violence gets lost. These points were reiterated by many of the participants interviewed for this research. Phipps further states,

In the neoliberal university though, it's all about the bottom line. Supporting students costs money. Complaining students cost reputation (and threaten income streams). There is a cost/benefit equation here. But whose cost counts?... Sexual harassment and violence in higher education are situated within cost/benefit frameworks which prioritise the welfare of the institution. Incidents must be hushed up lest they jeopardise our recruitment. Incidents must be hushed up lest they damage our reputation (Phipps 2015).

Every HE institution has a duty of care towards its students and staff. However, while Indian institutions demand continuous accountability from their students and staff, they provide little in return.<sup>20</sup> When neoliberal institutions actively try to cover up cases of SGBV, and 'due process' either does not exist or fails to serve its purpose, students and staff are left with very few options. Due to fear, stigma, and lack of support, it is rare for students to file police complaints. In that case, the question that many academics and activists are grappling with is: 'How do we hold academic institutions accountable for SGBV?'. I asked this question to every participant I interviewed for this research and most advocated two measures: sensitisation and activism.

Most participants point towards a serious lack of education around gender issues on campus. There is an urgent need for HE institutions to conduct sensitisation initiatives for not only students but also for members of faculty, workers, and administration aimed towards addressing a change of culture. Some of the activities used by universities in New Delhi are film screenings, panel discussions, open meetings, reading groups, and workshops. But there is a lack of evidence-based research to show how these initiatives have changed the culture. Pujari (2017) talks about the certificate course in gender studies run by her college in Mumbai to build a critical feminist perspective among students. This two-month course is led by students and allows them to talk openly about gender issues and think of ways they can challenge existing perceptions and structural violence. Pujari states that since the start of the course in 2014 they have noticed 'significant shifts in perceptions among students, openness to ideas, and greater conversation on gender and sexuality on campus' (*ibid.*: 3).

For those universities with existing ICCs, committee members are not always sensitised or trained to deal with complaints. Many of them have indulged in victim blaming,<sup>21</sup> and cases have been leaked and anonymity compromised.<sup>22</sup> As a student points out, 'the first step of accountability is to make them understand they are accountable'.<sup>23</sup> Participants also emphasised the urgent need for training and sensitisation of security staff who are often the first point of contact for students in relation to violence on campus.<sup>24</sup> HE spaces must ensure safety from the perspective of guaranteeing students their freedom, autonomy, and privacy without resorting to patriarchal protectionism (Kidwai 2015b). Sen (2017) points out that sensitisations cannot be the sole responsibility of the gender committees and need to involve all community stakeholders by crafting an ongoing process of conversations and continuous engendering of academic disciplines.

However, sensitisation alone is insufficient, and it must go hand-in-hand with activism and dissent. As an academic said, 'It is the job of not just the sexual harassment committees but each one of us to hold the institutions accountable through our activism'.<sup>25</sup> There is a need to understand sexual violence as a political issue and not an individual issue. In her 1970 essay, Carol Hanisch used the term 'the personal is political' to justify the significance of the personal experiences of women and to establish that personal experiences are a result of larger societal and political structures and inequalities. She emphasised the importance of raising awareness to inform women and to understand the different layers of oppression that exist in society.

Another participant states that the List started the conversation and made people more receptive.<sup>26</sup> Hence, at this critical junction, there needs to be more support and solidarity than ever before from different stakeholders through meaningful conversations and action, to fill the hole left behind by the #MeToo movement. Page, Bull and Chapman state in their most recent research that to fully implement cultural change, different forms of activism need to operate at different temporalities with a combination of both long-term and short-term approaches:

Cultural change takes time and, therefore, in conjunction with developing long-term, sustainable cultural change within an institution, other forms of activism including naming, departmental, and sector-led activism, and feminist direct action are also needed to bring urgent and sustained attention to this issue (Page *et al.* 2019: 1324).

So, at every stage there is a need for teachers' unions, student unions, feminist collectives, and others to step in and force institutions to be accountable through research, lobbying, mobilisation, and collective action. It is the responsibility of the institution to be accountable, and the responsibility of community

members to hold institutions to account through discussions, debates, and dissent. Only then can we create a 'powerful space where one's individual and collective intellectual energies are sharpened and multiplied so that injustices can be named and shamed, and alternatives may be imagined and thought through' (Orsini 2018: 213).

## 5 Conclusion

The #MeToo movement and List have finally challenged a system that has silently oppressed and harassed women across generations. Along with that, it has torn apart the feminist community in India. As Chadha states, 'sadly, the lack of care, trust, and most importantly, restraint on both sides has led us to damage which might take a long time to be repaired' (2017: 3). Further, since 2014, Indian students and academics have been under constant threat from a Hindu right-wing nationalist government which has actively propagated a culture of hate towards minorities along with the 'saffronisation' of the education system. Its patriarchal ideas on gender has been reflected in recent HE policies and practices that have promoted securitisation and patriarchal protectionism rather than freedom. This makes the fight of making institutions accountable even more difficult as the feminist community now not only has to fight institutions but also the state, which has shown little support for progressive gender policies (Roy 2016; Chaudhry 2016; Biswas 2020).<sup>27</sup>

The findings of this article highlight three important debates that emerged from the List and #MeToo movement in India: the politics of 'naming and shaming' as opposed to due process, the urgent need for the feminist collective and organisations to be more intersectional, and the meaning of 'institutional accountability'.

One of the participants, speaking about the List, stated that it was important and timely to have these discussions around power dynamics in academia as many students and staff from minority backgrounds or working on short-term precarious contracts are unable to file formal complaints. Further, a patriarchal culture of shame and stigma around issues of SGBV exists on most campuses and becomes another barrier. This is amplified by lack of support from peers, institutions, and families.<sup>28</sup> Hence, even when formal mechanisms exist, they remain largely inaccessible. So, the ways in which larger cultural changes can be implemented in Indian HE by making power structures visible and questioning existing structures and mechanisms, require further research.

Large numbers of participants spoke about the urgent need to develop an intersectional feminist understanding and practice where the voices of marginalised women are central. As the anti-caste feminist collective Dalit Women Fight stated post publication of the List,

To those that may reprimand us for speaking of gender justice before the battle against caste is won, we say that structural violence cannot be separated; neither for analysis nor for action. The intersectional impact of caste and gender is manifold, the appropriate response multi-pronged. Always... Dismantling institutions that reek of patriarchy and caste is a long haul for anti-caste feminism and all women – from the margins to the centre, from the poorest to the most empowered. We all will get to live in a better world if it's done (Dalit Women Fight 2018).

Accountability is not only the responsibility of institutions but it is also the responsibility of the academic communities to hold institutions accountable for their actions. Such negotiations and debates are integral to academic freedom (Farooqi 2018; Jayal 2018; Orsini 2018). In neoliberal academic institutions where the idea of duty of care is seldom practised, it is only through a combination of both short-term actions such as naming and shaming, and direct action, along with long-term mechanisms such as lobbying and research, that larger cultural change can be truly implemented (Page *et al.* 2019).

### Notes

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- 1 Adrija Dey, British Academy Research Fellow and Teaching Fellow, SOAS University of London, UK.
- 2 *Dalits* (or formerly 'untouchables') are at the bottom of the Hindu caste system in India and despite laws to protect them, they still face widespread discrimination and abuse.
- 3 Most women's hostels in Indian HE have curfew times which are specifically implemented in the name of protecting women, leading to severe curtailment of their freedom and mobility.
- 4 On 16 December 2012, Jyoti Singh, a female physiotherapy student from New Delhi, was repeatedly raped by six men on a bus while making her way home with a male friend after watching a movie. Her male companion, who tried to protest, was also gagged and beaten. After they lost consciousness, the beaten and half-naked bodies of both victims were thrown from the bus into the street. They were discovered by a passer-by and were immediately taken to hospital. After 13 days spent fighting for her life, Jyoti Singh passed away. Abiding by Indian law, the actual name of the victim was never used by the media and pseudonyms such as '*Nirbhaya*' (fearless) were used. The case came to be known as the *Nirbhaya* case.

- 5 Participant 7, 6 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 6 After the 16 December 2012 rape case, a three-member committee was set up by the government headed by former Chief Justice J.S. Verma to review sex crime law. The committee submitted the Verma Committee report which suggested amendments to the Criminal Law related to rape, sexual harassment, trafficking, child sexual abuse, medical examination of victims, police, and electoral and educational reforms.
- 7 The Saksham report was submitted by a task force appointed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India to review measures for ensuring the safety of women on campuses and programmes for gender sensitisation. It was the first of its kind and engaged in a broad process of dialogue with policymakers, administrators, faculty, staff, and students to develop a set of recommendations.
- 8 Vishaka versus State of Rajasthan was the landmark case where the Supreme Court dealt with the question of safety of women from any kind of sexual harassment at the workplace and laid down detailed guidelines for the same. See Vishaka & Others vs State of Rajasthan & Others (AIR 1997 SC 3011).
- 9 Participant 5, 3 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 10 Participant 9, 20 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 11 Participant 14, 17 August 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 12 With the idea of reclaiming public places, in 2015 an autonomous women's collective of students and alumni of colleges from across New Delhi called Pinjra Tod was formed to make hostel and paying guest accommodation regulations less regressive and restrictive for women students. Pinjra Tod work towards countering the 'security narrative' which is structured around securitisation of the bodies of women and patriarchal protectionism.
- 13 Participant 7, 6 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 14 Participant 4, 2 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 15 Participant 3, 1 February 2018, interview, New Delhi; Participant 4, 2 February 2018, interview, New Delhi; Participant 11, 31 July 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 16 Participant 16, 11 August 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 17 This is in reference to the pink panty campaign in India in 2009; see *Feminism in India*.
- 18 Participant 17, 3 April 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 19 Participant 17, 3 April 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 20 Participant 6, 4 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 21 Participant 5, 3 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 22 Participant 7, 16 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 23 Participant 7, 6 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 24 Participant 9, 20 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 25 Participant 15, 11 August 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 26 Participant 16, 1 March 2019, interview, New Delhi.
- 27 Also mentioned by Participant 7, 6 February 2018, interview, New Delhi; Participant 6, 4 February 2018, interview, New Delhi; Participant 10, 21 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 28 Participant 8, 16 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.



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