

COUNTERING BACKLASH

RECLAIMING
GENDER JUSTICE

WORKING PAPER 1

CASTE AND GENDER BACKLASH

**A STUDY OF THE #METOO MOVEMENT IN TERTIARY
EDUCATION IN KOLKATA, INDIA**

Madhurima Sanyal

January 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to sincerely thank my supervisor and mentor Tessa Lewin for believing in my ideas, showering me with continuous support and encouragement to write this paper during such a difficult time and forgiving all the late drafts. I also want to extend my gratitude to my best friend for always listening to my ideas and helping me gain clarity on them, my incredible classmates in MA Gender and Development 19/20 for everything I have learnt from all of them. Finally, a big thank you to my lovely parents for always encouraging me to follow my dreams and making my journey at IDS possible.

ABOUT

Countering Backlash aims to create much needed new knowledge around the complex phenomena of patriarchal backlash and identifying opportunities for women's rights organisations and other gender justice defenders, to address the erosion of gender objectives within development and counter gender backlash. The programme's main countries of focus are Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Kenya, Lebanon, and Uganda.

Led by the Institute of Development Studies, Countering Backlash is being implemented by a consortium which includes: Advocates for Social Change Kenya, the Arab Institute for Women at the Lebanese American University, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, Centre for Basic Research, Centre for Health and Social Justice, Gender at Work, Nucleus of Interdisciplinary Women's Studies of the Federal University of Bahia, and Refugee Law Project. The programme is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The opinions are the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funder.

CITATION

Sanyal, M. (2023) 'Caste and Gender Backlash: A Study of the #MeToo Movement in Tertiary Education in Kolkata, India', Countering Backlash Working Paper 1, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

Design: Lance Bellers

ISBN: 978-1-80470-073-0

DOI: [10.19088/BACKLASH.2023.001](https://doi.org/10.19088/BACKLASH.2023.001)



© Institute of Development Studies 2023. This is an Open Access working paper distributed under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence** (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited and any modifications or adaptations are indicated.

Hosted by



Funded by



Partners



CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	5
2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	7
3 METHODOLOGY	8
3.1 INTERVIEWS	8
3.2 LITERATURE REVIEW	8
3.3 LIMITATIONS.....	8
3.4 POSITIONALITY	9
4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW	10
4.1 UNDERSTANDING BACKLASH	10
4.2 OPERATIONALISING BACKLASH.....	10
4.3 THE PRACTICE OF CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA	12
5 EXPLORING CASTE, CLASS, AND BACKLASH	14
5.1 CASTE-BASED GENDER BACKLASH.....	14
5.2 CLASS-BASED GENDER BACKLASH.....	16
6 CONCLUSION	19

REFERENCES21

FIGURES AND APPENDICES

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Backlash Continuum11

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Interview Guide and Questions20

ABBREVIATIONS

DBA	Dalit - Bahujan- Adivasi
GSCASH	Gender Sensitisation Committee against Sexual Harassment
ICC	Internal Complaints Committee
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
LoSHA	List of Sexual Harassers in Academia
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
SC/ST	Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes
UN	United Nations

1 INTRODUCTION

In the light of the #MeToo movement, this paper explores how the positionality (in terms of caste and class) of female university students in Kolkata, India is employed as an instrument of backlash to pushback their efforts at making progressive change with regard to sexual harassment. The study includes an analysis of six semi-structured interviews based on an amalgamation of conventional and alternate understandings of backlash. It argues that conventional and alternate understandings are not independent of each other, but are interlinked and exist side by side. Backlash silences women and forestalls their demands and pushes crucial gender issues to the backburner.

This paper is an exploratory study of how backlash to gender equality operates in institutions such as public universities in Kolkata, India. It focuses on the #MeToo movement in these institutions and the demands that emerged out of the movement including a properly functioning and strengthened Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) in the campuses and the formation of the ICC within political organisations in the campuses, the formation of Gender Sensitisation Committees against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) within political organisations and stronger redressal bodies. Female students in these universities sharing their #MeToo posts on social media, calling out perpetrators in general body meetings and demanding justice had been met with backlash in most cases.

Student politics in Kolkata is dominated by Leftist organisations who philosophise the world in terms of class struggle and claim to be supportive of all democratic movements including women's movements and anti-caste struggles. However, the Left's emphasis on social equity does not always extend to caste (Roy 2017).

There is a strong anti-caste critique of the #MeToo movement in India posited by *Dalit- Bahujan- Adivasi* (DBA) feminists creating critical fissures in the Indian feminist movement (Mani 2019; Mondal 2018; Raiot 2017, 2018). These rifts also exist amongst female student activists belonging to the two social identities in universities. I argue that Leftist male-dominated

political organisations in university campuses in Kolkata use these critiques to their advantage as tools of backlash against gender equality to uphold established power structures in the campuses, silencing and removing both categories of women from spaces of power and nullifying their #MeToo incidents and demands for redressal and justice.

Backlash to gender equality has been conceptualised by different scholars in different ways. In this paper I primarily draw on two theoretical and conceptual frameworks proposed by Jane Mansbridge, and Shauna Shames (focusing on power) and Erica Townsend-Bell (focusing on positionality). These concepts can be grouped under two broad categorisations of understanding backlash (Piscopo and Walsh 2020): as an immediate reaction to progressive change made or demanded by women (conventional understanding); and as inherent discrimination and oppression present within powerful structures which make the experience of backlash different for different groups of women (alternate understanding).

I analyse my case through these two concepts because I focus on two different groups of women in the universities - DBA women or women belonging to backward castes as per the Hindu social order and *savarna*¹ or upper caste women who face backlash differently owing to their positionality² in society. I have employed a single case study approach using interviews and literature review for the analysis.

¹ *Savarnas* refer to the four unequal castes (*Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas* and *Shudras*) in Hinduism whereas the *Dalits, Bahujans* and *Adivasis* are considered Avarnas who do not belong in the Hindu caste order altogether (Raiot 2018).

² Positionality refers to how an individual's place in the society determines and shapes their identity in society (see: [The University of British Columbia](#)).

Following this introductory section which encapsulates the scope of the study and the methodology used, the remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a brief overview of the background to the study, discussing the global trajectories of the #MeToo Movement and how it manifested in India. Section 3 lays out the methodology used for the analysis based on the conceptual framework. Section 4 outlines the conceptual framework that was used to analyse the case study and provides a review of relevant literature. The conceptual framework looks at different understandings of backlash and the practice of the caste system in India. Section 5 presents the findings from the interviews and a review of secondary literature with an analysis of the findings using the conceptual framework. The paper concludes with a summary of the findings.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

More than a decade ago, Tarana Burke, an American activist set up a social media page on Myspace, for a movement she wanted to create to support survivors of sexual harassment like herself (Ohlheiser 2017). This marked the beginning of the #Me Too campaign. The movement unfolded a year later through a non-profit organisation, 'Just Be Inc.' that Burke created (Garcia 2017). The goal of Burke's #Me Too movement was to change existing narratives around sexual harassment by holding perpetrators accountable for their actions.

The #MeToo movement took rather different trajectories in different sectors, most notably in print and digital media, the legal sector, Bollywood and even the burgeoning comedy sector. However, responses to the #MeToo movement tended to be ephemeral meaning follow-up actions were few. At its inception, however, it trickled down to India when Raya Sarkar, a Law student in the United States published a List of Sexual Harassers in Academia (LoSHA). This list was published on Facebook and included the names of more than 50 Indian professors accused of sexual harassment (Prasad 2017). The LoSHA was condemned by prominent *savarna* feminist Nivedita Menon through a statement in an online critical engagement forum called Kafila where she expressed her concern regarding naming the accused without any explanation and not following due process thus endangering Indian feminists' long struggle against sexual harassment (Menon 2017). Raya Sarkar's LoSHA and the Kafila statement brought to the fore the many fractures in the Indian feminist movement, both in terms of its upper middle-class hegemony and caste blind nature, as well as intergenerational fissures and rifts (Roy 2020).

As the #MeToo movement progressed in India, continued exclusion of women from marginalised communities was very apparent in terms of legislative modifications as well (Pegu 2019) meaning, amendments made to legislations concerning sexual

violence still did not cater to the needs of DBA women. It was repeatedly stated by DBA women and activists that #MeToo in India was not inclusive and that the enforcing tools of #MeToo were predominantly in the hands of *Savarna* women (Mondal 2018; Raiot 2017).

In tertiary educational institutes in Kolkata, reports via Facebook post of sexual harassment and molestation were made before the #MeToo hashtag started trending in India. In 2016 a female university student called out her harasser on Facebook following which 13 other undergraduate students claimed via Facebook to have been sexually harassed by the same male student. The students described it as a way to 'reclaim their agency and re-establish the narratives that were taken...' (Mukherjee 2016). Complainants believed that since the accused was the son of an influential professor at the university, formal complaints would land them in trouble. However, the accusers received severe backlash from the institute administration for not following due process and filing formal complaints (Mukherjee 2016).

Following this incident and the subsequent wave of the #MeToo movement, calling out perpetrators of sexual harassment through social media platforms became common among university students in Kolkata. However, these online complaints often did not develop into formal complaints, and action taken against the harassment and the perpetrators by university administration departments was very infrequent. One reason for this was backlash, which will be discussed later in this paper.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this section I outline the methodological choices I have made for this paper. I have employed a case study approach using Denscombe's idea of in-depth study (Denscombe 2010) as this allows me to use multiple sources and methods and has helped me triangulate information. I have selected the #MeToo movement in Kolkata as my case study. The study uses two methods, semi-structured interviews and literature review.

3.1 INTERVIEWS

I conducted six semi-structured interviews with female activists from two universities in Kolkata between the ages of 18 to 25. All the interview respondents are currently residents of Kolkata, a metropolitan city in India and are students of two public universities located in Kolkata. Three respondents, referred to as A, B and C identify themselves as DBA women and three respondents, D, E and F identify themselves as savarna women. The respondents were selected based on their involvement in Left student politics, their caste backgrounds, and their experience with backlash. The purpose of undertaking interviews was to understand the experiences of the female interviewees from the two different caste backgrounds, and their struggles to register their demands for safety, equality, and justice in political spaces of power in university campuses, and how they experienced backlash. The respondents were selected through two types of non-probability sampling: convenience sampling and snowball sampling.

I used convenience sampling in terms of the location and familiarity with a few of my interviewees. Moreover, sexual harassment being a sensitive area of discussion I wanted respondents who would be comfortable sharing their experiences and would then guide me to interview more respondents with similar experiences in the form of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is useful when it comes to the investigation of sensitive topics (Das 2014) such as sexual harassment. Since the issue is sensitive as it involves discussions around sexual violence and political affiliation, I have kept my respondents anonymous throughout the paper. Interviews have been transcribed and coded thematically, using alphabets; A, B, C for Dalit respondents and D, E, F for *savarna* respondents, to replace their names. Interviews were analysed

thematically, and themes were drawn from debates within the literature. Due to the sensitive nature of this study, it required informed consent from the respondents. Interviewees were provided with a consent form and verbal consent was acquired prior to starting the interview.

3.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Through a secondary literature search, I discovered several newspaper articles and reports relevant to backlash and the #MeToo movement in Kolkata to triangulate the data that I acquired from interviews. I also used academic literature focusing on forms of backlash relevant to my case to broaden the perspective of the analysis. Finally, I used grey literature primarily from party documents of the Leftist organisations, and from Dalit and feminist collectives online to triangulate the data from interviews.

3.3 LIMITATIONS

The data obtained from the interviews and the literature review helped me to understand the ways in which caste and class play a crucial role in perpetrating backlash against women. However, the practice of caste is so deeply rooted in Indian culture, it is difficult to disentangle it from every sphere of an Indian's social, political, psychological, and economic life. Not only does it serve as a tool of backlash against female students' demands regarding sexual harassment, but also in their regular activities in the universities. However, to analyse how caste operates to engender backlash in other spheres, direct interaction with respondents would be necessary through longer interviews and focus group discussions and that was not possible via the virtual communication platform I was obliged to use. Due to the global pandemic that the world has been experiencing, face-to-face interviews and focus group setups were not possible. Further, the pandemic has had a negative impact on my mental health as a researcher and it was difficult to be in the right frame of mind to write a research paper on such a sensitive issue. Notwithstanding these limitations, conversations with the participants opened-up crucial issues and political narratives around caste, class, and sexual violence, as well as suggestions for further research in this area.

3.4 POSITIONALITY

As a student never having studied in a public university in Kolkata, my experiences with backlash have been different in many ways. I have never been involved in active student politics or interacted with political leaders. Additionally, I have collected my data sitting at a desk in the comfort of my home. This 'outsider' position has influenced the conversations with my participants during the interviews in several ways. Firstly, the online interviews were audio conversations which did not establish personal connections which in-person interviews would have. Internet barriers meant unclear connectivity which interrupted the flow of conversations making it incoherent in some cases. Secondly, a few conversations were carried out in Bengali, which although my native language, was my third language in school, thus making it difficult for me to translate correctly. I had to schedule short follow-up meetings with a few respondents to clarify my interpretations of the conversations. Finally, my outsider position as a student in the UK and never having studied in any of the universities my respondents have studied in made it harder for them to relate to me. However, it is possible that it allowed them to share their experiences more openly than if I had been a student studying in their universities.

4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 UNDERSTANDING BACKLASH

In 1991, Susan Faludi broadly defined backlash as a 'powerful counterassault on women's rights' (Faludi 1991: 9). She called these counter reactions 'backlash' because they were predominantly aimed at retracting any significant progress women had achieved. Faludi, in her book entitled *Backlash, The Undeclared War Against American Women*, discussed the largely media-based reaction against feminism in the 1980s mainly in the US. For Faludi, backlash gained traction during this time by simultaneously stating that feminism had achieved its goal and by claiming that feminism was the reason why women were unhappy (Braithwaite 2004: 21). She argued that backlash emerged as an ideology within the New Right (Faludi 1991: 242).

Where Faludi's analysis fails is in its lack of intersectionality;³ an emphasis that other writers of backlash have picked up on (Murib 2020; Rowley 2020; Townsend-Bell 2020). In reality, different women have different reasons to fight for their rights, and as a result the backlash they face, and how and to what extent they face it, is also different. For instance, black women in the US will be subject to different kinds of backlash as compared to white women. However, almost thirty years after writing her book, Faludi argues that in the 1980s, although women of colour suffered serious setbacks from backlash, white women who were 'upwardly mobile, college-educated and professional' (Faludi, Shames, Piscopo and Walsh 2020: 342) were the main targets of backlash perpetrated by the media. She also describes the changing nature of backlash from 'undercover myth making' regarding feminism to 'frontal assault' (Faludi et al. 2020: 339).

The rise of backlash as an ideological frame within the New Right, as Faludi argues, also echoes with the works of David Patternote who writes about backlash in Eastern Europe and its connections with the Right and the church (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018).

Following a proliferation of backlash incidents in recent times, the need to explore and conceptualise backlash in more detail has become increasingly important. To obtain a thorough understanding of the term, Piscopo and Walsh sought to explore what it entails and proposed four topical questions: What is backlash? Who is affected by it? How does it work? How can it be countered? (Piscopo and Walsh 2020: 256). To do this, they categorised backlash scholars into two broad groups: those who understand it as a retaliation to a specific event of progress, and those who understand it as an ever-present violent monitoring of who belongs in public spaces (Piscopo and Walsh 2020: 256). I argue that this binary categorisation negates the fact that those who are removed from public space may also be subject to backlash related to a specific event that furthers their progress. I believe that these two categorisations overlap in some instances. I also argue that the ever-present backlash may or may not be violent.

4.2 OPERATIONALISING BACKLASH

This research uses two different concepts within backlash literature as its analytical tools. The foremost theory was put forward by Mansbridge and Shames (2008). Mansbridge and Shames understand backlash as a retaliation to a specific event of progress and they can therefore be grouped under scholars with conventional understandings of backlash according to Piscopo and Walsh's categorisation (Piscopo and Walsh 2020: 256). Mansbridge and Shames, however, have departed from using the colloquial definition of backlash rooted in a politicised understanding of it like Faludi (1991) and other scholars have. Instead, they have attempted to posit a more non-ideological definition based on a neutral approach. Thus, their point of departure is to view backlash from a neutral perspective rather than looking at it from a political one. For them, backlash begins with 'power and a challenge to the status quo' (Mansbridge and Shames 2008: 624). Defining power as 'preferences and interests

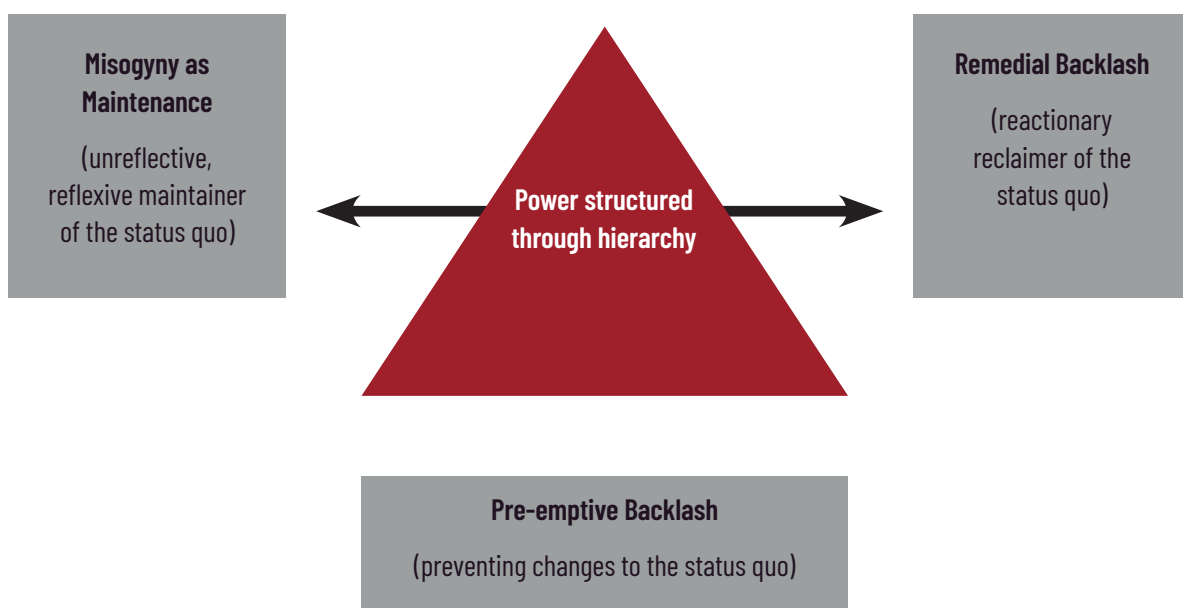
³ The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 essay, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics'. Crenshaw argued that black women experienced oppression multidimensionally and treating race and gender exclusively tended to remove black women from the understanding of race and sex discrimination (Crenshaw 1989).

causing outcomes' (ibid) they broadly use the term 'power as capacity' for a better understanding of it. Power as capacity for them is regained through the use of coercive power (both subtle and overt) and this according to them is backlash (Mansbridge and Shames 2008: 627). They have drawn on examples from social and feminist movements in the US to illustrate different kinds of backlash, different forms of coercive power and how they operate.

This unique theoretical framework that Mansbridge and Shames propose, with power being at the crux, is necessary for first understanding the meaning of backlash, why and how it occurs and then for looking at it from a political perspective, making the analysis more refined. Having said that, I believe that backlash and its dynamics cannot be understood entirely from a neutral approach because backlash comes as a response to challenges to the status quo and the privileges of the status quo are very much politically rooted. However, I would be wary of claiming that 'the Left in general initiates more change from the status quo than does the Right' (Mansbridge and Shames 2008: 633) since the Left has also had its fair share of anti-gender campaigns for instance in Latin America and European countries like France and Italy as Patternote and Kuhar have demonstrated (2018: 14) which may qualify as backlash against any gains made by progressive feminist movements.

Next there is Erica Townsend-Bell's theory (2020). Her understanding of backlash fits with Piscopo and Walsh's second categorisation of alternate understandings of backlash focusing on who experiences backlash. Townsend-Bell conceptualises backlash with a focus on intersectionality (how different groups of women experience backlash differently) and asserts that backlash and misogyny operate on a continuum (Townsend-Bell 2020). In other words, misogyny and backlash are the two ends of a continuum and both are hierarchical structures of power. While misogyny on one end is an enabler of patriarchy, remedial backlash on the other end seeks to reclaim the power that may potentially dismantle the status quo, however she argues that a mid-point exists on the continuum which she calls 'pre-emptive backlash' (ibid 288). Pre-emptive backlash is an attempt to stop certain groups of people from even trying to gain power, and these groups are most often the marginalised and disadvantaged. She draws heavily on racism and its similarities with misogyny to illustrate that black women in the US are more prone to facing pre-emptive backlash because they are black and they are women. Therefore, pre-emptive backlash may hinder their attempts to challenge the status quo. Townsend-Bell calls for an understanding of backlash as experienced by different groups of women based on privileges and disadvantages.

Figure 1 Backlash Continuum



Source: Author's own

Townsend-Bell's concept of backlash is analytically very useful for understanding not just how perpetrators of backlash try to maintain the status quo, but also how they determine who are the ones that can reach the other end of the continuum to face remedial backlash. This conceptualisation of backlash is important because a woman does not always face backlash just because she is a woman, but also because of her intersecting identities. Moreover, this conceptualisation can be operationalised using other identities such as sexual identity (Murib 2020), ethnicity, class, caste and a range of identities across different regions. I would, however, like to note that some groups of women may be subject to both pre-emptive backlash and remedial backlash, for example in India a Dalit woman may face backlash because she is a Dalit and because she is a woman trying to make her position in society better.

Drawing on Mansbridge and Shames' theorising on power as capacity and coercive power and Townsend-Bell's concept of the misogyny-backlash continuum, I will now attempt to propose a framework that amalgamates both to demonstrate that instead of a clear-cut categorisation of conventional and alternative understandings of backlash, both are interlinked and exist side by side.

In the Indian context, caste and class are dimensions that cannot be ignored, and it is interesting to analyse these as an ever-present dimension of oppression against female students in universities, as well as an enforcement tool of backlash against their struggles for safety and justice emerging from the #MeToo movement, using the two analytical lenses. To do so, I want to look at how female students belonging to DBA backgrounds are systematically kept out of mainstream politics so that their representation remains largely tokenistic. I will look at the struggles of such female students to try to conceptualise backlash based on their caste and class positionality in university campuses. I will trace the backlash these women experience because they are *dalits* and women. I will then explore how women's caste and class positionality can be used as instruments of backlash against gender to remove female student activists belonging to both *dalit* and *savarna* backgrounds from spaces of political power; and, how perpetrators of backlash employ subtle forms of coercive power, to reinstate power as capacity to male student activists belonging to these backgrounds.

4.3 THE PRACTICE OF CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

Caste, a social phenomenon in India, is a broad and rather debated academic and empirical arena of study. In order to encapsulate the meaning of caste and its relevance to this study, I have primarily drawn on Arundhati Roy's writing 'The Doctor and the Saint' (Roy 2017). Roy traces the practice of caste in India from the past to the present and largely relies on the writings of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (Roy 2017). B R Ambedkar, a *dalit*, was the architect of the Indian constitution. Roy states that caste was and is still organised according to the principles of a hierarchical structure of entitlements and duties, purity and pollution (ibid.: 15). People belonging to the top of this hierarchical structure are considered pure and have greater access to entitlements, while people at the bottom are considered polluted and have fewer or no access to entitlements (ibid.).

In Hinduism's earliest texts, the system of four *varnas* (categories) is what is known as the caste system (ibid.: 16). The large number of enclosed castes and sub-castes in India, based on their hereditary occupations, are divided into four *varnas*: the *Brahmins* (priests), the *Kshatriyas* (warriors), the *Vaishyas* (merchants and traders), and the *Shudras* (servants). Outside of these four *varnas* are the *avarna* castes consisting of the untouchables, unseeables, and unapproachables. The very presence of these individuals was 'polluting' to the higher caste Hindus (ibid. 16). The word *dalit* (broken people) is now used to refer to the former untouchables and is often understood as the equivalent of a 'scheduled caste'⁴ which scholars like Rupa Viswanath understand as incorrect practice (Viswanath 2014).

Each region of India, including its states and union territories, have different versions of caste-based cruelty. Even to this day caste-based cruelty is rampant in certain regions of the country (SabrangIndia 2019). According to a report released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 40,801 cases of atrocities against Dalits were reported in India in 2016, rising from 38,670 in 2015. Uttar Pradesh and its capital, Lucknow, rank highest for number of cases. The report also shows that most of the crimes against people from backward castes were crimes against *dalit* women, the most frequent being assaults to outrage *dalit* women's 'modesty'- 3,172 reported cases (The Wire 2017). Caste-based discrimination at university works in both subtle and overt forms (Devi 2020).

⁴ In India scheduled caste is the official name given to lower castes that are now protected by the government and offered special concessions.

Roy ardently believes that the practice of caste must be challenged in international forums like the United Nations (UN), in the same way practices like racism, apartheid, and religious fundamentalism are challenged (Roy 2017: 14). She draws an analogy between racism and casteism, both being forms of discrimination based on descent (ibid. 15). However, the profound intertwining of caste with Hinduism prevents it from receiving international scrutiny. Further, a prominent section of privileged Indians are appreciative of the caste system (ibid. 14). Finally, Roy argues, 'By force-fitting caste into reductive Marxist class analysis, the progressive and left-leaning Indian intelligentsia has made seeing caste even harder' (Roy 2017: 15).

Notwithstanding the existence of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe (SC/ST) legislation which provides reservation in higher education and government employment to people from backward castes, Dalits still have fewer opportunities than high caste Hindus to seek education and employment. This sets them back economically and slows down their social mobility. Roy draws on many sources to show that university faculty, major corporation owners, big business, media, and judiciary are all dominated by high caste Hindus. Dalits remain more or less static at the bottom of the economic structure. The only government job dominated by Dalits is sweeper: those who clean streets, sewers and toilets (Roy 2017: 19–27). Roy argues that 'Democracy hasn't eradicated caste. It has entrenched and modernised it' (Roy 2017: 28).

Thus, it is evident that *dalits* (with few exceptions) are the ones most affected by poverty. However, as Roy has argued (2017: 15), Marxists tend not to see caste as a distinct social phenomenon and often condense it with class. This paper will reveal how in higher educational institutions in Kolkata, dominated by Left wing politics, caste is equated with class, and female students from both social positionalities face backlash related to this.

5 EXPLORING CASTE, CLASS, AND BACKLASH

In this section I draw on six semi-structured interviews to understand and uncover the experiences of female students and activists in renowned public universities in Kolkata around sexual harassment, demands for safety and justice, and the backlash they are subject to because of their caste and class positionality.

In my conversations with the respondents two clear themes emerged related to the centrality of power and misogyny, and how they operate together to create gender backlash. All the respondents said that the powerful positions in the leftist political organisations on campus were held by *savarna* men, although the organisations were by principle pro-working class. Issues of sexual harassment and gender sensitisation were most often circumvented by the leaders by bringing up the caste and class positionality of female party members whenever they felt that their power was being challenged.

Before delving into the analysis, it is important to mention that respondents have strongly claimed that for the male political leaders on the Left being *savarna* is equivalent to being upper class and elite, while being *dalit* is equated with being lower middle class or financially poor. I will begin with the accounts of *dalit* women and their experiences which will be followed by the accounts of *savarna* women.

5.1 CASTE-BASED GENDER BACKLASH

Marxist culture permeates elite universities in Kolkata (Ghosh 2020). In this section my respondents - female *dalit* students - have outlined the dominance of *savarna* men in leadership roles in campus who systematically use their caste privilege to target and silence female students coming from DBA backgrounds. This is in contrast to the claim of Marxist organisations of being supportive of all forms of democratic movements including women's liberation movements and anti-caste struggles (CPIM 2016). Caste-based discrimination is rampant in higher education institutes (Gupta 2016) and to the picture is very similar in terms of sexual harassment.

Respondent A, a survivor of sexual harassment, believes that for a *dalit* woman to call out her harasser is a challenge in itself, because 'nobody takes the issue seriously (A)'. Similarly, Respondent B emphasised that for students like her 'calling out' the perpetrator was a far-fetched idea because the male-dominated *savarna* structure of the organisation she was part of was not in favour of it.

Respondent B: I was sexually harassed both physically as well as on social media several times which has affected my mental health tremendously. I didn't call out my harassers because I did not know how to cope with it and did not want to be judged because of my caste background. I faced discrimination from the savarna male leaders of the organisation, I wanted to raise my voice, but I am a woman and from a backward caste, so I felt that my opinion didn't matter.

In most cases the harassers hold powerful positions in the organisation and are backed by both male and female members of the party. For some women their caste itself engenders backlash, and although they may be members of political organisations on campus their existence in such organisations is tokenistic.

Additionally, Respondent A recalled that with support from her friends and seniors she lodged a formal complaint to the University ICC against the perpetrator for which she was 'slut-shamed (A)⁵ and threatened to be 'shown her place (A)' by the leaders of the student union. The perpetrator was not adequately punished. She was further ostracised from the organisation for not resolving the issue privately with the accused.

Respondent A: I called out my harasser in a general body meeting of the organisation I was part of and lodged a formal complaint to the ICC but after 5 months the punishment for my harasser was a suspension for two weeks and a counselling. There is subtle but rampant misogyny, casteism and classism. I have tried to speak up against these dynamics, but our voices don't count in a savarna male dominated structure. The leaders discouraged me to speak about this culture and said that they will raise the issue themselves, which they never did.

⁵ The Cambridge Dictionary defines slut shaming as 'an act of talking about a woman's sexual behaviour in order to embarrass her and make people disapprove of her', <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/slut-shame>

Respondent C looks back on an incident that took place a few years ago in her university when a female *dalit* student and activist was sexually harassed during a campaign for making female toilets more accessible to students. Her harasser was a male *dalit* student. She had called out her harasser on social media through a #MeToo post and the following day the accused was missing. She was severely condemned for calling out a *dalit* man and the leaders in her organisation accused her of his disappearance. The media had covered the story (Uddipan 2017). However, the complainant was 'slut shamed (C)' and compared to another *savarna* female student who had recently lodged a formal complaint to the ICC against her harasser, in terms of following due process. Consequently, she was compelled to delete her social media post and when she went to lodge a formal complaint, she was subject to moral policing and shamed for her choice of clothing. She ultimately decided not to file a complaint and resigned from the organisation. The accused returned to campus soon after that.

Furthermore, respondents claimed that the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SC/ST) cell in universities are very much non-functional and that complaints lodged by female students against sexual harassment in these redressal bodies are often ignored.

Respondent A: A female dalit student was slut shamed by her professor following which she lodged a complaint in the SC/ST cell where she was advised not to make the incident public and sort it out with her professor because 'after all he is your professor, he must have not meant it, it was just a casual remark, you should behave properly'.

On #MeToo and its relevance to DBA women, respondents reiterated that female students from DBA backgrounds studying in universities in Kolkata have never really been able to deal with sexual harassment in the first place. Even though sexual harassment cases against *dalits* are more than those against *savarna* women on campus, the number of cases reported and the rates of redressal are low. They fear speaking against their harassers and often do not realise that they have been sexually harassed. They believe that *savarna* women have appropriate tools to get justice, which DBA women on campus do not have. They emphasised that there are a few *savarna* feminist activists on campus who stand up for them and include them in important activities, but the majority of *savarna* feminists pretend to be woke⁶ but when it comes to including DBA women in their struggles they hesitate. However, my respondents discerned that *savarna* men, who are in decision-making positions on campus, make use of these rifts between *savarna* and DBA women, and

pit them against each other, subsequently retaining power themselves.

Sexual harassment at its very core means maintaining masculine power and identity (Schultz 2018), and any person (usually, but not exclusive to, women) trying to challenge gender norms and power meet with backlash from the perpetrator. Therefore, sexual harassment may qualify as a perpetual form of gender discrimination and resistance against the challenging of gender norms, for instance in the form of #MeToo in work places, universities, and other institutional settings. In the context of my case study politically active female students speaking out against sexual harassment, demanding justice and redressal faced backlash from the male leaders of their respective organisations. However, to understand whether a response is backlash or perpetual discrimination it is important to revisit the conceptual framework for backlash laid out previously. In the case of the *dalit* respondents, it is better to understand backlash both as ever-present misogyny (Townsend-Bell 2020), as well as a reaction to the threat of dismantling the status quo (Mansbridge and Shames 2008).

Respondents unanimously claimed that female *dalit* students face sexual harassment more often than *savarna* women on campus which attests to scholars' opinions on 'who belongs in the public space' (Piscopo and Walsh 2020). If in this case sexual harassment is seen as a perpetual form of oppression against marginalised women, we can agree with alternate understandings of backlash which prioritises its focus on who is harmed by backlash rather than what backlash is. Respondent B, who did not have the confidence to speak out against her harasser, can be situated in Townsend-Bell's middle node on the misogyny and backlash continuum (Townsend-Bell 2020), meaning that her marginalised identity was already a pre-emptive backlash which stopped her from going forward to face remedial backlash had she spoken out against the perpetrator and demanded redressal. On the other hand, both respondent A and respondent C faced both pre-emptive backlash in the form of sexual harassment for being marginalised female students, and remedial backlash for calling out their harassers in public. The remedial backlash they faced was due both to misogyny present within the institution broadly, and also within the organisations of which they were part.

From the experiences shared by the respondents it is evident that men in universities enjoy a powerful position owing to both their gender identity and social identity. Naturally, when respondents spoke out against them in public spaces this power was threatened and coercive power was employed to

⁶ In American colloquial usage the term 'woke' refers to being aware of social issues such as racism or inequality (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/woke>).

reinstate that power and, in the case of both respondent A and C, power was reinstated. What is important to highlight here is how coercive power or misogyny was employed. Respondents unanimously said that their caste had been targeted to stop them from moving ahead with their complaints. Backlash comes in different forms, ranging from subtle remarks to blatant dangerous threats (Mansbridge and Shames 2008; Sen, Vallejo and Walsh 2017; Townsend-Bell 2020). In this case study the positionality of the respondents was used as a tool to further marginalise and intimidate them through ostracisation, silencing, stereotyping, stigmatisation, and invisibility (Sen et al. 2017). These responses came as an immediate reaction to the challenge to the power structure and so this can be called backlash. However, being marginalised women within an institution in itself has proved to be a backlash for the respondents. Therefore, the two categorisations of understanding backlash as time bound and based on certain resistance events, and as a perpetual form of oppression against marginalised and vulnerable groups, are mutually dependent on each other and need to be understood as a whole. Inherent discrimination, misogyny and established power structures engender backlash. Backlash against the marginalised *dalit* respondents by the *savarna* dominated leadership within the campus proved to be successful because the *dalits* lack both social and economic capital to demand justice.

In addition to being stigmatised by party members the *dalits* also faced stigmatisation at home which the respondents claimed the party members made them aware of, thus further discouraging them from reporting incidents. Respondent B, in reference to a friend of hers, said 'my friend told her parents after she was sexually harassed on campus and they advised her not to report it, withdrew her admission and got her married (B)'. Respondent C's acquaintance also faced hostility at home after her #MeToo post made headlines, forcing her to temporarily leave home.

Another form of backlash that operates within universities against marginalised women is procedure. Respondents said that redressal bodies like the ICC, again headed by a cis-het *savarna* man, have more than once reversed formal complaints lodged by *dalit* women against sexual harassment citing failure on the part of the complainant to follow due process. This resonates with *savarna* feminists' opposition on the grounds of due process to Raya Sarkar's LoSHA which she had published on Facebook (Raiot 2018).

5.2 CLASS-BASED GENDER BACKLASH

This section presents the findings of my interviews with *savarna* respondents. It outlines the experiences of female students from *savarna* backgrounds, and their experiences with backlash on campus.

Respondent D affirms that the powerful organisations are inherently misogynistic. Having been a member of a considerably powerful party previously, her opinions on important decision-making issues were brushed off, and she was often given the tag of 'being an elite urban female coming from an English medium school and therefore not familiar with working class problems (D)'. However, this narrative was only employed by the predominantly (male) party leaders when questions about how to deal with the growing numbers of sexual harassment cases that were coming to light following the #MeToo movement were raised. Respondent D goes on to explain that 'leftist organisations on campus have no place for women (D)' and this was a major reason that led the women in her organisation (both *savarna* and *dalit*) to form a separate organisation. This organisation was situated at the Left in the political spectrum, primarily with the goal to address sexual and gender-based violence on campus and to make it a safe space for women, LGBTQ+ students and other oppressed identities. The leaders of her party were vehemently opposed to an organisation exclusively formed and led by women under the political umbrella of the Left, and they rebuked the women who decided to form this organisation for being upper class and urban, although women from different social positionalities and economic backgrounds had proportionate representation within the organisation. She and many other members soon resigned from the party as a consequence.

Respondent D: The leaders of my party were opposed to the very existence of a Leftist women's organisation formed by the female members of the party as a separate identity, following which 31 of us decided to resign from the party and make the women's organisation an autonomous one but even then, although the organisation still exists, they made sure we get no support from students and therefore our work is stalled at the moment.

Respondent E highlighted similar experiences with the male leaders of the party to which she belonged. She asserts that in the party's general body meetings, women had very little scope to talk on issues related to sexual harassment or anything related to gender. The only topic they were encouraged to pick up were general issues that concerned the male party leaders.

Respondent E: In 2016, a few female students in the party including me decided to demand for the formation of a Gender Sensitisation Cell against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) within the party in order to address the alarming proliferation of sexual harassment cases in the campus brought to light by the #MeToo posts on social media. We kept insisting on the formation of the GSCASH because the ICC was proving to be non-functional and survivors were not feeling safe in the campus or getting justice. However, we were again rebuked for being upper class urban women and our demand bore no fruit.

Respondent E further adds that as soon as the idea of the GSCASH was raised, the party leaders said that if the GSCASH was set up then a SC/ST cell should also be set up within the party to address caste struggles. This suggestion was approved by everyone but ultimately neither of the two redressal bodies were ever instigated. This shows that caste came up merely as a tool to reverse a demand related to gender, and more so from the fact that savarna women were trying to push demands for gender issues to be addressed.

Respondent F, the former chairperson of the student union and a member of the party ruling the student union at her university, had several experiences to share demonstrating the gender insensitive stance Leftist political organisations in her university hold, and how caste and class positionality is very often used as a means to push back on gender related issues raised by female students. Being a survivor of sexual harassment on campus and knowing women who had similar experiences, on campus she employed her *savarna* privilege and her powerful position within the party to call out the party as a whole on social media and to highlight its bureaucratic structure which did not allow women's voices to reach decision making levels, the culture of silence that existed within the party, and the lack of women's representation. She recalls an instance from a party meeting where the district level secretary was present when she called out her harasser, also a powerful male member of the party. Her harasser's response and the response of most of the other party members shook her.

Respondent F: When I described my experience with the harasser, he confidently dismissed the allegation and retorted with accusing me and other savarna female members of planning to form a group to falsely accuse men in the party of sexual harassment, malign the party's image and beat up the men. He kept repeating that urban elite feminists like us do nothing constructive for the women's movement and marginalised women. He also added that if the women can form such a group, 'we can also send men to physically harm you'. What shocked me however was that nobody protested against such a threat which affected my mental health and made me feel extremely unsafe. I kept requesting for the dissolution of the meeting, but the Secretary General refused saying, 'I know you're feeling bad but as a communist I cannot stop a working-class man from expressing his opinion'. A threat of violence had become an opinion.

She illustrated other instances when the gender question was pushed back through reminding her of her class positionality. Her only demand was to set up a redressal body within the party to deal with the sexual oppression that *dalit* and *savarna* women were both facing on campus. For this she was called an 'urban elite middle-class woman (F)' which is paradoxical given that

the ones who tagged her as such were also *savarna* men, both upper class and lower middle class. She felt that Leftist leaders on campus believe that 'gender comes after the revolution (F). Gender and caste are appendices to class struggle only when gender equality issues are concerned. For them 'caste and class are the same (F). She added that the male Leftist leaders take away the political and personal agency of the female members of the party. When it comes to women demanding leadership roles they are dismissed, and many times clothing choices of female party members are decided by the leaders.

Respondent F: I used to wear jeans to university, but the leaders insisted that I wear traditional Indian clothes to look pro-working class and drop urban middle-class Western wear when I went to campaign for elections. Their idea of being de-classed was to wear traditional attires. All this made me question my position in the party and I ultimately resigned.

Most female *savarna* students normalise this behaviour and are hesitant to stand up for *dalit* students or include them in their struggles. This is also a form of backlash against both groups of women, marginalising them by pitting them against one another. Much of the Indian feminist movement, according to DBA women, has been dominated by *savarna* women and the #MeToo movement is no exception (Mondal 2018; Raiot 2017, 2018). In contrast to *dalit* women, *savarna* women seem to have more access to, and opportunities for, calling out perpetrators and demanding redressal (Pegu 2019). This echoes with the experiences of the *savarna* respondents who had the agency to call out their harassers in party meetings, general body meetings, and also online without having their post taken down. However, they also face backlash because of their class position which in the case of Respondent F proved successful.

In late 2017, the response to Raya Sarkar's LoSHA widened the split in the Indian feminist movement along intergenerational lines where young feminists were criticised for being elitist and furthering middle-class urban interests. However, DBA feminists soon disrupted that criticism and pointed out that caste-based differences and power hierarchies within the movement subjugated their efforts (Roy 2020). They argued that caste-based power imbalances prevailed over time within the Indian feminist movement and could not be limited to young feminists only (which also included young DBA feminists), rather upper-caste feminists have had the upper hand in the movement for years. This is a very important and valid narrative posited by DBA feminists. However, this critique has unfortunately been misused by male *savarna* leaders in universities against *savarna* feminists as a tool of backlash to impede their efforts in bringing gender issues into the mainstream agenda of political organisations within campuses.

Respondents have described how the leaders of their political parties have persisted in stating that they are elite middle-class women and that issues such as calling out perpetrators of sexual harassment online and in general body meetings are middle-class issues and do nothing for DBA women. Such backlash has not only silenced *savarna* feminists but also does nothing to serve the interests of DBA feminists within campus, ultimately removing the crucial need to address sexual harassment from the purview of the DBAs political activities. This resonates with young feminists' view of intergenerational criticisms being less about elitism and more about reclaiming their sexual agency and bringing sex from the personal to the public (Roy 2020).

Respondents have also repeatedly emphasised that Leftist organisations within the universities tend to integrate caste within class and target women's position in society to reverse any attempt they make to address critical issues like sexual harassment. Being upper caste and, according to the male leaders, automatically upper class, they first need to address the issues of the working class and then gender. Intimidation through threats of physical and sexual violence, and marginalisation using caste and class positionality in society, engenders successful backlash in the case of upper caste female students, as well ultimately silencing them and stalling any progressive change. In the same way that *dalit* respondents mentioned that *savarna* women are pitted against them strategically by *savarna* male leaders, *savarna* women are also pitted against *savarna* women within the party as a subtle form of backlash. However, there is a question as to whether *savarna* women can be considered within the framework of backlash which focuses on experiences of backlash towards disadvantaged groups. I believe that in the context of this case study where sexual harassment is perpetrated within the boundaries of an educational institution that is dominated by Leftist *savarna* leaders who do not recognise class as different from caste, upper caste women are disadvantaged and their attempts for progressive change are forestalled on account of being upper caste, upper class and women. Having said that, this argument may not be valid in other contexts where the amplified disadvantages of *dalit* women and the privileges that *savarna* women hold are more distinct.

The purpose of this exploratory study using conventional and alternate conceptual frameworks of backlash is to show that

the two frameworks can be understood in unison, and this might also be relevant in understanding and further analysing backlash. The intersection of gender identity and caste and class positionality in Indian society plays a crucial role in generating backlash. It is important for the feminist movement to include an analysis of caste and class to understand the needs and aspirations of women belonging to DBA backgrounds and upper caste backgrounds, and to understand how the intersectionality of gender with class and caste generates backlash. Similarly, anti-caste and anti-class movements need to include an analysis of patriarchy and sexism, and should focus on women's contexts and experiences based on the sources of their difficulties.

It is essential to bridge the rift between *dalit* and *savarna* feminists and to be inclusive. Only then can the co-option of valid narratives emerging from within the two different groups of feminists which engender backlash come to a stop. Such backlash forestalls the progress of the movement. Respondents claimed that the formation of the GSCASH was stalled and that the ICC still does not function efficiently. Female students who file formal complaints to the ICC receive backlash from ICC members who include *savarna* women. Such backlash also impacts women's representation in political organisations. DBA women in campus, respondents mentioned, often do not want to engage with political parties because they know their representation will be tokenistic.

Another important revelation from this study is that this kind of backlash not only sets back progressive change but also has a negative impact on the personal as well as political agency of both marginalised (DBA) women and privileged (*savarna*) women, albeit in varying degrees. Within campus DBA female students often fear calling out their harassers so as to not receive backlash based on their caste, whereas *savarna* female students who have more agency than DBA students to call out harassers lose their agency to act upon their demands for redressal and change owing to their caste and automatically assigned class. More so, both groups of women, on account of being women do not have the agency to choose what clothes to wear to universities for fear of being sexually harassed and then receiving backlash for dressing provocatively and 'wanting it', if they report or call out their harassers. This is a theme that needs further exploration from feminist scholars and activists.

6 CONCLUSION

This study has explored how caste and class positionality is used as a tool of gender backlash which reverses attempts made by women in higher educational institutions in Kolkata to address sexual harassment following the #MeToo movement. By analysing the importance of caste and class positionality, and power and misogyny within the discussion of backlash this paper has attempted to depart from the binary conventional and alternate understandings of backlash. The findings of this case study have revealed that the two categories of understanding backlash overlap. Therefore, concepts of backlash that focus on power and why and how backlash occurs should also look at the intersection of gender identity and women's caste and class positionality to better understand experiences of backlash within different groups. Conversely concepts of backlash focusing on intersectionality need to include an analysis of how power is exercised to generate backlash. A combined understanding will contribute to strategies of dealing with backlash and to make efforts to mitigate it through activism.

Findings derived from the six semi-structured interviews complicate the reading of the #MeToo movement in Indian universities as a homogenous movement in terms of the backlash it has engendered. By conceptualising backlash as experienced differently by different groups of women and situating it as a response to progressive change demanded by women irrespective of their caste and class, this study manifests the overlapping of conventional and alternate views regarding backlash.

Significantly, it has found that caste and class identity of women in political spaces pose as a threat to gender equality within university campuses in Kolkata which are dominated by male *savarna* leaders predominantly belonging to Leftist organisations. Interviewees emphasised that although these Leftist organisations may seem to be supportive of gender equality, women's movements, and anti-caste struggles, they do not distinguish caste from class, which makes it difficult for women to bring up gender issues. Power and misogyny also prove to be two gatekeepers of gender backlash. Having said that, caste and class positionality may not be overarching tools of gender backlash, but they certainly are two of the most dominant tools in this case. The use of the caste and class backgrounds of female students by male *savarna* leaders to ensure gender issues take a backseat, exemplifies the scanty space for discussion on feminist politics within leftist organisations in India (Menon and Nigam 2007).

What such backlash ultimately does in this case is remove both *dalit* and *savarna* women from spaces of power and silence them. It has a negative impact on their agency (Kabeer 1999: 437), which means their ability to pursue and act upon their goals, and their ability to negotiate and resist. The existing literature on backlash addresses how feminists prevent backlash and there is an emerging body of literature suggesting ways to confront and counter backlash (Piscopo and Walsh 2020). An additional focus of future work should be on how backlash negatively impacts the agency of female activists and how they are removed from political spaces due to this.

In terms of countering and confronting backlash, it is important that feminist activists, and anti-caste and anti-class activists in India recognise the intersectionality of gender identity and caste and class positionality, have open dialogues on caste, power, sexism and patriarchy, and become more inclusive and build solidarities between *savarna* and *dalit* feminists. *Savarna* feminists need to use the activism and justice tools at their disposal and join *dalit* women to construct a united fight against systematic backlash against gender. They need to realise that the differences based on caste and class within the movement leads to co-optation by forces of patriarchy and only pushes the goals of the Indian feminist movement to the backburner. Thus, it is important to understand intersectionality and to build inclusivity within feminists belonging to different social positionalities to resist gender backlash.

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE AND QUESTIONS

Interview Guide

1. Introduce myself and the research project
2. Read out the verbal consent form
3. Start recording

Interview Questions

1. Are you sharing your experience as a survivor of sexual violence on campus, if yes, what followed?
2. Have you been involved in activities on campus which might have challenged established power structures?
3. Were you targeted based on your caste and class positionality?
4. Did you ultimately leave the organisation?

REFERENCES

- Braithwaite, A. (2004) 'Politics of/and Backlash', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5.5: 17
- CPIM (2016) 'Plenum: Report on Organisation', 25 January, Communist Party of India, <https://www.cpim.org/documents/plenum-report-organisation> (accessed 9 September 2020)
- Crenshaw, K. (1989) 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989.1, article 8, <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8> (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Das, D. K. L. (2014) *Practice of Social Research*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications
- Denscombe, M. (2010) *The Good Research Guide*, Maidenhead: Open University Press
- Devi, A. (2020) 'How Caste Works in University Spaces: My Experience Dissects the Hypocrisy of Savarna Women', *The Standpoint*, <https://thestandpoint.in/2020/07/28/how-caste-works-in-university-spaces-my-experience-dissects-the-hypocrisy-of-savarna-women/> (accessed 5 August 2020)
- Faludi, S. (1991) *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, New York, United States of America, New York: Three Rivers Press
- Faludi, S., Shames, S., Piscopo, J. M. and Walsh, D. M. (2020) 'A Conversation with Susan Faludi on Backlash, Trumpism, and #MeToo', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45.2: 336–45, <http://doi.org/10.1086/704988> (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Garcia, S. E. (2017) 'The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags', *The New York Times*, 20 October, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html> (accessed 8 August 2020)
- Ghosh, E. (2020) 'Leftist Dadas, 'Faka Flats' and the Right-Wing Dilution of Left Feminist Anger', 29 July, <https://feminisminindia.com/2020/07/29/left-wing-sfi-politics-faka-flats-right-wing/> (accessed 31 August 2020)
- Gupta, A. (2016) 'Caste: Why it's still an issue for India Inc.', <https://www.fortuneindia.com/ideas/caste-why-its-still-an-issue-for-india-inc-/100264> (accessed 31 August 2020)
- Kabeer, N. (1999) 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', *Development and Change* 30.3: 435–64
- "Kolkata: JU student missing after being shamed on social media for 'misbehaving'" (2017, February 4), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/kolkata/shamed-on-social-media-jadavpur-university-student-goes-missing/story-7GPYMEFASHjeh1fcP6fU7M.html> (accessed August 8, 2020)
- Mani, L. (2019) 'We Inter are: Identity Politics & #MeToo', *Feminist Review* 122.1: 198–204, <http://doi.org/10.1177/0141778919844187> (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Mansbridge, J. and Shames, S. L. (2008) 'Toward a Theory of Backlash: Dynamic Resistance and the Central Role of Power', *Politics & Gender* 4.4: 623, <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X08000500> (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Menon, N. (2017) 'Statement by Feminists on Facebook Campaign to 'Name and Shame'', *Kafila*, 24 October, <https://kafila.online/2017/10/24/statement-by-feminists-on-facebook-campaign-to-name-and-shame/> (accessed 10 August 2020)
- Menon, N. and Nigam, A. (2007) *Power and Contestation: India since 1989*, Halifax: Fernwood Publishing
- Mondal, M. (2018) 'A Dalit Woman's Thoughts on #MeTooIndia', *The Indian Express*, 15 October, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/a-dalit-womans-thoughts-on-metooindia-5402538/> (accessed 9 June 2020)
- Mukherjee, S. (2016) 'Ekalavya-Chaudhuri News: Latest', <https://thewire.in/tag/ekalavya-chaudhuri> (accessed 17 September 2020)
- Murib, Z. (2020) 'Backlash, Intersectionality, and Trumpism', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45.2: 295–302, <http://doi.org/10.1086/704953> (accessed 14 November 2022)
- NCRB (2016) 'Crime in India 2016', New Delhi: National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India
- Ohlheiser, A. (2017) 'The Woman Behind 'Me Too' knew the Power of the Phrase when she created it — 10 years ago', *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2017/10/19/the-woman-behind-me-too-knew-the-power-of-the-phrase-when-she-created-it-10-years-ago/> (accessed 8 August 2020)
- Paternotte, D. and Kuhar, R. (2018) 'Disentangling and Locating the 'Global Right': Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe', *Politics and Governance* 6.3: 6, <http://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i3.1557> (accessed 14 November 2022)

- Pegu, S. (2019) 'MeToo in India: Building Revolutions from Solidarities', *Decision* 46.2: 151–68, <http://doi.org/10.1007/s40622-019-00212-x> (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Piscopo, J. M. and Walsh, D. M. (2020) 'Introduction', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 45.2: 265–78, <https://doi.org/10.1086/704950> (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Prasad, E.C. and R. (2017) 'Student's 'Sexual Predator' List Names Professors', *BBC News*, 6 November, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-41862615> (accessed 10 August 2020)
- Raiot (2017) 'The 'Sexual Harassment' Discourse: A Bahujan Woman's Perspective', *Raiot*, 21 November, <http://www.raiot.in/the-sexual-harassment-discourse-a-bahujan-womans-perspective/> (accessed 9 June 2020)
- Raiot (2018) 'Academically-Transmitted Caste Innocence', *Raiot*, 24 August, <http://www.raiot.in/academically-transmitted-caste-innocence/> (accessed 7 June 2020)
- Rowley, M. V. (2020) 'Anything but Reactionary: Exploring the Mechanics of Backlash', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45.2: 278–87, <http://doi.org/10.1086/704951> (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Roy, A. (2017) 'The Doctor and the Saint: Caste, Race, and the Annihilation of Caste: The Debate between B. R. Ambedkar and M. K. Gandhi', <http://www.myilibrary.com?id=1006119> (accessed 1 September 2020)
- Roy, S. (2020) '#MeToo is a Crucial Moment to Revisit the History of Indian Feminism', 5 May, <https://www.cetri.be/MeToo-Is-A-Crucial-Moment-to> (accessed 6 May 2020)
- SabrangIndia (2019) 'Dalit Youth set Ablaze in Horrific Caste Crime, Contradictory Versions of Incident Surface: UP', 24 September, <https://sabrangindia.in/article/dalit-youth-set-ablaze-horrific-caste-crime-contradictory-versions-incident-surface> (accessed 1 September 2020)
- Schultz, V. (2018) 'Reconceptualizing Sexual Harassment, Again', Yale Law School, Public Law Research Paper 647, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3165561>, <http://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3165561> (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Sen, P., Vallejo, C. and Walsh, D. M. (2017) 'Opposition to Women's Participation in Politics and Civil Society', University of Virginia, https://uva.theopenscholar.com/files/pvi/files/sen-vallejo-and-walsh_8.pdf (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Townsend-Bell, E. (2020) 'Backlash as the Moment of Revelation', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 45.2: 287–94, <http://doi.org/10.1086/704952> (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Uddipan, S. (2017) 'Where is Sushil Mandi?', https://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8975:where-is-sushil-mandi&catid=129:events-and-activism&Itemid=195 (accessed 8 August 2020)
- Viswanath, R. (2014) *The Pariah Problem*, New York: Columbia University Press
- The Wire (2017) 'Most Crimes Against Dalits Are Against SC Women: NCRB Data', <https://thewire.in/caste/ncrb-crimes-against-dalits-women> (accessed 1 September 2020)

COUNTERING BACKLASH

RECLAIMING
GENDER JUSTICE

counteringbacklash.org

[@CounterBacklash](https://twitter.com/CounterBacklash)

Hosted by



Funded by



Partners

