

TRANSFORMATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY?

Gender and its intersections within participation in higher education

Colloquium

10-11 February 2020

School of Women's Studies

Jadavpur University, Kolkata

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are the intended key drivers of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which identify a number of global challenges to be addressed within Lower-Middle Income Countries (LMICs). Quality education (SDG 4), gender inequality (SDG 5), and strong institutions for peace and justice (SDG 16) have a direct bearing on the academic functions of social formation and knowledge building. Feminist scholars globally have critiqued the adherence to liberal feminist and neoliberal framework in the SDG framework.

- Cognizant that the SDG framework may not be fit-for-purpose, what can be done with this powerful external referent?

Parallel to increasing commodification and privatization of higher education institutions, has been a feminization of the education market into flexible, peripheral labour such that teaching resources have been increasingly casualised, rendered docile and deprofessionalised. Women's Studies Centres (WSCs) face a drastic reduction in investment. The wide gender disparity among academic staff and their positions of power in universities continues. The disparity is exacerbated when gender intersects with other markers of difference, including caste, class, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, language, location, displacement. Yet those located within such categories are cited in policy rhetoric as beneficiaries.

- Cognizant that institutions are not fit-for-purpose, how might their transformation be re-imagined?
- What do discourses and constructions of 'transformation' and 'sustainability' reveal about the conditions of possibility?
- How might feminist scholars bring their expertise to bear on theorizing the lived experiences of those who (mis)fit in the margins and in the mainstream to inform counter-narratives of higher education?
- What truths are to be told about the functions of the policies of affirmative action, gender equality, sexual harassment, etc. in terms of participation in institutions of higher education?
- What are the parameters of power and inclusion which determine who gets to become a learner and then a teacher?

The Indian University Grants Commission (UGC) has mandated WSCs to inform the achievement of the SDGs of promoting equality and empowerment of women. Indian feminist scholars, within and beyond such WSCs, have contributed towards challenging notions of main(male)stream authority within the sphere of academic influence – academic methodologies of practice in teaching and research; knowledge systems; and participation within the 'institutional logics' of the academy's hegemonic culture(s).

- In what ways may a feminist vision and praxis contribute to the transformation of higher education, its sustainability in terms of gender equality, peace and justice?

This colloquium invites scholars and practitioners to come together, to speak and write a way through the impasse of intellectualization, feminization, and dehumanization of the current conditions of our positioning. Key to the ethos of this gathering is the reflexive openness and self-criticality to engaging with the problematic of how the 'claiming' of diverse experiences of systemic injustice, may also lead to certain inhabiting and reproducing of institutional power.

Dr. Nandita Banerjee Dhawan, Jadavpur University, Kolkata
Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi, Queen's University Belfast
November, 2019

