

Minutes of the National conference on “Gender and Sexuality : Stigma Discrimination and Exclusion”

organized by Advanced Centre for Women’s Studies, TISS, with the collaboration of NHRC on 11th March 2023 at TISS Mumbai.

As part of a collaboration between National Human rights Commission and Advanced Centre for Women’s Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, a one-day Conference is organized on 11th March 2023 as part of the series of conferences decided under the umbrella theme of “Sexual and Reproductive Human Rights”. The main aim of the first conference organized at TISS Mumbai campus is to bring together academicians, activists, policy and legal experts, with other stake holders to discuss issues related to sexual violence and other exploitative practices against women and other sexual and gender minorities in India.

Conference 1: Stigma, Discrimination and Exclusions on the grounds of Gender-Sexuality

Sub-theme:

Who is left out - The Framing of Rights and the Exclusions - this sub-theme focussed on some of the key international, South-east Asia regional, and national debates around how rights are understood, and vulnerable communities that get left out of the discourse.

The conference was inaugurated by 1. Prof.Bino Paul, Deputy Director of TISS Mumbai,

Ms.Yasmin Ahmad, representative of National Human Rights Commission New Delhi

Dr.Bindhulakshmi, (Chairperson), Prof.Meena Gopal, Dr.Asha Achuthan Dr.Sangita Thosar, Dr.Sujatha Devarapalli , Ms.Laxmi Banjan from Advanced Centre for Women’s Studies and the external Invitees include

1. Dr.Chayanika Shah, Feminist activist and Writer,
2. Ms. Nidhi Goyal , Disability and gender rights activist and Founder of Rising Flame,
3. Dr.Shampa Sengupta ,Disability and gender rights activist, Founder & Director, Sruti Disability Rights Centre
4. Dr A K Jayasree - Associate Professor and the Head of the Department of Community Medicine at the Academy of Medical Sciences, Kannur

5. Sai Bouruthu – Criminology researcher, Researcher at Ban Killer Robots
6. Dr Madhu Mehra – Head of Research & Trainings, Partners for Law in Development
7. Deepa Pawar – Founder & Director, Anubhuti Trust
8. Dr Sheetal Kamble – Senior Research Associate, Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education, TISS,

The conference was inaugurated by Prof. Bino Paul, Deputy Director of Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Ms. Yasmin Ahmad, senior Judge and representative of National Human Rights Commission, New Delhi, Dr. Bindhulakshmi Chairperson of Advanced Centre for Women's Studies, Dr. Sujatha Devarapalli program convener (ACWS) participated and addressed the inaugural session.

The Keynote address was given by Dr. Chayanika Shah, feminist activist and writer who spoke on the structural analysis of systemic exclusions in academics and health care in Indian society. The session is chaired by Prof. Meena Gopal. In this session, Dr Chayanika discussed the ground realities of caste, gender and sexuality based discriminations in higher educational spaces and public health care systems and the need for serious interventions in protecting the human rights of each and every Individual of the society.

The first panel was on Stereotyping faced by persons marginalized on grounds of gender and sexuality living with disabilities, including those living with mental health challenges, chaired by Dr. Bindhulakshmi. The Speakers of the session are Nidhi Goyal, Disability and gender rights activist and Founder of Rising Flame; the second speaker was Shampa Sengupta, Disability and gender rights activist, Founder & Director, Sruti Disability Rights Centre. The session highlighted how lack of data on disability became a hinderance in addressing the issues of disabled persons. The panel raised concern about the increasing violence against disabled persons, access to resources, homogenization of disabled persons and the need for serious research on incentives of marriage, implementation of trainings for health care professionals, politicians, officials and policy makers.

The second panel was on Discrimination-stigma against and exclusion of queer women and trans*persons, chaired by Dr. Asha Achuthan. The Speakers are Dr A K Jayasree - Associate Professor and the Head of the Department of Community Medicine at the Academy of

Medical Sciences, Kannur and Sai Bouruthu – Criminology researcher, Researcher at Ban Killer Robots . In this session The tokenistic representation of transpersons was discussed by Sai particularly the violation of human rights of trans persons in prisons was highlighted. The speakers requested the urgent need for intervention by NHRC in the issues related to violence against transpersons and community mobilization in creating sensitivity towards the issues of marginal sections in society.

The third panel was on Discrimination and stigma faced by Dalit Bahujan Adivasi and rural women and children in education and healthcare settings, chaired by Dr.Sangita Thosar. The Speakers are : Dr Madhu Mehra – Head of Research & Trainings, Partners for Law in Development Deepa Pawar – Founder & Director, Anubhuti Trust Dr Sheetal Kamble – Senior Research Associate, Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education, TISS, & Specialized trainer in Gender, Caste, Violence, Education, Health and Law. The discussion was mainly on the Scholarship on sexual and reproductive healthcare with respect to individuals with non normative gender and sexual identities, highlighting the various barriers that characterize the process of seeking healthcare facilities. It also highlighted on the access to healthcare for queer communities also needs to be placed within the context of interlocking grids of marginalization along the lines of caste, class and other social locations; which determine the uneven nature of this access for different individuals within the queer community. It is also important to account for structural discrimination and violence that pervade across domains such as labor, housing, education; among others; and how they determine and shape access to health and well-being.

The final session was on a way forward. Several participants requested National Human rights commission to intervene in the issues faced by marginal communities in terms of education, access and availability of resources, financial assistance particularly in the educational and health care spaces. The session discussed on how to take the discussions happened in the conference to the community. The conference was concluded by Dr.Bindhulakshmi and Dr. Sujatha Devarapalli of ACWS with a summary note and a vote of Thanks.