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# Student Diversity and Social Inclusion:
## An Empirical Analysis of Higher Education Institutions in India

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# CONTENTS

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**Nidhi S. Sabharwal**[*] **and C.M. Malish**[**]

## Abstract

Policies of affirmative action have played an influencing role in the massification of the higher education system in India and the creation of a diverse student body in campuses. Diversity in student composition is reflected in terms of their caste, ethnic, class, linguistic, regional, and religious backgrounds. In this backdrop, CPRHE carried out a large-scale study to understand the dynamics of student diversity in higher education campuses in India. The study was undertaken in higher education institutions located in six states including Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. The study adopted a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Based on empirical evidence, an attempt has been made to theorise the emerging phenomenon of student diversity. Study classifies student diversity into the following three distinct but inter-related stages: Stage I (social diversity), Stage II (academic diversity), and Stage III (social inclusion). The sources and unique nature of each stage are explained and the factors impacting each stage are identified. It provides a framework for assessing the nature of student diversity, campus experiences and various types of challenges faced by diverse student bodies and institutions. The findings suggest that the higher education system has made a commendable improvement in achieving social diversity though new forms of inequalities have emerged in the form of institutional and disciplinary segregations. Further, social disparities in academic integration in classrooms and the teaching–learning process continue to persist. Social exclusion, stereotypes and identity-based peer group formation also remain as unresolved concerns, and pose challenges for students from the socially excluded groups. It is essential to fully weave diversity and inclusion in the institutional fabric to make campuses more inclusive, to strengthen the existing institutional mechanisms that address the academic and social concerns of diverse students and to ensure greater sensitivity from managers and professionals of higher education institutions towards the students from the socially excluded groups facing numerous challenges.

## Introduction

The higher education sector in India has experienced an unprecedented expansion in the recent decades. India is now in the stage of massification of higher education with a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 25.2 per cent (MHRD, 2017). The expansion of the sector in India has been the result of increasing social demand and expanding supply conditions. Efforts made in promoting school education up to the higher secondary level in India were crucial in increasing the share of the eligible population in the higher education space, cutting across castes, classes, and sexes. Higher education campuses are now marked by the presence of a spectrum of socio-economic groups who were earlier excluded from higher education due to various socio-economic and historical reasons.

Equity has been one of the major concerns in the expansion of the higher education system in India. Constitutionally mandated caste- and ethnicity-based affirmative action policies, relaxation in admission criteria and freeships have been important drivers for improving enrolment ratios among the disadvantaged groups and for encouraging social diversity on higher education campuses. Reservation policies are being implemented at the federal and state levels for the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

The notion of equity has wider dimensions. It cannot be restricted to access alone. While access initiatives attempt to attract the hitherto under-privileged and non-traditional social groups into entering higher education institutions (HEIs), initiatives to improve academic outcomes focus on retaining those who have entered the higher education system, by offering them adequate support, incentive systems and provisions. Equity initiatives in the form of remediation and educational support programmes are being implemented with the aim of facilitating academic success and the completion of academic courses. Diversity in student population in higher learning institutions is, therefore, the result of continuous policy efforts of both the Union and federal states.

An important aspect of the equity dimension in higher education is the nature of social inclusion and the social experiences of diverse student groups in higher education campuses, given the prevalence of a social hierarchy in India. With the influx of students of varying socio-economic and cultural backgrounds pre-college credentials and academic competency levels into the campuses of HEIs, these campuses are now becoming sites of political contestation, assertion, and the assimilation of identities. If social and academic differences are left unattended, it soon becomes a source of discrimination and exclusion. As can be gleaned from

the vast extant literature, education can serve as a source of both social reproduction and social transformation. Discrimination based on ascriptive characteristics such as gender, socio-economic status, caste, ethnicity, and geographic locations contributes to social reproduction of inequalities. Evidence points to the presence of a social divide in higher education spaces based on caste, religion, ethnic and regional identities (EPW, 2008; Thornton et al., 2012; Ovichegan, 2013; Rao, 2013; Sukumar, 2008; Malish, 2011; Sabharwal, Thorat, Balasubramanyam and Diwakar, 2014; Malish and Ilavarasan, 2016; Kamat et al., 2018). The history of power and privilege stemming from a perception of birth-right will continue to create a hierarchy that would relegate some groups into dominant and others into disadvantaged positions, if the issue of discrimination is not addressed, and concomitant differences between people belonging to diverse backgrounds are not addressed (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2012).

The potential of education to foster social transformation cannot be achieved unless and until concerted institutional efforts are made to address discrimination and promote measures for the inclusion of diverse students in the educational process. Diversity has to be ensured through diverse ways of inclusion and the provision of equal access to opportunities. Inclusion is a process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of the disadvantaged classes on the basis of their social identity, enabling them to participate fully in the educational process. Since initiating acts of inclusion in the educational process is an institutional responsibility, the policy environment becomes an important element in building the capacity of institutions to respond to student diversity. Since no education process is 'neutral' (Freire, 1972), the manner in which higher education is experienced by the diverse student body is of critical significance.

In this context, CPRHE/NIEPA[1] initiated a research project with the objective of developing an understanding of the experiences of diverse students in HEIs and how these HEIs are responding to the changing nature of student diversity. The research project was implemented in 12 HEIs located in six states of India including Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. Case study states were selected in such a way that ensure representation of different regions of the country as also states with varying stages of socio-economic and educational development. The case study institutions include different types of HEIs including universities, institutes of national importance, institutions offering courses in traditional arts, and science, as also professional courses, and different types of colleges such as government colleges, private aided colleges and constituent colleges of the university.

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[1]    This study was funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, Government of India.

This study has followed a collaborative research model by constituting a research team in each of the case study institutions. CPRHE organised three methodology workshops for the research team during three important stages of research. It helped to develop a collective understanding about the core objective of the study, data collection, analysis and writing of case study reports. Additionally, we visited each of the case study institutions and took part in the data collection process. The study utilised a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods for the collection and analysis of data/information. The empirical findings are derived from the results of a questionnaire-based survey administered to 3200 students, interviews with 200 faculty members, faculty in-charge of cells and committees and administrators, and 70 focus group discussions with students belonging to various social groups and women students. Based on the empirical study, the authors of this paper and the research team members from the 6 case study states involved in the study have prepared one synthesis report and six state research reports. The list of reports is provided in Annexure 1. While duly acknowledging the intersections of caste, ethnicity, class, gender, physical ability and religion, the focus of the study is social diversity in identities derived from caste and ethnicity. An extensive body of literature provides us with theoretical approaches on valuing student diversity and ensuring equity in educational outcomes.

This paper is divided into eight sections. Section 2 contains a review of the existing literature that has guided research on student diversity and discrimination. Section 3 presents our guiding conceptual framework for analysing the empirical evidence emerging from our study on diversity and discrimination in the context of India. Based on the analysis of empirical evidence from the study, Section 4 discusses the classification of student diversity in institutions of higher education. Section 5 describes the nature of social group composition amongst student bodies and the status of social diversity in campuses of higher education institutions in India. Section 6 discusses the forms of academic differences and their effects on achieving equity in academic integration. Section 7 presents the nature and forms of discrimination faced by students belonging to the socially excluded groups and women, and their effect on the levels of social inclusion in higher education campuses. Section 8 assesses the status of implementation of existing institutional mechanisms for addressing the risks and vulnerabilities faced by students from diverse social backgrounds and the challenges affecting the effective implementation of such institutional mechanisms. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for managing student diversity in institutions of higher education in India.

**Inter-generational Equity and Higher Education**

This section presents a review of the existing literature on access to higher education and its link to inter-generational equity and social mobility; theoretical approaches and strategies related to student success; how social group identity becomes a source of discrimination and empirical evidence which suggests that student diversity in higher education campuses can be channelled for civic learning.

*Higher Education Attainment, Economic Mobility and Inter-Generational Equity*

The positive role of higher levels of education in attaining inter-generational economic and social mobility is now widely recognised. Economic and social mobility is closely related to educational achievements, given the direct link between human capital and labour productivity in the knowledge economy. When knowledge and information become the fulcrum of the production process and its products, trained human capital acquires significance. Higher education contributes to human capital formation that has the potential for the cultivation of certain traits that are attractive to the labour market. Reliance on educated manpower or what the proponents of the knowledge economy call scientific and technical class have redefined the role of higher education across the globe. The advent of new modes of production and the consequent impact on national productivity and global business competitiveness has created a massive demand for technical manpower.

Empirical analysis of various countries by Gregorio and Lee (2002) for the period ranging from 1960 to the 2000 suggests that higher education attainment rates are positively linked to income mobility. In social terms, higher education has the potential to influence mobility of individuals along the social ladder as compared to their parents. Higher education plays a role in overcoming the challenges associated with inherited traits (such as caste and sex) and the advantages accruing from the socio-economic status of the parents. Consequently, nation states made a significant contribution in the expansion of higher education systems in the early 1960s and 1970s. As a result, there was a massive increase in the Gross Enrolment Ration (GER) in the tertiary sector in developed countries.

Since higher education is widely acknowledged as a key driver of economic growth and productivity, equalising access to higher education opportunities can become a pathway for achieving inclusive economic development. New ideas of inclusive development in the post-capitalist development imagination and the changing nature of the production process and emergence of the knowledge economy (Drucker, 1992; Webster, 2006) are based on the understanding that

traditional roots of inequality no longer exist in contemporary society. Rather, in knowledge economies, national productivity and growth will be determined by the capacity of the countries to adapt to the changing nature of production processes rooted in the manipulation of information and knowledge (Castells, 2000). Lyotard (1989), who provided a philosophical interpretation of the changing status of knowledge and learning in advanced capitalist societies, argues that in the new economy, knowledge exists in the form of a commodity. As opposed to its "educational value and political importance", knowledge is circulated in the same way as money is being circulated (Lyotard, 1989, p.6).

The dual benefits accruing to both the individual and the nation's economy from the attainment of higher education complicate the private and public nature of higher education (Carnoy et al., 2014; Tierney and Sabharwal, 2016). On the one hand, access to higher education is the single most important determinant of access to decent employment, and hence the economic and social mobility of individuals. On the other hand, national economic growth and prosperity are determined by the expansion of higher education. This is why higher education is considered as a quasi-public good—the benefits of higher education are neither purely private nor purely public. This dilemma pertaining to the defining nature of higher education has been an important consideration in setting higher education priorities.

In developed economies, public funding had been the major source of higher education expansion (Varghese and Panigrahi, 2015). This fact has larger implications for equity in higher education. Persisting inequalities in resources perpetuate inequality in access to higher education. Given the lack of equal distribution of other resources such as land, education is the only resource that can act as an equalising mechanism in modern society. Unlike other resources, human capital is the only resource that can be universally distributed, if opportunities for higher education are made available, affordable and accessible to all. Therefore, inequalities in access to higher education have wider social and economic implications.

Access to what type of courses further complicates the issue. The expansion of higher education has been accompanied by diversification of the sector both horizontally (in terms of disciplines and specialisations) and vertically (in terms of the duration of education and prestige). The various reasons offered as justification for the increased diversification of the higher education sector include efficiency, quality, and a need for higher education to serve a diversified student population (Teichler, 2008). World-wide higher education signifies a stratified structure of educational opportunities with elite universities offering professional degrees and

greater career outcomes, and mass institutions offering courses that command a low premium in the labour market (Marginson, 2016). Access to programmes and institutions that offer a higher market value and exchange rate in the labour market entails greater occupational outcomes than admission to the less prestigious institutions and programmes. Offering an explanation for the link between elite universities and greater occupational outcomes, Arrow (1973) suggested that in part "higher education serves as a screening device, in that it sorts out individuals of differing abilities, thereby conveying information to the purchasers of labor" (p. 194).

Socio-economic status and parental educational levels are also associated with access to prestigious universities and fields of study with better occupational outcomes. Triventi (2013) finds that "individuals with better educated parents have a higher probability of attaining a degree from a top institution, of a higher standard, and with better occupational returns" (p. 499). Social inequalities in access to higher education opportunities in elite institutions reproduce social hierarchies and exacerbate intra-generational inequalities (Arum et al., 2007; Marginson, 2016). Financial affordability is a major hurdle to access to elite institutions. Student loan schemes are designed to support poor students financially, enabling them to pursue higher education. The available data on education loan schemes in India indicates that the number of beneficiaries of these loans from among the SCs and STs constitute only 8 per cent of the total beneficiaries for the period 2009–14 (Jayadev, 2017). Interestingly, out of the total interest subsidy of Rs. 5127 crore distributed during the above period, nearly 60 per cent was bagged by candidates belonging to the general category (Jayadev, 2017). This points to two issues. Firstly, the lack of social capital hinders SC and ST families from accessing education loans. Secondly, the benefit of the interest subsidy, which is sourced from the public exchequer, disproportionally favours the upper castes.

Educational challenges posed by the socio-economic status and background of families are not only strongly linked to inequalities in access to higher education opportunities in elite institutions, but also impact the performance and academic success of students. The following sub-sections first present theoretical insights from the extant literature on factors determining the academic success of diverse students in higher education. This is followed by a delineation of the social barriers facing students from the disadvantaged groups, which has roots in negative stereotypes and the stigma associated with identity of these groups.

*Student Experience and Academic Success of Diverse Student Bodies*

Understanding student experiences in college is a complex issue, as is evident from the variety of concepts that are used to explain the post-admission phase of college students. As per the existing literature, the background of students is one of the most important factors shaping their academic and social experiences. The various concepts used to discuss student experiences include first-year experience student retention, persistence, academic success and student identity formation. There is a widespread agreement among scholars that the first year is a 'critical year' for student life as it critically influences the students' decision to stay on or leave the campus and student success (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1988; 2006; Trotter and Roberts, 2006; Pasceralla and Terenzini, 1991; Rayle and Chung, 2007; Yorke and Longden, 2008). It has also been empirically verified that the first six weeks in college constitute the most crucial period (Daubman, Williams, Johnson and Crump, 1985). The various theoretical and methodological approaches used in the literature are indicative of the complexities and multi-layered aspects of student experience. However, there is greater agreement among scholars of higher education that the first year is a critical year for students. The experience acquired during the first few weeks is important in determining the trajectory of the students' learning curve. In this context, the following section will elucidate the experiences of diverse student groups during their initial days in college.

Early works on the first-year student experiences are largely based on psychological approaches and cognitive theories. The over-dominance of the psychological approach in assessing student experiences has been well documented in the literature (Tinto, 2006; Reason, 2009). Since the college-going age constitutes a crucial phase in the life span of the students, psychological studies have focused attention on how individual traits such as aspiration and motivation influence experience and adjustment at the college level. On one hand, scholarly discussions on student retention have viewed individual attributes, skills and motivation of students as factors responsible for the students' decision to stay on or leave campus, that is, student failure is attributed to the failure of students to cope with new setting. On the other hand, the role of the environment or the institution in motivating students to stay on in college as opposed to the approach of 'blaming the victim' was viewed as an important factor in student retention (Tinto, 2006). The approach of 'blaming the victim' continued until the 1970s when research shifted its attention from students per se to the environment or the institution.

Among many others, Tinto's model (1975) has been the most tested and debated model of student withdrawal (Braxton, 2000; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1975; 1993). The central premise of Tinto's longitudinal model was the idea of social and academic integration and student–institution fit. Tinto (1975) elaborated the three-stage process of student withdrawal, wherein the stages are separation, transition, and incorporation. Tinto's model suggests that as a student enters college with differing expectation and aspirations, the mismatch emerges between the student and the institution during the period of college adjustment gradually results in isolation and leads the student not to engage in behaviours that will increase their sense of belonging in universities. It affects academic performance and leads to gradual withdrawal and attrition from universities. The more a student integrates into the university socially and academically, the less she/he is likely to withdraw. The role of student–teacher engagement is of crucial significance here along with engagement with the peer group and other stakeholders. However as per the model, in order to assimilate into the dominant mainstream minority and the non-dominant student group, the student has to leave his/her identity and associated attributes. The model explicitly stresses that non-cognitive dimensions of the individual play an important role in student success. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, pp. 51–53), who elaborated Tinto's model, "integration refers to the extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in that community".

However, the Tinto model has been charged with being insensitive to the success of the disadvantaged in higher education. It goes against viewing campuses as a space of multiculturalism, pluralism and diversity. Its implications are many. Conceiving student failure as a result of their own failure to adjust, socially and academically, with the institutions nullifies the role of institutions in fostering success of disadvantaged. The Tinto model (1975) was challenged on the premise that it implicitly legitimises the dominant culture (Tierney, 1992) as the campus culture. According to the model, student withdrawal is attributed to the inability of students to integrate with the institution. It was further argued that legitimising the 'white' culture of the institution, for example, has a negative impact on students from the subaltern and non-white cultures. Most importantly, the model does not consider the role of the institution and its major stakeholders in student withdrawal.

The manner in which the non-traditional groups are depicted in the studies on student experience and student success largely exhibits a common pattern.

There is a tendency to put the non-traditional groups in 'deficit terms' according to which issues were listed in terms of challenges, deficiencies, and problems—the proposition that the student lacks something for which the institution has to intervene is often problematic. As noted by O'Shea (2016), positioning the students in deficit terms is fundamentally flawed. Related to Tierney's critique, Yosso (2005) and O'Shea (2016) have expressed concerns on how non-traditional students were subjected to the acculturation process and were positioned in 'deficit terms'. The acculturation process included an element of breaking away from the student's past communities. It is believed to be essential for better integration with the new environments. The idea that integration is possible only when the students break away from their past backgrounds ascribes all the blame for their non-integration on the students themselves and the backgrounds they belong to.

The tendency to position the non-traditional groups in 'deficit terms' entails highlighting their deficiencies and problems. Instead O'Shea (2016) suggests that students from the non-traditional groups "arrive with a range of capitals, and the challenge for institutions is to work effectively with what learners have rather than expect them to change or disregard these strengths" (p. 75). To that effect, Yosso (2005) put forward the "community cultural wealth framework" with elements of agency and pathways drawn from the psychological theory of hope. According to this framework, capital is not restricted to social, economic and cultural capital. The interplay of different forms of capital exists such as aspirational capital, familial capital, resistant capital, linguistic capital, and navigational capital, which are important for understanding student experiences. And Tierney (2016) points to new possibilities of inquiries pertaining to the success of first-generation low-income students by analysing the intersection of 'grit' and social capital.

Importantly, the proponents and opponents of the student departure theory unanimously agree that the pre-entry educational attributes alone are not solely responsible for student success in higher education. What happens after entering college also has a significant role in determining one's success. The cognitive and non-cognitive adjustments of students are important and teachers have a major role to play. Teacher–student interaction has been the crux of the teaching–learning processes. Teacher–student engagement as part of the teacher–student relationship in higher education institutions is not limited to the classroom. Given technological advancements, teacher–student engagement can take place in many domains and in various forms. The use of social media in teacher–student engagement has been the latest domain of such an engagement. There are formal and informal ways of

student–teacher engagement. Literature has shown that student–faculty interaction outside the classroom is an important factor in social development and in improving the performance of students as such interactions help in gaining knowledge, build confidence, and develop abilities to maintain positive relationships based on care, which, in turn, provides students with the motivation to learn and induces a desire in them for greater efforts to succeed (Endo and Harpel, 1982; Astin, 1993; Anaya and Cole, 2001; Thompson, 2001; Cotten and Wilson, 2006). Studies also demonstrate a positive relationship between student–faculty interactions and the intellectual self-concept (Kuh, 1995; Cole, 2007). The intellectual self-concept signifies self-awareness about one's own intellectual ability and judgement, which is regarded as an important factor of student success in higher education.

Student–faculty interactions outside the classrooms are, however, determined by how interactive faculty members are with students when they are inside the classrooms as well as the social background of the students. Studies have shown that students take cues from positive or negative in-class interactions, which determine their level of comfort to approach the faculty outside the classroom (Loo and Rolison, 1986; Wilson and Gaff, 1974). The feeling of not being welcomed and tensions related to social backgrounds can also sometimes create a barrier for the students from the minority groups in interacting with the faculty outside the classroom and subsequently influence their educational experiences (Allen, 1992; Davis, 1991; Hurtado, 1994).

Related to the role of institutions, Tinto and Pusser (2006) provided an improvised model that put greater significance on the overall institutional climate, faculty expectation and student feedback. They listed five conditions required to ensure student success, including expectation, support, feedback, involvement and learning. While involvement refers to student effort, all the other conditions explicitly and implicitly indicate the role of the institution and faculty members. It was argued that "students are more likely to persist when they find themselves in settings that are committed to their success, hold high expectations for their learning, provide needed academic and social support, and frequent feedback about their performance, and actively involve them with other students and faculty in learning" (Tinto and Pusser, 2006, p. 4). The post-admission experience of students is also affected by their group identities and social belonging. Students from the disadvantaged social groups experience situations wherein they face discrimination. Considerable evidence has been generated on the discrimination experienced by SC students in higher education institutions (Malish, 2011; Ovichegan, 2013; Thorat and Sabharwal, 2015). In the

following sections, we present the concept of discrimination and the forms it takes in higher education.

**Social Group Identity and Discrimination in Higher Education**

In the context of massification when students from the disadvantaged groups such as the SCs, STs and OBCs enter the higher education system, they face multiple sets of vulnerabilities. One set of vulnerabilities is related to their pre-college academic credentials and their parents' educational background, which negatively affects their academic outcomes. As discussed above, there is a higher likelihood of students from the disadvantaged backgrounds having poor economic circumstances, belonging to families in which neither parent attended college, being the first in their families to attend college and have differentiated educational backgrounds, which may be attributed to lack of access to advanced course offerings in their high schools, particularly in mathematics and science. The other set of vulnerabilities is related to their social group identity. The inseparability of these vulnerabilities makes the analysis complex. The cumulative vulnerabilities faced by students from the socially excluded groups make their transition from school to higher education very difficult.

The vulnerability of the students from the 'lower castes' stems from their social group belonging. Historically, the lower castes have been suffering from a denial of certain basic rights, including civil, cultural, religious and economic rights that are traditionally denied to the 'polluting' occupations and manual labour. Besides this, the SCs have specifically experienced severe forms of discrimination and exclusion as they were treated as untouchables because of their affiliation to the polluting castes. Due to this unique stigma of untouchability, the SCs are considered unfit for social association and inter-relation with the castes above them (Thorat and Sabharwal, 2015). Social groups, specifically, in the traditional caste system have an unequal social location or position relative to each other. Castes are not placed on a horizontal plane, different but equal. They are on the vertical plane, different and unequal (Ambedkar, 1987). Students from the 'lower castes' are thus vulnerable to prejudicial attitudes, symbolic violence and discrimination in the spheres of teacher–student and student–student interactions. Symbolic violence refers to a kind of violence, oppression, or coercion that is not physical; rather, it is "a gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 127). Those with more capital within a field are able to control symbolic meanings and to "impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its forces" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p. 4).

A close reading of the definitions of discrimination indicates that both actions which are intended to have a negative effect and are not intended but have a negative effect on certain groups are considered discriminatory. In the 1960s, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education defined discrimination in education. According to the convention, 'discrimination' includes any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which, being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education" (Article 1, UNESCO, 1960). The International Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (ICERD) in (1969) and the Convention of Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 followed the same definition.

Discrimination in higher education can take different forms. Two important forms are individual discrimination and institutional discrimination (Pincus, 1996). Individual discrimination is related to the behaviour of an individual. Individual discrimination can be overt and covert. While overt forms of discrimination such as derogatory remarks are visible forms of discrimination, covert forms of discrimination are often hidden. Micro-aggression put forward by critical race theorists captures the essence of covert discrimination. Daniel Solo´rzano, Miguel Ceja and Tara Yosso, (2001) define micro-aggressions as "subtle insults (verbal, non-verbal, and/or visual) directed towards people of color, often automatically or unconsciously".

Many studies have cited instances of overt form of discrimination and micro-aggression against SCs and STs in Indian campuses. The other set of vulnerabilities that students from the socially excluded groups face concerns their pre-college academic credentials. Compared to the non-SC/ST/OBC students, SC and ST students are more likely to be the first in family or first generation higher education learners'; those who have studied in government school with the regional medium of instruction and are academically under-prepared for college work. Most of the pre-college academic variables that students from the socially excluded groups differ in from their peers from the non-socially excluded groups have links with academic transition, academic performance, and opportunity levels for upward mobility. This places students from the socially excluded groups at the risk of academic failure. Thus, academic differences, along with identity in diversity, become a source of discrimination in teacher–student and student–student interactions and a hindrance in students' performance.

Many studies have also discussed affirmative action policies in higher education. However, issues related to social group identity and discrimination have not received the attention they deserve (Parthasarathy, 2012; Malish and Ilavarasan, 2016). Parthasarathy (2012) explains how caste privilege and stigma are simultaneously naturalised through the micro-processes of pedagogical and evaluation systems in IITs. It is further argued that "the absence of specific guidelines from the institute regarding teaching, in general, and the failure to incorporate diversity issues in teaching methodology and curricula, means that faculty in IITs are not even aware that admission of students on the basis of reservation brings unique problems that need to be addressed in unique ways" (Parthasarathy, 2012, p. 262).

A successful higher education system treats diversity as an asset rather than a problem by harnessing the benefits that students from diverse backgrounds bring to the campuses. At the core of discussion is a perspective that values the transformational potential of diversity in student composition for the academic and socio-cultural life of campus. The following sections delineate insights from the literature on the transformational potential of student diversity for higher education campuses.

### Student Diversity and Civic Learning

A growing body of literature also indicates a positive impact of social diversity in student composition on their academic outcomes and civic learning. The theoretical foundations to value student diversity as a resource for civic learning are based on theories of cognitive development and social psychology—the psychologist Erikson's (1946;1956) theory of social identity formation in the late adolescence/early adulthood (first year of college) and Allport's (1954) theory of interpersonal contact. Allport's (1954) theory of interpersonal contact with diverse peers maintained that interaction with diverse peers was beneficial for cognitive development and critical for reduction in prejudice and other negative behaviour towards the out-groups. It is in the college campuses that young people (in early adulthood) come together from different backgrounds, and, experience classroom and social relationships that are in variance from the students' home environments.

However, one cannot assert an identity or rather asserting an identity has no value unless and until it is legitimated by people around (Shotter, 2004). The process of identification through cognitive and symbolic means is essential for identity formation. Jenkins (2008) has observed that identity 'is a process-*identification* –not a 'thing'. It is not something that one can *have,* or not; it is something that one *does'* (p. 5, Italics original). Given the social stratification system that exists in India,

the social identity of the individual is predetermined by the accident of birth (Ambedkar, 1987). Graded inequality places people belonging to different caste and ethnic groups on hierarchy and the continuum of privileged and devalued identities.

Literature asserts that a diverse student body promotes an atmosphere essential to quality higher education. Social diversity in the demographic composition of students, faculty and staff representation in the physical presence of previously under-represented groups on the higher education campus creates conditions of inter-group interactions and learning about diverse peers (Hurtado et al., 2012). College campuses are viewed as laboratories and structural (numerical) diversity is regarded as a resource for fostering positive campus climate, inter-group relations, learning outcomes and civic learning. Three major approaches were identified to channel student diversity for civic learning within the curriculum and co-curriculum spheres: curriculum that provided knowledge about other groups to increase inter-group understanding; contact programmes that provided opportunities for members of different groups to interact with each other in controlled settings; and skill programmes to manage differences in a peaceful manner and to collectively solve public problems (Allport, 1954; Antonio, 2001; Chang 2002; Hurtado et al., 1999; Milem and Hakuta, 2000; Orfield, 2001; Smith, 1997; Kurlaender and Orfield, 2006; Tropp and Pettigrew, 2005).

**Understanding Dimensions of Student Diversity**

The conceptual framework for our analysis has been drawn from many of the elements of conceptualisations in the literature on student diversity and student experience in higher education. Our conceptual framework included five constructs of influences and their interplay that have the potential for shaping the campus experiences and educational outcomes of students. The five constructs include the social group identity of students, family backgrounds, pre-college academic characteristics, institutional culture, and policy environment, which support the act of inclusion to achieve diversity. The influence of these dimensions on student diversity and student experience has been diagrammatically represented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Dimensions of Student Diversity (SD) and Student Experience (SE)**
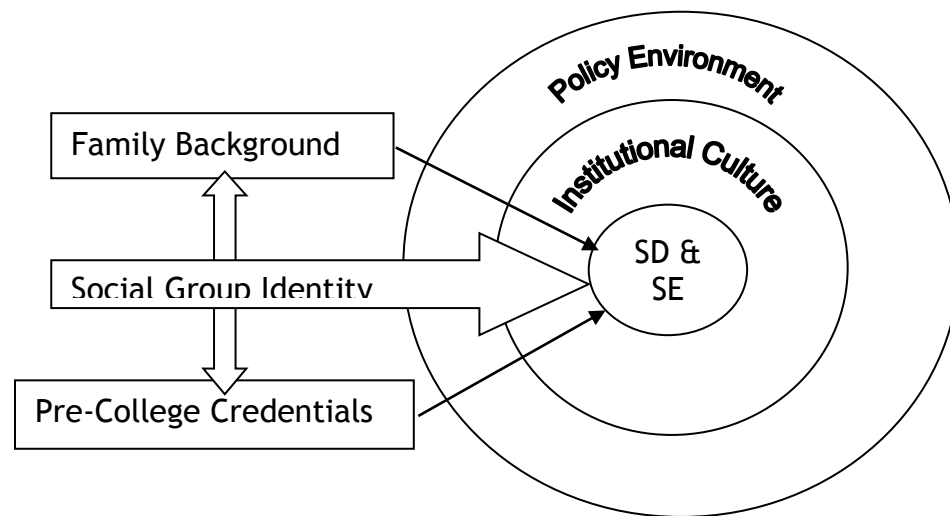


*Source: Prepared by the authors.*

### Social Group Identity

Social group identity in terms of caste, ethnicity and religion is an important factor that influences the dynamics of student diversity in campuses and student experiences. As informed by the vast literature on Indian social systems, castes are hierarchically arranged in a continuum of pure and impure/polluted castes. While the upper castes obviously occupy a higher position in caste hierarchy, the lower castes are relegated to lower positions. Untouchabilty or pollution divides the traditional Hindu castes into pure and untouchable castes. Ethnic groups are located outside the social hierarchy of castes. Geographically isolated habitation patterns and the socio-cultural practice of ethnic communities further push them into the margins of society. The non-Hindu religions, particularly those practising Islam, are prone to the 'othering' process. They also face serious forms of social exclusion in contemporary society.

Differences in initial endowment possessed by the caste, ethnic and religious groups contribute to the development trajectory of each of these groups. As a result, people belonging to the non-disadvantaged groups get undue benefits and privileges, while the socially excluded groups are vulnerable to cumulative disadvantages. Empirical evidences on the socio-economic and education indicators reinforce the fact that social group identity continues to impact socio-economic and education development and the democratic participation of these socio-religious groups.

It is well recognised that social group identity impacts educational development, and pre-college academic characteristics. Social group identity matters in higher

education in two ways. Firstly, there is a strong correlation between social group identity and access to higher education. Differences in the GER among social groups confirm this point. Although there are improvements in higher education access among the SCs, STs and Muslims, disparity in access continues to persist. Secondly, the available empirical evidence suggests that social inequalities emanating from social group origin are reproduced in the higher education scenario. Various studies have found that the socially disadvantaged students face severe forms of discrimination, harassment and isolation in the social and academic space of higher education institutions.

### Family Background

Family is one of the important institutions that reproduce inequality in contemporary society (Beteille, 2010). Family is the most influential determinant of education levels. It is well recognised in the literature that the resources available within the family and the capacity of the family to invest in its children, enabling them to accumulate social and cultural capital, has a far-reaching impact on the educational attainment of the family members. The factors that influence the choice of and strategies for determining the educational paths of their children are family income, occupation, land ownership, educational backgrounds and the social capital of parents. However, family as an institution is closely linked to the social group origin.

### Pre-college Credentials

Another dimension that influences access to higher education and student experiences in higher education pertains to the pre-college academic credentials of the students. Social group identity and family background are closely interlinked to the pre-college credentials of students. The pre-college credentials refer to the marks and grades obtained by students at the higher secondary level, the type of courses studied and the institutions in which the students were enrolled. Here the medium of instruction is particularly important. A significant proportion of the students are found to have studied in the regional language, which poses major difficulties in their efforts to access higher education. As Borooah and Sabharwal (2017) observed, equity in education cannot be achieved until and unless equity is achieved in access to English medium schools. Lack of competency in English exacerbates problems emanating from lower grades and marks secured by students in higher education.

*Policy Environment*

The policy environment is an important determinant of how enrolment in higher education is distributed among the population and how the interests of the disadvantaged are addressed. The constitutional provision of equality and non-discrimination ensures a broader landscape for non-discriminatory access to education for all. Affirmative action policies mandated by the Constitution ensure educational opportunities for the disadvantaged social groups. However, access to education is largely fuelled by various incentives schemes and supportive programmes in higher education. Some of the examples of such incentive and support schemes include fee exemption, book bank facility, coaching schemes, stipend and hostel schemes inside and outside the colleges and universities. The UGC guidelines for the promotion of equity and the Anti-sexual Harassment Act constitute other forms of policy environment that exist at the macro level for the welfare of diverse student bodies. There also exist institution-specific policies for addressing the equity concerns in higher education. Among these are the deprivation point system in the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), the mentor scheme and gender policies in institutions that determine their specific policy environments, respectively. A policy environment that is conducive towards diversity plays an important role in the institution's adaptation to student diversity.

*Institutional Culture*

Although institutions are located in the larger landscape of the policy environment for equity and inclusion, how these goals are realised in each of the institutions varies. This situation induces us to explore more deeply the intricate deeper structure of institutions. Therefore, the notion of institutional culture has been found to be an effective for understanding the deep-rooted structure of an institution as an organisation. Swidler's (1986) idea that culture is to be seen as a lynchpin that holds ideology and actions in an organisational context is particularly relevant. Since culture is a "historically transmitted meaning embodied in symbols" (Geertz, 1973, p. 89), the prevalent ideology possessed by stakeholders is often invisible.

Every day practices take place quite naturally for actors. Kuh and Hall (1993, p. 2) comprehensively define the culture of institutions as "the collective, mutually shaping pattern of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education which provide a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of events and actions on and off campus".

Institutional culture can be identified through the behaviour of individuals in the organisation and determines how colleges and universities adapt and respond to the students they serve. In the case of public higher education institutions, the three key stakeholders are the students, faculty, and administrative staff.

The interplay of the five elements lays down the path for achieving diversity and social inclusion in higher education. These five dimensions greatly influence not only access to higher education institutions but also what happens after students enter college. Both the nature of student diversity and the experiences of diverse student bodies are influenced by all these five dimensions. However, institutions as a system do not have major control over all the dimensions of higher education except institutional culture. The social group identity, family backgrounds and pre-college credentials of the students remain unchanged even after the students take admission in colleges. Two dimensions that have the potential for change are policy environment and institutional culture. Although there are deficiencies in the policy environment at the macro level, the realisation of these goals pertaining to the policy environments is largely the responsibility of institutions themselves.

Therefore, addressing the issue of student diversity through the implementation of effective policies and practices needs to be achieved by the institutions themselves. This reinforces the fact that institutional culture is one of the most important dimensions that determines the nature of the students' experiences in higher education. Here, the question is to what extent institutions rooted in tradition respond to the changing nature of student diversity and how equity is institutionalised through the creation of a conducive institutional culture that upholds the spirit of social inclusion in the academic and non-academic domains of campuses.

**Towards a Theory of Student Diversity in Higher Education in India**

The empirical analysis of student diversity across the socio-economic context and in several higher education institutional set-ups reveals some common trends of student characteristics, teacher–student interactions inside and outside the classroom, peer to peer interactions, institutional processes, and the functioning of institutional mechanisms in their response to student diversity, which can be generalised into a tentative theoretical model of student diversity. Based on the empirical analysis undertaken in the study, we have developed a classification system of student diversity: a tentative theory of student diversity.

This theory attempts to classify student diversity across three stages in higher education institutions. These stages are at the level of entry (Stage I), at the level of

academic integration after the entry (Stage II), and at the level of interactions and engagements outside the academic activities, that is, in non-academic space, which entails a condition of equality and social inclusion (Stage III). In other words, the first stage is that of a socially diverse student composition at the entry level; the second stage is that of the academic integration of socially diverse students in classroom interactions and teaching–learning processes; and, the third stage is that of a socially inclusive campus environment, wherein students from the disadvantaged social groups feel welcome and enjoy the opportunities to experience non-discriminatory interactions with their teachers, the administration and their peers (Sabharwal and Malish, 2017).

Diversity at the entry level has implications in achieving academic diversity in the classrooms and social inclusion in the campuses. At the level of entry, which is termed as social diversity, the share of students in enrolment from different social groups represents the extent of social diversity. There are external factors in the form of legislative measures that decide student diversity in Stage I. Achieving social diversity in access is related to public policies which can take the form of affirmative action, reservation of seats, and the provision of financial aid and freeships. Factors affecting social diversity involve not only the formulation of affirmative action policies, but also the institutions' commitment to implement these policies. Acceptance and consistency of adherence by institutions to policy rules and regulations that pertain to social objectives facilitates student diversity in campuses. Access to higher education institutions by the socially disadvantaged group is the first step in the pathway of achieving student diversity in higher education institutions.

While Stage I diversity deals with issues at the entry level, Stage II diversity reflects what happens inside classrooms and its effects on academic outcomes. While external factors decide the first stage of student diversity, it is the teachers who are mainly responsible for achieving the next stage of student diversity, as it pertains to academic integration in the classroom interactions and in the teaching–learning processes. Diversity may exist in the classrooms; there are social disparities in academic outcomes. The institutional response at this stage is on how to provide academic support for students to make the level playing field equal for students with varying pre-college academic credentials. Institutional mechanisms that are designed to overcome the cumulative disadvantages and strengthen academic capabilities are essential for ensuring the successful transition of students from the socially disadvantaged groups to higher education, and to achieve parity in academic outcomes. Faculty members are best placed to initiate such mechanisms at the

institutional level. The sources for achieving parity in education outcomes are equity measures such as the creation of conducive teaching conditions to meet the academic needs of diverse students in the classroom, and academic support programmes in the form of compensatory education and remediation implemented at the institutional levels. Thus, academic support by teachers at this stage is essential in the process of academic integration and for ensuring overall academic success. Facilities such as a well-equipped library, advanced technical infrastructure like audio-video learning aids and language labs also contribute to academic success.

Stage III is that of social inclusion and social cohesion. Achieving Stage III depends on the institutional strategies and practices for promoting meaningful social interactions, which advance the inclusion of students from the disadvantaged social groups in the wider community in the campus. The campus community comprises administrators, outside classroom interactions with peers and interactions with teachers. Interactions which are discriminatory in nature result in social exclusion, which in turn, poses barriers from fully participating in campus life. Social exclusion affects the ability, opportunity and dignity of students from the disadvantaged social groups to integrate in the social life of the campus. Social distance between teachers and students reflected in low teacher–student engagement outside the classrooms, discriminatory interactions with the administration and identity-based peer group formation are all forms of social exclusion which impede the process of inclusion.

Non-discriminatory interactions with administrators and teachers, active encouragement and reassurance by the teachers to students that their inquiries outside the classroom are welcome, interaction and socialisation with peers from the 'other' social groups and mixed peer group formation for activities are non-academic factors which lead to a situation of social inclusion and equality on campuses. Teachers and students from privileged backgrounds with inclusive orientation and positive attitude towards diversity, and administrative arrangements for actively protecting the interests of the disadvantaged students are effective means of eliminating discrimination, achieving equal access to institutional resources for all, creating a welcoming and sensitive environment and building an inclusive campus environment. It is also important to inculcate civic values and democratic behaviour amongst students in the learning process for improving social ties across groups and facilitating inclusion and social cohesion.

The theoretical model of student diversity in higher education is, in fact, a combination of all three levels—social diversity, academic diversity and social inclusion. These stages can be seen as—social diversity in student composition at

the level of entry (Stage I); after entry, at the level of academic interaction in the classrooms and integration in the teaching-learning process (Stage II); and then in terms of social inclusion, which is a condition of non-discriminatory interactions which facilitate access to opportunities for the socially excluded groups to feel welcomed and integrate fully in the social life of the campus (Stage III). These stages represent a higher level of student diversity being achieved by public policies, programmes and practices in the institutions. The empirical evidence from the study showed that the best way to analyse student diversity is by categorising the phenomenon into distinct, but related, stages which not only helps in understanding the issue of diversity, but also provides institutions a framework for action to develop inclusive campuses.

Each stage is unique though interconnected. The source and feature of each stage of diversity varies and larger policy environment (national or state level) and institutional factors and its major stakeholders play different roles in different stages. This three-stage classification provides us with a method to better understand the changing nature of student diversity and how best higher education institutions can respond to unique challenges faced by students from traditionally under-represented social groups and leverage opportunities offered by student diversity. Achieving wider goals of equity in education and hence equity in development is largely determined by the degree to which each influential element performs its role in the corresponding stages. We postulate that in an era of massification, the institution as a system has a major role to play in institutionalising equity and nurturing the perspectives, skills and capacities for students to live, learn and work in an increasingly diverse social world.

**Stages of Student Diversity**

The phenomenon of social diversity (Stage I) is quantifiable and measureable, and is the most visible form of student diversity. The social diversity is reflected in terms of the relative share of students in enrolment from different social groups such as the SCs, STs, and OBCs. Discussions in Stage I diversity revolve around understanding the social nature of student composition, which is quantifiable. Understanding Stage I student diversity entails gaining insights into socio-economic diversity in student characteristics and socio-economic differences by the field of study and types of institutions offering stratified educational opportunities.  An understanding of student characteristics in terms of their socio-economic backgrounds and the parents' level of education is important for understanding the substantial barriers being faced by the disadvantaged students and hence the challenges that institutions must overcome in order to help students succeed in earning a degree.

Social stratification (Clark, 1973) and the social reproduction theory (Bourdieu and Passerson, 1977) inform us that social status background influences the students' likelihood of going to college. There is a close association between socio-economic status, parents' education and chances of gaining access, persistence and degree completion. For some students, social status background factors in the form of their cultural and social capital provides social advantages and privileges in gaining access to college and the college choice process. Families with strong social networks help develop students' social capital formation that in turn positively impacts human capital formation (Coleman, 1988). Further, the educational levels of the parents influence the basis of the college-going decision-making process in terms of whether, where and what to study in college, and, help students in gaining access to avenues of social capital formation. The rational choice to go to college takes into account access to necessary college information (in terms of college choice, discipline choice, employment opportunities after completing college) and weighs that information relative to the costs (for example, costs in time, money, distance) that will be incurred to acquire knowledge and skills for financial gains and in terms of upward mobility (Hossler et al., 1989; Paulsen, 2001).

There is evidence to suggest that students from the socially disadvantaged groups, low-income students and those who are the first in their families to attend college are at a greater disadvantage than their peers from the advantaged social groups, middle- or high-income students. To achieve Stage I, diversity initiatives take the form of affirmative action policies and other supportive measures implemented at the time of admission to make the campuses numerically diverse in terms of student composition. Achieving Stage I diversity where the traditionally under-represented students are represented in higher education also offers both challenges as well as opportunities for the higher education system in India. It also impacts the nature and forms of student diversity in Stage II and Stage III.

In Stage II diversity, we reflect on what happens inside the classrooms, the level of academic integration and the effects on academic outcomes. Stage II diversity provides us a space to go deeper into the pre-college academic attributes and level of college readiness to academically succeed in college. Diverse student bodies have varying pre-college academic credentials and academic preparation at the secondary school for a successful transition to higher education. Varying pre-college academic credentials across social groups include the medium of instruction, subjects pursued in high school, scores secured in high school, college knowledge, which in turn, determines access to the type of institutions, choice of institutions and subjects opted

for in the college and academic outcomes in college. Pre-college academic differences stem from inequitable access to opportunities prior to entry in college. Differentiated academic grounding and nature of academic interaction with teachers in the classroom influence level of academic integration of the socially excluded groups along with academic diversity and equity in academic outcomes. In Stage II diversity, the focus is to identify academic variables that have the potential to reduce the social gap in academic integration, achieve academic diversity and equity in academic outcomes. The sources of achieving academic diversity are remediation/academic support/development programmes, which help bring the students' academic skills up to a level that will allow them to academically perform adequately in college, thereby building their levels of self-confidence. Understanding the implementation of academic support programmes at the institutional level is an important component in Stage II.

Stage III diversity is a situation where social diversity among student bodies is respected and students, irrespective of their social group origin, enjoy a feeling of inclusion while maintaining their own identity. The focus in Stage III is on the campus culture that shapes the perceptions and experiences of students, faculty and staff. This stage of diversity reflects the extent of the socially inclusive campus climate, which accepts and welcomes students from diverse backgrounds, particularly those from disadvantaged groups. It is here that we get insights into the nature and forms of discrimination and the experiences of diverse students in academic, social and administrative spaces. Discrimination can also take direct and indirect forms (those that are more hidden) and can exist at both the individual and institutional levels.

The forms of discrimination in academic spaces can be understood by analysing the students' experiences of feeling included in the classroom and the curriculum, teacher's attitudes towards students from the disadvantaged groups, and the level of interpersonal interaction both in the classrooms and outside. This stage includes students' responses, which measure the level of inclusion/exclusion experiences in classroom transactions, and help in understanding the degree of social distance between teachers and students from the disadvantaged groups. Discrimination in social space can be analysed by reflecting on level of participation from the disadvantaged students in extra-curricular activities and the basis of peer-group formation. Participation in extra-curricular activities provides an opportunity for students to integrate in the social spaces of the campuses and cross-cultural peer groups helping them acquire capacity to live with and learn from diverse peers.

Cross-cultural peer group formation has the potential to contribute to an important dimension of social purpose of higher education, that is, of fostering the value of fraternity. Fraternity is a mental attitude of respect and reverence for others, which provides unity and solidarity to social life. Studying the forms of discrimination in administrative spaces involves understanding the behaviour and attitudes of the administrative staff towards the disadvantaged groups, the level of willingness to facilitate access to scholarship/stipend schemes for disadvantaged students, and how functional and effective are institutional mechanisms, such as orientation programmes and special cells, that help students acquire knowledge of the college, address group-specific concerns of the disadvantaged groups and make the students feel welcome in the campuses. Diversity in faculty is also an important component of Stage III as faculty from diverse backgrounds advance student engagement and social inclusion in campuses.

Understanding the forms of discrimination experienced by students across the academic, social and administrative spaces is crucial as it is these forms that alienate them and result in social exclusion constraining the process of social inclusion. The degree and extent of Stage I diversity (the physical presence of a large number of students from previously under-represented social groups) influences, if not determines, academic diversity and social inclusion in Stage II and Stage III. Achieving diversity at each stage through acts of inclusion suggests that institutions are making progress in becoming diverse, equitable and inclusive campuses. The following sections discuss empirical findings pertaining to each of the stages of student diversity in Indian higher education.  This empirical evidences from the study provides a strong base to conceptualise, and offer a new perspective on understanding the challenges faced by students from the socially excluded groups in a massifying higher education system.

### Stage I of Student Diversity: Social Diversity

Expansion of the higher education system in India, over the last few decades, has substantially increased participation, particularly of individuals from different socio-economic and religious groups, which were previously under-represented in higher education. With a GER of 25.2 per cent (MHRD, 2017), India is in its early stage of massification. Growing student diversity is one of the defining characteristics of massification of the system. This section presents insights into Stage I of student diversity, that is, social diversity in student characteristics in terms of their social and economic levels and their parents' educational levels; how there are variations in student characteristics by types of institutions and across disciplines based on caste,

ethnicity and gender. A discussion on student characteristics in terms of their social and economic characteristics and parental educational backgrounds is important to understand substantial barriers facing students from socially excluded groups in gaining access to higher education and the challenges the institutions must overcome in order to help students succeed in earning a degree. We also analyse the social nature of student diversity by discipline (social sciences, sciences and engineering) in order to gain an insight into access to levels of opportunities available for the students for their upward mobility. Furthermore, even when at the overall level, India is in a stage of massification, stages of higher education development vary when analysed at the disaggregated level of various states in India. The varying stages of higher educational development in the states affects the level of student diversity. We start this section with an analysis of the relationship between the levels of educational development of the state, stages of higher education development of states, and social diversity in the case-study institutions. There are two sources of information for this section– the census of students' characteristics in the case studies as well as a survey administered to 3200 students.

*Students' Characteristics*

*Social Characteristics:* The insights from the study indicate that in terms of social characteristics, a majority of students in our survey belong to socially excluded groups such as SCs, STs and OBCs (61 per cent) as seen in Table 1. Data in Table 1 further show that a majority of the students in our survey reported their religion as Hindu (79 per cent), followed by Muslim (14 per cent) and other religious minorities such as Sikhs, Christians, Jains and Buddhist (8 per cent). Of the 3200 students, over half of the students are girls (54.0 per cent) across the 12 institutions selected for the study. A majority of students in the survey reported being from urban areas (56 per cent) while the rest (44 per cent) are from rural backgrounds. There are gender differences in locational background across types of institutions, which is discussed later in this section. We also find that diversity occurs more at the undergraduate level than at the post-graduate level. One possibility could be the lower transition rates of students from the disadvantaged social groups from the undergraduate to the post-graduate levels. The second possibility could be that the disadvantaged students would be opting to join the labour market immediately after graduation due to social and economic reasons.

Therefore, it seems we have made progress in the right direction.  Visible social diversity in student composition (Stage I) is a reflection of the same. As mentioned before, most students identified themselves as OBCs (42 per cent), followed by

SCs (14 per cent), STs (5 per cent) and non-SCs/STs/OBCs (39 per cent).[1] The social composition of students found in our survey is also reflected in the national level surveys. For example, according to the latest National Sample Survey, 2014, a majority of the students (63 per cent) belonged to the socially excluded groups, with OBCs comprising 42 per cent of the student population, SCs (15 per cent) and STs (6 per cent). The non-SCs/STs/OBCs comprised 38 per cent of the student social composition. Moreover, data from the large-scale national surveys (such as the National Sample Survey) indicate that the shares of students belonging to the socially excluded groups have increased over the years, thus suggesting that diversity in terms of social composition has improved (Table 2).

### Table 1: Student Composition by Social Groups, Religion, Gender and Locational Background

| Student Composition | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| *Social Groups* | |
| Scheduled Tribes | 4.7 |
| Scheduled Castes | 13.8 |
| Other Backward Classes | 41.4 |
| Others (Non-SC/ST/OBC) | 39.7 |
| **Religion** | |
| Hindu | 78.6 |
| Muslim | 13.7 |
| Other Religious Minorities | 7.7 |
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 46.4 |
| Female | 53.6 |
| **Location** | |
| Rural | 43.8 |
| Urban | 56.0 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

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[1]  Non-SCs/STs/OBCs can be seen as the upper castes and are categorised as 'Others'.

**Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio and Growth Rate of Enrolment by Social Groups, 2007 and 2014**

| Social Groups | GER (2007) | GER (2014) | CAGR of Absolute Number of Enrolment (2007–2014) |
|---|---|---|---|
| STs | 7.22 | 17.19 | 15.99 |
| SCs | 11.35 | 22.31 | 10.02 |
| OBCs | 14.57 | 29.36 | 10.80 |
| Others | 26.22 | 41.65 | 5.90 |
| Total | 16.83 | 30.07 | 8.82 |

*Sources: NSSO, 2007, 2014. The GER in this table is based on the National Sample Survey*

*Social Diversity and Variations across States:* Further, data in Table 3 shows a relationship between the levels of educational development of the state, stages of higher education development of states, and social diversity. While the Indian higher education system as a whole is in the early stage of massification, the case study states are in different of stages of higher education development. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are still in elite stage of higher education, while Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra are in the early stages of massification and Delhi is in an advanced stage of massification.

**Table 3: Development and Educational Indicators of Case Study Institutions**

| State | Per Capital State Domestic Product (SDP) at Current Price (2011-12) | Literacy 2011 | NER Primary (2014-15) | NER Secondary (2014-15) | GER in HE - All Categories (2012-13) | GER in HE – SCs (2012-13) | GER in HE – STs (2012-13) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bihar | 23,435 | 61.80 | 93.77 | 42.08 | 11.2 | 6.9 | 13.4 |
| Delhi | 1,75,812 | 86.21 | 93.16 | 65.13 | 38.5 | 18.2 | Na |
| Karnataka | 68,374 | 75.36 | 94.44 | 59.19 | 25.5 | 16.9 | 15.3 |
| Kerala | 83,725 | 94.00 | 84.62 | 74.89 | 22.9 | 17.8 | 14.8 |
| Maharashtra | 1,01,314 | 82.34 | 85.70 | 58.27 | 25.6 | 25.3 | 11.1 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 30,052 | 67.68 | 85.64 | 40.09 | 18.1 | 13.4 | 21.3 |
| All India per Capital NNI (2004-05 base) | 60,603 | 74.4 | 87.41 | 48.46 | 21.1 | 15.1 | 11.00 |

*Sources: For per capital SDP (https://data.gov.in/catalog/capita-net-state-domestic-product-current-prices); for literacy rates: Census of India, 2011 (http://www.census2011.co.in/literacy.php); for Net Enrolment Ratio (NER): NUEPA, 2015; for Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Varghese, 2015.*

The analysis shows that state universities among the educationally advanced states like Kerala demonstrate greater student diversity than across Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Advancement in the school education sector, which in turn,

has created more demand for higher education, has directly contributed to student diversity of higher education institutions as we can see in Kerala. Having achieved universal enrolment and retention at the primary level, transition from elementary to secondary and secondary to higher secondary schools being above the national level, Kerala's higher education is in the stage of massification with a GER of 22.9 per cent. Historically, massive socio-religious movements, particularly led by subaltern castes and communities, intensive and extensive commercialisation of the agricultural economy, the work of Christian missionaries such as the Church Mission Society (CMS) and London Missionary Society (LMS), and the progressive attitudes of princely states and democratically elected governments are decisive in raising the demand and supply of education (Lieten, 2003; Tharakan, 2006).

In contemporary times, equity initiatives in Kerala range from increased public investment to expand institutional capacity a well spread network of schools and fee concessions for students from the socially disadvantaged group. As a result, Kerala has achieved universal enrolment and retention at the primary level, transition from elementary to secondary and secondary to higher secondary schools there is above the national level (91.95 per cent and 68.91 per cent, respectively) (NUEPA, 2015). Education is the largest economic activity in the state in the services sector and the largest employer (George and Sunaina, 2005).

Thus, educational expansion at the school level in Kerala has resulted in a larger cohort of secondary school graduates from all the social groups to pursue higher studies. To increase the enrolment of students from the socially disadvantaged groups and ensure social equity in the higher educational sphere, Kerala's major initiatives include reservation of seats for the weaker sections at the time of admission, fee concessions, pre- and post- metric scholarship schemes, stipends, and fellowships for further studies such as MPhil and PhD.

On the other hand, Bihar's rich historical legacy of being a major centre of learning, teaching and research with ancient universities like Nalanda and the Vikramshila located in Bihar, is not reflected in its present educational scenario. As discussed above, the expansion of the higher education sector is mainly the result of increasing social demand and expanding supply conditions. The social demand increases due to higher rates of growth of the economy, growing employment opportunities, especially in the knowledge sectors, and pressure from a larger cohort of secondary school graduates to pursue higher studies. Efforts made in school education up to the higher secondary level results in an increase in the share of

the eligible population for higher education, which in turn, creates more demand for higher education.

According to the latest estimates (Census, 2011), the literacy rate in Bihar is 61.80 per cent, which is the lowest among all the states and Union Territories. The transition rate from the primary to the upper primary and the elementary to the secondary levels is also below than national average (NUEPA, 2015). In 2013–14, the state's school transition rate from the secondary to the higher secondary level was 44.35 per cent, which is the lowest in the country (67.70 per cent). This means that more than 55 per cent of the students in secondary schools are not able to transition to the higher secondary level.

Since the higher secondary pass percentage determines the share of eligible population for higher education, a high dropout rate during the transition from secondary to higher secondary levels will have far-reaching implications for the nature of higher education expansion in the state. While we see enabling conditions for expansion of the higher education sector in Kerala, Bihar is still in the elite stage of higher education with a GER of 11.2 per cent. One of the major features of the elite stage of higher education is the low participation of women and the non-elite or marginalised social groups. So as compared to Kerala, Bihar demonstrates a relatively lower social diversity in student composition.

Despite the fact that Bihar's higher education system have had relatively lower expansion as compared to the other states, which could be due to multiple reasons, such as, lower levels of economic development; low literacy rate; transition rate from the primary to the upper primary and the elementary to the secondary level is below the national average; so is the school transition rate from the secondary to the higher secondary level, which is the lowest in the country, implying that more than 55 per cent of the students in secondary schools are not able to transition to the higher secondary level—the state could achieve equity in access as far as the participation of SCs and STs in higher education is concerned. These factors indicate the complex nature of the higher education scenario in the state of Bihar.

The affirmative action policies to improve access at the state level emerge as important sources of student diversity in higher education institutions in addition to advancement in school education. The role of state initiatives of affirmative action can be witnessed across states. For example, in Bihar, despite being in the elite stage of higher education (that typically characterises lower participation of non-elite or marginalised social groups), it can be seen from data in Table 3 that the gap in the GER based on national data sets (AISHE) between all the categories and the SCs and STs

put together is marginal, while the GER for STs in the state is above the national average. This is a clear example of the effect of state initiatives in the form of reservation policies.

While all the states, in principle, follow reservation policies, the variance in student diversity in different states and its institutions reminds us that besides reservation in higher education, there are many state level and institutional factors that are influential in determining student diversity. For instance, in the state of Maharashtra the GER gap between all the categories and SCs is marginal with the case study institutions in Maharashtra displaying the highest share of SCs (19.8 per cent) where the reservation for SCs is only 13 per cent. As we show later in the institution selected for our study, VNGIASS, Nagpur, in Maharashtra has the highest share of SC enrolment among the case study institutions in our sample with a wide catchment area serving students from the neighbouring rural and backward districts.

A majority of the students in the case study institutions in Maharashtra are drawn from the neighbouring backward districts and regions like Amaravati and Vidarbha. The faculty share of SCs, STs and OBCs is also high. A special feature of the case study institutions in Maharashtra is that the SC, ST and OBC faculty occupy leadership positions in the University and in affiliated colleges. Social factors contributing to student diversity in higher education institutions in Maharashtra include the efforts of social reformers like Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule who fought for the education of marginalised and women in the mid nineteenth century. Ambedkar politics has deep roots in Nagpur and the neighbouring districts. Under the leadership of Ambedkar, Dalits massively converted to Buddhism in an event organised in Nagpur where all case study institutions are located.

The higher education system thus has become more representative of the larger society. Affirmative action policies in admissions as well as relaxation of admissions criteria for the socially excluded groups such as the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have been important source of social diversity in student composition. To enhance the enrolment of under-represented groups in publicly funded higher education institutions, the Constitution of India guarantees 15 per cent reservation in admissions for SCs, 7.5 per cent for STs and 27 per cent for the OBCs. The intent to promote social diversity through admission policies is reflected at both the Central and state levels. In higher education institutions that are established and aided by the Central Government, reservation of seats in the admission of SC, ST and OBC students is in accordance with the Central Educational Institutions

(Reservation in Admission) Act, 2006 (Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, 2006). This Act follows the Constitutional provisions of reservation in admission.

On the other hand, reservation in the state level institutions is defined in accordance with the population share of each social group in the respective state. The diversity of the student population in higher learning institutions is, therefore, a result of the continuous efforts of union and federal states since independence.

*Students' Economic Background and Parents' Occupation and Educational Level*: An important element in the nature of social diversity is the students' economic background and the parents' educational level. Both economic status and the parents' education are closely associated with the likelihood of gaining access to college and influence the choice of the college and discipline. Factors pertaining to the socio-economic status and background include the students' cultural and social capital, which provides social advantages and privileges in gaining access to college, in the process of choosing the college, in their persistence and degree completion (Bourdieu and Passerson, 1977; Ishitani, 2006; Aud et al., 2012; Ross et al., 2012). Furthermore, the educational level of the parents influences the college-going decision-making process and helps students in gaining access to avenues of social networks (relationship with peers, parents friends, and community) that help students gain information about the college.

Of the respondents in our survey, a majority reported that they belonged to low income families (64 per cent)—40 per cent reporting less than Rs. 10,000 as their monthly income and 24 per cent reporting income between Rs. 10,001 and Rs. 25,000. Further, 39 per cent belonged to families where their father was a salaried employee, 36 per cent were self-employed and 14 per cent were from wage labour households. On the whole, 75 per cent of the higher education student population came from families that have a regular source of income while the rest belonged to families with fewer economic resources as well as irregular sources of income.

In terms of the educational level of the parents, the results from our study indicate that a large proportion of the students in our survey belonged to families where one of the parents (usually the father) had not gone to college. A majority of the students in our survey reported that their fathers had studied only up to the higher secondary level (60 per cent); out of others 22 per cent were graduates, 14 per cent had a post-graduate degree, while only 4 per cent had a professional degree.

The implications of the findings are that a large majority of students and their families may not have had access to the requisite college information and may not have

known whether the college and discipline being chosen was a rational investment, that is, whether the benefits of studying in that particular discipline at college outweigh the costs.

Data from our study further suggest that students from the lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to be the first in the family to attend college. We calculated a variable called first-generation learners who are first in family to attend college. There is significant relationship between the level of education of the father and first generation higher education learner. The correlation coefficient in Table 3a indicates that as the level of the father's education increases, those who reported to be the first in family to attend college (first-generation higher education learner) decreases. The results from our study also indicate that there is far greater diversity in student representation at the under-graduate level than at the post-graduate levels. This shows that students from the disadvantaged groups, even when they enter the higher education system, are unable to progress beyond the undergraduate level. This is clearly reflective of the educational and social disadvantages that beset students from the socially excluded groups, causing him/her to drop out of continued academic scholarship.

**Table 3a: Correlation between Education of the Father and Being the First in the Family to Attend College**

| Variables | Education of the Father | First Generation HE Learner |
|---|---|---|
| Education of the Father | | |
| Pearson Correlation | 1 | -.459[**] |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| N | 3170 | 3170 |
| First Generation HE Learner | | |
| Pearson Correlation | -.459[**] | 1 |
| Sig. (two-tailed) | .000 | |
| N | 3170 | 3200 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

*Note*: **: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

**Table 3b: Student Background Characteristics of First-generation Learners**

| Background Characteristics | % | | Mean (SD) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | First-generation Learner | Traditional Learner | First-generation Learner | Traditional Learner |
| Gender Male= 1, Female=2 | | | 1.54 (0.50) | 1.54 (0.50) |
| Male | 23.8% | 76.2% | | |
| Female | 23.9% | 76.1% | | |
| Religion Hindu=1, Muslim=2, OR=3 | | | 1.35 (0.62) | 1.27 (0.59 ) |
| Hindu | 22.3% | 77.7% | | |
| Muslim | 32.4% | 67.6% | | |
| OR | 24.9% | 75.1% | | |
| Social Group SC= 1, ST=2, OBC=3, General=4 | | | 2.82 (1.03) | 3.15 (0.97 ) |
| SC | 31.4% | 68.6% | | |
| ST | 44.3% | 55.7% | | |
| OBC | 26.3% | 73.7% | | |
| Upper Castes (Others) | 16.3% | 83.7% | | |
| Mother tongue Hindi=1, English=2, Urdu=3, Regional Language=4 | | | 2.77 (1.46 ) | 2.31 ( 1.47) |
| Hindi | 18.5% | 81.5% | | |
| English | | 100.0% | | |
| Urdu | 27.2% | 72.8% | | |
| Regional Language | 29.8% | 70.2% | | |
| Location Rural=1, Urban=2 | | | 1.43 (0.50) | 1.60 (0.49 ) |
| Rural | 30.9% | 69.1% | | |
| Urban | 18.2% | 81.8% | | |
| Occupation of the Father (1 to 4) | | | 1.96 (0.96 ) | 2.35 ( 1.08) |
| Self-employed (agriculture and Non-Aggregate, BP) | 27.3% | 72.7% | | |
| Causal Labour (Aggregate + Non-Aggregate) | 51.3% | 48.7% | | |
| Regular salary (Private or Public) | 13.4% | 86.6% | | |
| Others | 15.6% | 84.4% | | |
| Monthly household income (1 to 5) | | | 2.21 ( 1.14) | 3.12 (1.30 ) |
| Less than or equal to 5000 | 46.20% | 53.80% | | |
| 5001-10,000 | 29.70% | 70.30% | | |
| 10,001-25,000 | 21.60% | 78.40% | | |
| 25,001-50,000 | 13.90% | 86.10% | | |
| 50,000 and above | 5.90% | 94.10% | | |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

Further, we wanted to assess the differences between first-generation learners and traditional learners in terms of their family background characteristics (social group, economic background, mother-tongue, locational background). As regards first-generation learners, 25 per cent of the students reported that they were the first in their family to attend college. Table 3b reports the social, economic and language differences between first-generation and traditional students. The largest differences between the two groups were seen with regard to total family income, mother tongue, occupation of the father and social group. In addition to being more likely to come from lower income backgrounds, having Urdu and other regional languages as their mother tongues, with their fathers being wage labourers and belonging to a 'lower' social group status (STs and SCs), more first-generation students were Muslims or resided in rural areas, as compared to their traditional peers.

*A Binary Logistic Regression Model and Chances of being First-generation Learners:* The previous section referred to five overlapping background characteristics of first-generation learners—social group; religion; economic status; location; and mother tongue. Moving beyond descriptive analysis, we undertook a logistic regression exercise to study the joint association of student background characteristics and the likelihood of the student being the first in the family to attend college.

The estimation was performed on 2754 observations on students. Table 3c provides the regression coefficients, the Wald Statistics (to test the statistical significance) and Odds Ratio (Exp B) for each variable category. The following student background characteristics are associated with first-generation learners. These are listed in order of importance based on the odds from the logit regression presented in Table 3 c.

- *Ceteris paribus,* students from families where occupation of the head of the household is casual wage labour is 5.3 times significantly more likely to be first in the family to attend college than the children from regular salaried families. Students from self-employed families are as well more likely to be first-generation learners than students belonging to families with regular sources of income.

- Other background characteristics being equal, ST and SC students are significantly more likely (ST=3.1 times and SC=1.7 times) to be the first in their families to attend college than the upper-castes students (others).

- Locational background also exerts an effect on the likelihood of students being the first in the family to attend college. Students from rural backgrounds have a higher likelihood of being first-generation learners as compared to those in urban areas.

Thus, it is clear from the logistic analysis that, *ceteris paribus*, first-generation learners are more likely to come from wage labour households, belong to the SC and ST social groups, and reside in rural areas. Further, social diversity also varies across states; levels of higher education; by type of institutions; and by discipline. In the following sections, we discuss variations in social diversity across states, by type of institutions, and by discipline.

### Table 3c: Association between First-generation Learners and Their Background Characteristics

| Student Characteristics | B | S.E. | Wald | df | Sig. | Exp(B) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | -.201 | .098 | 4.213 | 1 | .040 | .818 |
| ORM | | | 36.372 | 2 | .000 | |
| Hindu | .138 | .182 | .577 | 1 | .447 | 1.148 |
| Muslim | 1.007 | .226 | 19.904 | 1 | .000 | 2.739 |
| SCs | .523 | .151 | 12.063 | 1 | .001 | 1.688 |
| STs | 1.134 | .209 | 29.429 | 1 | .000 | 3.108 |
| OBCs | .253 | .115 | 4.834 | 1 | .028 | 1.287 |
| Self Employed | .773 | .113 | 46.777 | 1 | .000 | 2.167 |
| Casual Wage Labour | 1.676 | .144 | 135.882 | 1 | .000 | 5.345 |
| Others | 1.231 | .387 | 10.115 | 1 | .001 | 3.426 |
| Hindi | -.293 | .113 | 6.788 | 1 | .009 | .746 |
| English | -18.877 | .970 | .000 | 1 | 1.000 | .000 |
| Urdu | -.712 | .312 | 5.190 | 1 | .023 | .491 |
| Rural | .224 | .106 | 4.419 | 1 | .036 | 1.250 |
| Constant | -2.124 | .215 | 97.607 | 1 | .000 | .119 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

*Social Diversity and Variations across Institutions:* We now turn to variations in student characteristics in terms of their socio-economic and parental education backgrounds across categories of institutions in our sample. We have two categories of institutions in our sample of - state universities, their affiliating colleges offering courses in arts, social sciences and sciences, and elite institutions offering courses in engineering, computers and management. As mentioned earlier, the institutions for our case studies include state universities (Patna University, Nagpur University and

University of Calicut) and their affiliated colleges (government and private-aided), a central university and its affiliated college (Delhi University- Zakir Hussain College) and an institute of national importance, the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Surathkal, Karnataka (NITK). Amongst other differences (like management and sources of funding) these institutions differ in terms of their admission policies and disciplines offered. State universities and their affiliated colleges admit students based on qualifying examination marks and mainly offer subjects in arts, social sciences and sciences, whereas admissions in NIT, Surathkal, which is mainly an engineering college, are based on a selection test.

The admission criteria followed for the under-graduate and post-graduate courses offered at NITK are based on performance in the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE Mains) and the Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE), respectively. In the state universities and affiliated colleges, admission criteria for the under-graduate and post-graduate courses are based on the students' performance (scores) at the qualifying level of education. NITs thus impose an additional screening stage for their prospective students by requiring them to take the JEE and GATE. On the other hand, the state universities simply go by the board exam scores, making it relatively easier for students to gain admissions from the local examination boards. We hypothesise that the admission policies of the institutions may have a direct impact on differences in the social nature of student diversity across these institutions. This analysis helps us gain an insight on how the nature of student diversity varies across these two categories of institutions, which also vary by the disciplines they offer and the concomitant policy implications. We now discuss variations in social diversity across institutions and across disciplines.

First, the data point to differences between the two types of institutions in terms of student characteristics such as their social group, locational background, parents' education and gender. Second, the data suggests disproportionality among the social composition of students in more selective elite public institutions, that is, selective institutions (where there is an additional screening at the time of admission) cater disproportionally more to students from the upper castes than to students from the socially excluded groups. The disadvantage faced by students from the socially excluded groups may stem from various factors such as being in lower ability groups, tracked into less rigorous courses earlier in education which then typically leads to taking less rigorous courses in higher education. Moreover, their medium of instruction may be the regional language, which constrains them from taking competitive examinations for higher studies in English. We elaborate the variations in

social diversity across the types of institutions following different admission policies below.

In state universities and their affiliated colleges from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Kerala, which admit students based on the qualifying examination marks, social composition seen at the overall level from our survey is also reflected in the student bodies of these institutions. The affiliated colleges of the University of Calicut in Kerala, and government colleges of Nagpur University in Maharashtra and Patna University had a relatively large proportion of students from the socially excluded groups such as the OBCs, SCs and STs (Figure 2). In these state universities and their affiliated colleges, amongst the socially excluded groups, the OBCs constitute the dominant group. In the government college affiliated to the University of Calicut, for example, close to 70 per cent of the students were from the socially excluded groups (including 50 per cent from the OBCs and 20 per cent from the SCs and STs) followed by the upper castes (31 per cent). This is also true for the government college affiliated to Nagpur University (Figure 2).

Another important feature of diversity is a 'new' dominant student group in higher education institutions. Figure 3 shows that in state universities in Maharashtra, Kerala and Bihar, OBCs constitute the dominant group in the student body. Since the elites among the upper castes have withdrawn from public arts and science institutions and their share has gradually reduced, OBCs have become the new dominant caste in campuses. This has altered the structure of social relationships among social groups, as seen in the later sections. From a bi-partite division of the upper castes and lower castes (SCs, STs and OBCs) in social relationships, campuses have now moved to a tri-partite division of OBCs, lower castes, and upper castes. The middle caste status of the OBCs helps this group to engage with both upper castes and lower castes. The group which the OBCs align with shapes the social climate of the campus.

**Figure 2: Student Composition of Educational Institutions by Social Group**
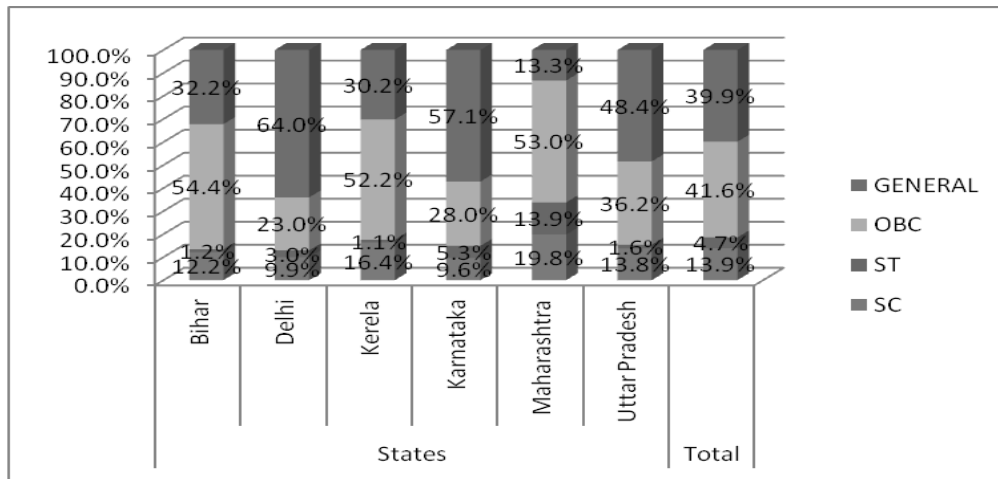


*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Figure 3: Current Status: Nature of Diversity among the Students at VNGIASS Nagpur (2013–14)**
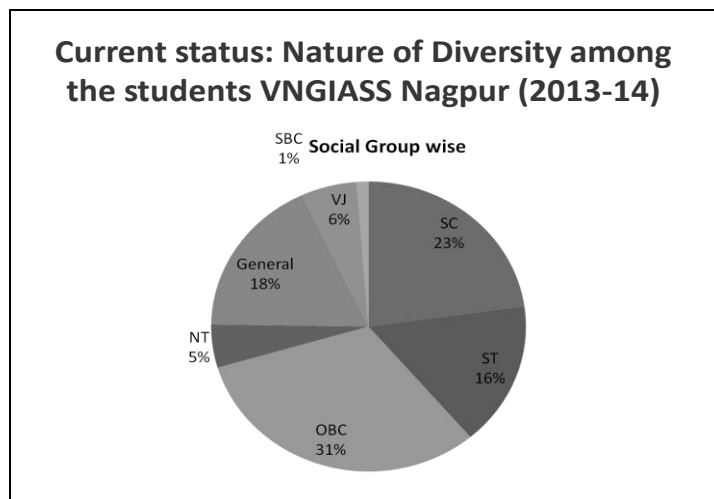


*Source: Nagpur State Team Presentation*

Figures 4, 5 and 6 show that in the more selective elite public institutions, there is disproportionality between the social, locational and gender composition of students, that is, more selective institutions catered disproportionally more to students from the higher caste, from urban areas, and to men than they do to students from the socially excluded groups, from rural backgrounds and women. Hence, more than their average, students from the higher castes were concentrated in Zakir Hussain College, Delhi University, and NIT, Surathkal.  For example, 64 per cent of the students in Zakir

Hussain College, Delhi University, and 57 per cent of the students in NIT, Surathkal, in Karnataka, (which are the relatively more selective institutions in our research) were from the higher castes, whereas the proportion of this group in the overall student composition was lower at 40 per cent.

Within these institutions, students from the higher castes dominate, followed by the OBCs. The census data in NIT, Surathkal, for example, indicates that out of 820 students admitted in 2014, 23.5 per cent were OBCs, while 13 per cent and 6.5 per cent were SCs and STs, respectively. In these institutions, the representation of students from rural backgrounds is also lower, as is the representation of female students (19 per cent of the 820 students were female), and only 9 per cent of the students in the survey were first-generation learners. On a positive note, the data points towards an improvement in the enrolment of the socially excluded groups and women over the years in the elite institutions. For example at NIT, from 2008 to 2014, there was a 3.5 per cent of increase in the admissions of female students in both post-graduate and under-graduate courses.

**Figure 4: The Student Composition of Educational Institutions by Social Group**
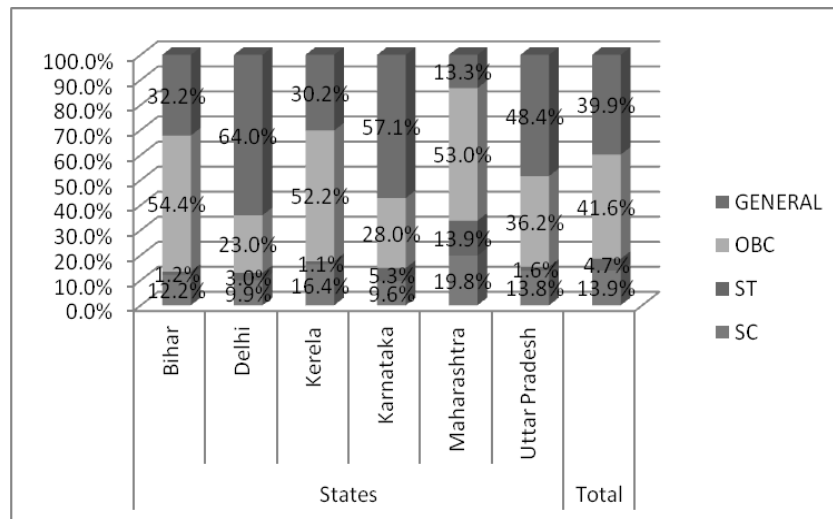


*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Figure 5: The Student Composition of Educational Institutions by Locational Background**
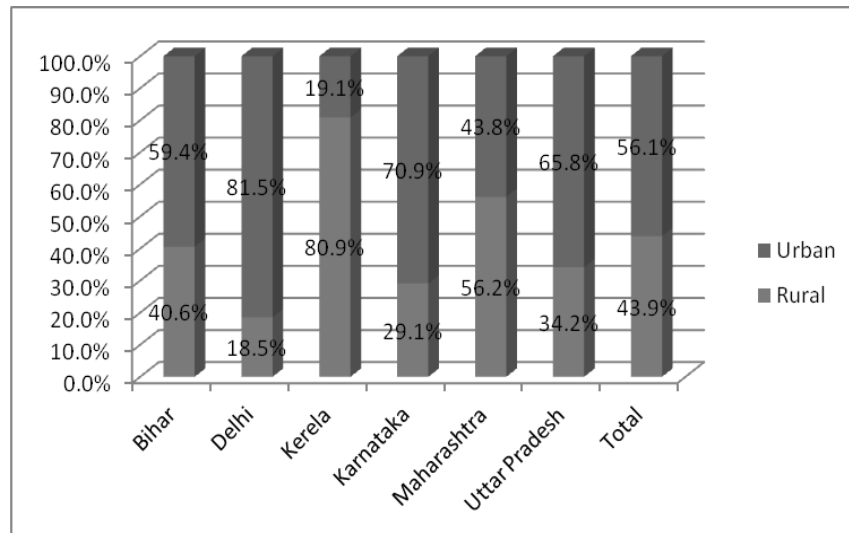


Source: *Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Figure 6: The Student Composition of Educational Institutions by Gender**
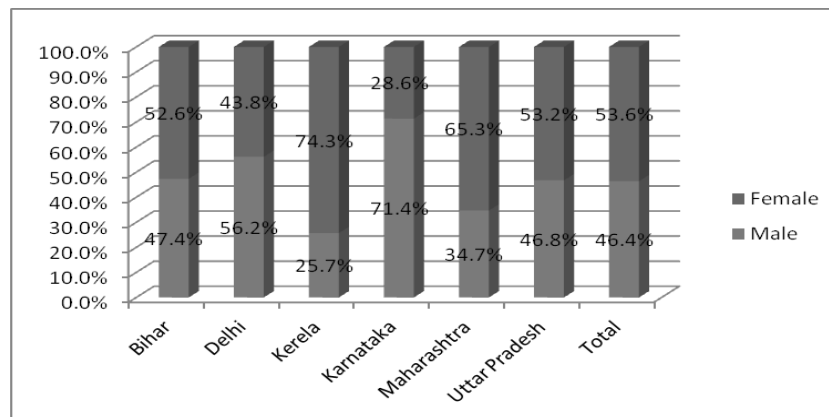


Source: *Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

*Variations in Student Characteristics by Discipline:* The data further indicates that there is a difference in representation of various caste groups across disciplines (for example, between the higher castes and SCs). The results clearly point towards differences based on caste and ethnicity in access to disciplines such as engineering. A far greater proportion of higher-castes students are studying engineering than the social sciences while the reverse is true for SC students—15 per cent of the students enrolled in the social sciences are SCs whereas only 9 per cent of those studying engineering are SCs. There is a far greater representation of higher-castes students (59 per cent) in the engineering disciplines than in the social sciences (38 per cent).

At the post-graduate level too, 53 per cent of the students from the higher castes were pursuing Master of Computer Applications (MCA); whereas far lower proportions of SCs (12 per cent) and STs (9 per cent) were pursuing MCA.

This also implies that more selective elite public universities offering engineering courses like NITK are under-serving students from the under-represented groups. Therefore, the social nature of student diversity differs across disciplines even within the public universities with more upper-caste students studying subjects like engineering as compared to the SC students. We agree with Varghese (2015) that such disciplinary stratifications add to "widening inequalities in access to education and employment as students from the well-to-do families opt for engineering courses leaving the courses in arts and humanities mostly to students from the disadvantaged households".

As discussed earlier, social diversity is influenced by the nature of student admission. As compared to colleges admitting students based on entrance tests, colleges admitting students based on marks secured in qualifying examinations are more diverse. State universities and affiliated colleges offering arts, social sciences and sciences demonstrated greater student diversity than selective institutions offering engineering with rigorous admission tests. Even though as per constitutional provisions, attempts are made to ensure social diversity in student bodies—there are reservations in admissions to the tune of 15 per cent for SCs, 7.5 per cent for STs, and 27 per cent for OBCs—in some cases, the constitutional commitments are not being met.

This may be due to the fact that students from socially excluded groups are not best-placed to attain good scores in entrance/competitive exams; or non-compliance in filling quota seats, or the preference accorded to students from the more socially 'advanced' groups to the more-selective institutions/courses. An empirical base for this statement is seen in McDonough's research (1997). Applying the Bourdieu theoretical concepts of cultural capital and habitus, he examined the decision-making process for choice of college among high school students from varying socio-economic backgrounds. The study found that students from middle class backgrounds and schools were more likely to attend selective four-year institutions and were taught to consider college as simply the next logical step in their lives while other students were taught to believe that such colleges were inaccessible to them.

The present study shows a reflection of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts in explaining the process of choosing the college. There is a three-stage filtration process taking place across the case study institutions. The rich and affluent class

largely prefer to enrol in job-oriented professional courses like engineering and medicine. This is seen in NIT, Karnataka, a premier science and technology institute where a majority of the students are from the socio-economically advantaged groups. The affluent students also migrate to Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities inside and outside the state. Those who fail to enrol in professional courses due to multiple socio-economic and familial reasons opt for traditional arts and science colleges. The advantaged groups among them first opt for the best and elite arts and science colleges. This is the second stage of filtration. Those who fail to enrol in elite institutions finally get enrolled in the non-elite public science and arts colleges. This phenomenon also indicates the gradual withdrawal of the elite caste and class from non-elite public institutions.

In any case, lower social diversity in elite institutions in India implies that there are socio-economic disparities in access to elite higher education institutions with these institutions still catering disproportionally more to elite students from the upper caste, from urban areas and to men than they do to students from the socially excluded groups, from rural backgrounds and women. The prevalence of socio-economic disparities in access to elite and more selective institutions also leads to stratifications of disciplines based on caste and ethnicity. In other words, massification reinforces the process of self-selection into various disciplines. Such stratification of discipline adds to the existing inequalities in education and the nature of future employment.

*Institutional Variations in Locational Backgrounds*: The state universities are also universities where a higher proportion of the students reported residing in rural as compared to urban areas. For instance, in the government college in Kerala, the census of the students' locational backgrounds indicate that 74 per cent of the students in the college were from rural backgrounds. A student survey in Kerala also reflects similar locational background characteristics, with 81 per cent of the respondents from rural backgrounds (Figure 5). Data suggests that these institutions disproportionately serve students from the socially excluded groups and from rural areas and those who are the first in their families to attend college. Data points to the existence of a wide network of catchment areas in the state universities at the under-graduate level, largely serving students residing in rural areas. For example, a higher proportion of students in colleges in states such as Maharashtra (53 per cent), Bihar (55 per cent) and Kerala (82 per cent) were from rural areas.

Data, however, also points towards gender differences in the locational background of the students. On one hand, there was an equal locational

representation amongst boys (rural = 49 per cent and urban= 50 per cent), whereas on the other hand, at the overall level a majority were girls from urban areas (61 per cent). The data implies that at the under-graduate level, it was the boys who were travelling from the rural areas to colleges while the catchment areas of the universities and colleges for the girls were the local surrounding areas. For example in Maharashtra, at the under-graduate level, only 39 per cent of the girls were from rural areas as compared to a corresponding figure of 75 per cent for boys.

The locational background of the female students specifically, shows wide variations across institutions. For example, in Kerala, close to 80 per cent of the girls were travelling from rural areas to attend college while in Uttar Pradesh, the corresponding figure was as low as 16 per cent.  In Uttar Pradesh, 82 per cent of the female students in the higher education institutions belonged to urban areas. At the under-graduate level, in the case of Lucknow, 85 per cent of the girls were coming to college mostly from the local urban catchment area and only 15 per cent from the rural areas. At the post-graduate level, the catchment area in universities was slightly wider for girls, with 22 per cent of them reporting that they belonged to rural areas. Poverty, responsibilities of household chores, lack of conveyance, and the fear of sexual assault en route to college were cited as reasons for a lower representation of girls from rural areas in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

**Figure 7: Gender and Locational Background across Institutions**
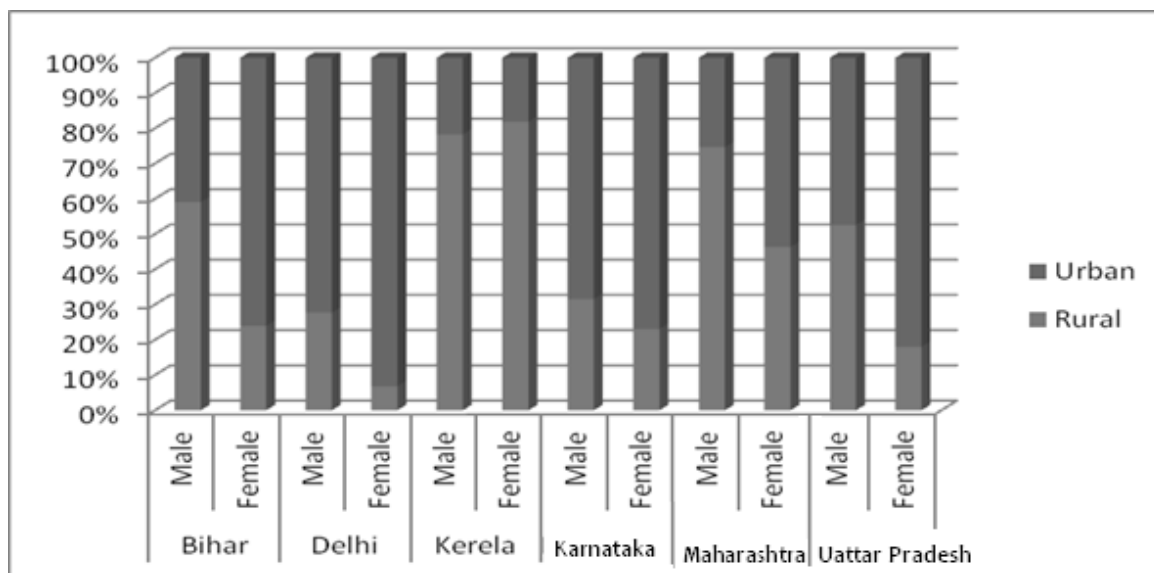


Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016

*Type of Management and Nature of Student diversity*: Data further suggests that diversity in the social composition of student bodies is also related to the type of

management, with government colleges supporting far greater diversity as compared to privately managed government supported colleges (private-aided colleges). This pertains to results from Kerala. In the private-aided colleges in Kerala, higher castes constitute the majority group (51 per cent), followed by OBCs (30 per cent) and SCs/STs (19 per cent). Further, there are not only differences in compositional diversity in private-aided colleges but there is also a decline in absolute numbers for SC/ST students from 2008 to 2013 (195 in 2008, 162 in 2013) as also for OBC students. The number of OBC students declined at 7 per cent annually whereas the corresponding number of SC/ST students declined at an annual rate of 3 per cent in private-aided colleges. In the case of higher-caste students however, the data points to an annual increase of 12.5 per cent from 2008 to 2013.

The responses obtained in the interviews with regard to the reason for these compositional differences suggest the prevalence of prejudice against the students from the socially excluded groups. It is also suggested that a higher representation of higher-caste students was due to the existence of a 'management quota', which need not be based on 'merit' in private aided colleges. This may at time distort the social composition of students in favour of students from privileged groups. As regards religion, data points towards the dominance of students professing the Hindu religion across institutions (Figure 8). For instance, in the case of Kerala, the proportion of Hindu students was comparatively higher in private-aided colleges (89 per cent), followed by Christians (6 per cent) and Muslims (5 per cent).

**Figure 8: Student Composition of Educational Institutions by Religion**
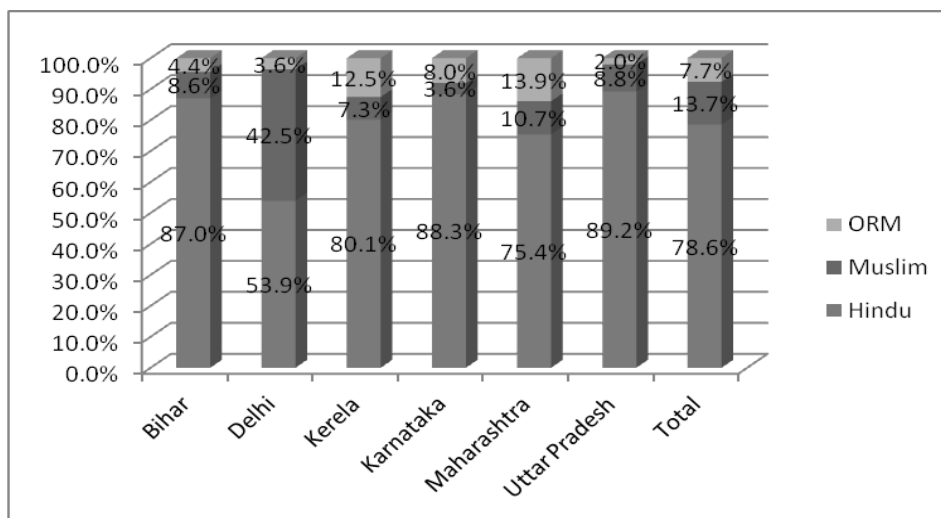


*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

In terms of growth over the years, the government college under study reported a growth of Muslim students and a decline in Hindu and Christian students. In the private-aided college, managed by the Cochin Devaswom Board, a religious trust, the proportion of Hindu students increased at the rate of 2.5 per cent per annum between 2008 and 2013. Simultaneously, the number of Christian students also increased but the proportion of Muslim students showed a decline of 6 per cent per annum. To a certain extent, the management, which as per policy reserves 20 per cent of the seats for students of certain religious groups as a management quota, contributes to maintaining religious homogeneity in the student composition as mostly Hindu meritorious students are admitted through this quota.

Figure 8 also indicates that Zakir Hussain College in Delhi catered in a disproportionally large number to Muslim students as compared to all other institutions in our sample—nearly 43 per cent of the students in Zakir Hussain College, Delhi University, were Muslims whereas the proportion of this group of students in the overall student composition was much lower at 14 per cent. Students from both religions (Hindu and Muslim) from this college averred that the academic requirements of the college matched their pre-college grades/marks, which was the top reason why they chose to enrol in this college (Figure 9). For Non-Muslims, securing admission in the course that was their first choice for the subject was the next important reason for enrolling in the college.

**Figure 9: Reasons for Choosing College by Religion**
**(Zakir Hussain Delhi College, Delhi University)**
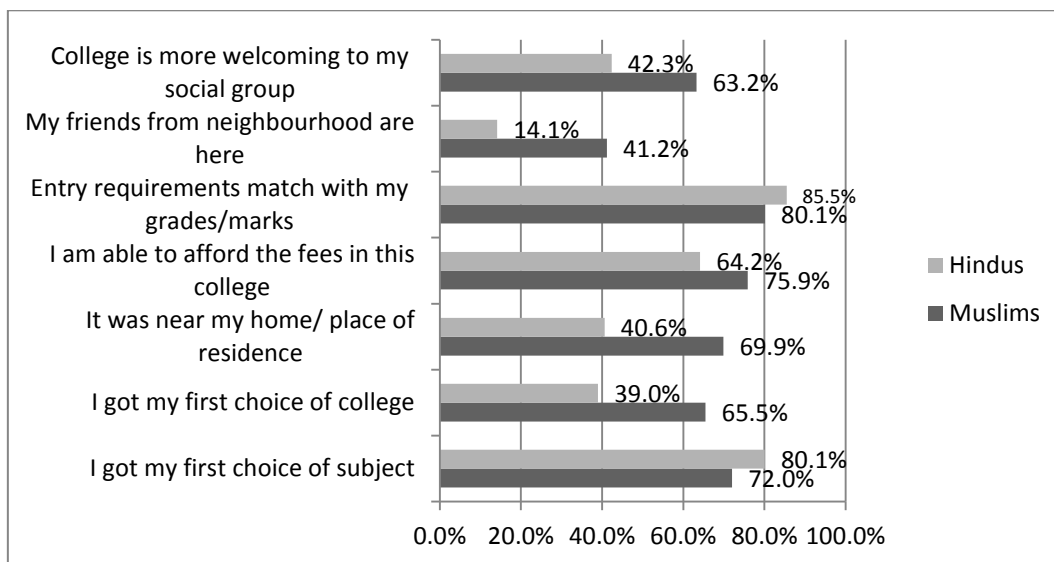


*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

Among the Muslim students, a slightly higher proportion responded that they chose this college because of its financial affordability (76 per cent), while 72 per cent reported securing the subject of their choice. One of the important reasons that facilitates access to Zakir Hussain College, especially for students from the economically weaker sections, is the availability of financial aid in the form of scholarships for students belonging to minority religious groups in the form of the 'UGC post-metric scholarship for minorities and the 'World Brotherhood Scholarship'. For Muslim students, the additional reasons for choosing this college were the proximity of the college to their homes in terms of location, and their perception that the college would be more welcoming of their social background.

To summarise, the analysis in this section indicates that the higher education system in India has made commendable progress in achieving a level of social diversity that enables the system to become more representative of the larger society, and this diversity is also measurable in quantitative terms. However, the level of student diversity in case study institutions in different states varies in accordance with the level of development of higher education in the respective states. While the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, with their low levels of social diversity, are still in the elite stage of higher education, the states of Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Delhi, with their higher levels of social diversity, are in the early or advanced stages of massification. The various significant factors contributing to social diversity in the composition of students in higher education institutions across states include the respective levels of economic development of the states, progress in the school education sector that creates more demand for higher education, and the prevalence of a reservation policy that ensures access for the socially disadvantaged groups to these institutions.

The level of social diversity in student composition differs across different levels of study, by the nature of the student admission policy followed by the institutions, and by disciplines chosen by students. Evidence also suggests that social diversity in student composition was greater at the under-graduate vis-à-vis the post-graduate level, in colleges admitting students based on the marks they had secured in the qualifying examination vis-à-vis those admitting students based on entrance tests, in the arts and social sciences vis-à-vis the STEM disciplines, and in access to elite higher education institutions. The admission policies of the institutions and the socio-cultural capital of the students determines access to elite higher education institutions. These elite institutions often impose an additional screening stage in the form of selection tests for their prospective students, which results in skewed access in favour of

students from the privileged groups. State universities in Maharashtra, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar exhibited greater social diversity amongst their students as compared to the more selective institutions such as NIT, Surathkal. A higher level of social diversity demonstrated by state universities from Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Kerala indicate that these universities are providing broader access to students and addressing the issue of inequality in participation of students from the historically under-represented groups, including SCs/STs/OBCs, first-generation learners, women, and students hailing from rural areas. Across these institutions, there is greater diversity among institutions located in educationally advanced states such as Kerala.

Social stratification across institutions and disciplines is the result of the admission policies followed at the institutional levels and pre-college academic differences that stem from inequitable access to opportunities prior to the entry in college for the socially disadvantaged groups. In the next section, we discuss the pre-college academic differences across social groups and the specific academic challenges faced by students from the disadvantaged groups. Overcoming academic challenges is necessary for achieving academic integration and academic success, and for creating conditions conducive for achieving academic diversity to ensure that students from the socially excluded groups succeed in college. Achieving academic diversity is as important a measurement of diversity as ensuring the participation of members from socially excluded groups in higher education.

### Stage II of Student Diversity: Academic Diversity

Academic diversity refers to a situation wherein students, irrespective of their pre-college credentials, are academically integrated in the classrooms and in the teaching–learning process for achieving equity in academic success. Stage II diversity provides us with a space to go deeper into the pre-college academic attributes and the level of college readiness that determines variations in the choice of college, selection of disciplines of study, and academic integration in the classroom. According to the extant literature, various factors such as the decision to pursue higher education; the process of choosing the college and the choice of subjects are closely related to the students' socio-economic and pre-college academic characteristics. An important finding of our analysis is that those who preferred to pursue higher education were more likely to have studied in a private rather than government school after controlling for student characteristics such as gender, social group, religion, location of permanent residence, occupation of the father, and institutional characteristics (Table 4).

**Table 4: Preference to Pursue Higher Education as a Post-Secondary Choice**

| Variables in the Equation | B | S.E. | Wald | DF | Sig. | Exp(B) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| State universities | .226 | .136 | 2.755 | 1 | .097 | 1.253 |
| Government school | | | 10.531 | 2 | .005 | Reference |
| Private aided | -.056 | .106 | .285 | 1 | .593 | .945 |
| Private Unaided | .450 | .155 | 8.380 | 1 | .004 | 1.568 |
| Female | .484 | .099 | 24.169 | 1 | .000 | 1.623 |
| Others | | | 2.408 | 3 | .492 | Reference |
| Scheduled Castes | -.150 | .154 | .958 | 1 | .328 | .860 |
| Scheduled Tribes | -.235 | .224 | 1.094 | 1 | .296 | .791 |
| OBCs | -.146 | .110 | 1.754 | 1 | .185 | .864 |
| ORM | | | 2.748 | 2 | .253 | Reference |
| Hindu | -.210 | .193 | 1.185 | 1 | .276 | .811 |
| Muslim | -.012 | .235 | .002 | 1 | .961 | .989 |
| Rural | .254 | .103 | 6.133 | 1 | .013 | 1.289 |
| Constant | 1.225 | .233 | 27.727 | 1 | .000 | 3.405 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

We also find differences in pre-college credentials, level of college readiness and degree of choices in higher education among various groups of students. While general students are mostly from private schools with English as the medium of instruction, students from the disadvantaged groups were observed to have studied in government schools with the vernacular language being the medium of instruction (Table 5). Pre-college scores are lower for those attending government schools as compared to those from the private schools (Figure 9a). The medium of instruction and pre-college scores, in turn, determine the choice of subjects. Students who studied in government schools with the regional language being the medium of instruction opted for subjects in social sciences (Figure 9b). A majority of those studying the sciences and engineering courses were from private schools and had been taught in English.

**Table 5: Socio-economic and Pre-college Academic Characteristics
(Type of Management at the Higher Secondary School Level)**

|  | Government (%) | Private-Aided (%) | Private-Unaided (%) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Gender* |  |  |  |  |
| Male | 51.6 | 29.5 | 19.0 | 100.0 |
| Female | 53.7 | 33.7 | 12.5 | 100.0 |
| *Religion* |  |  |  |  |
| Hindu | 52.4 | 31.6 | 16.0 | 100.0 |
| Muslim | 55.1 | 32.7 | 12.1 | 100.0 |
| ORM | 51.0 | 32.9 | 16.0 | 100.0 |
| *Social Groups* |  |  |  |  |
| SC | 64.9 | 26.0 | 9.1 | 100.0 |
| ST | 56.8 | 35.8 | 7.4 | 100.0 |
| OBC | 56.9 | 31.7 | 11.5 | 100.0 |
| General | 43.7 | 33.4 | 22.9 | 100.0 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Figure 9a: Pre-College Marks and Subjects Opted for in College**



*Index for fig 2&3*
Pre-College Marks
1 =Less than 50%,
2=50%-60%, 3=60%-70%, 4=70%-80%,
5=80%-90%, 6=more than 90%.
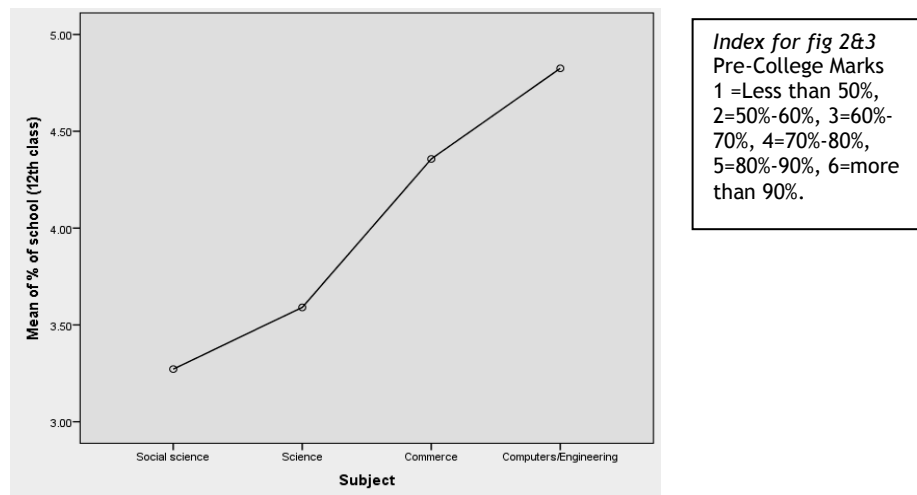
Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016

**Figure 9b: Type of School and Subjects Opted for in College**
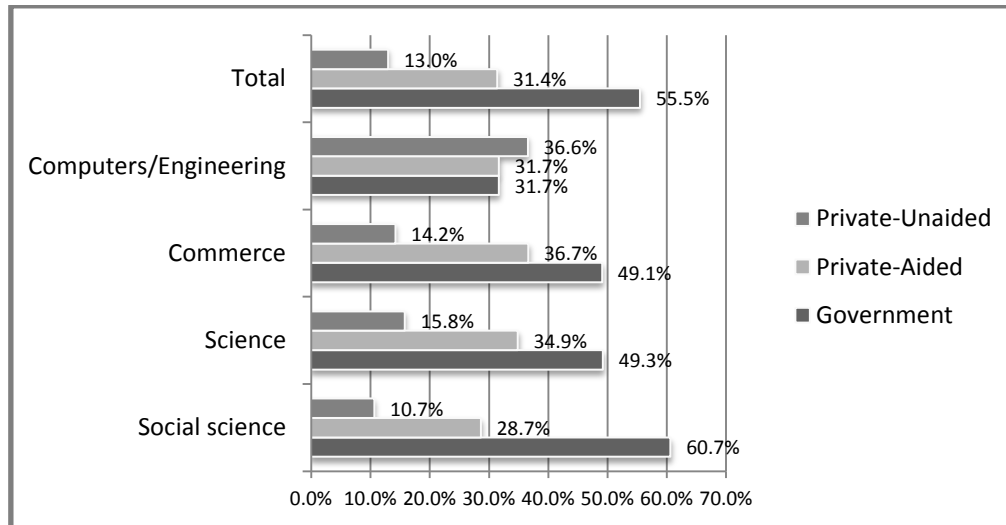


Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016

Thus, while the overall diversity has improved, social group disparities continue to exist in the choice of discipline. Since the medium of instruction in most of the institutions, especially those offering STEM, is English, a lack of competency in the English language poses many challenges for students from the disadvantaged groups. The social nature of student diversity during Stage I, especially with respect to social disparities in access to elite institutions and the discipline enforced therein, is affected by the pre-college academic credentials. Thus, data points to a gap across social groups in the academic preparation that begins in secondary schooling.

The impact of academic under-preparation is seen in the low levels of proficiency in the English language and in low pre-college scores, which poses challenges to academic integration in the classroom during the initial semesters/year in college as well as to the ability of the students to complete the entire course and be eligible for the degree. For example, some studies of engineering colleges report that in the initial stages, students who may be academically under-prepared fail in their papers, which then cumulates as 'back-papers' to be cleared, and ultimately lead to a longer time for completing a degree or even students dropping out mid-way through the course (Sivasankaran, 2004).

Moreover, in the college-going process, planning for the college and acquisition of knowledge thereafter are closely inter-linked with academic-social capital development. Academic-social capital (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2012) signifies a basic knowledge of the college-going process, college level counselling and planning, including academic preparation (or preparation for coursework in the college) and

the choice of the college as well as the subjects to be studied there. Preparation for college and the basic knowledge of the college entails guidance at the post-secondary, parental, and teacher levels, as well as peer influence on the decision to attend college, and the choice of both the college and subjects. Such forms of support that help in developing academic-social capital facilitate the creation of subsequent social and economic opportunities for the students. A majority of the students in the survey (67 per cent) reported that they did not attend classes which would have prepared them for a post-secondary career or for further studies (Table 6). This was especially true of students from the socially excluded groups, who were less likely to have accessed post-secondary career guidance opportunities than their peers from the higher social classes.

**Table 6:  Preparation for a Post-Secondary Career across States**

| Attended Post-secondary Guidance Classes (%) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **States** | **Yes** | **No** | **Total** |
| Bihar | 29.10 | 70.90 | 100.00 |
| Delhi | 32.60 | 67.40 | 100.00 |
| Kerala | 37.80 | 62.20 | 100.00 |
| Karnataka | 30.50 | 69.50 | 100.00 |
| Maharashtra | 35.70 | 64.30 | 100.00 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 30.20 | 69.80 | 100.00 |
| Total | 32.80 | 67.20 | 100.00 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

Moreover, students who were the first in their families to attend college were less likely to have access to avenues that would prepare them for college (Figure 10). Further, the survey results also indicate that students studying humanities at the higher secondary level, students studying in government schools, students from low-income backgrounds and SC and ST students were less likely to have access to avenues that would prepare them for college.  Students from institutions in Kerala were most likely to have attended career guidance classes before joining colleges than students in other states in our sample. Students in Bihar seemed to be most disadvantaged in terms of accessing opportunities for post-secondary career preparation as compared to the rest of the students.

**Figure 10: Educational Background of the Father and Pre-College Career Guidance**
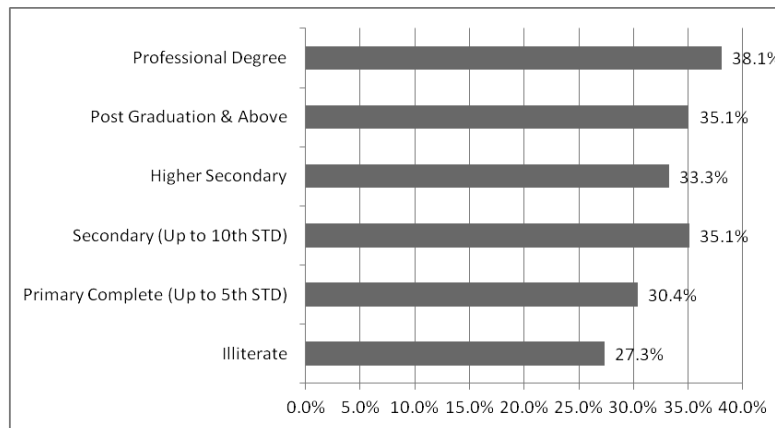


Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016

 Importantly, our findings suggest that students from private schools were more likely to have attended career guidance classes organised by their schools; on the other hand, students who had accessed an event organised by a commercial centre were largely from government schools. Further, students studying in government schools from rural areas, and humanities at the higher secondary level were less likely to have access to avenues that would prepare them for college.

Further, the first important source of academic-social capital formation and in preparing them for college reported by the students was their school, followed by seniors in their college, and commercial coaching centres, in that order. Moreover, data also suggests that students from the socially excluded groups relied heavily on their schools for advice as compared to their peers from the non-SC/ST/OBC social groups. As regards the choice of the subjects in college, the guiding factors were family members, teachers and friends at school, and the Internet and media (in order of importance).

We find that the sources that help develop academic-social capital vary across institutions according to the educational levels of the parents, subjects studied in the twelfth standard, the type of school attended, and the socio-economic backgrounds of the students. As regards the variation seen in terms of the institution, in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra and Karnataka, the schools are important sources that help prepare students for their post-secondary academic careers in universities and colleges. In Kerala, however, the second most important source of career guidance for students was private commercial centres offering coaching for college preparation.

Pre-college credentials and level of college preparation impact the academic integration of SC and ST students. Empirical evidences generated through focus group discussions with students and student surveys point to problems and challenges associated with their academic integration. Group discussions with SC and ST students across the institutions reveal the students' low competency in the English language, poor awareness about the student support system, low level of teacher–student engagement, and difficulty in forming peer groups. The lack of proficiency in the English language seems to pose a major challenge in their efforts to accelerate their learning process in the new environment, while the low level of teacher–student engagement increases the disadvantages for students needing maximum academic support.

As far as the classroom level of teacher–student engagement is concerned, the analysis in this study shows that though there are nominal changes, the nature of the teacher–student engagement in the classroom largely remains unchanged. The question posed to the teachers in this study as to whom they were addressing in the classroom elicited mixed responses. A majority of the teachers said that they address the average student, followed by those who address the below average students, and lastly those addressing the top ten students in the class in terms of learning acumen and performance. They consider it as a 'challenge' to address the students with diverse learning requirements and the inability of some students to complete college is attributed as a failure of students rather than of the institution. As a faculty member from Kerala pointed out, *"There are an increased number of SC and ST students who drop out from the colleges. They are ultimately careless in this matter. A majority of the students who have studied the state syllabus are given concessional marks in lower classes. There is no failure till class 8, which is why students are not even fluent in writing Malayalam (their mother tongue). This affects the quality of education at the higher levels."*

Teachers surveyed in this study also reported that large sizes of classes constrained them from engaging with students in a focused manner, reduced the time apportioned in a semester system for teaching the required syllabus and limited the abilities of students to cope with the strenuous demands of the semester system, such as the need to keep pace with the syllabus taught in the class, to write assignments, and to make presentations, which imposed additional barriers in their efforts to contribute in promoting the academic integration of students with divergent pre-college credentials in the classrooms. The teachers interviewed also asserted that they were compelled to address the average students. In many

institutions, faculty members are also compelled to teach in the regional language. The case study institution in Delhi, however, claimed to have resolved this problem by dividing classes into Hindi and English medium classes. Although both groups of students acquire the same university degree, the career prospects and occupational mobility of students having studied in the regional medium language have largely been ignored. Interestingly, the solution to start separate classes for students who have studied in the regional medium in school is viewed as positive as it would help students from the lower socio-economic strata and from first-generation families.

One of the faculty members from the science discipline in a case study institution in Delhi commented, "*Since 'backward students' lack a 'base', faculty members feel it is difficult to improve their learning.*" One professor from a case study institution from Bihar says, "*Yes, students from the marginalised sections can do well, provided their initial schooling is good.*" The focus on quality schooling or pre-college credentials in one way or another acts as a mechanism to put the onus for succeeding in college on the students themselves. The role of the teacher in a classroom situation is often neglected.

Many suggestions have been offered for improving the teaching–learning process. One professor from a case study institution from Maharashtra suggested: "*Change is required in the methodology of teaching where poor and rural students should be taught the subject more intensively, and comprehensively through special remedial coaching.*" The stress on special remedial cells deserves elaboration. First, remedial coaching is not taking place effectively in all the 12 case study institutions. Second, remediation programmes face stigmatisation issues as one of the faculty members from the case study institution in Kerala pointed, "*Actually remedial coaching is targeted for the SC/ST and OBC students. But if we are conducting a coaching class for SCs/STs they don't show up due to the social stigma associated with remedial classes. Therefore, we conceal the fact that the class is a remedial one, and invite all the students as a result of which a few students belonging to the non-marginalised groups may also attend these classes.*" Our interaction with the students of these institutions confirmed this. Third, the onus for succeeding in the classroom even after the remedial classes is again on the students. The role of a teacher as a change agent in the classroom is missing. There is also no continuous monitoring of the learning outcomes of students belonging to the disadvantaged social groups. Even the institutional leaders are unaware about the learning outcomes of students segregated by social groups and gender.

Thus, there is a general agreement among the faculty members that the nature of student diversity has changed and that classrooms are now occupied by the hitherto under-represented groups with varying pre-college credentials. No one disputes the fact that teaching these students is a major challenge for a teacher. However dealing with this requires a well-thought out strategy and approach. With few exceptions in some of the institutions, none of the faculty members were seen to be devising any fruitful mechanism for improving the level of student engagement in the classroom. Here, improving student engagement is to be understood as a process of inclusion of all the students in the teaching–learning processes.

Teaching–learning processes that are not conducive to the promotion of better student–teacher engagement in the classroom culminate in greater difficulties for students from the disadvantaged groups, preventing their academic integration in the classrooms, as shown by the correlation coefficients in Table 7. The signs for correlation coefficients seen in Table 7 indicate that SC/ST students found it difficult to follow the classroom teaching and to deal with the complex subjects. The SC and ST students also exhibit a low level of confidence in clarifying their doubts in the classroom or even in informally interacting with the teachers as compared to their counterparts from the non-SC/ST groups. The existing academic gap between the privileged and underprivileged students is accentuated by this difficulty in comprehending classroom teaching and in developing a deeper understanding of the subject domains. The language of instruction also plays a major role here. The SC students also claimed that they were not being given sufficient attention by the teachers in the classroom during the question–answer sessions.

The reliance of teachers on traditional methods of teaching and learning without taking into account the nature of student diversity leads to academic vulnerability among students from the marginalised backgrounds and first-generation learners. While students from the privileged backgrounds usually depend on their peers and the Internet to clear their doubts, such resources are unfortunately not accessible to students from the lower socio-economic groups. The latter group of students are instead more likely to depend on the library to clear their doubts, as indicated in our study, or they depend on their peers outside the college. Thus, the results of the study indicate that students from the socially excluded groups face difficulties in adjusting with the academic life of the college.

**Table 7: Experience of Academic Integration by Social Groups**

| Experience of Academic Integration (Overall) | General | OBC | ST | SC |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| It was difficult to follow the class room teaching (initial days) | -.045* | 0 | .042* | .038* |
| I face difficulty in dealing with the subjects | -.036* | 0 | .040* | 0.027 |
| My teacher gives equal attention to me in classroom during question-answer sessions | 0 | 0.02 | 0.016 | -.039* |
| I am hesitant to clarify my doubts in the classroom | 0.017 | -.042* | -0.016 | .046* |
| In my opinion most of the teachers encourage questions in the class | .137** | -.038* | -.133** | -.058** |
| I directly get my doubts clarified from faculty during or end of class | -0.006 | 0.032 | 0.007 | -.041* |
| I search the internet if I am not clear about some issue taught in the classroom. | .055** | -0.018 | -.071** | -0.009 |
| I discuss with friends outside college if I am not clear about some issue taught in the classroom. | -.072** | 0.028 | 0.03 | .044* |
| I visit the library if I am not clear about some issue taught in the class | -.057** | .031 | .038* | .013 |
| **Karnataka** | | | | |
| The instructions were simple and easy to follow | .106* | -.079 | -.049 | -.019 |
| I face difficulty in dealing with the subjects | -.150** | .031 | .156** | .083 |
| It was difficult to follow class room teaching | -.187** | .072 | .193** | .053 |
| **Kerala** | | | | |
| Study materials are too expensive | -.046 | -.034 | .113** | .071 |
| It was difficult to follow the class room teaching | -.039 | -.087* | .050 | .152** |
| Teachers encourage questions in the class | .013 | .057 | -.116** | -.060 |
| **Maharashtra** | | | | |
| Teachers encourage questions in the class | .080* | .076 | -.092* | -.084* |
| I directly get my doubts clarified from faculty during or end of class | .058 | .031 | -.005 | -.084* |
| **Bihar:** My teacher delegate academic responsibilities to me | .106* | -.051 | .090* | -.105* |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*
*Notes:* **\*\***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
 * .Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Academic integration and the level of confidence among students is an outcome of both pre-college academic credentials and the receptiveness of the teachers to engage with the students in the classroom. Unfortunately, non-interactive classroom teaching and negative attitudes of the faculty in the classroom fail to help students in

coping with the academic challenges and overcoming the difficulties that they face. These negative attitudes get reflected in the belief among a majority of the faculty members that expanding admission facilities to the disadvantaged social groups is the root cause of deterioration in academic standards in higher education. This negative attitude, coupled with the non-interactive classroom teaching methods, which get reflected in the low level of teacher–student engagement in the classroom and unfriendly classroom practices (such as not providing students the space to ask questions in the class, and following the lecture method) leads to widening of the academic distance between the privileged and students from the disadvantaged groups while also preventing the students from the disadvantaged social groups from approaching faculty members and interacting with them outside the classrooms. Moreover, social gaps within the academic sphere, and the inaccessibility and unapproachability of the teachers for the disadvantaged social groups to clear their academic doubts adversely affect the path of achieving social inclusion in higher education. As can be observed in the next section, social group identity and academic differences become a source of discrimination in teacher–student, and peer-to-peer interaction, largely determining how students from the socially excluded groups experience their campus life. The following sections discuss the discriminatory nature of interactions, which result in the social exclusion of students from the disadvantaged social groups in higher education campuses in India.

### Stage III of Student Diversity: Social Inclusion

Stage III of student diversity in campuses is achieved when student diversity is valued, students belonging to diverse social groups feel welcomed and feel a sense of belonging and experience inclusiveness from their entry to exit from the institution. Inclusionary institutional practices strive to promote meaningful interactions amongst diverse groups of students and with their faculty. Students are provided equal opportunities to experience non-discriminatory interactions with their teachers and with their peers. Administrative arrangements which ensure equal access to institutional resources and strict implementation of legal measures to protect students from discrimination are important mechanisms for achieving the inclusion of students from the historically socially excluded groups in higher education campuses. The findings from the study suggest that discrimination continues to exist in higher education campuses both directly as well as indirectly in overt and covert forms.

Presently, discrimination mostly exists in the non-physical terrains or in the symbolic social, academic and administrative spaces. Drawing from Bourdieu (1989), we use the term space as a 'system of relations'. We define the symbolic world of

social, academic and administrative space in terms of the 'system of relationships'. The position and disposition of social groups and their possession of different forms of capital matters in understanding the structure of their relationships and its impact (Bourdieu, 1989; 1990).

The nature of relationships in the symbolic world of campuses is both a consequence and an amalgam of the values, beliefs, and attitudes of its major stakeholders, which results in the creation of an institutional culture. This culture both shapes and is shaped by its stakeholders. Table 8 delineates an overview of the forms, spheres, and examples of discrimination reported in the symbolic world of campuses. We found an insensitive institutional culture towards diversity in student bodies. It was also observed that the dominant attitude of faculty members and institutional leaders towards student diversity is mostly negative, as they perceive diversity to lead to a deterioration in quality. This section focuses on the spheres and forms of discrimination related to teacher–student, student–student and student–administration interactions.

**Table 8: Forms and Spheres of Discrimination**

| Forms of Discrimination | Sphere of Discrimination | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Irregularity in admission | Admission | Given admission under reservation despite being ranked in the merit list. Derogatory remark: '*Sarkari Damad*'. |
| | **Teacher-Student Interaction** | |
| Avoidance to provide academic guidance | Time for academic discussion | Rarely given one-to-one time on academic matters for SC/ST/OBC. |
| | Student–faculty academic interaction | Rarely able to visit teacher due to fear. |
| Denial of opportunities to develop leadership qualities | Development of leadership qualities | Rarely providing encouragement for organising academic activities; |
| | | Rarely selected as leaders in group work. |
| Differential treatment in evaluation and giving marks | Evaluation | Evaluation of paper is not fair |
| | **Library and Hostel** | |
| Segregation | Library | Separate timing for allocation of books |
| | Hostel Allocation | Separate hostels |
| Suppression of Information | **Remedial Coaching** | |
| | Information on remedial classes | Information is rarely provided on remedial classes |
| | Awareness on remedial coaching | Leads to low awareness |
| | **Administration** | |
| | Information on SC/ST Cells/ EOC and other related Committee | Information is rarely provided Not aware of the cells and not functioning |
| Lack of initiative to extend the benefit through EOC | Functioning of Equal Opportunity Office | Not aware of EOC and their functioning |
| Rude behaviour of the administration | Access to administration | Rude behaviour at the time paying fees and receiving fellowship ("come tomorrow"/"the Internet is down") |
| | **Women** | |
| Differential treatment in collection of admin fees | Administrative fee | Additional fee collected from girls for the women development cell |
| Lack of availability of restrooms | Restrooms for women | Restrooms are not available or available in another location |
| Unsafe campus | Access to campus spaces | Women feel unsafe in the campus |
| Denial of choice to dress | Dress code | Women's dress code being determined by male students |
| Sexual harassment | Administration | Sexual harassment faced by girls and Dalit girls; "*Quote se ho ya Kothe se*" |

*(Prepared by the Authors)*

*Teacher–Student Interactions*

Literature on student success duly recognises the role of teacher–student interaction, especially one that takes place outside the classroom in the informal social spaces of higher education campuses. As elaborated earlier, studies have established that teacher–student interactions have a significant impact on the social development, self-concept, self-worth and confidence levels of students while also enabling positive campus experiences and intellectual outcomes among them. Having access to informal interactions with teachers leads to a higher likelihood of students recognising the importance of course work increasing their academic efforts and levels of motivation to succeed. Teacher–student interactions outside the classroom become even more important as many of the students are first-generation learners who may not know enough about ways to make the most of their campus experience.

With reference to teacher–student interactions, the data suggests that no single group gains a disproportional advantage or suffers a disadvantage from these interactions. Generally, the responses of the students from across the institutions selected for the study indicate a low level of teacher–student interaction outside the classroom. A majority of the students (71 per cent) reported that they rarely received academic support outside teaching hours from their teachers. However, the disadvantaged groups of students are less likely to express feelings of being treated equally by the teachers than their more privileged peers. As compared to the other students, the SCs and STs are less likely to get encouragement from teachers for organising academic events and participating in extra-curricular activities. The SC students also contended that they were not being provided one-to-one time for discussing academic matters outside the classrooms (Table 9). Further, the SCs and STs felt that they are ignored in the curriculum and curricular transactions.

Non-classroom teacher–student engagement is an important form of interaction, which enables the social inclusion of diverse student groups in campuses. Non-classroom student engagement can assume different forms. For example, it can be an extended academic discussion beyond the classroom. While many faculty members said that they encourage out-of-classroom 'academic discussions', they admitted that only few SC and ST students approach them for consultation after class. They also revealed that it is mostly the class toppers or 'serious students' who approach teachers outside the classroom for getting their doubts clarified. As a teacher from a case study institution from Delhi put it, *"Generally, the more confident ones approach us outside the classroom. People with language problem are too shy to interact with teachers."* The signs of correlation coefficients in Table 9 corroborate

these observations of the teachers. The signs indicate that SC and ST students were hesitant to informally interact with the teachers outside the classroom, negatively impacting the development of their academic social capital. As a result, SCs and STs have an unequal access to opportunity for bridging their academic gap and succeeding to gain parity with students from the non-SC/ST social groups.

One may also observe that faculty members, though claiming to be "open" to out-of-classroom academic discussions, rarely explain how 'disadvantaged' students can be encouraged to participate in out-of-classroom discussions. This implies that the claimed 'openness' of faculty members towards out-of-classroom discussions is not perceived by the students. It may be noted here that throughout the field work, in all the institutions, the SC and ST students exhibited hesitation in discussing their views both in open settings and in mixed groups. One possible explanation for hesitation could be the fear of discrimination.

**Table 9: Teacher–Student Engagement**

| Teacher–Student Engagement | General | OBC | ST | SC |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I receive academic support from my teachers in comparison with other students. | .062** | -0.032 | -0.01 | -.037* |
| My teacher delegates academic responsibilities to me. | .066** | 0.007 | -.066** | -.063** |
| I am able to visit my teacher without inhibitions in his/her office/staff room to discuss academic issues. | 0.019 | 0.021 | 0.013 | -.063** |
| My teacher gives me one-to-one time on academic matters. | .043* | -0.014 | -0.009 | -0.035 |
| I feel free to interact informally with faculty members outside the classroom. | -0.005 | 0.021 | .037* | -.046* |
| Teachers from my own background give me more attention than other teachers. | -0.029 | -0.022 | .051** | .042* |
| My teachers encourage students to respect different beliefs. | .065** | 0.01 | -.102** | -.045* |
| I am labelled as a 'reserved' category in the class. | -.042* | -0.001 | .037* | .038* |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*
*Notes:* **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The second type of engagement is out-of-classroom personal engagement between the students and faculty members. As witnessed in the literature, personal engagement, that is, faculty members engaging with students to discuss the latter's personal problems, is also important for student success. Social engagement is particularly important in the wake of the entry into college of a large number of first-generation learners belonging to the lower social strata and with lower

pre-college credentials. Only a minority among the faculty members encourage students to approach them for discussing the his/her personal concerns and issues. A significant proportion of the teachers feel that teachers cannot engage with the personal problems of students. Rather, they suggest that students should seek the assistance of counsellors who are 'trained' in resolving such issues. There is a clear lack of understanding of the meaning of 'personal engagement' with students. It is widely accepted in the educational literature that the teacher has an important role to play as a guide and mentor. Career guidance and counselling are an integral part of education training which is duly recognised by school education training curriculum and is reflected in the recommended pedagogical practices.

Further, when it comes to element of trust, though a majority of the students were of the opinion that teachers evaluate the examination fairly, the SC/ST students were more likely to report that teachers did not evaluate their examination papers fairly when compared to the general category students. Although the rate of these students is low, a comparatively a higher proportion (close to 34 per cent) of the SCs/STs were of the opinion that teachers did not evaluate their examination papers in a fair manner as compared to the general category students (30.4 per cent). Significantly, a positive relationship exists between the social background of the teachers and students, especially SC students, as seen in Table 9a. Positive correlation coefficients for both SC and ST students indicated that the teachers from their own backgrounds give them more attention than other teachers.

It was also seen during the course of this study that in many places, faculty members belonging to the SC and ST social groups encourage students to meet them to discuss their personal issues. In Maharashtra, which has a high proportion of SC and ST faculty member disadvantaged students feel that *"faculty from their own backgrounds can understand their problems better."* The SC and ST students in the case study institution in Karnataka, which is an elite professional college, also acknowledge the significance of talking to faculty members from 'own community'. One of the major difficulties facing students in professional institutions is the lack of information about faculty members. In their own words, "*there is no information about the faculties in our own category.*" This also explains why diversity in faculty composition is important. At the same time, the duty of providing support to disadvantaged students by faculty members from the same sections has wider implications. In every case study institution, we also found exceptions among the faculty who were taking pro-active steps to encourage interaction outside the classrooms. However, these faculty members are few in number and there is limited

systematic effort to institutionalise the process of interaction between students and teachers.

*Variations across Institutions:* Table 9a further presents significant forms of teacher–student interaction and its relationship with social identity. The forms of interactions ranged from the nature of the teacher–student interaction to the level of sensitivity of the teachers towards diversity. In Delhi and Bihar, a positive association exists between students getting more attention from teachers who share similar social backgrounds with their students; in Uttar Pradesh, students from the SC background expressed a feeling of being ignored in the classroom; in Maharashtra and Kerala, SC and ST students contended that were not encouraged to ask questions in the classroom and they felt hesitant to interact informally outside the classroom for academic support.

On feeling ignored in the classroom, students in the group discussion expressed, '*Many times during teaching, if teachers are using examples from Hindu scriptures/texts they accept the responses from general students. They don't consider our responses or arguments because they think we don't have knowledge of Hindu rituals.*' In Karnataka, in addition to a positive association between the students' social backgrounds and academic difficulty being faced by the students in the classroom, there is a negative correlation between the social background of the students and the feeling that their college is sensitive to regional/language and cultural differences. This is perhaps because their teachers may nurture stereotyped beliefs about students from the disadvantaged backgrounds. The views of the teachers are discussed in detail later in the next section.

**Table 9a: Relationship between Teacher–Student Interaction and Social Identity across States**

| Bihar | General | OBC | Scheduled Tribes | Scheduled Caste |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My teacher delegate academic responsibilities to me. | .106* | -.051 | .090* | -.105* |
| Teachers from my own background give me more attention than other teachers. | .000 | -.058 | -.019 | .094* |
| **Uttar Pradesh** | | | | |
| I found it difficult to form a peer group. | -.124** | .012 | -.012 | .167** |
| I felt I was deliberately ignored. | -.124** | .049 | .050 | .094* |
| The teacher addressed other types of students and not students from the social background I belong to. | -.031 | -.038 | -.020 | .105* |
| **Maharashtra** | | | | |
| Teachers give equal attention and feedback. | -.084* | .041 | .005 | .016 |
| My teacher delegates academic responsibilities to me. | .129** | .026 | -.079* | -.074 |
| I feel free to interact informally with faculty members outside the classroom. | .043 | .048 | -.010 | -.088* |
| **Delhi** | | | | |
| Teachers from my own background give me more attention than other teachers. | -.060 | .003 | .126** | .019 |
| **Karnataka** | | | | |
| This college is sensitive to regional/language and cultural differences. | .043 | -.003 | .055 | -.111* |
| This college addresses the concerns of women students. | -.039 | .109* | .002 | -.104* |
| **Kerala** | | | | |
| My teacher encourages me to ask questions and participate in discussions. | .031 | .004 | -.095* | -.016 |
| I am able to visit my teacher without inhibitions in his/her office/staff room to discuss academic issues. | .012 | .081 | -.020 | -.118** |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*
*Notes:* **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

*Religion-wise Differences*: Experiences related to teacher–student engagement of students from the minority groups (non-Hindus) is generally positive at the overall level. For example, Table 9b shows that students from the non-Hindu groups were being delegated academic responsibilities, and were being encouraged to organise academic activities, and to participate in extra-curricular activities. The negative correlation coefficients amongst the students from a Hindu religious background may be due to the SC/ST/OBC students being classified as Hindus. That may explain the results in Table 9b.

However, the non-Hindus too faced other difficult and unfriendly experiences. Some of these experiences included being allotted differential time to meet faculty as compared to other students; being kept idle in the laboratory and not being allowed to work even if being allowed to enter; and teachers making derogatory jokes that hurt regional sentiments were some of the significant forms of experiences that were reported by students from the non-Hindu groups. The forms of discrimination also varied across states. The significant correlation coefficients are presented in Table 9c.

**Table 9b: Relationship between Teacher–Student
Interaction and Religion across States**

| Overall | Hindu | Non-Hindu |
|---|---|---|
| My teacher delegates academic responsibilities to me. | -.014 | .052[**] |
| My teacher encourages me to organise academic activities (e.g. seminars, debates, other academic meetings) equally with others. | -.035 | .050[**] |
| I am able to visit my teacher without inhibitions in his/her office/staff room to discuss academic issues. | -.038[*] | .033 |
| I am allotted differential time to meet faculty as compared to other students. | -.024 | .044[*] |
| I am kept idle in the laboratory and not allowed to work even if I am allowed to enter. | -.027 | .045[*] |
| My teachers encourages me to participate in extra-curricular activities (debates, literary activities, etc.). | -.035[*] | .046[**] |
| My teachers can identify each student by their name. | -.047[**] | .059[**] |
| My teacher makes derogatory jokes that hurt regional sentiments. | -.029 | .067[**] |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*
*Notes:* **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Table 9c: Relationship between Teacher–Student Interaction and Religion across States**

| overall | Hindu | Non-Hindu |
|---|---|---|
| My teacher gives equal attention to me in classroom during the question–answer sessions. | .119** | -.125** |
| My teacher gives equal attention to me while clarifying my doubts. | .148** | -.165** |
| My teacher delegates academic responsibilities to me. | .088* | -.088* |
| My teacher gives me one-to-one time on academic matters. | .138** | -.156** |
| I feel free to interact informally with faculty members outside the classroom. | .079 | -.102* |
| I get my doubts clarified directly from the faculty during or at the end of the class. | .086* | -.102* |
| My teachers encourages me to participate in extra-curricular activities (debates, literary activities, etc.). | .095* | -.095* |
| I discuss my academic doubts with co-students after class. | .128** | -.119** |
| I search the Internet if I am not clear about some issue taught in the classroom. | .080 | -.112** |
| I receive greater academic support from my teachers in comparison with other students. | .119** | -.114** |
| Teachers encourage students to ask questions in the class. | .083 | -.105* |
| I have been guided by a faculty member in research/projects. | .102* | -.107* |
| My teacher makes derogatory jokes that hurt regional sentiments. | -.103* | .112** |
| **Maharashtra** | Hindu | Non-Hindu |
| My teacher gives equal attention to me in comparison with others in monitoring my performance and giving feedback. | .105** | -.118** |
| My teacher delegates academic responsibilities to me. | -.063 | .153** |
| My teacher encourages me to organise academic activities (e.g. seminars, debates, other academic meetings) equally with other students. | -.072 | .132** |
| My teacher gives me one-to-one time on academic matters. | -.020 | .131** |
| I feel free to interact informally with faculty members outside the classroom. | .010 | .093* |
| I am allotted differential time to meet faculty as compared to other students. | -.074 | .148** |
| My teacher includes various perspectives of different cultures in class discussions/assignments. | .211** | -.267** |
| My teachers encourage students from different social backgrounds to work together in group assignments. | .181** | -.246** |
| My teachers encourage students to respect different beliefs. | .168** | -.215** |
| My teacher makes derogatory jokes that hurt regional sentiments. | -.048 | .118** |
| **Karnataka** | | |
| My teacher encourages me to organise academic activities (e.g. seminars, debates, other academic meetings) equally with other students. | .036 | .109* |
| My teacher gives me one-to-one time on academic matters. | .093* | -.049 |
| I am kept idle in the laboratory and not allowed to work even if I am allowed to enter. | -.034 | .124** |
| In my opinion most of the teachers encourage questions in the classroom. | .092* | -.013 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

*Notes*: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

*Teacher's Perceptions and Views about Student Diversity*

Based on the analysis of interviews with faculty members, we got insights into why students feel that they are not being treated equally and there is discrimination. We found that increasing diversity is largely unwelcomed by faculty members as it is believed to lead to a deterioration in the quality of education. A majority of the teachers acknowledged that the nature of the social group composition of students has changed drastically over the years. Teachers were aware that students who are currently attending are more representative of society and belong to diverse social and economic groups. Women's participation has improved significantly and women outnumber men in many disciplines. A professor of science in Uttar Pradesh said, *"Campuses today reflect a multiplicity of cultures, all types of students are here, ranging from those from rich backgrounds to even those from the villages or rustic backgrounds. From social point of view, both urban and rural students are coming. It's a mixed bag." "If the 'lower category' students were in a minority two decades back, they are in a majority now as a result of affirmative action,"* affirms a faculty member. However, increasing student diversity is not viewed as a positive development by many faculty members.

The faculty members of case study institutions were concerned about the 'declining status' of their college as a result of this expansion and advent of the 'new' student bodies. The changing nature of student diversity is not viewed as a positive development by the faculty members, in general. In most cases, as the number of years of experience increases, there is tendency to compare the 'good old days' with the present campus scenario. According to the teachers, it is not just the teaching–learning processes, but also the academic ambience and cultural space of the campus that have been deteriorating. In many instances, this 'overall decline' is also viewed as a change in the 'quality of generations'. Faculty members explained that those who are socially, economically and educationally well off first prefer professional courses like engineering and medicine or other 'best colleges'. Students who fail to access the first two categories of institutions finally take admission in the 'traditional arts and science colleges and universities'. As a result of this filtration process mentioned above, and the demand from students belonging to the disadvantaged and lower income groups, faculty members and institutional leaders feel that the share of elite class in terms of their social, economic, and educational characteristics has gradually declined over a period of time in arts and science institutions supported by state governments.

On being asked their views on the changing nature of student diversity, many of the faculty members opined that previously 'really motivated' students were coming to colleges and universities. Today due to 'reservation' and 'low cut-off marks' for the under-privileged students, entry into higher education institutions has become easy. In Kerala, some also reiterated this point and claimed that *"There is a great difference in the mental state of students paying the full fee and those getting concessions in fees. For the latter, higher education is virtually free and easy to access. So even those students acquire no knowledge after the completion of the course, they do not consider it to be a problem. Three years are just a time pass.... So the students do not have a clear ambition. They merely get admission any which way."* The principal of one case study college in Bihar angrily responded, *"What diversity...now better families do not prefer this college...it was once one of the most sought-after colleges in this city...now students from the city are not coming...all are coming from rural areas...from lower class and categories...we have lost our status."* Some faculty members perceived a deterioration in the quality of students and attributed this to the regional and social affiliations of the students. Some faculty members claimed that the entry of students in the campus from certain regional locations is the root cause of decline in academic standards.

Following is one of the comments indicating this regional bias: *"Previously students were mainly from Delhi....now they come from neighbouring states and this has led to degradation in academic standards."* It was clear that faculty members viewed student diversity as a challenge and a problem. Another faculty member from Delhi adds, *"Since I had to teach a diverse set of students from various backgrounds, I as a teacher, had to address the lowest common denominator. As a result, I had learned to be simple, more understanding, more patient and as a result developed as a better teacher. This would have never happened if I were in St. Stephen's or Hindu College.....Sometimes, I as a teacher, have to spend much longer time explaining the same concept in order to reach the most disadvantageous. This amount of time I could have devoted to teaching newer things."*

Further, pointing to evidence on the lack of motivation and competitiveness among SC and ST students, one faculty member stated, *"Generally SC/ST students think that they can manage to pass without working hard. Parents also inform them that way. Some students think that even if they score 50 per cent marks, they will get a job."* Following is the comment by a professor in Uttar Pradesh: *"The socio-economic background of these students is very poor and thus they are not very confident. The growth of these students has been hindered. The quality of education they receive at*

*the primary and secondary levels is also not very good. They only have a degree. They come directly to the college with this degree where they encounter many difficulties in studying as their academic background and base are very poor. They do not know the language... in such circumstance how can we teach them?"*

It was further elaborated that there are many problems and challenges associated with the new student bodies being dominated by the disadvantaged groups. This is related to both the cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions. As far as the cognitive dimension is concerned, the lack of academic preparedness, 'lower marks/grades', 'English language competency', 'lower grasping power' and 'inherent motivation to study' are major 'hurdles'. These views expressed by the faculty members reflect biases and insensitivities towards the idea of social diversity. The observation that SC/ST students are not hard working and attempting to secure only pass marks as they believe that they would get jobs through reservation clearly highlights the negative attitudes towards marginalised students and the very idea of inclusion and equity in higher education. Overall the decline in the share of the elite category of students and enhanced over-representation of the under-represented groups is considered the reason for the decline in the quality of education in India. It was thus suggested that overall quality of student intake has deteriorated due to the quota system.

Only a minority of teachers and those who belong to the disadvantaged groups opposed this idea. In every case study institution, we found exceptions as well who were taking pro-active steps to encourage interaction inside and outside the classrooms and expressed strong displeasure against the dominant attitude of the faculty and the institutional culture rooted in the ideology of caste. It came to our attention that in many places, SC and ST faculty members encourage students to meet them to discuss their personal issues. However, these faculty members are few in number and there is limited systematic effort to institutionalise the process of interaction between student and teacher.

Since the increase in student diversity is largely viewed by the faculty members as an outcome of *reservation based provision*, and not *merit*, this affects the teacher–student engagement both in the classroom and outside the classroom. Not only academic credentials such as marks and grades matter in shaping perceptions of faculty members, regions from which students are coming, state of domicile, schools from which students graduated and medium of instructions followed in schools are also considered to be root cause of overall decline of quality. Teacher-student engagement in class room which includes teaching-learning process is generally not

impacted by characteristics of diverse student body. Although everybody recognises that characteristics of students in the campuses have changed, teaching learning process largely remains unchanged. Instead of improving teacher-student engagement that can foster engaged and active learning, faculty members suggest for remediation process outside class room. Moreover, data suggests that implementation of remedial coaching is poor across the institutions under study too. As a result, academic integration of students from the socially excluded groups is negatively impacted.

Teacher-student engagement outside the class room is also limited. Outside class room academic engagement opportunities are mainly utilised by students from academically well-off sections. Faculty members feel that disadvantaged students are either not interested, shy or lack confidence to approach faculty members. They tend to see it as a problem of the students. The teacher student personal engagement and the effort required by the teacher for the same is not recognised adequately. They consider it is unimportant. Rather, they suggest for seeking assistance of counsellor who is 'trained' in solving such issues. Role of teacher as guide and mentor is not valued across the institutions.

Institutional level mentorship scheme exists only in one institution in our study and exceptionally few faculty members are undertaking efforts to regularly interact with students outside classrooms. Thus, mentorship schemes are largely dysfunctional due to lack of interest among faculty members and lack of guidelines and coordination process at institute levels. Our analysis shows that teacher's perspective towards teacher student engagement is discouraging. Even when the system as a whole is changing, teaching community tends to resist changing themselves and maintain a social distance between themselves and the students from the socially excluded groups.

### Student Interaction with the Administration

The sphere of interaction with the administration is also a difficult space for the students from the socially excluded groups. The discriminatory and biased attitude of the staff members have been reported across the institutions. Both the verbal and non-verbal gestures of staff members towards SCs and STs are often discriminatory. The SC and ST students have to visit colleges more than once to submit their applications for admission. Distinction between the 'fee-paying general category' and '*sarkari damad*' or 'category students' translates into differential treatment meted out to the latter. Stipend distribution is one domain wherein the SCs and STs experience severe forms of discriminatory behaviour. In a student's own words, "*They*

*(administration) feel that money is given from their pocket... the staff member dealing with stipend distribution always get irritated by student queries."* The SC and ST students are unaware about their entitlements and are often not provided adequate information on the release of stipends and scholarships. The SC women students are also prone to sexual harassment in the form of non-verbal gestures and 'night calls' from the staff. However, the fear of delay and stopping of the stipend and other incentives prevent the students from reporting such incidents of harassment to the college authorities.

### Student–Student Interactions

During the transition from late childhood to early adulthood, campuses as a social space provide multiple avenues for students to learn, experience and experiment new ways of social life. It is a challenge as well as an opportunity for students. The patterns of friendship and interactions with peers are important component of social lives of the students. The most important dimension of social space in campus is the nature of peer group formation. Peer group formation can either challenge or be confined to social hierarchy, stigma and traditional values. In the specific context of increasing student diversity, it is important to illustrate how peer-group formation is influenced by social group identity.

Empirical evidence suggests that caste and gender norms existing in society are getting reproduced in campus life. The dominant values and perceptions of the diverse student bodies are influenced by superiority of caste belonging and patriarchal norms. Similar to the beliefs of the faculty members, the beliefs of the upper caste peers are rooted in the ideology of merit and stand against the idea of reservation. The higher-caste students feel that universities frequently have to admit under-qualified SCs/ STs/OBCs ($F(3, 3032) = 18.319$, $p = .001$) and reservation policy for the latter is no longer needed as the lower castes have progressed and they do not require reservation policy, - whereas students from the disadvantaged groups felt the opposite and said that there was a statistically significant difference between students from the SC/ST/OBC social groups and students from the higher castes ($F(3, 3032) = 39.699$, $p=.001$).

The statistically significant difference in the responses between students from the SC/ST/OBC social groups and students from the higher castes suggests that despite the negative views and stigma attached to this policy, students from the socially excluded groups are able to justify the necessity of the reservation policy. For example, debates for and against reservation policy take place in the classroom. The following paragraph is based on the interview of an SC student that shows the divided

stands being taken on the line of castes by students on this issue, with teachers opting to take neutral stand, instead of a stand for social justice.

*A class gets divided into castes when there is a discussion on the topic related to equality and reservation….I remember one such interaction on reservation. There were two groups arguing. I was with the group that was arguing for reservation whereas general student were against reservation. They asked why they should pay higher fee in the name of reservation and get lesser chances….. why they are facing the consequences of the actions and rituals followed in the past by others. Our group, which was in favour of reservation, expressed empathy and called for our higher caste peers to show empathy for SCs/STs/OBCs…. that we have faced denial of rights and opportunities over thousands of years….would you deny they are not your forefathers who exploited us or how is it that most of the land is still owned by the general castes…. are you able to return our land? Our professor concluded diplomatically that reservation is a constitutional requirement, but it is a matter of national debate of being right or wrong."*

The students' dominant negative perceptions about the idea of reservation, diversity and social justice explains why SC and ST students are reticent in interacting with students from the other castes and remain confined to their own groups. Identity-based peer group formation is a key indicator of the prevailing fear of discrimination among the SCs and STs and same group preferences among the general castes and OBCs. The findings from our study suggest that the reasons for the vulnerability expressed by the students are specific to their social backgrounds. For example, while the stigma of caste belonging may appear to be the reason for the biases and discrimination faced by the SC students, in the case of STs and de-notified tribes, it is the language of their communication (which is the 'community'/tribal language), and the stigma of criminality—(this is especially applicable to the de-notified groups) that impacts friendship, and leads to peer group formation on the basis of identity, thereby resulting in low social cohesion among these groups. While OBCs succeed in achieving better social networking with the non-OBCs, the SC, ST and general category students remain confined to their own social groups (Table 10a), 'a sense of being comfortable' is the key reason for SCs and STs remaining in their own caste groups. This is especially magnified in the case of women students (Table 10b). The tension-filled and stressful interaction that SCs and STs have with other groups is the reason why they choose not to interact with students of the other castes.

**Table 10a: Peer Groups Formation by Social Groups**

| Friend 1 | SC | ST | OBC | General | Don't Know | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCs | 37.2 | 2.6 | 21.5 | 24.8 | 10.5 | 100 |
| STs | 20.9 | 36.5 | 16.9 | 18.2 | 4.1 | 100 |
| OBCs | 12.6 | 2.8 | 42.4 | 27.4 | 13.3 | 100 |
| General | 9.2 | 1.5 | 15.1 | 58 | 13 | 100 |
| Total | 15.2 | 3.9 | 28.8 | 37.3 | 12.4 | 100 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Table 10b: Peer Groups Formation of Women by Social Groups**

| Friend 1 | SC | ST | OBC | General | Don't know | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SC | 43.6% | 3.1% | 23.6% | 22.2% | 7.6% | 100.0% |
| ST | 29.3% | 37.9% | 12.1% | 17.2% | 3.4% | 100.0% |
| OBC | 11.7% | 1.9% | 49.2% | 25.7% | 11.5% | 100.0% |
| General | 7.5% | .8% | 18.9% | 62.0% | 10.9% | 100.0% |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

The phenomenon of social group identity as a factor in peer group formation and the process of isolation take root in the initial weeks of the first year of students. When SC and ST students recollected their experiences in the initial days of college, they felt that the college was less welcoming and they were searching for students of their own backgrounds to avoid feeling out of place. The correlation coefficients for the initial days' experience of the students in Table 10c indicates that students from the socially excluded groups, especially SC and ST students, felt unwelcome and nervous, were unable to form peer groups, found it hard to adjust and were searching for students of their own backgrounds to avoid the feeling of being out of place. We constructed an index of initial day experience[2] (Table 10d). The initial days' experience index shows that the overall experience of the SC and ST students was relatively poor vis-à-vis their OBC and higher-caste peers.

The OBC students also felt unwelcome but they did not find it hard to adjust (a similar experience to the general category students) as indicated by the correlation coefficients in Table 10a. As seen earlier at the aggregate level of representation in student bodies, OBCs constitute the single largest social group in campuses. In fact, in Bihar, Kerala and Maharashtra, students from the OBC social group account for more

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[2]   The index for initial days experience included the students' experience on the likert scale ranging from not feeling welcomed; feeling nervous; finding social and cultural life of campus strange; finding it difficult to form peer group; feeling of being deliberately ignored; finding it hard to adjust; not feeling safe in the campus and searching for students of their background to avoid feeling out of place.

than half of the respondents. This reflects the emerging dynamics of higher education in India. Since most of the students from the elite upper castes and general category have withdrawn from the arts and science public institutions, OBCs are now enjoying benefits of being numerically dominant that may have earlier been enjoyed by the 'higher castes'.

**Table 10c: Relationship between Initial Days Experience and Social Group Belonging**

| Initial Days' Experience | General | OBC | ST | SC |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I felt welcomed. | .089** | -.052** | -0.018 | -.040* |
| I felt nervous and under-confident. | -0.022 | -0.033 | .038* | .055** |
| I found it difficult to form a peer group. | -0.019 | -0.029 | .036* | .047** |
| I felt I was deliberately ignored. | -.041* | 0.009 | 0.026 | 0.031 |
| It was hard to adjust. | -0.006 | -.037* | .049** | 0.031 |
| There is a lot of tension across social differences in this college. | 0.022 | -.060** | .065** | 0.014 |
| I was searching for students of my background to avoid feeling of out of place. | -0.028 | -0.005 | .051** | 0.014 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*
*Notes:* **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Table 10d: Initial Days' Experience Index by Social Groups**

| Social Group | Initial Days Experience Index | | F |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Mean** | **SD** | |
| SC | 55.01 | 8.84 | 5.35** |
| ST | 53.75 | 9.40 | |
| OBC | 56.22 | 9.15 | |
| Others | 56.24 | 9.00 | |
| | If mean value is less than 50 = Poor If mean value between 50 to 56 =Moderate If mean value more than 56 = Good | | |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*
*Note:* **p>0.01

Women in general and SC and ST women, in particular, are prone to gender-based stereotypes and exclusion. The lack of feeling of safety is prevalent among women students, which also impacts their learning. Women in some colleges do not stay back in campuses after the class hours due to the fear of discrimination and harassment from male peers and locals. In some colleges, male students impose certain dress codes on women restricting their choice to wear what they like. Derogatory comments, particularly aimed at SC and ST women, are also observed in some colleges. Specific to SC women, these derogatory remarks from their peers take

the form of "*quote se ai ho ya kothe se ai ho*" (are you from quota or from "kotha"– brothel).

Overall the findings suggest that both direct and indirect forms of discrimination exist in higher education institutions. As compared to the direct forms, indirect forms are more dominant. In the academic space, physical segregation is no longer a practice. But student groups are divided on the amount of equal attention and support received from teachers. The students from the socially excluded groups experience a lack of confidence which results in the persistence of social distance between them and the faculty members. The perceptions and attitudes of the campus administrators towards students from the socially excluded groups are unsupportive. This, in turn, impacts the students' access to special programmes and resources earmarked for them.

In the social space, identity-based physical violence is not reported. However, discrimination takes the form of self-imposed segregation, derogatory remarks, humiliation, and mocking. Such forms of discrimination and micro-aggressions that happen on a day-to day basis lead to cumulative disadvantages and a low educational development trap.  When they recollect their initial days' experiences in college, SC and ST students felt that college was less welcoming during the initial days. They felt like 'fish out of water' during that period. Peer group formation occurs on the basis of group identity. The formation of peer groups based on similar identities is the consequence of a lack of institutional response to the issues of exclusion and isolation of the socially and marginalised groups. They gradually begin to remain in their own circle without forging any close and intimate relationships with other groups.

Thus, caste, tribe, and language identities take over in defining the formation of peer groups within and outside the classrooms. In the absence of an effective institutional mechanism to protect their interests, the students from the socially excluded group are forced into isolation. Thus, this study highlights that increasing campus diversity leads to different forms of discrimination and is a major source of social tensions on in the campuses. The prevalent societal values and their associated practices get reproduced in campus life. Caste- and ethnicity-based discriminatory practices and gender stereotyping are some of the major forms of such practices. It can be argued that caste and ethnic origins continue to impact the social and academic life of students in higher education from the first day of admission until their exit from these institutions.

*Diversity in Faculty*: The institutional commitment in valuing diversity and creating a more inclusive campus climate also gets reflected in the level of diversity in the social composition of the faculty and in explicit programmes of the institutions to increase diversity in their faculty. Studies have found that diversity in the social identity of faculty has an important role to play in fostering positive views about diversity amongst the staff and faculty (Mayhew, Grunwald, and Dey, 2006). Several scholars have found that a racially diverse faculty is closely tied to the successful recruitment and retention of both racially diverse students and junior faculty who can become mentors and role models and offer a sense of connection that the under-represented students and junior faculty may lack (Blackwell, 1981; Cheatham and Phelps, 1995; Reyes and Halcon, 1991). They are more likely to use active pedagogical techniques known to improve student learning such as encouraging students to interact with peers from different backgrounds, engaging in service-related activities and orienting their work to service ideals, and producing scholarship that addresses the issues of race, ethnicity, and gender (Knowles and Harleston, 1997; Antonio, 2002; 2003).

The findings of our study suggest that despite affirmative action, faculty from the socially excluded groups remain significantly under-represented across most of the selected higher education institutions for the study. Our results on the homogenous nature of faculty composition at the institutional level are in line with the national level results. We find an under-representation of faculty members from the disadvantaged groups, especially from the SCs and STs in higher education at the national level (Sabharwal and Malish, 2016). In terms of faculty members, gender, religion, social group, rural–urban and regional belonging, faculty members across all institutions were dominated by men, were Hindus, from the higher castes, from urban areas, and from within the state where the institution was located. For example, in the case of Bihar, the disparity between male and female teachers is quite evident—a majority of the faculty members were men (65 per cent). Similarly, at NIT, Surathkal, 85 per cent of the faculty members were men. This gender gap highlights the need for initiatives to bring more women in the education stream and for maintaining a balance between the appointment of male and female faculty.

Despite the Constitutional provisions of reservation in faculty positions for the socially disadvantaged groups, we find an under-representation of faculty members, especially from SCs and STs in higher education institutions under study. In institutions like NIT, Surathkal, the faculty from the SCs and STs comprised 7.42 per cent and 2.18 per cent of the total, respectively, and those from the OBC

category accounted for 9.60 per cent, while the rest were from the general category. Social diversity in faculty composition was also poor in institutions in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Tables 11, 12 and 13) with the general category social group comprising the numerically dominant members in the faculty. In Uttar Pradesh, one of the institutions under study reported to have no SC or ST faculty member. In Kerala too, a large majority (74.6 per cent) of the faculty were from the upper caste group, followed by OBCs (20.4 per cent) and SCs (4.9 per cent). Further, the share of SC faculty members was higher in the University (14.3 per cent) as compared to government colleges (11.5 per cent) and government-aided colleges (2.8 per cent).

Another remarkable observation is seen in terms of urban–rural disparities and regional disparities. In Bihar, for example, the share of teachers from rural background is very small (8.2 per cent) as compared to teachers from urban areas. Further, we find low regional diversity, that is, there is a dominance of faculty from within the state where the institution is located. For example, in Maharashtra, more than 90 per cent of the faculty members belonged to the same state. A majority of the faculty members (65.06 per cent) employed in NIT, Surathkal, which is a national institute of importance, were from within the state, that is, Karnataka. This indicates a lower exposure for students, faculty and administrators to regional diversity and varying perspectives in the classrooms from other Indian states and regions. Employing faculty from other states in India would also mean openness in the system. Moreover, faculty members from the 'disability' group across all institutions were less than 3 per cent. Adding to challenges of under-representation is the hostile campus climate encountered by many faculty of socially excluded group, which leads to feelings of alienation.

**Table 11: SC, ST, OBC and Minority Representation in the Faculty at the University of Lucknow, UP (2013–2014)**

|                     | SC   | ST   | OBC   | Minority | General |
|---------------------|------|------|-------|----------|---------|
| Professor           | 2    | 0    | 1     | 7        | 119     |
| Associate Professor | 3    | 1    | 16    | 7        | 81      |
| Assistant Professor | 26   | 1    | 28    | 12       | 75      |
| Total               | 31   | 2    | 45    | 26       | 275     |
| %                   | 8.17 | 0.52 | 11.87 | 6.86     | 72.5    |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Table 12: SC, ST, OBC and Minority Representation in the Faculty at JNDC, University of Lucknow (2013–2014)**

|                     | SC | ST | OBC | Minority | General |
|---------------------|----|----|-----|----------|---------|
| Associate Professor | 0  | 0  | 5   | 3        | 44      |
| Assistant Professor | 0  | 0  | 4   |          | 23      |
| Total               | 0  | 0  | 9   | 3        | 67      |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Table 13:  Subject-wise Percentage Distribution of Faculty in Patna University (UG and PG)**

| Faculty | Male | Female | Rural | Urban | General | OBC | SC | Hindus | Muslims | Total |
|---------|------|--------|-------|-------|---------|-----|----|--------|---------|-------|
| Economic | 58 | 42 | 17 | 83 | 83 | - | 17 | 75 | 25 | 100 |
| Political Science UG | 67 | 33 | - | 100 | 67 | 33 | - | 67 | 33 | 100 |
| Geography UG | 67 | 33 | - | 100 | 67 | 22 | 11 | 78 | 22 | 100 |
| Sociology | 100 | - | - | 100 | 67 | 33 | - | 67 | 33 | 100 |
| Persian | 50 | 50 | - | 100 | 100 | - | - | 50 | 50 | 100 |
| Botany | 67 | 33 | - | 100 | 100 | - | - | 100 | - | 100 |
| English | 100 | - | - | 100 | 100 | - | - | 100 | - | 100 |
| History | 25 | 75 | - | 100 | 100 | - | - | 75 | 25 | 100 |
| Sanskrit | 100 | - | - | 100 | 100 | - | - | 100 | - | 100 |
| Maithili | 100 | - | - | 100 | - | 100 | - | 100 | - | 100 |
| Philosophy | 67 | 33 | 33 | 67 | 67 | 33 | - | 100 | - | 100 |
| Mathematics | 50 | 50 | - | 100 | 100 | - | - | 100 | - | 100 |
| M.Com | 71 | 29 | - | 100 | 100 | - | - | 100 | - | 100 |
| Psychology | 100 | - | - | 100 |  | 100 | - | - | 100 | 100 |
| Hindi | 75 | 25 | 25 | 75 | 25 | 75 | - | 100 | - | 100 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

*Access to Professional Development Opportunities*: Equitable access to professional development opportunities is an important indicator of institutional support to diversity. The findings from our study indicate unequal access to professional development opportunities for women and faculty members from the disadvantaged groups in comparison with upper castes. Our study shows that access for women and faculty members from the disadvantaged groups (rural, outside the region/state, 'lower caste' and indigenous groups) to professional development opportunity across fields of study (social sciences/humanities/STEM subjects) is lower than that enjoyed by men, those belonging to the higher castes and urban areas as also those from the region/state where the higher education institution is located. The gap is especially worse in elite institutions offering engineering subjects.  For example, in an elite institution, of the 3691 various professional development programmes attended by the faculty members in this institution only 7 per cent of the women faculty members got a chance to participate in international and national conferences

(Figure 11a). A majority of those who got the opportunity to attend any type of conferences (international, national, summer–winter workshops, writing and publication workshops) were male faculty members.

**Figure 11a: Participation in Conferences by Gender (in an Elite Engineering Institution)**
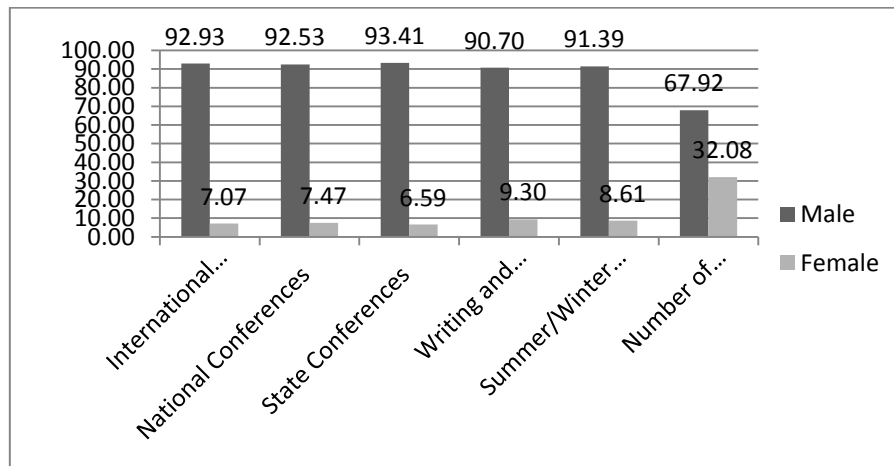


*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Figure 11b: Participation in Conferences by Caste (in an Elite Engineering Institution)**
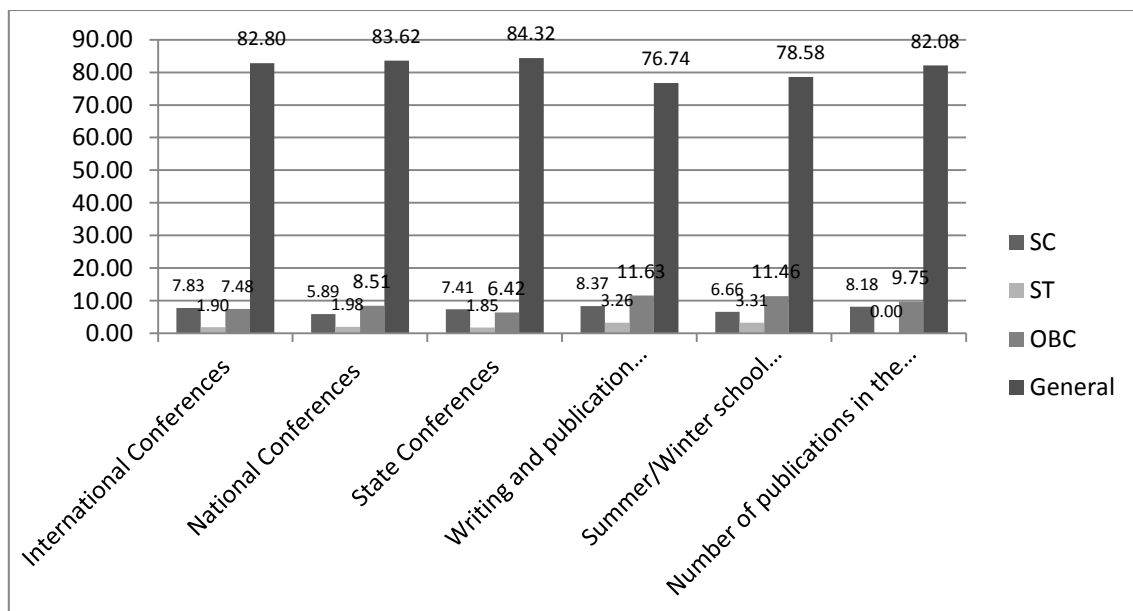


*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

Similarly opportunities to participate in conferences were lower for the 'lower' castes (SCs/STs) as compared to the higher castes such as 7.83 per cent for SC

faculties, 7.48 per cent for OBC faculties, 1.90 per cent for ST faculties (Figure 11b). Similarly, 83.59 per cent of the publications were from faculties from general categories. As one moves up the caste hierarchy from the low-caste to the middle- and upper-caste groups, participation in conferences also increases. Table 14 presents the status of access to professional development opportunities among faculties from various religions. The figures for participation in professional development programmes by Muslim communities were 2.72 per cent with a break up of 3.13 per cent in national conferences, and 2.46 per cent in international conferences. The initiatives for workshops and training programmes by faculties from Christian communities were higher as compared to those for other minorities (24.13 per cent). Our findings also suggest that faculty members from urban areas, and from within the state where the institution is located, had greater access to professional development opportunities (Figures 11c and 11d).

**Table 14: Status of Access to Professional Development Opportunities among Faculties from Various Religions (%)**

| Professional Development Programmes | Hindus | Muslims | Christian |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participation in conferences | 83.65 | 2.72 | 13.62 |
| Initiatives from faculty | 70.32 | 5.55 | 24.13 |
| Publications | 81.90 | 2.44 | 15.66 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Figure 11c: Participation in Conferences by Place of Residence (in an Elite Engineering Institution)**
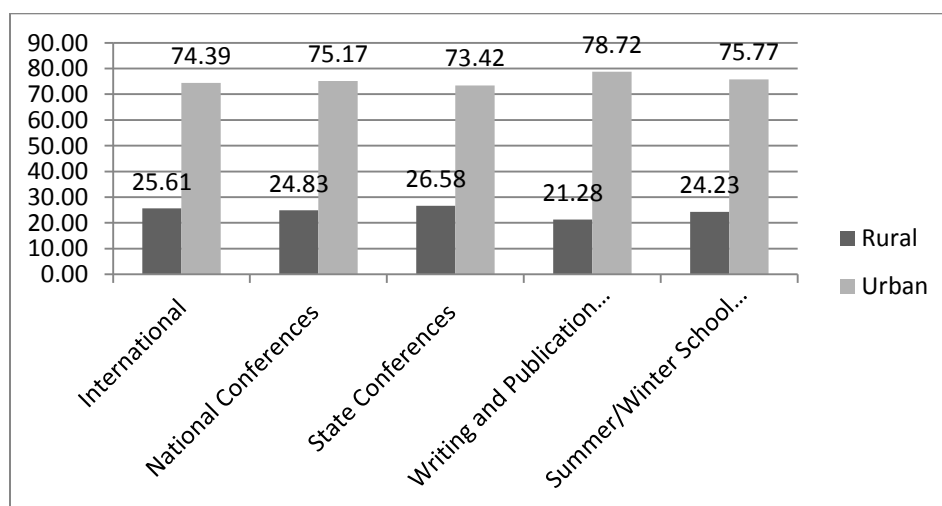

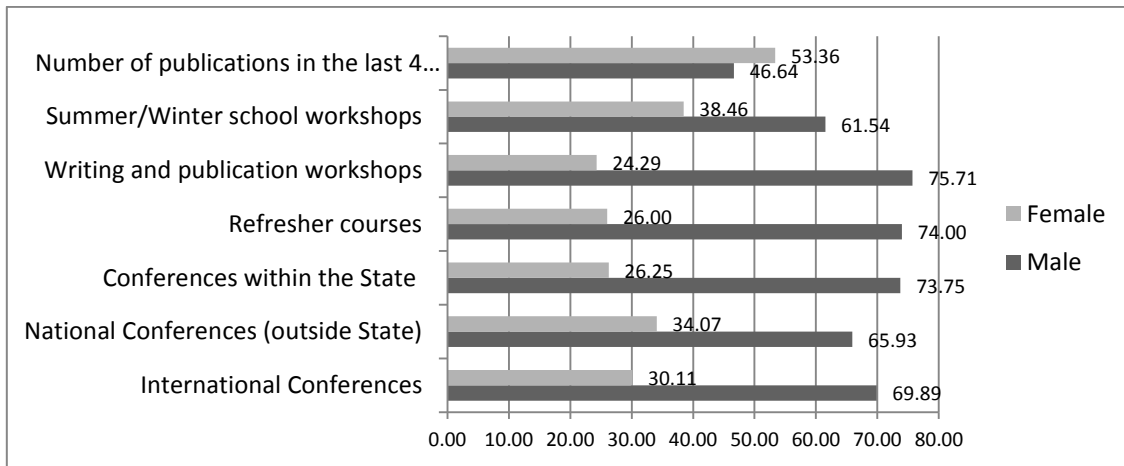
*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Figure 11d: Participation in Conferences by Regional Affiliation (in a High-prestige Institution)**
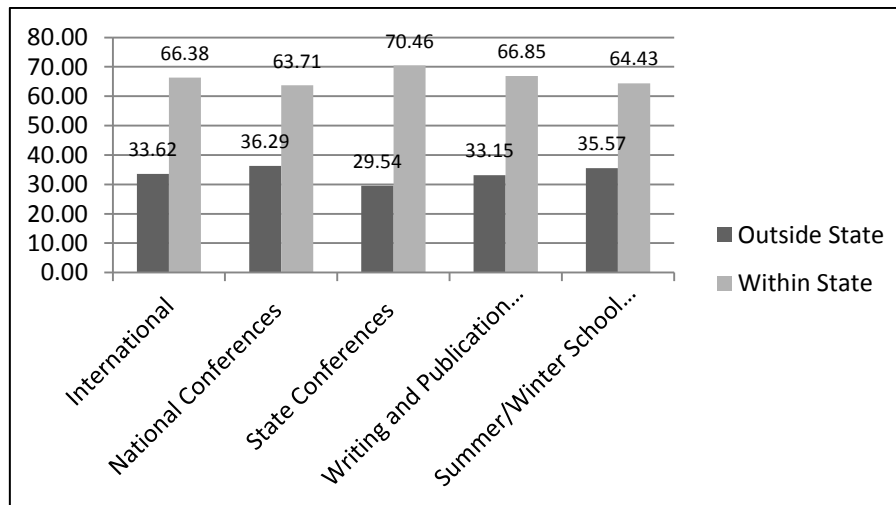


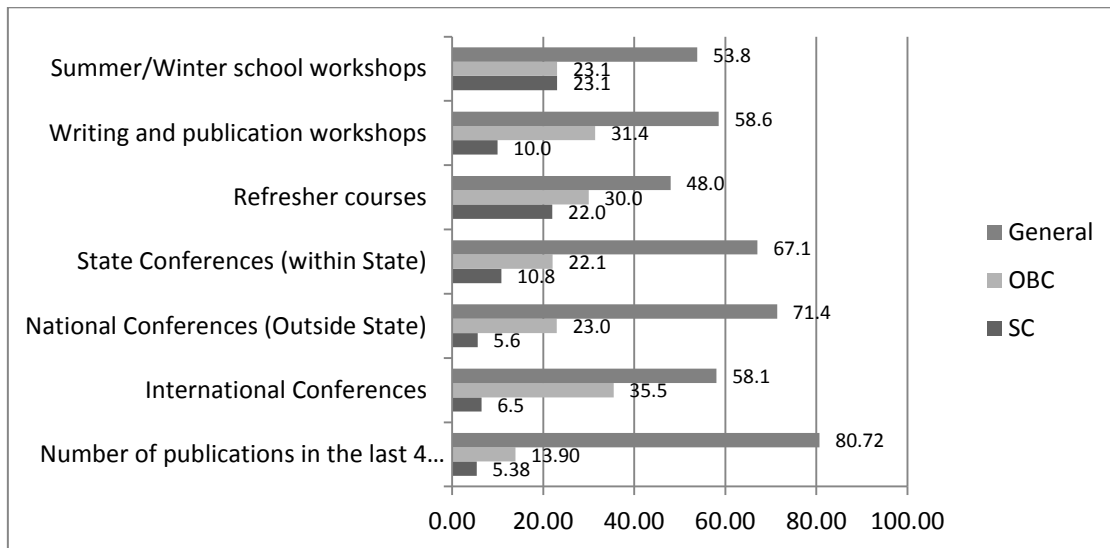*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

Participation in professional development opportunities by women faculty members and those from lower castes was better in institutions that were lower in 'prestige' and offering humanities and social sciences subjects' vis-à-vis elite institutions. Gender and caste inequalities in participation in conferences, however, persist here too. Figure 11a shows gender inequalities in participation in conferences in a higher education institution offering humanities and social sciences. For example, participation in international conferences for men was two times more than that of women. Similarly, we see a gender gap in access to writing and publication workshops, and refresher courses (Figure 12a). Figure 12b shows the caste gap in participation in conferences. Participation in conferences by caste follows the graded nature of the caste system where one caste stands above the other (general category/OBCs/SCs). Opportunities to attend conferences follow a similar graded pattern, as participation increases with an 'increase' in the caste status, with the General category (which includes the upper castes) enjoying a greater likelihood of participation and the lowest caste (SCs), the least. Faculty members from urban areas in this institution also had greater access to professional development opportunities (Figure 12c).

**Figure 12a: Participation in Conferences by Gender
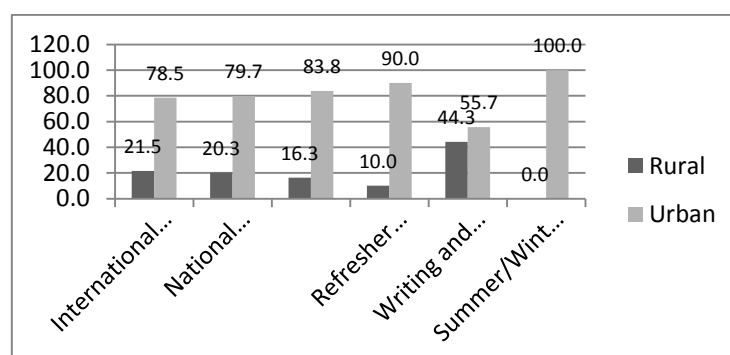(in an HEI Offering Humanities/Social Sciences)**



*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Figure 12b: Participation in Conferences by Caste
(in an HEI offering Humanities and Social Sciences)**



*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Figure 12c: Participation in Conferences by Place of Residence (in an HEI Offering Humanities and Social Sciences)**



*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Table 15: Academic Positions by Gender and Caste**

| Elite Engineering Institution | Male | Female | SC | ST | OBC | General |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Permanent Faculty | 86.46 | 13.54 | 7.42 | 2.18 | 9.61 | 80.79 |
| Assistant Professors | 83.19 | 16.81 | 9.17 | 4.17 | 10.83 | 75.83 |
| Associate Professors | 80.00 | 20.00 | 10.26 | 0.00 | 12.82 | 76.92 |
| Professors | 97.10 | 2.90 | 2.86 | 0.00 | 5.71 | 91.43 |
| Institution offering Social Science/Humanities | | | | | | |
| Permanent Faculty | 41.98 | 58.02 | 5.30 | 0.00 | 18.18 | 76.52 |
| Assistant Professors | 38.30 | 61.70 | 6.38 | 0.00 | 23.40 | 70.21 |
| Associate Professors | 45.00 | 55.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 12.50 | 87.50 |
| Professors | 100.00 | 0.00 | 33.33 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 66.67 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

Interactions with teachers provide us with reasons for social disparities in accessing professional development opportunities. Limited encouragement on the part of management for professional development in the form of restrictions on the number of days for taking academic leave to attend conferences, the absence of orientation programmes organised by the administration on academic potentials and benefits of participating in conferences (other than requirement for promotion) were generally cited as barriers by faculty members. While these barriers may impact all faculty members, irrespective of caste, gender or other demographics, being under-represented as faculty members, being placed lower in the academic hierarchy (a higher proportion of women and socially excluded groups are employed at the junior levels as faculty members, Table 15), limited access to social networks and knowing the regional language (as expressed by a faculty member,*"The office workers*

*are mostly from same state and I belong to this state, hence language often helps me understand the procedures to avail these opportunities…"*) marginalises women more than men and faculty members from the socially excluded groups than the rest.

Interviews with faculty members from the socially excluded groups (SCs, STs and women) pointed several issues of biases (gender and caste bias) contributing to the development of a 'chilly climate' (Turner, Myers, and Creswell, 1999) at their institution. Being overlooked for promotion, having limited access to professional development opportunities like conferences, being held to standards higher than those for the faculty from the socially dominant groups, and formation of caste-based lobbies were highlighted as a various causes of internal dislikes and rivalry.  As a result, the faculty members felt isolated, lacked support from seniors, lacked information about channels of promotion and professional development and found their work environments 'unfavourable and unhelpful' (Sabharwal, 2018).

Our finding also point to differences between faculty members, with senior faculty being 'suspicious' of the junior faculty, especially in the case of participation in conferences. As it was explained during our interactions with faculty members…… *'there is a fear from the side of senior faculty that junior faculty may skip their teaching duties in the name of attending seminars and conferences…. and so they want to closely observe the latter and restrain and warn them from principal's office by emails referring to the number of classes missed by them enforcing strict leaves calculations, and other administrative procedures.'* Limited access to professional development opportunities, such as participation in conferences has implications on one's academic growth and upward mobility, as it is a professional requirement for promotion contributing to scoring points in the Academic Performance Index (API).

On a positive note, the present findings also reveal how institutions can take tangible steps to recruit and retain faculty from the disadvantaged groups. Institutions where we find a diverse representation in faculty composition, as in the case of Maharashtra, explicitly affirm the Constitutional reservation provisions on representation of the disadvantaged groups in the University Act. For example, 66 per cent of the faculty in one of the institutions (Vasantrao Naik Government Institute of Arts and Social Sciences (V.N.G.I.A.S.S.), Nagpur) comprised faculty from the SCs, STs, and OBCs. The SCs formed 32 per cent of the total faculty, OBCs, 25 per cent, Others, 36 per cent, STs, 1.79 per cent, and denotified tribes, 5.36 per cent. The Institute of Science also had a dominance of faculty members from the socially excluded groups vis-à-vis Others (45 per cent). The proportion of the SC faculty to the total was close to 25 per cent, of OBCs, 26.53 per cent, and of STs, 2.04 per cent.

Similarly, in Post Graduate Teaching Department (PGTD), Nagpur, during the year 2013–14, the total number of faculty were 32, including 28 per cent SCs, 6.25 per cent STs, 25 per cent OBCs, and almost 38 per cent 'Others', demonstrating social diversity at the post-graduate level as well. In Maharashtra (as well as Kerala) gender composition in the faculty is also better than the rest of the institutions. For example, in one institution in Maharashtra, 58.93 per cent were men and 41.07 per cent were women. In Kerala, gender representation was among the highest as compared to all the case studies—more than half of the faculty from the sample institutes (58.5 per cent) were females.

As indicated above, demonstration of valuing diversity in faculty and promoting inclusion by the institution in the case of Maharashtra is connected to provisions in the University Act. The provisions in the Act cover recruitment, promotion, representation in governance and management councils (27-4gi) and academic councils (28-7e). The Maharashtra Public University Act, 2011, clause 7 for example, states:

> Clause 7 (2) The university shall adopt government policy and orders issued, from time to time, in regard to the reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes Denotified Tribes (*Vimukta Jatis*)/Nomadic Tribes and Other Backward Classes for appointment to different posts of teachers and non-teaching officers and employees and for the purpose of admission of students in the affiliated or conducted colleges, university departments, university institutions or recognized institutions (p. 77).
>
> Clause 8 (3) The State Government may in accordance with the provisions contained in this Act, for the purpose of securing and maintaining uniform standards, by notification in the *Official Gazette*, prescribe a Standard Code providing for the classification, manner and mode of selection and appointment, absorption of teachers and employees rendered surplus, reservation of post in favour of members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes Denotified Tribes (*Vimukta Jatis*) and Nomadic Tribes and Other Backward Classes, duties workload, pay, allowances, postretirement benefits, other benefits, conduct and disciplinary matters and other conditions of service of the officers, teachers and other employees of the universities and the teachers and other employees in the affiliated colleges and recognized institutions (other than those managed and maintained by the State Government, Central Government and the local authorities). When such Code is prescribed, the provisions made in the Code shall prevail, and the provisions made in the Statues, Ordinances, Regulations and Rules made under this Act, for matter included in the Code shall, to the extent to which they are inconsistent with the provisions of the Code, be invalid (p. 80).

The following sections discuss the status of implementation of existing institutional mechanisms that aim to support an environment or climate of diversity. At the institutional level, university statutes through rules on representation of faculty from diverse groups in governance and management structures (as seen above),

federal directives to establish SC/ST cells to monitor implementation of reservation at the time of admission, gender cells, anti-ragging cells, grievance redressal cells and equal opportunity offices to address group-specific concerns of students pertaining to norms of behaviour and redressal are attempts towards institutionalising the national vision of diversity. In the next section, we discuss the sources of institutional level challenges that pose barriers in the effective implementation of diversity initiatives which range from administrative challenges to the beliefs, values, and norms held by the faculty, administrators and students that shape their views and determine the institutional culture.

**Institutional Mechanisms to Address Student Diversity**

As seen in the preceding sections, Stage I diversity is characterised by the presence of diverse student groups measurable in terms of numbers, while Stage II is characterised by pre-college academic differences. Stage III diversity is characterised by the extent to which diversity is considered as a value of inclusion. Unlike Stage I, which is largely achieved by non-institutional factors, Stage II and Stage III are to be achieved by institutional factors and institutional efforts.

For academic integration and social inclusion, which are important elements of inclusion to enact diversity in Stage II and Stage III, the existing literature establishes that institutional strategies such as orientation in the college, participation in extra-curricular activities and remediation programmes play an important role in successfully integrating the non-traditional and first-generation students into the social and academic mainstream of the institutions. Various institutional mechanisms have been established in higher education institutions in India to support a climate of diversity. For academic and social integration, the diversity initiatives include remediation programmes; orientation programmes; and extra-curricular programmes such as the National Service Scheme. To address group-specific challenges, there are 'special cells' established such as the SC/ST cells, women's cell (also called Internal Complaints Committee against Sexual Harassment), anti-ragging cells, Equal Opportunity Cell/Office (EOC/EOO), placement cell, and discipline committee. The EOC, anti-ragging cells, anti-sexual harassment cells and SC/ST cell are mandatory.

The functions of the SC/ST cell can be classified into three types: monitoring of effective implementation of admission and recruitment policies; improving the level of academic preparation and college knowledge and redressing grievances of SC/ST students and employees. Specifically, monitoring of course-wise admissions of SC and ST candidates; appointment, promotion and training of SC/ST communities in teaching and non-teaching posts; organisation and monitoring of the functioning of the

remedial coaching scheme; organising orientation programmes and addressing complaints. The objectives of the women's cell range from providing an immediate redressal or solution to problems like harassment and sexual assault, inviting discussions with girls and class representatives regarding any problem being faced by girls in the campus, regularly monitoring the upkeep of girls' common rooms and organising events on occasions like Women's Day. The main function of the grievance redressal cell, both in the university and the college is shared among students to collect and record grievances received by the cell through various media like email, letter, phone or personal meetings.

The student welfare cell has been established with the objective of ensuring the overall benefit and welfare of the student community of the college. Its activities range from organising new student orientation programmes, cultural events, and annual sports meets to celebrate various important days and national and religious festivals. The call to establish such cells is mainly taken by the State and Central level directives with financial support, such as from the University Grants Commission (UGC). This section includes a discussion on the status of implementation of these mechanisms and challenges in their effective functioning.

### *Status of Implementation of the Remediation Programme*

Remediation programmes constitute a major institutional strategy to help develop academic skills for adequately performing in college and ensuring academic success for the under-prepared students. The programme provides capacity development by providing stronger foundation in subjects for further academic works. The remediation programme is thus an important strategy for achieving Stage II diversity. The empirical evidence from our study suggests that those who took remedial classes and need additional academic support in the way of course-work in college were more likely to be first-generation learners, from government schools, hailing from rural areas, who had studied the state syllabus in Hindi or a regional language and had opted for humanities in high school.

The faculty and students from colleges and institutions in our survey repeatedly highlighted the importance of remedial coursework. Across institutions, a very high proportion of SC students found remedial coaching useful (Table 16). Students found the classes useful because in these classes they were able to clear their basic concepts unlike in the regular classes where teachers were more focused on completing their syllabi and they were provided with notes. Because of access to more knowledge and clarity in subjects, attending remedial classes resulted in greater levels of confidence. Since special funds are allocated for remedial coaching specifically targeted for the

excluded groups, we find a higher proportion of students from the excluded groups taking up remedial course work as compared to the general category students (Table 17). However, in terms of access to information on remedial classes, data points to social group disparities with a higher proportion of SC/ST/OBC students indicating that they had lesser access to information as compared to their peers from the higher castes (Figure 13).

**Table 16: Share of Students Who Found Remedial Coaching Useful**

| Social Group | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| SC | 50.7 | 49.3 |
| ST | 63.0 | 37.0 |
| OBC | 45.5 | 54.5 |
| General | 35.5 | 64.5 |
| Total | 41.9 | 58.1 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Table 17: Share of Students Who Took Remedial Courses (%)**

| Social Group | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| SC | 41.3 | 58.7 |
| ST | 40.2 | 59.8 |
| OBC | 37.5 | 62.5 |
| General | 27.4 | 72.6 |
| Total | 33.4 | 66.6 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Figure 13: Received Information on Remedial Classes by Social Groups**
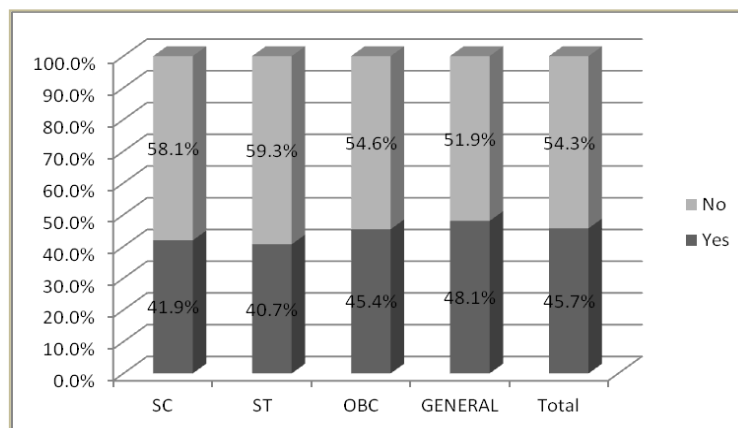


*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

*Status of Organisation of Orientation Programme*

With respect to *the* orientation programme, a majority of the students in our survey reported that they had attended the orientation programme organised by their institution.  As regards the benefit of social programmes for students during the initial days, it is clear that students indicated a positive relationship between experience of feeling welcomed and finding the new place interesting in initial days with attendance in orientation programme (Table 18). The evidence indicates that an emphasis on acquainting students with the general codes of conducts during the orientation programmes (on anti-ragging rules and other code of conduct) indicates towards an attempt on the part of the campus administrators to create an environment conducive for diversity.

**Table 18: Association between Attendance in Orientation Programme and Initial Days of Experience**

| Initial Days Integration | I felt welcomed | I found the new place interesting |
|---|---|---|
| Attended orientation programme | .271** | .194** |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

*Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

However, in selective and elite institutions in our sample (with the exception of Maharashtra), the orientation programmes were organised for all first-year students as well as additional focused programmes/department-wise orientation programmes, which provided an opportunity for closer interactions with administrators and faculty. Thus, within the public higher education system, there exists a situation of unequal access to opportunities focused on students' academic development when they come to college. Students attending the state universities and colleges (such as those in Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar), have lower access to department-wise support programmes for their transition to college as compared to their peers from selective institutions (in Delhi and Karnataka).

Further, there seems to be a relationship between having access to information and attending orientation programme. A lower proportion of students from the marginalised groups reported having attended an orientation programme as compared to their non-SC/ST/OBC peers. On the other hand, the non- SC/ST/OBC students were more likely to have access to information on the college orientation programme as compared to the OBCs, SCs and STs (Figure 14). The SC and ST students also lacked awareness of location of information boards; and exhibited hesitation and lack of confidence in seeking information from others.

**Figure 14: Access to Information to College Orientation
Programme by Social Groups**
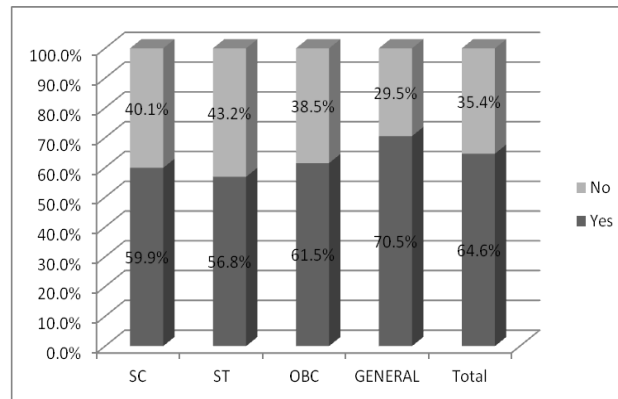


Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016

*Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities*

In terms of extra-curricular activities, which contribute to students' social integration, develop students' social capital, and subsequently, affect students' ability to persist through college, the students in our survey who participated in extra-curricular activities found their college interesting, were able to share their personal feelings with others, and had access to leadership roles, as seen in Table 19.

**Table 19: Relationship between Participation in Extra-Curricular
Activities and Social Integration**

| Participation in extra-curricular activities | I found my college interesting | I shared a meal with students from a caste other than mine | I am cautious in interacting with students from other castes | I am selected as a leader in group activities | I am able to share my personal feelings with students belonging to other castes. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Member of any extra-curricular activity groups/ clubs/society in the campus | .060** | .059** | -.057** | .153** | .064** |

Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016
Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

However, students (particularly women students belonging to STs) in the survey reported a low participation in extra-curricular activities. Participation across institutions was low with more boys than girls reporting to be members of some extra-curricular group; and lower participation of the STs as compared to the rest of

the students (Table 20). The reasons for low participation of students in extra-curricular activities, in general, and of ST students and women, in particular, ranged from individual and institutional factors. The individual factors were mainly related to students not having time as they were engaged in part-time jobs. The institutional factors included the limited number of extra-curricular activities being organised by their institution, lack of encouragement from teachers, informal groups being formed on the basis of social group identity such as caste and region, and unsafe campuses, especially for girls.

**Table 20: Membership in Extra-curricular Activity Groups/Clubs/Society in the Campus (%)**

| Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities | Yes | No | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 35.8 | 64.2 | 100.0% |
| **Social Group** | | | |
| SC | 38.1 | 61.9 | 100.0% |
| ST | 31.0 | 69.0% | 100.0% |
| OBC | 33.9 | 66.1% | 100.0% |
| General | 37.6 | 62.4 | 100.0% |
| **Gender** | | | |
| Male | 39.9 | 60.1 | 100.0% |
| Female | 32.4 | 67.6 | 100.0% |
| Total | 35.9 | 64.1 | 100.0% |
| **Level of study** | | | |
| Post Graduate | 27.3 | 72.7 | 100.0 |
| Under Graduate | 40.1 | 59.9 | 100.0 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

*Sense-making of the National Service Scheme: Ghettoisation or Space for Disadvantaged Students for Learning Leadership Skills?* SC students were seen to be participating actively in extra-curricular activities and mostly in the National Service Scheme (NSS). *The* theory of sense-making is particularly useful to understand how stakeholders, the students and faculty in this case, are influenced by beliefs, values and cultural norms, which shape their perspective towards a national policy, that is, the NSS, whose main aim is to promote the value of social service.

The implementation of the NSS depends on how the stakeholders 'make sense' (Coburn, 2001) of this policy. Making sense, in turn, occurs through the interaction of three constructs (Spillane et al., 2002); a) policy signal, b) individual cognition, and c) situated cognition. The policy signal 'provides the tools with which local actors construct meaning' (Duncheon, 2015); individual cognition influences sense-making of

a policy through beliefs, values and cultural norms and; 'situated cognition' is the individual social context that influences sense making and action.  The policy signal is 'national' but the individual cognition is situated and embedded in the 'local' social context that shapes its implementation. We posit that sense-making of NSS students and faculty affects the social nature of implementation of this scheme.

Two perceptions of faculty and students on participation of disadvantaged social groups in NSS emerged from the interviews: first, there was a ghettoisation or social group separation—a higher number of SC and OBC students were participating in the NSS, leading to stigmatisation of this scheme. Attitudes and dominant ideology, indicators that shape organisational culture, highlight how the NSS is perceived, and how these perceptions, in turn, determine which group of students participates in the NSS and why.

As we have seen in Table 19, a higher proportion of SC and OBC students reported being members of an activity group. The SC/OBC students were more likely to be a member of the NSS group as compared to general students from the non-SC/ST/OBC groups. The faculty perceived that the participation of a large number of students from the disadvantaged groups leads to ghettoisation and social separation in a particular extra-curricular activity, here 'social service'. As one NSS programme officer commented, *'The number of general students is very low in the NSS. …Out of 100, 75 students in the NSS are either women or those from SC/OBC backgrounds. The collective of SC/OBC students is very visible in NSS programme. General students are very less in number. For several years the proportion of students in NSS programme has been like this.'* The faculty member further commented, *'SC/ ST students are increasingly engaged in the NSS activities as they view this as 'their' comfort space ….where they share jokes, stories  which non-SC/ST/OBC may not be in a position to relate or to enjoy it.'* Maintaining and not challenging the status quo reflects support for social stereotypes, encouraging social separation by those responsible for implementation of a programme with the aim of cultivating a 'social value'.

The reason why the non-SC/ST/OBC students stay away from the NSS was the gendered nature of activities being carried out through the NSS. The nature of activities was mainly related to 'services' such as 'cleaning' traditionally perceived to be an occupation that is carried out by the 'lower' castes and women. As one faculty member explained, *'Students from the high-caste families are likely to stay away from such programmes. They prefer traditional arts and cultural activities. They are not willing to do certain kinds of jobs when they come to the NSS.'* Another faculty member corroborated, *'Students from affluent families and from the higher caste and class*

*backgrounds are rarely attending NSS activities.......they view the NSS as a gathering of lower caste and lower class people."* The programme officer also reported, '*Students who quit the programme are usually from the higher socio-economic level.*'

The interviews also highlighted that faculty members were reluctant to take responsibility for the NSS. This was due to multiple reasons. Scarcity of funds to organise activities was pointed out as a major challenge. However, the perceptions of faculty members were also negative towards participation in NSS activities as they did not want to be identified with the SCs and viewed the NSS as a domain where SCs mainly participate. Faculty members across social groups were reluctant to be associated with NSS.  As one faculty member commented, '*Even the teachers who are from SC categories are not willing to take the charge of programme officer….. as per my understanding, what prevented them from taking its charge was the fear that they will also be labelled as belonging to the same category to which most of the students from NSS programme belong….. It is also a kind of discrimination….*'

The students, on the other hand, viewed the NSS as their learning space for building their confidence and developing their management and leadership skills. Students themselves managed the NSS office, led its activities and were involved in decision-making. Moreover, the presence of a large number of students from a particular group in the NSS contributed to a strong voice in internal decision-making related to NSS activities. Some students also viewed the NSS as a route to activism and membership of the college students' union, especially since the activities of the NSS and participation in it were viewed positively and had the strong support from the college student union.

These features of participation were highlighted as positive outcomes both by students themselves and some faculty members. In a group discussion, SC students said, '*Focusing more on sports and NSS activities not only helps us boost our confidence levels but also compensates for the lack of opportunities to develop our leadership skill in the classroom.*' Only a lower proportion of students from disadvantaged groups such as the SCs reported receiving encouragement and opportunities to take up activities that developed their leadership skills. This shows that co-curricular activities and forums like NSS are extremely helpful in providing opportunities to the students from the marginalised groups.

 Our analysis indicates how cultural and social conceptions about 'social service' are constructed by students and faculty members, which in turn, affects the students' participation in a national level programme. The presence or absence of stigmatisation related to participation in NSS varied across campuses. This was mainly

due to two reasons. Firstly institutions where faculty and administrative leaders positively valued student participation in NSS and were pro-actively devising a broad range of programmes, students from all groups were participating. Here social separation was minimal. The broad programmes ranged from subject experts being invited to deliver the lecture and deliberations with the students for adopting a village. For example, in some of the institutions, the physics faculty members were organising such lectures through the NSS office; and administrative level programmes such as placement mock interview were being arranged for students. Adoption of a village during an academic session included activities such as enacting plays with a theme conveying a social issue, sharing information on the cropping pattern, importance of irrigation, use of new technological know-how and improving financial literacy amongst the villages. Second, in institutions where elections and formation of student unions with political affiliations are outlawed and student councils have been established wherein selection is based on academic and co-curricular excellence, excelling in NSS and NCC activities was viewed as a channel for participation in the student council. Excelling in and recognition of NSS activities were viewed as a platform for entry into coveted student councils. The student councils took up issues concerning students during a particular academic session and were also closely involved in the NSS activities.

Thus, we find from the example of implementation of NSS, how "decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and a symbolic level have a differential or harmful effect on certain groups of students either intentionally or unintentionally" (Tierney, 1988, p. 4) and how varying institutional mechanisms and processes can affect the organisational culture and change in culture. Culture change takes the following forms: first, in cases where the NSS programmes were broad-based, multi-disciplinary and not narrowly focused, there was diversity in participation with minimal social separation. Second, connecting participation in NSS to chances of getting representation in the Students' Council removed the association of 'shame' or 'de-stigmatised' perceptions of faculty and students towards NSS activities.

### Mechanisms to Address Group-Specific Challenges and Discrimination

Two types of structures exist on the campuses for addressing group-specific challenges and discrimination. The first type belongs to the mandatory structures and mechanisms following guidelines from the UGC. These include the anti-ragging cell, the SC/ST cell, the equal opportunity cell, and the cell for overseeing sexual harassment against women. The second type of cells are those that are initiated by

institutions, such as the disciplinary committee and the women development cell. We find that there are substantial differences among states and institutions in conceiving diversity as a value of inclusion and for addressing discrimination. Institutional structures and mechanisms for facilitating inclusion are mostly dysfunctional across the institutions. Students, particularly the beneficiary student groups, across institutions are mostly unaware about such cells and committees, and their roles and functions (as seen in Table 21).

**Table 21: Awareness about Whom to Contact in Case of Complaint (%)**

| I know where and whom to contact in case of complaint | | Total | Women | SCs | STs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Equal opportunity cell | 24.8 | 22.1 | 24.2 | 14.4 |
| 2 | Anti-ragging cell | 57.9 | 57.9 | 57.2 | 32.8 |
| 3 | Anti-sexual harassment cell/Women cell | 48.3 | 47.3 | 45 | 31.9 |
| 4 | Discipline committee | 41.1 | 40.4 | 37.8 | 22.7 |
| 5 | Student welfare cell | 46.7 | 46.8 | 41.4 | 23.6 |
| 6 | Career guidance cell | 38.1 | 37.1 | 32.7 | 18.2 |
| 7 | Placement cell | 35.6 | 33.9 | 29.7 | 17.7 |
| 8 | Student grievance redressal cell | 31.3 | 31.6 | 27.7 | 21.2 |
| 9 | Minority welfare cell | 17.8 | 16.7 | 13.5 | 5.5 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

**Table 22: Awareness of the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2012 (%)**

| States | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| Bihar | 52.2 | 47.8 |
| Delhi | 45.9 | 54.1 |
| Kerala | 10.4 | 89.6 |
| Karnataka | 31.2 | 68.8 |
| Maharashtra | 3.2 | 96.8 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 50.6 | 49.4 |
| Total | 30.7 | 69.3 |

*Source: Sabharwal and Malish, 2016*

Notwithstanding the existence of all types of cells including the equal opportunity, anti-ragging, and women's cells, awareness levels among students about these cells vary. While a majority of the students (74 per cent) reported awareness about the anti-ragging cell, student welfare cells (63 per cent) and the anti-sexual harassment cell (62 per cent), the awareness amongst students about these cells was far lower related to the person to contact for making a complaint, the faculty responsible for various activities, and attending events organised by the cell(Table 21).

The most effective among all the committees and cells, as seen from the data in Table 21, is the anti-ragging cell. Across the institutions, students are better informed about the anti-ragging cell and whom to contact for lodging a complaint. Information about this cell is also provided in the admission prospectus, which details the legal consequences of involvement in ragging. The cell arranges the screening of films on anti-ragging produced by the University Grants Commission (UGC). The anti-ragging helpline numbers of the UGC are also exhibited in the campus and various hostels. Across the institutions, anti-ragging measures assume the form of 'mass campaign' with the active participation of the faculty members, particularly the younger ones. Teachers take turn to visit campus blocks and hostels to check on ragging. In some institutions, the phone numbers of police officers are also provided to students. Since students can directly contact the UGC helpline or police station, the cell is therefore extremely careful in preventing such situations. Stringent action is reportedly taken against students indulging in ragging and details of the suspended and dismissed students are made available through public notices. As a result, students are fully aware about the consequences of ragging.

During the last few years, on the recommendation of the anti-ragging cell, college hostel allotment is being made year-wise in Uttar Pradesh because ragging mostly occurs during the non-academic hours and mainly in the hostels. With all the first-year students staying in one hostel, instances of ragging have drastically reduced in last few years. The success of the anti-ragging cell can be attributed to the following processes: First, awareness about the cell and the consequences of indulging in ragging are widely disseminated through a campaign. Second, there is institutional level planning to curb the incidents of ragging. Third, the cell functions in both redressal and proactive mode. Fourth, the activities of the cell receive better support from the members and other faculty colleagues. Fifth, there is a monitoring and evaluation process to take stock of the situation. Sixth, since reporting of ragging to UGC and external agencies like police is expected to damage the reputation of the institutions, this cell is very proactive and gets maximum support from the administration and institutional leaders.

Awareness about other cells such as the Equal Opportunity Office (EOO) is limited. A majority of the students (63 per cent) were unaware of the existence of the EOO, let alone its role and the faculty member responsible for the cell. Awareness about the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2012, was even lower. A majority (almost 70 per cent) of the students were not aware of these regulations that offer protection against caste-, ethnicity- and gender-based

discrimination (Table 22). A similar proportion of students also reported that they were not aware that their institution had appointed an anti-discrimination officer. Thus, the findings of the study indicate that though all types of special cells exist, implementation of the proposed measures and awareness among students of the various cells and their activities vary across institutions. Following is a discussion on the challenges faced by institutions in implementing diversity initiatives.

### Challenges in the Effective Implementation of Existing Institutional Mechanisms

The faculty in-charges of various cells in the institutions face many challenges and hurdles. The challenges are related to compositional strength (in terms of the number of members in the cell); position in the administrative structure (e.g. the anti-ragging cell is managed by the Proctoral Board, which in turn, determines access to infrastructure) methods of appointment of the faculty in-charge and members; institutional-level planning and coordination of the cells. The reasons for poor implementation of diversity initiatives also include challenges related to prejudices and stereotypes held by the faculty, administrators and students, which shape their views and determine the institutional culture. The institutional culture can have a huge influence on the effective functioning of such diversity mechanisms. We will first discuss the common challenges facing faculty members in effectively implementing the activities of various cells and then turn to the specific challenges faced in the implementation of the remediation programme, orientation programme, and setting up of special cells such as the SC/ST cell, EOC and women cell.

The common challenges experienced by faculty members across institutions related to the level of administrative support they receive in the establishment of the cells and the method of appointment of the faculty-in-charge. In terms of support and coordination, first, despite the existence of a committee comprising multiple faculty members, the cells are mostly managed as a 'one-man show' by the faculty in-charge, who is affiliated to the office of the cell. Moreover, faculty-in charge is solely responsible for all the activities with periodic meetings among the committee members for discussing, planning and evaluating the activities. Coordination between various other cells and committees is virtually non-existent. Second, according to the faculty-in-charges, the available administrative support and infrastructural facilities for running the cells are inadequate. Third, some faculty-in-charges believe that their colleagues are not supportive and, in fact, often oppose any action taken by the cell. Fourth, some committees and cells rarely organise periodic meetings of the committee.

During the interview, some faculty in-charges shared that they found it difficult to provide a list of members of the committee headed by them. This is indicative of the ways in which cells are functioning. On being asked if they would consider taking up charge of this cell the next time, the typical answer from the faculty-in-charges was 'no'. Fifth, except liaison officer in Delhi and NIT, none of the faculty in-charges received any training for managing the cell. They are also not provided with adequate guidelines to run the cells except the anti-ragging cells. While one group of faculty-in-charges demands that training be imparted to them for running the cells, others do not find any use in 'additional training'. The lack of adequate guidelines from the authorities also affects the functioning of the cell. Further, the cells and committees are mostly in redressal or reactive mode as they act as only when they receive a complaint.

On the method of selection, through the interviews it was found that despite uniformity and a clear definition of the rules for establishing such cells, their functioning varies across campuses. In universities, the cell/committee in-charge and members of committee are selected by the respective Vice-chancellors while in colleges, the respective Principals constitute the committees. Interviews with faculty members and the faculty-in-charges reveal that institutional leaders take into account many considerations to appoint a committee and its head, and the selection of the faculty-in-charge and committee members is not done systematically, nor is it necessarily based on the interest and capacity of the members and in-charge. At times, various faculty members are offered positions on the basis of factors that are not even relevant to the functioning of the cell. For example, in some places, the social group-based allocation is made. As one professor from UP shared, *"Selection means...that since the committee charge is given to an OBC, let us give the (this) position of the faculty-in-charge to a Pandit"*. Those who are close to institutional leaders are often appointed as in-charge of cells.

### Challenges in the Implementation of the Remediation Programme

In the case of remediation programmes, the faculty and faculty members in-charge of the programme reported a delay in funds and the lack of teachers training to deal with academically diverse student groups to be major hurdles in the effective implementation of remedial coaching classes. Lack of information and inconvenient timing of the classes were reported by students as reasons for not being able to access remedial coaching. As regards the timing of the classes, students reported that since they belonged to economically weaker families, they were doing part-time jobs after their regular classes. Moreover, one of the most important

challenges pertaining to the implementation of remedial coaching, as reported by the students and faculty members, was the stigma attached to participation in the programme.

Elaborating on this stigma attached to remedial coaching, many students and faculty critically analysed the existing construct of the 'remedial' student. Many faculty members felt that by requiring only a particular group of students to take remedial coaching, the policy reflected 'deficit thinking' about the under-prepared students and ended up framing students in problematic ways. One faculty member explained, *'Teachers have always taught classes with students of varied skill levels....but we (administrators and faculty) believe that students are coming in deficient rather than different...that we can fix this deficiency.'* A mathematics professor further explains and provides an example of experience that explained differences in 'skills' and students diverse strengths, *"...Some research scholars who joined under me are not fluent in the English language which affects the verbal communication between us. Initially it is absent; however they are strong in mathematical theories; thus, communicating areas of their strength during interactions cultivates confidence and promotes learning."*

### Challenges in the Implementation of the Orientation Programme

With respect to orientation programmes, institutions that are more open-access - state universities and colleges, situated in an era of constrained financial resources, including student–advisor ratios, are not in a position to organise a department-wise student orientation programme as the elite and selective institutions in our case study. Thus, the state universities opt to organise orientation programmes for all first-year students irrespective of the discipline of study. Interviews with institutional leaders and campus administrators in these institutes indicate that they struggle with the question of how to help their students more effectively. Moreover, there is discipline-stratification in opportunities for students for a successful transition to college. Students from institutions offering STEM subjects are more likely to access support programmes arranged by their respective colleges as compared to institutions offering social sciences, arts and humanities. Further, there is no institutional level body to plan, monitor and evaluate all the activities targeting student welfare and student inclusion.

### Challenges in the Implementation of Special Cells

One of the primary challenges confronting institutional mechanisms for addressing the issue of discrimination include the lack of awareness among

beneficiary student groups about the existence of special cells and committees, and their roles and functions. Overall, it was found that there was a lack of understanding among the faculty in-charge of the SC/ST cell and the EOC about its role and functions. The SC/ST cell, EOC, anti-sexual harassment cell and the women's cell are not active, except in the case of NIT, where the SC/ST cell is active and providing 'support' to students through regular meeting. It was reported that the faculty-in-charges are not provided with adequate guidelines to run the cell and plan the activities. They act as and when there is a complaint. In most of the case study institutions, these cells received zero complaints. As a result they just exist in name, claims one professor.

Similarly, the anti-sexual harassment cell receives a negligible number of complaints from students and staff. The faculty in-charge admitted that students are scared to lodge a complaint. One can see how the patriarchal norms of gender relations act as hurdle and have percolated into the activities of women and anti-sexual harassment cells. According to the faculty-in charge of one anti-sexual harassment cell, *"Gender sensitisation is the last priority of the authorities... they express sympathy but say, "OK madam, "aap apne level par dekh lijeye."* The faculty-in-charges also have to deal with their male colleagues, who are mostly non-supportive of the activities of the cell.  Active engagement by the faculty-in-charges often fetches them the label of 'women activists'. Some of those who are heading the cells try to make a conscious effort to 'balance' the activities of the cells. A senior professor associated with anti-sexual harassment cell pointed out, *"After getting a complaint we check whether the incident really happened... sometimes students lodge false complaints. On the other hand, there are also people who hesitate to register complaints even if a genuine incident takes place... so we need to adopt a balanced approach. ... Too many complaints will affect our credibility...it has actually become a problem for the institute's reputation."*

The belief that too many complaints of sexual harassment will adversely affect the reputation of college is indicative of the internal pressures that the faculty-in-charges face while managing such an important cell. This cannot be seen as the fault of an individual as the pressure to limit the number of complaints stems from the overall institutional culture and institutional climate. Another example from Kerala reinforces this point. A professor associated with the women's cell there stated, *'Girls are safe here. Boys will protect them even if anyone faces any problem. But it is the behaviour of girls that is not good. They are more wayward than the boys, and may even attack the latter."* On further examination of this claim, it was found that the women's cell had purchased a sewing machine from the funds allocated to the women's cell

propagating the belief that "learning stitching is good" for women students. Thus, instead of breaking the gender stereotypes, the women's cell organises activities to further reinforce the gender stereotypes that exist in society. This indicates that the faculty-in charge and members of the women and anti-sexual harassment cells need to be imparted comprehensive training on gender sensitisation, gender justice, and sexual harassment.

One of the peculiarities of all the cells is their existence in isolation as watertight compartments. They engage in very limited coordination and engagement with the other cells and committees to oversee the various dimensions of student welfare. The cells report directly to the institutional leaders. However, there is no institutional level mechanism to plan and coordinate the activities of the various cells. It was also found that none of the institutions organise meetings with the heads of the others cells and committees to deal with the issue of student diversity or the grievances of the students. This is a major limitation. The faculty in-charge felt that at present the cells and committees are 'merely' recommendatory bodies. In principle, all of them have chairpersons or coordinators or faculty-in-charges and other faculty colleagues as members. The decision for any action by these cells and committees is taken by the vice-chancellor or principal. The constitution of a statutory committee headed by the institutional leader overseeing all the heads of the cells and committees could make institutional decision-making more decentralised and effective. The committee may be effective in facilitating institutional level planning, monitoring, evaluation and coordination between the various cells looking after the different aspects of student diversity and its concomitant challenges.

While Stage I of social diversity in the case of student composition has been achieved, this is still an unfulfilled objective in the case of diversity in faculty composition. This is because of the under-representation of faculty members from the disadvantaged groups, especially the SCs and STs, across various institutions despite the Constitutional provisions of reservation in faculty positions for these groups. According to the literature, the social identity characteristics of the faculty have potential role to play in fostering positive views about diversity amongst students, staff and faculty.

As mentioned above, legislation has been one of the most important sources of achieving Stage I student diversity. This is equally applicable to both students and faculty. However, this legislation has worked in increasing diversity amongst students but not amongst the faculty. One argument for this state of affairs could be that of lead and lag. It is much easier to implement legislative measures and easier to achieve

diversity at the level of student level because after school, a large number of students become eligible for entering higher education. But this is not always possible in the case of faculty positions for the following reasons: a) no new recruitment taking place generally in the higher education system; b) discrimination during the recruitment; c) lack of eligible candidates to qualify for the faculty positions. Emerging evidence (Varghese, et al., 2017) indicates that a large pool of eligible candidates qualify for faculty positions across social groups. The mismatch between faculty diversity and student social diversity thus becomes a crucial element in shaping the culture of institution and the approach to diverse student body.

The empirical evidence and the discussions clearly indicate the need for a policy environment directing higher education institutions to adapt to student diversity. The policy environment includes federal directives to establish SC/ST cells for monitoring the implementation of reservation at the time of admission, women's cells, anti-ragging cell, grievance redressal cells, and equal opportunity offices to address group-specific concerns of the students pertaining to the norms of behaviour and redressal. These are attempts towards institutionalising the national vision of diversity. However, institutions per se are ill equipped to address the issues of student diversity and equity in higher education institutions. Despite the existence of all types of cells, there is low level of awareness among students about the functions of these cells, the person to contact for lodging a complaint, and the faculty-in-charge for each of the cells. There are also limited opportunities for students from diverse social groups for attending well-designed orientation programmes or receiving academic advice that could have a positive effect on their persistence, and academic and social integration. The fear of stigma remains a stumbling block for the disadvantaged groups in active participation in programmes and extra-curricular activities that address the academic and social needs of diverse students, such as the remediation and National Service Schemes.

Empirical evidence points to an unsupportive and unwelcoming campus climate for the disadvantaged student population. The campus climate and culture can powerfully influence students' experiences. The findings call for clarifying an institutional mission that values diversity and designs practices for achieving diversity. Such practices include setting clear goals and priorities for allocating resources for the learning and development of the under-represented students; for promoting diversity in the daily interactions between the faculty, staff and students to foster a more inclusive campus climate; hiring of diverse faculty and staff; and involving faculty in various diverse initiatives. More importantly, actions at the institutional level ensure

the institutional responsibility for policy adherence and impose an institutional accountability.

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

The higher education sector in India has expanded substantially in recent decades.  Reservation policies, relaxation in admission criteria and other equity measures have played an influencing role in the dissemination of higher education opportunities in India during this stage of massification. Today, diversity in student composition is reflected in terms of the caste, ethnic, class, linguistic, regional, and religious characteristics of the students and their pre-college academic backgrounds. The empirical evidence and analysis shows that accommodating a more diverse student population creates new tensions in higher education institutions both for academic integration and social inclusion. It is argued that the increase in student diversity across the higher education landscape fosters the demand for institutional strategies that respond to this change and promote an inclusive campus environment.

The purpose of the present study was to provide a better understanding of the varying dimensions of student diversity in higher education in India. Specifically, the aim of this research was to understand the social nature of student diversity, diverse academic pathways of gaining access to college for students and their diversity-related experiences on the campus in the context of discrimination and its consequences on peer group formation and the nature of the teacher–student engagement. The study focused on social identity related to caste and ethnicity. Overlapping disadvantages which stem from religion, gender, socio-economic status and location were brought into the discussion in order to represent the plurality of diversity and understand the concomitant cumulative disadvantages. Using a mixed-method approach, the study generated empirical evidence from twelve selected case study institutions located in six states.

Empirical evidence from our study provided us with a strong base for conceptualising a theoretical model of student diversity in higher education and the specific challenges that students from the socially excluded groups face in a stage of massification. We theorised the stages of student diversity in higher education in order to better understand the changing nature of student diversity and how best higher education institutions can respond to the unique challenges faced by students from the traditionally under-represented social groups. Student diversity is classified into three major stages, as follows: Stage I— social diversity, Stage II—academic diversity, and Stage III—social inclusion. While Stage I deals with demographic

diversity in student bodies and is concerned with questions regarding equitable access to higher education opportunities in a vertically and horizontally stratified higher education system, Stage II is concerned with academic integration in classrooms and Stage III with social inclusion in campus life. In other words, while Stage I deals with the system level dynamics of diversity and equity, Stage II and Stage III are concerned with institutional dynamics in achieving equity, equality and inclusion. Achieving each stage positively contributes to the achievement of equity in education, equality and social inclusion in campus life. These stages are unique but inter-related. The proposed classification provides researchers a framework to empirically analyse the levels of student diversity in varying regional and institutional contexts. For policymakers and academic administrators, the classification of student diversity helps in understanding and identifying the challenges in each stage and in developing perspectives and formulating strategies to address these challenges.

The findings from the study show that higher education institutions are gradually moving towards achieving social diversity (Stage I). In other words, campuses have a visible presence of a diverse student body. Social diversity is seen in terms of the class, caste, ethnic, religion, regional and gender-based backgrounds of the students. Amongst other factors, an affirmative action policy at the time of admission has been the major source of social diversity. However, there are institutional disparities in the levels of student diversity. Institutions where admissions are based on selection tests are less diverse (like NIT, Surathkal) vis-à-vis those admitting students based on the latter's performance (scores) at the qualifying level of education. One can also observe over-representation of the advantaged students in elite subjects and elite institutions resulting in the over-representation of students belonging to the lower social strata, underdeveloped regions, and those having studied in the vernacular medium and from poor families in the arts, humanities and social sciences streams. The educational levels of parents—specifically graduate level education— significantly impacts the students' chances of participation in higher education, controlling for household economic status, region (state), location, gender, and socio-religious affiliation. Disciplinary stratification along social lines, in turn, influences individual earnings and social outcomes. These emerging forms of disparities in a massified system call for concerted policy efforts to ensure equal educational opportunities. There is a need for closely assessing this phenomenon of differential access to disciplines or a field of study by campus administrators and for identifying the under-represented groups on their campuses. Finding pathways of access for students from the disadvantaged socio-economic groups and for women, especially in technical, selective and prestigious institutions of higher learning becomes important

for promoting equalisation of access to opportunities for higher education, as social group disparity in accessing different disciplines has far-reaching implications for the achievement of inter-generational equity.

An improvement in access ensures the first level of equity, that is, equity in access, but this is not sufficient. As noted by Tawney (1964, p. 102–103), "equality of opportunity depends not simply on the removal of disabilities but also creation of abilities". It is argued that all the stakeholders of higher education must be aware about the growing student diversity and academic challenges being faced by the diverse student community. The disadvantaged students need even greater support during their academic journey in order to traverse the increasing gap between their entry and exit points. With the point of entry being 'relaxed' due to the reservation policy and relaxation in admission criteria, indicators of academic success at the point of exit necessitate significant academic support for the disadvantaged students.

In terms of the academic nature of diverse student groups, students from the disadvantaged groups, particularly SCs and STs, differ in a number of ways from their peers from the non-disadvantaged groups, and these differences suggest the existence of potential vulnerabilities for the SC and ST students. Most of the ways in which students from the socially excluded groups differ from their peers from the non-socially excluded groups are linked to academic transition, academic performance and opportunity levels for upward mobility. Compared to the non-SC/ST/OBC students, SC and ST students are more likely to be the first in their families or first-generation higher education learners; academically under-prepared for college work; having studied in government schools with regional medium of instruction; studying social sciences and possessing a lower academic–social capital, which is the basic level of knowledge required for entry into college. Being academically under-prepared, the disadvantaged students exhibit low levels of proficiency in language and low pre-college scores, which culminate in their failure to clear examinations in the initial semester, thereby posing challenges not only for their academic integration in college but also in the completion of their graduate-level studies and the acquisition of degrees. All this leads to an accumulation of back-papers that need to be cleared, thus increasing the time taken to complete the degree or even causing the students to drop out of college. This process of poor performance negatively impacts academic motivation and  the stress of having to study for the pending back-papers also has a psychological impact, resulting in lower levels of confidence and triggering undesirable social outcomes (like suicidal tendencies). Due to this lack of confidence, students from disadvantaged backgrounds ask fewer questions in the classrooms to

clarify their doubts, as compared to their peers from advantaged backgrounds. This places students from socially excluded groups at an academic risk, which, in turn necessitates more concerted efforts to address their risks and vulnerabilities, and to facilitate their smooth transition from high school to college.

The smooth transition from high school to college also needs to be achieved through the introduction of programmes that facilitate collaboration between the high school and colleges. Linking higher education institutions with neighbouring schools has been a potential policy option for preparing school graduates for higher education. The wider dissemination of educational opportunities and nurturing of academic skills and competencies needed for higher education could also be initiated when the students are still in higher secondary school. Since undergraduate students come to college directly from school, it is possible for them to carry forward the deficiencies of the schooling system. Academic support programmes should thus be put in place in higher education institutions for students from less prestigious schools accounting for a large number of disadvantaged students. Unless and until academic differences are addressed and supportive academic opportunities are provided, The vast pool of higher education learners will not be able to realise their full potential unless these academic differences are addressed and the disadvantaged students are offered support in the pursuit of their academic activities. In colleges, there is also a strong need for comprehensive academic remediation, and for organising orientation programmes for students to ensure effective social and academic integration effective and greater teacher–student engagement. Importantly, our findings suggest that greater student–teacher engagement is required especially in the semester system where students have to choose their subjects, learn new academic skills to write assignments which require additional readings, consult libraries, engage in project work, and make presentations in class. In terms of academic support, there is a need for systematic and comprehensive academic support services in the form of remediation, 'learning laboratories', tutorial services, and monitoring of the students' progress. These are some established strategies that directly address the academic risks being faced by students. Although remedial coaching exists in many campuses today for the purpose of bridging the academic gap, there is very little awareness among the target groups about remedial teaching. Students do not receive adequate information from colleges and universities about the organisation of remedial classes. This limits participation from students in bridging their gaps and standing at par with their more accomplished peers. There is also a caste stigma attached to remedial coaching classes as such classes are perceived to be only for the SC and ST students. This further poses challenges for the active participation of students from

disadvantaged groups. Challenges such as lack of information on remedial coaching, and delay in commencement of classes at the start of the term as expressed by students can be resolved through administrative measures. These include providing information on remedial coaching in the classrooms, scheduling remedial classes from the beginning of the term and displaying the timetable on the notice board inside the classroom. Other measures such as making digital contents on subjects available to students to enable them to prepare for classroom discussions in advance and establishing language laboratories to help improve the language proficiencies of students will also enhance the possibilities of academic integration.

Learning laboratories for small groups of students can also be established in higher education institutions. These laboratories are based on the concept of active and collaborative learning by being part of learning communities. The learning community (LC) is defined as "small subgroups of students...characterised by a common sense of purpose...that can be used to build a sense of group identity, cohesiveness and uniqueness that encourage continuity and integration of diverse curricular and co-curricular experiences" (Kellog, 1999, p.2). LCs provide a network of support and facilitate students' participation in social and academic domain of colleges. These communities also create a sense of common purpose, which promotes the intellectual interactions of students with their peers and teachers. Some of the case study institutions for this study were also seen to be aligning academic enrichment programmes with co-curricular programmes for academic skill building by offering social and emotional support to students. This helps coalesce the academic and social experiences of students, and foster 'social learning' programmes to facilitate a more positive campus experience for the first-generation learners.

There is also a need for system level thinking and institutional level planning for addressing the academic challenges faced by students. For this purpose, institutions should recognise and internalise the role of remedial and bridge programmes for students facing academic challenges. This initiative should be an integral part of academic planning. Mechanisms like the internal quality assurance cell (IQAC) that exist in colleges and universities must incorporate this as a core function of the cell. Along with the other stakeholders, libraries as centres for learning and librarians as professionals also have a major role to play in improving academic and information literacy, and hence the academic success of students. The untapped professional expertise of librarians can be better channelled for achieving institutional growth and promoting success among students. This would also help students bridge

their academic gaps and realise their full potential in an era of information and knowledge explosion.

During Stage III, where we focus on social inclusion, our findings indicate that students from diverse social groups feel unwelcome in their campuses as they face an insensitive environment and persistent discrimination, which, as per the accounts of student experiences and perceptions of teachers and administrative staff indicate that discrimination is ingrained in the system. Caste- and ethnicity-based discrimination and gender stereotyping also adversely affect the campus life of disadvantaged students. Discrimination exists in three major domains of campus life, including the academic domain, social domain and administrative domain. Teacher–student interactions and peer formation are major spaces of discrimination. Teacher-student and peer group interactions are divided on caste lines. Due to these practices, students from the disadvantaged groups get less attention from their teachers and they are less likely to be encouraged to organise academic and non-academic events in the campuses. Teacher–student engagement outside the class room is also limited. This negatively impacts their confidence and active participation in the campuses. It is important for teachers to consistently encourage and reassure students that their queries outside the classroom are welcome and that would be taken seriously. It has also been found that the dominant attitude of faculty members and institutions towards increasing student diversity is mostly negative. This points to an urgent need to sensitise stakeholders of higher education such as teachers, administrators and staff about the notion of equity in higher education and its underlying principles of social justice and democratisation. It is also important to create a wider awareness among the institutional stakeholders that the massification or expansion of higher education is socially and economically rewarding in the context of the emerging knowledge economies.

Identity-based peer group formation is visible in all institutions, and the reasons for this phenomenon vary by social group. The fear of discrimination among the disadvantaged and the fact that they are targets of derogatory remarks lead them to confine their interaction to peers from their own identity group, and this kind of same group preference is also witnessed among the advantaged sections. Various factors such as an unsafe campus environment, restriction on their freedom of movement and their liberty to wear clothes of their choice, and gender stereotyping continue to affect the lives of women students and constrains them from realising their full potential. Women belonging to the SC and ST social groups are particularly vulnerable to both caste- and gender-based discrimination and derogatory comments

and behaviour, which are often used to embarrass and harass them in public. These trends, in fact, reflect how social divisions and patriarchal norms are getting reproduced in campuses. As a result, instead of being offered the opportunity for social and academic integration within the larger community of students, the disadvantaged students are left with a feeling of being unwelcome in higher education institutions. In this context, it is essential to organise well-designed induction and orientation programmes for first-year students during the early days of their academic year, as this is the period when students are most likely to encounter difficulties, specifically, in their struggle to adjust socially to the higher education culture. Well-designed orientation programmes have the potential to help students develop a sense of belonging while they also help in clarifying university procedures, and expectations. The orientation programme for students should include information on various institutional diversity enhancing mechanisms, remediation programmes and the extra-curricular activities offered. In order to make the social and cultural life of the campus inclusive, it is important to ensure equal participation of students from diverse backgrounds in extra-curricular activities. Promoting mixed social group hostels and cross-identity peer groups, programmes for gender sensitisation and planned curricular and co-curricular activities for civic learning amongst students have a great potential of fostering a spirit of fraternity.

The empirical evidence generated in the study clearly shows that institutional receptivity towards the disadvantaged is poor and often negative. Institutions constituting the system and its mechanisms are ill-equipped to address the concerns of and challenges faced by the disadvantaged students. The findings suggest that the prevailing practices of discrimination and institutional practices, in fact, negate the wider goals of equity in higher education. The other major challenges in this area include lack of sensitivity, prevalence of negative stereotypes towards student diversity and the stigmatisation of the beneficiary groups. Such beliefs, values and cultural norms shape the perspectives of those implementing the existing diversity initiatives within the institutions. Programmes wherein students from the socially excluded groups participate such as remedial coaching and the National Service Schemes (NSS) are often stigmatised. Certain prejudiced attitudes and dominant ideology, indicators that shape organisational culture, have resulted in the perception that the NSS is a sort of ghetto for the SC and OBC students, resulting in stigmatisation of participation in the NSS. The perceptions of faculty members were also found to be negative towards participation in NSS activities and they were reluctant to be associated with NSS, which they perceived would be a stigma.

The evidence points to a general trend which indicates that instead of responding to social diversity and exploring its potential for social transformation, institutional leaders and faculty members believe that the changing nature of student diversity is leading to a deterioration in the 'quality' of the higher education system. Insensitivity from the campus administrators and institutional leaders can create a vacuum in the discourse on diversity and equity in higher education. A strong conflict between the ideology of social justice and equity, on one hand, and meritocracy, on the other, is also clearly seen. Although the institutional vision and mission in its 'word mode' uphold the spirit of equity and inclusion, the institutional climate and institutional culture in the 'action mode' seldom uphold the spirit of the institutions' own vision and mission. It has also been observed that higher education campuses that propagate and promote social change resist changing themselves. Efforts thus need to be made to make higher education campuses more receptive to diverse student bodies, enabling a conducive and a more positive social and academic environment, and developing a positive perspective that values student diversity.

Cultivating a positive perspective towards student diversity means being sensitive towards the students and their problems, and being able to relate to students in a positive manner. This necessitates a strategy that addresses the stakeholders 'sense-making', which is influenced by the beliefs, values and cultural norms that shape their perspective towards student diversity. Institutional leaders, faculty members and administrative staff need to be sensitised about the positive value of student diversity and inclusion. As is being increasingly expressed in literature, a diverse student body promotes a conducive atmosphere for promoting quality higher education and civic learning. In order to realise the goals of social inclusion and make the campuses of higher education institutions more inclusive, institutional leaders should ensure that the designated special cells are functional and effective in addressing the group-specific concerns and needs of the target groups. The cells need to organise programmes in such way that the beneficiary groups are not stigmatised, and teachers from the disadvantaged social groups are recruited and appointed as per the opportunities available without any discrimination. Further, to make the institutional decision making more evidence-based, in line with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in the USA, the National Survey of Student Experiences (NSSE) may be launched at the national level to periodically collect information from students about their social and academic life in campuses. Similar periodical student surveys may be carried out by institutions and a student feedback mechanism may be introduced at the institute level to facilitate an assessment of the situation, and planning and monitoring of the programmes. The adoption of an institutional

research model would be a rewarding exercise. Like the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), institutional research can perform its role as an independent cell with the wider participation of faculty and students. It is not merely the end-product of this research in the form of analysis and report, but also the process of institutional research on student experiences that will have positive impacts on institutional culture and sensitivity to diversity.

To summarise, campuses are gradually moving towards Stage I diversity. However, they have a long distance to travel to achieve Stage II and Stage III diversity, that is, academic diversity and social inclusion, which are largely determined by institutional support and commitment. Discrimination assumes various forms in each stage of student diversity. However, inequities and discriminatory practices in each stage negatively affect student success and impact inter-generational and intra-generational equity. While unequal access to the different types of institutions and programmes has been a major challenge in Stage I diversity, inadequacies of teaching–learning practices and the prevailing exclusionary practices in campus life have been major concerns in the achievement of academic diversity and social inclusion. Institutions need to traverse a long distance to achieve the stages of academic diversity and social inclusion. This study clearly shows that we have reached a stage where more attention needs to be paid to the initiatives within institutions. Institutional efforts are crucial in achieving all the three stages. However, the need for such efforts is greater during Stage II and Stage III. As compared to Stage I, which is largely beyond the control of institutions, Stage II and Stage III diversity can be achieved only through institutional interventions. It requires changes in the beliefs, values, assumptions and actions of the major stakeholders of higher education institutions as also in the ways in which these institutions are governed and managed. Both the academic and non-academic spheres of social existence of students have to be democratic. Unless and until academic diversity and social inclusion are achieved, progress in the achievement in Stage I diversity may pose challenges for institutions and students. The consequent experiences of student bodies and their outcomes do not support the achievement of larger goals of equity in education and development. Therefore, the determinants of the future are embedded in the capacity of institutions to adapt to the changing nature of student diversity and adherence to the principles of equity, democracy and social justice in both the structure and process of higher education. The social and economic benefits of massification are linked to these institutional interventions in accordance with the policy directions of equity.

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*Annexure 1*

CPRHE Research Reports on the Study of Diversity and Discrimination:

- "Diversity and Discrimination in Higher Education: A Study of Institutions in Selected States of India" by Dr. Nidhi S. Sabharwal and Dr. C.M. Malish, New Delhi, CPRHE, NIEPA, 2016.

- "Diversity and Discrimination In Higher Education: A Study of Selected Institutions in Bihar" by Professor Asha Singh, Dr. Fazal Ahmad and Dr. Barna Ganguli, New Delhi, CPRHE, NIEPA, 2016.

- "Diversity and Discrimination In Higher Education: A Study of Selected Institutions in Delhi" by Dr. C.V. Babu, Dr. Satyender Kumar and Dr. Nitin Kumar, CPRHE, NIEPA, 2016

- "Diversity and Discrimination In Higher Education: A Study of Selected Institutions in Uttar Pradesh" by Professor Nidhi Bala, Dr. Shravan Kumar and Dr. Roma Smart Joseph, New Delhi, CPRHE, NIEPA, 2016.

- "Diversity and Discrimination In Higher Education: A Study of Selected Institutions in Karnataka" by Dr. Sreejith Alathur, Professor A.H. Sequeira and Dr. B.V. Gopalakrishna, New Delhi, CPRHE, NIEPA, 2016.

- "Diversity and Discrimination in Higher Education: A Study of Selected Institutions in Maharashtra" by Dr. H.A. Hudda, Dr. A.V. Talmale and Dr. A.C. Bankar, New Delhi, CPRHE, NIEPA, 2016.

- "Diversity and Discrimination In Higher Education: A Study of Selected Institutions in Kerala" by Professor K.X. Joseph, Dr. T.D. Simon and Dr. K. Rajesh, New Delhi, CPRHE, NIEPA, 2016.