

Gendered Social Environment And Urban Development: A Study On The North Campus Of The University Of Delhi

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate the implications of finding safe accommodation for female students from different parts of the country through a field study conducted from August to October 2022 in the neighbourhood areas of North Campus, University of Delhi, particularly in the context of the University resuming offline classes in the post-COVID-19 world. On the one hand, this paper highlights how young girls explore the city by utilising paid guest facilities (PGs) in the area and empowering themselves to stay alone in the city. On the other hand, this transition to urban areas exposes the faultlines of the social environment in terms of gender, class, caste, region and religion.

This research takes a sample of twenty PGs with 40 participants. These PGs are chosen based on their location, that is, in the neighbourhood of North Campus, University of Delhi, namely, Roop Nagar, Kamala Nagar, Vijay Nagar, Mukherjee Nagar, Hudson Lane and Shakti Nagar. The study's major highlight is to understand the gendered social environment in the university space and how it is linked with urban development.

This work is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. A feminist standpoint methodology is adopted to understand the universal and yet particular experiences of female students coming to the University of Delhi to pursue their higher education. It reflects power dynamics between different types of girls (meaning girls coming from diverse social and economic backgrounds) sharing a space. It has taken an inductive method to understand a contextual experience in North Campus, University of Delhi, and then apply these learnings to larger urban spaces. This research navigates negotiations taking place between parents, students and PG owners. The voices are valuable as they raise questions of security and inclusivity related to urban development.

Keywords: *University of Delhi, Paying Guest facilities, Urban Development and Gender.*

University and the Social Environment

The social environment perspective in this paper offers the impact of social and cultural discourses in contouring acceptable behaviour and experience. From different parts of the country, students seek admission to various courses and colleges to fulfil their larger purpose and passion. In a country like India, in seeking better educational opportunities, students from various corners of the country mostly take their first flight away from home to the best universities in urban spaces like Delhi. The aspirations of parents and the ambitions of students make this mass migration an annual ritual. Only the characters change, but the concerns are similar. Therefore, the social environment attached to the university becomes crucial.

Largely, the university is understood as a space to foster critical thinking and sharpen communication skills. For most students, entering university is also a threshold between their adolescence and adulthood. It has a literal and symbolic value (Walsh 2015). It is a space they are seeking to shape themselves. It is the place where various ideas and ideologies are floated, and students are immersed in different world viewpoints. It is the first platform to mould one's passions, perspectives and purposes.

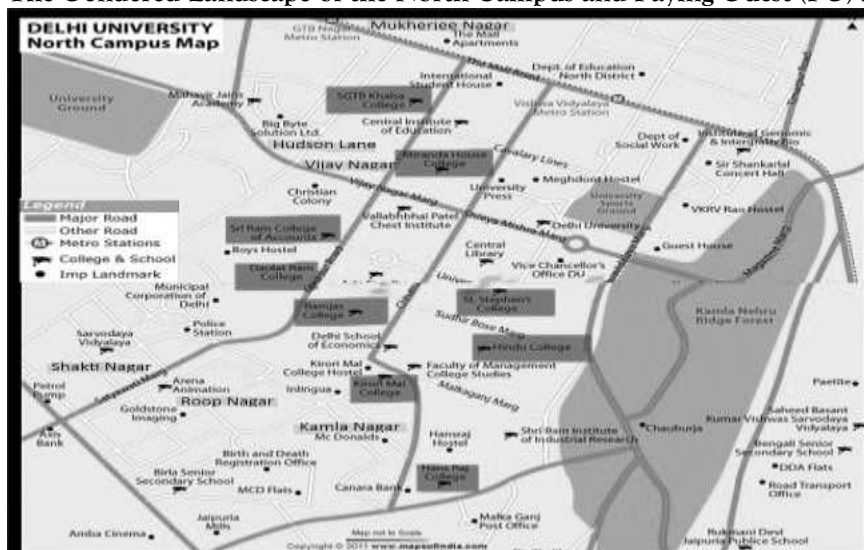
When we trace the historical evolution of universities, we understand that this space is associated with exclusion and elitism. In the particular case of India, it is a space based on excluding students based on caste, gender, religion and region. However, this exclusionary and elitist space of the university has been constantly challenged by the intervention of both the state and the market. With the intervention of the British colonial administration in the field of education and some princely states, the doors of universities are open for students from diverse social and economic backgrounds. It is a space attached to social and economic mobility, a trump card to the 'middle class'. In this sense, education is understood in terms of being a public good and the university as a space with democratic promise. With the pulls and pressures of the state and market, this space is a mosaic of politics and factions, both among faculty and students. Students arrive at the university to better their lives and have the passion to be part of knowledge creation. In the process, some of them feel withdrawn as they realise this path to enlightenment and equality is tough. Just reaching the university space is not enough, but the democratic inclusion of all in the system is far from reality. At the same time, some students treat university as a space that provides scope for self-

reflection and critically engages with burning societal issues. It is a process of continuous learning and unlearning to navigate new equality and inequalities. Here, with the promise of equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution and subsequent laws, first-generation learners get access to knowledge. They get an opportunity to interact with students of diverse identities based on caste, class, gender, sexuality, religion and region. However, this interaction also creates friction and tension as a particular group may feel entitled to the university space and perceive others as intruders and outliers (Nair 2017 and Garalytė 2020).

According to Antony Giddens (1990), modernity brings globalising institutions that lead to the 'disembedding' of social relations. This means in modern educational institutions, cutting across geographical boundaries, students are reaching university spaces from diverse 'local' markers, and the university lifts them away from that particular identity to a universal identity of being a student. Thus, restructuring the separation of space and time. In the university spaces marked by state policies of equality, societal hierarchies and market inequalities, the search for dignity and security on an everyday basis becomes a reality. The need for ontological security on an everyday basis becomes a necessity in a globalised world (Kinnvall 2017). To aspire for ontological security in the transition phase is a natural tendency among students, particularly among female students, as gender question adds multiple layers of discrimination. The increased accessibility and mobility to modern educational institutions expose female students to various forms of corruption and patriarchal prejudices. How to navigate shifting paradigms of self/others, rural/semi-urban/urban spaces, knowledge/ignorance, inclusion/exclusion and equality/inequality is an everyday challenge.

At the University of Delhi, the entry of women in large numbers reflects a powerful democratisation process. Girls have forged friendships for life and collectively experienced greater freedom on campus. However, addressing gender questions is not a priority on campus. There is a constant absence of gender sensitivity on the campus and a larger tendency to treat all girls/women as the same without considering their internal diversities based on class, caste, religion, region and sexuality. Girls have constantly faced discrimination and disadvantage based on gender and other particular social and economic markers. Even the Saksham Report¹ highlights the fact that there have to be concrete steps taken by the universities to ensure a safe transition from adolescence to adulthood for female students on campuses (John 2016). One of the places where these bonds and tensions are produced and performed is hostel/ accommodation spaces. When accommodation is provided by the state university within the campus, some norms of impartiality and equality are at least outwardly projected. This is evident in the way the merit list for hostel accommodation is created and various reservation policies are adopted to make this distribution of limited rooms inclusive. After the initial democratic inclusion, this space also witnesses segmenting tendencies based on cultural claims and class manifestations. However, the focus of this research paper is on Paying Guest (PG) accommodations provided to those outstation girl students who fail to get hostel accommodation in their respective colleges and are struggling to get a foothold in a new city.

The Gendered Landscape of the North Campus and Paying Guest (PG) Accommodations



Source: www.mapofindia.com

Legends

Name of the place	Name and Year of the Undergraduate Colleges in the area
Shakti Nagar	Hansraj College (1948)
Kamala Nagar	Kirori Mal College (1954)
Roop Nagar	Hindu College (1899)
Hudson Lane	St. Stephen's College (1881)
Vijaya Nagar	Ramjas College (1917)
Mukherjee Nagar	Daulat Ram College (1960)
	Sri Ram College of Commerce (1926)
	Miranda House (1948)
	Khalsa College (1951)

By looking at the map, we can understand that the area is a cluster of educational institutions offering higher education. When we trace the origin of these undergraduate colleges, it is evident that the collaborative existence of these institutions has happened from the colonial era to the present. Similarly, the residential areas have sustained themselves for a long time. However, the mass migration of outstation students to the North Campus, University of Delhi, triggered the commercial benefits of the area. From small tea stalls, eating joints, PGs, to shopping malls have mushroomed in the area. Gradually, the residential nature of the adjacent areas was transformed into a commercial one. Therefore, there is a symbiotic relationship between commercial interests and educational interests. For students pursuing their educational passion and purpose in North Campus, their PGs became the platform of survival. Over the years, not only have the rent and living expenses in the adjacent areas skyrocketed, but safety and security challenges have manifolded. In the pre-COVID-19 era, June was the month of admissions to these undergraduate colleges and the rush to find a suitable PG began at the end of May and concluded by the end of July. The fresh-out-of-school students, with dreams in their eyes to find meaning in their lives, start exploring the options to survive in the city. In this pursuit, parents, relatives, seniors, social media, property dealers and PG Owners are in constant negotiations and bargaining to strike the best deal.

What this map doesn't show is the artificial borders and gendered space in the safety discourse of a large public university. In the name of crime prevention, certain unsaid areas are marked as non-accessible to girls/women or as dangerous for girls/women to explore. The gendered notions of what the place of a woman shapes the safety discourse and becomes unquestionable. This social control over the physical and sexual safety of women is an everyday phenomenon, and it diminishes women's full potential (Walsh 2015 and Mackinnon 2016). This creates a gendered social environment wherein gender becomes the core identity to navigate a space.

In this study, we have focused on the trials, tribulations and triumphs of female students seeking safe accommodation in the first batch of post-COVID-19 offline academic sessions. The time of conducting the field study is from August to October 2022. This period is crucial due to the uncertainties of life marked by COVID-19. On the one hand, the extra concern for hygiene, virtual and actual connectivity and the safety of students are new developments. On the other hand, the desperation of the PG owners to recover the financial losses made during the COVID-19 times made the situation highly unpredictable and expensive. There are new terms and conditions for finalising a deal. Unlike in previous years, parents and students are cautious about interacting with unknown persons for fear of contracting the virus or physically travelling to all places. Likewise, PG owners are demanding online advance payments in bulk. There are networks of virtual financial fraud and fake visuals and projections of properties. To navigate and negotiate this new post-COVID-19 gendered social environment is a challenge of unprecedented levels.

In the following paragraphs, we will discuss narratives of female students who stayed in PG accommodation on the North Campus. As per the proximity to the college, students preferred their PG accommodation, as travelling is a major concern. Most of them search for PGs having walking distance from their respective colleges. For instance, students in Khalsa College, Miranda House, Daulat Ram and Shri Ram College of Commerce predominantly prefer accommodation at Vijay Nagar, Hudson Lane and Mukherjee Nagar. While students studying at Ramjas, Hindu College, St. Stephen's, Kirori Mal and Hansraj College mostly opt for Kamala Nagar, Roop Nagar and Shakti Nagar. Other than the distance,

the money factor is an important aspect in considering a particular PG. In this study, we interacted with students who opted for single, double and triple seater rooms. For most of the single-seater rooms, the rent range is between rupees 22,000 to 25,000 per month. In most cases, additional charges for electricity were levied. The participants with family income between rupees 2 lakh to 2.5 lakh per month (in most cases, both parents are paid workers) could opt for the single-seater rooms. Out of 40 participants, only 4 students opted for single-seater rooms. Most of the participants, 21 out of 40, opted for double-seater rooms. The rent range for the double-seater rooms is between rupees 15,000 to 22,000. This arrangement is most suitable for students as it is more affordable and balances loneliness and the crowd. The triple-seater rooms are mostly preferred by students facing financial limitations. The rent range for this category of rooms varied between rupees 8,500 to 15,000. After the criteria of distance and finance, students paid maximum attention to hygiene and the quality of food available in the PG.

As mentioned earlier, this batch of 2022-23 is unique in the sense that this is the first post-COVID batch to have offline classes in the first year of admission. Therefore, outstation students had minimal reference points from immediate seniors as they never physically shifted to Delhi. Even with reference from seniors, things have changed too much to gather a sense of the situation to find a safe and affordable PG accommodation.

When we speak about outstation girl students staying in PG accommodation in the North Campus, the category is complex and multi-layered. These students are similar in terms of their age, but they are different on the grounds of religion, region, class, caste and sexuality. For the convenience of understanding students' aspirations and larger experiences, we have divided them based on region. Afreen, Ada, Firdaus, Fathima and Nazreen are Muslim girls from different parts of Kerala. Afreen and Firdaus live in a PG run by a Muslim organisation. The PG owner is known by their family members. In terms of acquaintance and finance, both of them opted for this PG, rather than their parents choosing this PG. They have opted for a two-seater room as both of them are school friends. They are happy to be together but feel things could have been better in terms of food quality and curfew timings (8.00 pm). They have settled for this PG for multiple reasons. Firstly, as first-generation female students studying outside the state, the familiarity of the PG owner with their parents opened the doors for their studies. Secondly, when seen from the vantage point of the parents, the religious affiliation of the PG ensured certain continuities and control over girls. Parents feel that their daughters are in safe hands, especially in keeping intact cultural affinities in a big city like Delhi. Ada and Fathima came to know about the PG from a senior. They chose the PG for its proximity to the college. They shared that the most significant concern for their parents was safety. The shadows of the Delhi Rape Caseⁱⁱ (2012) were enough to deny their dream of studying at the University of Delhi. Not only violence against women, but also increasing targeted violence against Muslim women has raised concerns among parents. Mary John (2016) highlights how women students who wear the hijab were recipients of frequent comments, taunts and harassment. Sometimes, attacks on Muslim women in public spaces are justified for political reasons, as a reaction to supposed violence committed by Muslim men against Hindu women (Kabeer 2014). Therefore, the atmosphere of Islamophobia and patriarchy makes choices available to Muslim women to pursue their purpose and passion very limited and controlled. Similarly, here the girls have prioritised their security as Muslim girls in a city over the comfort of existence. They have opted for a double-seater room. However, they are not happy with the food quality and hygiene. Nazreen is living in a single-seater PG. As she belongs to a big business family, funding her stay in Delhi was not a problem. She feels that Delhi, as a city, is a stepping stone towards her larger plans to study abroad for her master's degree. She has the support of her family in pursuing her studies in Delhi. However, the air pollution of the city has made her ill most of the time with breathing problems. The presence of open and polluted drains and garbage-driven roads adds to the health woes of the people. She strongly feels that the government should improve the city's air and water quality and the locality's hygiene factor. Her educational ambitions are negatively affected by the pollution of the city.

Athira, Baby, G. Divya, V. Kamala and Sunitha are from different South Indian states. Athira (a Hindu student) and Baby (a Christian student) share a room in the PG. Both of them are from Kerala. For them, language is a great barrier to interacting with students from other parts of the country. They came to know about this Malayalee-owned PG through an online portal. The promise of good quality food, Wi-Fi facility and hygiene are the reasons that attracted them to this PG. Once they reached Delhi, their parents inquired about the security measures taken in the PG and the travelling facilities available. They are satisfied with the option of a self-cooking kitchen facility, installation of CCTV, a lift in the building, a

nearby metro station and an e-rickshaw stand adjacent to the building. The rent is affordable, too. They want to explore the University of Delhi not only for studies but also for co-curricular activities. Inter-college competitions and collaborations are added advantages at the University. They feel the quality and quantity of these activities are much better than those available in their home state. They hope to harness their skills in these aspects while studying at the University. G. Divya, V. Kamala and Sunita are from the state of Telangana. It is the transformation seen in their seniors from school who studied at the University of Delhi that propelled them to the same path. All of them have cited that the confidence gained to deal with difficult situations in a big city and the ability to live independently from the family are the factors that seniors shared with them. They find that the task of balancing studies with all other responsibilities and distractions will enhance their true self. They miss their home-cooked food and pampering at home. However, becoming someone with self-worth demands this hardship. All three of them are preparing for civil service exams simultaneously with their graduation classes. Therefore, the calm and comfortable atmosphere provided by the PG is an excellent platform for their transition from adolescents to adults. Anu, Deepti and Komal are from the state of Rajasthan. Their ambition is to escape rigid patriarchal norms and transform themselves into confident women. These factors have charted their path to the University of Delhi and are searching for PG accommodation. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, their search for a suitable PG was done online. After shortlisting three options, they came with their parents to Delhi to finalise the PG. Looking back, they feel there was an unsaid tension and rather contradictions between their parents' expectations and their own. Parents saw this shift to the University of Delhi as a trump card for better marriage proposals, whereas girls visualised it as a trump card for better career prospects. It is a predominant view that the West and Westernisation corrupt young girls in the city, and they forget their primary role as bearers of the culture and traditions of the community (Yuval-Davis 2008). Overcoming these prejudiced perceptions, Anu wants to be an air hostess. She admires the grace and sophistication in this profession. Additionally, she feels her dream to fly to different cities can be fulfilled in this profession. For this, near her PG itself, she has joined a spoken English course (three days a week) and on weekends she attends a Spanish class in Central Delhi. The easy access to her classes via e-rickshaw and Delhi metro rail services has helped her to balance her commitments. Deepti wants to pursue an academic line. She envisions herself as a professor in future. For this, she has joined a coaching class for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in Central Delhi and is following online courses on academic writing and publishing. She is also pursuing an internship with an NGO engaged in educating slum-dwelling children in the neighbourhood. She feels that Delhi has expanded her horizon for future endeavours. The easy transport connectivity and excellent Wi-Fi connectivity in the PG have helped her immensely to follow her dreams. Komal is a sportsperson (tennis player) and has been admitted to the University under the sports quota facility. Her seniors in the school have inspired her to study at the University of Delhi. Her days begin early with practice sessions in the college, and post-classes she trains in an academy in North Delhi itself. Her choice of PG is based on the proximity of the place to both her college and sports academy. Another factor that has been given importance in selecting the PG accommodation is the quality of the food served and the provision for self-cooking. As a sportsperson, she has a strict diet plan to follow. She balances it with self-cooking. She feels that staying together with other girls (she has opted for a three-seater room) has helped her mental health. After all, staying alone and rigorous sports practice create multiple challenges. Therefore, venting out with her roommates and seeking their input has helped her immensely. Anu, Deepti and Komal agree that their modern outfits and attitudes are not exposed to their loved ones in their home town. They say that they have not openly challenged patriarchy as they are not powerful enough now to withstand the opposition. If they do so now, it will be the end of their stay in Delhi. However, they have subverted the patriarchy by having the best of both worlds. In Delhi, they live the way they want to, in terms of their dress and roaming around without restrictions. But in their hometown visits during vacations, they will revert to their traditional attire and appearances. This gives assurance to their parents that our girls have kept traditions intact and that sending them to Delhi is not a mistake. For them, their PG and Delhi as a city have enabled them to navigate the vicissitudes of life.

Priya and Varsha are from Uttar Pradesh and are roommates. They also belong to the same city and caste. In their interactions, they have realised that even in big cities, particular social markers of caste, class, gender and region matter. Both in college and their PG, they have seen how friendships are forged based on these identities. They have seen how there is a language barrier between English-speaking and Hindi-speaking students at both places. There are some subtle and some overt ways to find out about the caste

and class status of students. The study on the hostel experience of students in one of the Central Universities also highlights the fact that after the automatic allocation of rooms by the administration, special requests from parents and students come based on their refusal to share the room with a student who speaks another language or belongs to a particular caste or religion. There is a constant tension between rights-based discourses and cultural entitlements on campus (Nair 2017). Despite all these hierarchies, they have found new and helpful friends in the city. For them, it has strengthened their understanding of the self and society at large. As they come from economically and socially backward communities, their selection of a PG is purely based on financial constraints. To spend rupees 10,000 per month on a girl child's education is a big challenge for their family. They have settled for one of the affordable PGs in the locality. They go to college by walking and never eat outside, even when the food served at the PG is monotonous and of low quality. One thing that they are constantly learning is financial management. They try to minimise requests for money from their families. Both of them are preparing for various government service entrance exams. They feel that they have to take the best out of their stay in Delhi to ensure a better life in future. The curfew time in their PG is 8.30 pm, and they don't complain about it. For them, the little freedoms in a big city are enough to sustain their dreams. This highlights how girls who are already fighting conservative family backgrounds and limited economic resources internalise restrictions as natural (John 2016).

Gurpreet, Harshpreet and Jolly are from Punjab. All of them have opted for double-seater rooms. For them, staying in a PG is nothing but bargaining daily. From hygiene to food quality, they know that one has to express oneself to get a better deal. The important lesson that they have learnt while staying in PG is to speak up. It is not easy. Being raised as obedient daughters and trained to become dutiful wives and mothers, knowing the self and standing for that self is a new, empowering experience for these girls. They cite an incident when girls collectively fought the PG owner for extending curfew timings from 8.30 pm to 10.30 pm. They feel that there should not be any curfew timings, but extending the limit is a small victory for the time being. They are aware of the *Pinjara Tod* movementⁱⁱⁱ that began on the campus in 2014 and feel that things are changing, but slowly. The curfew on women's movement in the public spaces reflects the conventional notions of female bodies as risky, and the responsibility for inviting sexual harassment falls on the shoulders of women. Instead of controlling and punishing men who perpetrate sexual harassment, women are controlled, blamed and punished (Hall 2002). Women are constantly projected as vulnerable and need constant protection from parents, PG owners and University officials. Despite all these societal restrictions, together, they want to start a business that deals with nature-friendly, homemade bathing products for women. This is one way of spreading the message of self-love and self-care among women. To fulfil this vision, they are currently taking courses on making herbal beauty products in North Delhi. They pointed out that in our patriarchal society, as girls and later as women, we are always taught to compromise and sacrifice for the well-being of loved ones. Therefore, they have decided to be financially independent in future and help other women to find their self-worth. Through their conversation, they highlighted that staying in Delhi has taught them that class, caste, religion, region and other social markers are immaterial when it comes to the subjugation of women, only the degree varies. This has strengthened their understanding that a woman takes care of everything only when she cares for herself. They clarify that it is not a fight against men but a fight together with men. They look forward to having partners in future who value them.

Navpreet and Noor are from Haryana. Navpreet, in her third year of graduation, is from a farming family and has opted for a three-seater room. Finding a room in February 2022 (when offline classes began for them) is seen as a blessing, for many affordable options are available. Noor is from an academic family where both her parents are professors. She has opted for a single-seater room. Both of them go to the same college. For Navpreet, coming to Delhi and staying alone is a dream coming true. She had never ventured out of her village in Haryana. She is a first-generation learner in an undergraduate course from her family. Her boyfriend, who was a senior at her school, is already studying at the University of Delhi and joining him in Delhi has been her motive. Both of them are also sportspersons (sprinters). At her PG, boys are not allowed, and there is a curfew of 10.00 pm, but she meets her boyfriend during the day outside. They also travel together to their village during vacations. Her family is not aware of the relationship, and they will not approve of it as they belong to different communities. The curfew timings are also a way to infantilise an adult woman and curtail her choices of consent-based companionships/friendships. Gendered social environment is sustained in the campus area. There is an unsaid pact between the parents, PG owners and administration for restricting the autonomy and

mobility of young girls. Here, the twin objectives of disciplining and surveillance over women's bodies are fulfilled. Women on campus facing harassment are not allowed to speak but are spoken about (Bano, Nanda, Bandyopadhyay and Datta 2011; Krishnan 2018). Navpreet is aware of all these limitations, but she is focusing on both her studies and sports training to justify her stay in Delhi. She aspires to represent the country at international competitions. For her, studies and sports are the trump cards to escape marriage pressure at home. Her stay at the PG has offered her new friendships with whom she can share her fears and fantasies without being judged. From Noor's vantage point, staying alone in Delhi in a PG is a preparatory ground to explore the world at large. She is taking this phase of her life as a brief training to prepare for bigger cities in the world. She aspires to work in the United Nations (UN). To enhance her skill sets, she is simultaneously taking coaching in Spanish and French. She is also associated with an international NGO working on food security. She has already done internships with UN agencies in Delhi. For all these reasons, she has opted for a single-seater room. She is happy with the facilities provided at the PG in terms of food, hygiene and internet connectivity.

Alice, Cynthia, Mumma, Sonam and Wang are from the North-East states of India. They are staying together in a private PG exclusively run by and for the Northeast girl students at the University of Delhi. Many of their school seniors have already studied at the University and have guided them about this particular PG. Alice and Cynthia are from Manipur. Mumma and Sonam are from Arunachal Pradesh. Wang is from Nagaland. This PG is a home away from home. The owner provides authentic and clean food specialities from various states of the Northeast. In this PG, they have realised that the internal politics of Northeast states become immaterial once they are in a big city like Delhi. The 'othering' process that happens in Delhi of female students from the Northeast makes them stand together. The stereotypical notions of them as morally corrupt and sexually promiscuous have led them instances of abuse on the streets of Delhi. According to Amal Krishna Saha and Arunava Saha (2017), there are multiple reasons for sexual harassment on the streets. The reasons can be unemployment, drug abuse, the patriarchal perception of women as commodities and the unequal treatment given to women by men in their intimate relationships. Initially, it was a cultural shock, no matter how much their seniors had warned them about it. In this background, this PG has provided them with a warm and secure atmosphere. There is no curfew time at their PG, and boys are also allowed to visit them during the day. They want to make friends from other parts of India, but believe it will be a cautious path to follow. They have highlighted the fact that friendships can happen only when spontaneous and genuine efforts are made from both sides. Friendships cannot be calculated and imposed. Therefore, they are hopeful that slowly and steadily, they will be successful in finding new friends in the city.

Looking Ahead

Gendered social environment is consciously sustained. There are continuities of norms and conditions to stay in a paid PG in the North Campus. Simultaneously, these contexts are challenged by students (mostly by girls, but sometimes boys also join) living in the area. In this study, we have seen that spaces are political. They are sites of inclusion and discrimination; equality and exclusion, freedom and fear, all co-exist in a continuum rather than in binary terms. The way a person experiences a particular space is determined by the social, economic and cultural vantage point of the person. Therefore, we have seen how the North Campus of the University of Delhi is a gendered social environment. It calls for reimagining urban development and governance. Girls/women coming from diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds experience the space differently. The North Campus, as an educational hub for thousands of outstation students, has given massive commercial benefits to private PG owners in the area. However, there are many aspects in which this commercial boon has negatively impacted the lives of students residing in these PGs. There is an urgent need on the part of university authorities and urban administration to sensitise and streamline the security and safety of the students. Looking ahead, we suggest and recommend the following actions on the part of the University and urban administration:

- **Information and Registration of the PGs:** Verified dissemination of information both in the virtual and actual world, regarding the availability, cost and facilities of the private PGs is needed. There should be a government body for the registration of private PG owners, where they will submit the data regarding the number of rooms available, the cost of the rooms and other infrastructural facilities provided by them. This information can be verified by physical visits to the location by the concerned government officials and feedback from the current inmates. Thereafter, price capping and licenses can be provided by the government body for PG accommodation as per the facilities provided. This step will help outstation students choose safe and affordable accommodation in the city and will also control the greed of the PG

owners to collect unlimited charges. Any deviation from the government guidelines will lead to the cancellation of the license to run the PG.

- **Infrastructural facilities and basic amenities:** An online feedback line should be activated for the private PG inmates to report the quality and hygiene of the accommodation. There should be government guidelines on the quality of the food, the hygiene of the premises, proper ventilation and drainage system and the mechanism of waste disposal. Additional facilities like lifts, CCTV, cooking and cleaning gadgets provided to the students should be properly maintained. It should be the collective responsibility of the urban administration and university administration to have regular water and electricity supply, well-lit roads in the locality, with an appropriate number of CCTVs installed. The administration should also ensure the functioning of affordable and environment-friendly transport facilities like e-rickshaws in the area. The need to have curfew timings can be done away with in the North Campus if it is made an active, secure and safe area for all students 24/7.

- **Regular and effective awareness, sensitisation and redressal mechanism:** The university and local urban administration should regularly conduct awareness and sensitisation drives against all forms of discrimination based on gender, sexuality, caste, class, region and religion in the area. There should be a 24/7 online grievance cell to file complaints by the outstation students staying in private PGs. The existing University Grants Commission (UGC) supported Saksham portal can provide a platform for the same. Not only should filing complaints be easy, but a quick redressal mechanism should be activated. Anti-ragging rules should be effectively implemented in private PGs also. The police personnel posted in the area should be given extra training to sensitively deal with student issues.

As more girls/women are seeking higher education, we need to ensure safe and affordable accommodation for these girls/women. Increasing government hostels within the campus, registered and regulated private PGs, safe and secure public spaces and amenities will ensure the empowerment of women on the campus. The public university campus should be a place where young girls should be free to pursue their passion and purpose for knowledge without any favour or fear. The North campus area should act as an example for other public university campuses in terms of defending the freedom and equality of all students, and an administrative grip over private PGs is an essential step in this direction. As gendered social environments are products of human mindsets and policies, a sensitive and sensible approach can reframe the paradigm on an egalitarian basis.

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ⁱ A task force was constituted by University Grants Commission focusing on Measures for Ensuring the Safety of Women and Programmes for Gender Sensitization on Campuses and the team submitted the report to UGC in the year 2013. Please refer to https://www.ugc.gov.in/pdfnews/5873997_saksham-book.pdf for further details.

ⁱⁱ The brutal gang rape of a 23-year-old medical student, commonly coined as the Nirbhaya case, on the roads of Delhi shook the consciousness of the nation. Due to public protests, the questions of gender justice gained the utmost attention during this time

and the Justice Verma committee was formed to review the legal provisions of sexual harassment and assault in the country. The outcome was the Criminal Amendment Act, of 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pinjara Tod movement started in the year 2015 with girl students questioning curfew timings in their hostels. Soon this movement spread to other campuses in the city highlighting the gender and sexual discrimination faced by girls/women on campuses. Over the years, this movement has fizzled out due to the exclusionary and divisive politics of the members, Covid-19 and the attitude of the authorities.