Teaching Trust

An Ethic of Care and Resilience in Pandemic Times

Rukmini Sen
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Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
an initiative of the
Foundation for Universal Responsibility

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Preface

Situations of crisis—whether episodic or pervasive – like wars, natural disasters, armed conflicts, epidemics, or pandemics impact education in indelible ways. Sadly, too often, their significance to the universe of learning is overlooked. Up until recently in India, they were seldom seen as sufficiently "politically" salient to demand serious policy analysis and speedy executive action. The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the landscape of learning in cataclysmic ways and set alarm bells ringing about the grave consequences of its impact on education and our shared futures.

The pandemic-induced lockdown since 2020 has spurred an almost continuous and consistent rethink of pedagogical practice the world over. In countries like India, educators have had to learn technological skills in order to 'teach', and students have had to get used to studying from/at home, away from the familiar space of the conventional classroom during the nationwide lockdown triggered by an unprecedented global health emergency. While imaginative pedagogies and technological outreach were attempted by teachers, the digital divide on the one hand, and worrying drops in enrolment and achievement rates among students signalled immediate as well as long-term challenges to the school system and the universe of higher education in India. The deleterious effects of the pandemic only amplified existing exclusions within the learning ecosystem. The statistics are staggering!

As per the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020-21 although the availability of smartphones has increased from 36.5 percent in 2018 to 67.6 percent in 2021, students in the lower grades of school, especially from marginalized communities, found it difficult to engage in online activities as compared to higher-grade students. The non-availability of smartphones or even a regular phone for the use of a child, along with a lack of network connectivity, compounded the challenges faced by school goers. As many as 1.5 million schools remained shut during 2020 due to the pandemic and lockdowns, impacting 247 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in India, according to data released by UNICEF in March 2021. A January 2021 report in the *Frontline,* noted that ten million girls in India would likely drop out of secondary school due to the effects of the COVID pandemic.

Online classes through Google Meet and Zoom platforms became the norm following the stay-at-home and work-from-home directives of the Government of India at the end of March 2020. Schools and other educational institutions were among the first to close down and, ironically, the last to open up around

March 2022. While some states in India, like Delhi, did intermittently open up schools, especially for senior classes, most others did not, and elementary school education remained online for almost two years, as did much of college and university education. Teachers had to, in many cases, self-train on the modes and modalities of using online platforms for teaching, classroom discussion, assignments, evaluation, and the like.

Understanding the importance of pedagogic transformation, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) initiated a dialogue on *Pedagogy in Times of the Pandemic* in July 2021. Following WISCOMPs earlier engagements with challenges for education in other crisis situations—armed conflict and ethnic violence, for instance—serious engagement with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was a natural follow-through. This research study *Teaching Trust: An Ethic of Care and Resilience in Pandemic Times by* Rukmini Sen and Ashwin Varghese, situates the learnings from the ground in the broader body of discussion on pedagogy that the pandemic has generated, mostly in/ from the Indian context with certain references to the global discussion as well. The authors propose the **centering of empathy** in pedagogic practice –'*the pandemic has given us an opportunity to be reflexive about this really important feature in any kind of teaching pursuit*' (Vahali 2019). For example, how can the practice of empathy within the classroom (in an online space) lead to the building of relationships among students, between teachers and students, and establish the connections between what is being learned and taught in the classroom and the broader social world?

The pandemic-induced lockdown while causing physical isolation through distancing norms, brought home the importance of care relations. Students were also caring for their kin and helping out in the kitchen while studying from home, at times with interrupted internet connections. Female teachers in particular were attending to their domestic responsibilities alongside professional commitments from the same physical space/household. The gendered nature of these care practices is already well documented. The pandemic further exacerbated such gendering, strongly pointing toward the deep-seated inequalities in society.

As we move ahead, drawing on the experience of a global health crisis that impacted all aspects of life—education, in particular—what are the robust lessons for the future? This study is an attempt to generate dialogue on what an empathy-centered pedagogy can look like, both in theory and in practice.

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The authors would like to thank Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Director, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) for creating a space for teachers (in higher education institutions) to reflect upon the impact the pandemic has caused to the teaching community. Writing this monograph also gave the authors an opportunity to realize how the art and practice of teaching in crisis requires unwavering commitment from teachers.

Rukmini Sen would like to thank all her students of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University Delhi whose patience, support and experience sharing have made her value compassion and empathy in very different ways than earlier. She would also like to remember how through the days of the long lockdown and the encounter of losses, her dogs would provide a sense of routine and resilience.

Ashwin Varghese would like to thank his colleagues and students at O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU), as well as fellow research scholars and teachers at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University Delhi, whose commitment to academic knowledge taught him how to integrate care and empathy in pedagogy and research.

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I. Introduction

In December, 2019 a new highly infectious virus causing severe acute respiratory disease was first identified in Wuhan, China. The virus, named SARS-Cov-2, caused the COVID-19 disease which spread like wildfire in China at first. The potential for its spread as an epidemic had been noted in China. By March, 2020 COVID-19 had spread to almost all countries in the world, and the epidemic had been transformed into a pandemic. With no vaccinations against this new disease, and news of death caused by the virus spreading, panic engulfed the masses and the states. Many countries across the world closed their borders to international mobility, and imposed lockdowns inside the countries to restrict mobility of people, in the hope that it would prevent the spread of the virus. Lockdown, contact tracing, quarantine, and self-isolation were seen to be drastic but necessary steps to avert a public health crisis. It was believed that within a few weeks of such stringent steps, we would be able to flatten the curve, and manage the public health crisis, assuming that it would break the chain of transmission. This however, was not the case.

It was important and it presented a moral opportunity as well to 'get out of our comfort zones, and explore all imaginable aspects of this large social experiment that the Covid-19 pandemic has laid down in front of us' (Jandriæ 2020). As all aspects of human life were affected as a result of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, education and the ways in which its transaction can happen was one domain which had to do multiple kinds of adaptations. This monograph intends to look at the manifold implications that were experienced by students and teachers mainly in HEIs within the broader context of what happened post the implementation of stringent lockdowns to the 'opening up' of the space of the 'campus' for teaching learning purposes. It is necessary to understand that higher education institutions require new strategies for cohabitation of, and collaboration between, various socio-technological actors, and new hybrid politics and practices of knowledge production and academic publishing. In an academic world that has encountered the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not possible to simply apply 'lessons learned' back into a pre-COVID-19 structure. What is being attempted here is to assess the dynamics of teaching and learning during the days of the first global lockdown in a pandemic-stricken environment. Since, despite the overwhelming consequences of the pandemic, this global crisis has also been an extraordinary time for learning, pedagogical adaptations have proven to be pivotal as the traditional lecturing in-person models did not translate to a remote learning environment. No matter the type of channel used (radio, TV, mobile, online platforms, etc.) teachers needed to adapt their practices and be

creative to keep students engaged as every household became a classroom (Barron et al. 2021).

The mechanism of lockdowns, social distancing and quarantining to manage the public health crisis had far ranging social, psycho-social, economic and political ramifications, drastically affecting marginalized individuals and communities. As per the International Labour Organisation, about 81% of the global workforce had been affected by workplace closures (International Labour Organization 2020). In India, this triggered a massive reverse exodus of migrant workers back to villages. 'Social distancing', in India's social sphere conditioned by caste, burst open caste and class-based hierarchies. Kaul (2020) argues that India's entrenched power hierarchies meant vertical distancing – along caste and class lines – which was quickly introduced; however, horizontal social distancing – separation within the same group – posed a much bigger problem. The lockdown led to large-scale international and intra-national migrations. Camporesi (2020) notes that when imagining oneself vulnerable, a person wants to be surrounded by familiar people and places. This can be imagined as a yearning for 'home'. At the same time, the idea of a safe, universalized, non-fragmented home and access to it with sufficient resources for material and emotional subsistence had been put to test and questioned (Sen 2020). Following the lockdowns, multitudes were stranded across closed borders miles away from home (Manchanda 2020); multitudes embarked on perilous journeys to reach home (Peterson and Chaurasia 2020); and multitudes were trapped in homes grappling with anxiety, violence, and abuse (Griffith and Smith 2004).

The lockdowns that started in March 2020, went on for several months in different countries, leading to closure of all work places and institutions. With the cascading social, political and economic costs of such measures mounting, and little to no effect on the spread of the virus, it soon became clear that the pandemic would not be short lived, and the only solution in sight was the race for the search of a vaccination, and mass inoculation. India started its inoculation in January 2021, with the first recipients being healthcare professionals and a category of workers, termed 'frontline workers' deemed essential for the functioning of society, and managing the pandemic. It took more than two years to bring the pandemic under control. COVID-19 in 2022 is an everyday reality, having affected millions of people. Rather than eradicating the disease, we have learned how to live with it. This coping however has been at the cost of significant changes to our everyday lives, to the ways in which we live, work, rest, celebrate, mourn, and cohabit.

As life today staggers back to a memory of what was the pre-pandemic reality, all institutions and platforms – government departments, corporate sector, primary

and higher education, hospitality, healthcare etc. have imbibed mechanisms that emerged as coping mechanisms at first, but have now been transformed into opportunities. While all work sectors were affected by the pandemic, a significant impact was made on the education sector. In this monograph, we focus on how the education sector in India transformed during the pandemic, and continues to do so. What we are proposing in our engagement with the transformative pedagogies experienced in the higher education landscape are twofold, a) The realization of the need to and practices around care, nurturance and inclusion as foundational praxis in teaching and learning processes b) The therapeutic act of education as a futuristic goal in a pandemic affected world where loss and suffering have been experienced by one and all. While the monograph primarily draws inferences from practitioners within higher educational institutions, yet research studies on the changes in school education during the pandemic are used as reference points, or to demonstrate similarities in the transformation. The first section contextualizes the Indian education system through the lens of digital divide in order to comprehensively understand the repercussions of shifting to online education as a result of lockdown. The second section engages with the experiences of teachers in higher educational institutions through a conversation facilitated by Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) through certain futuristic concepts that will become pillars of pedagogical practice. The third section deals with how education copes, sustains in everyday situations of conflict like in Kashmir or recurrent situations of natural disaster like in Kerala. This is necessary in order for us to emphasize that while the pandemic induced disruption was large scale and massive, regular disruptions to education is a lived reality in many parts of India, and yet the institution is resilient enough to rebuild trust between its actors and the community at large. Finally, looking at a list of University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines for students in higher education institutions, we make our final reflections on a pandemic experienced teaching-learning process project for the future.

II. COVID-19 and Education in India

Contextualizing the Shift Online

Schools and higher educational institutions in India were shut with the announcement of the lockdown in March 2020. India is reported to have implemented one of the longest school closures in the world - 73 weeks (ASER 2021). These closures have had a severe, and one assumes, a lasting impact on the education sector in India. Physical closure of school and university campuses did not mean a complete halt in education and pedagogical engagement however. The closure of physical classrooms prompted a *swift* (and possibly an unprepared) transition into online mode of education, at a large scale. Virtual spaces like zoom, Webex, google meet etc. soon started being used to make up for the loss of physical class rooms, and the possibility of coming together in a campus for education. This transition itself was not without precedent however, the desire for online education has been in the pipeline as part of educational reforms for many years. The lack of digital infrastructure, i.e., access to internet, and suitable devices through which internet could be accessed had been the biggest hurdle in implementing the online education model so far. The pandemic induced lockdowns created a situation where an online model of education was adopted with the assumption that there was no other alternative. State after state, the adoption of massive online education viewed the transition to the online mode as a choice between online education and no education (Reddy A, Jose and Vaidehi 2020).

The shift online was not in the absence of other technology and mechanisms like radio/television broadcasting, and the massive network of distance education. The shift online, on the contrary, has to be understood in the larger context of the reforms in the education sector globally, which may be dated back to at least the 1970s and the advent of neoliberal policies reconfiguring the global political economy, and perceptions about public resources like education. Envisioning a large-scale restructuring, education was re-envisioned as a system that would be instrumental in producing human resources with 'employable skills' catering to the needs of the burgeoning corporate sector, as well as significantly reducing the cost of training to be borne by the employers (Biswas 2020). This indicated not only a reimagination of the purpose of education but a transformation in the method of teaching-learning as well, i.e., a pedagogical transformation. In the Indian context, the desire for similar transformation in education, may be traced back to at least the early 2000s to the deliberations on private investment in higher education. The intention behind such restructuring was claimed to be the transformation of India into a 'competitive yet cooperative knowledge society' as per Ambani-Birla report (Biswas 2020). This way, education premised on

promoting individual freedoms, for which the online platform was seen to be ideal, as it could offer greater access to resources at significantly reduced costs (Biswas 2020).

In this strain, several courses had been floated on online platforms based on MOOC models, offering educational instructions focusing on employable skills. This however was accessible for only a small proportion of the population that had access to basic infrastructure like uninterrupted electricity supply, suitable devices to access the internet, uninterrupted access to the internet etc. Till the pandemic, it would be safe to assume that the online model of education was only a peripheral mode of education, or rather an additional platform for education, to supplement existing education with additional instructions catering to individual needs of skill development. It had never been implemented to the scale of replacing primary education and educational instruction in higher educational institutions before the pandemic induced lockdown. This context is relevant in understanding where the educational sector is headed in the post-pandemic world. Before venturing into a discussion of where the educational sector is headed, it is worthwhile to review the effect of the pandemic on the education sector first.

Digital Divide

Since education was not categorized as essential services, educational institutions began closing down and authorities directed vacating their campuses after lockdown orders. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the UGC, in order to assist the physical closure of campuses, explored multiple options to make a swift transition to online methods. There was an emphasis on the use of asynchronous and synchronous platforms such as Google Classroom, Google Hangout, Cisco Webex Meeting, YouTube Streaming, Open Educational Resources (OERs), SWAYAM Platform and SWAYAMPRABHA (available on Doordarshan[Free dish] and Dish TV). Additionally, the UGC guidelines (University Grants Commission 2020) highlighted the need to maintain regular contact with students with the help of tools such as WhatsApp mobile application and other social media outlets. Through the guidelines, it advised that faculty should 'maintain communication with the students and discuss course material on a regular basis.' It also emphasized 'strengthening the mechanism of mentor-mentee counseling through university websites to impart timely guidance and counseling to the students' and stressed on 'regular communication of supervisors with the students.'

What these contingency measures achieved were a change in the imagination of education to atomistic pedagogical instructions focusing on teacher-student (note

the emphasis on the singular) dynamic. In short, the online mode did away with the need for a physical campus. The campus and the physical classroom as a space for education, where students and faculty could congregate to deliberate on various topics other than curricular instruction, was rendered an additional but not necessary component of education. Thus, for education to continue, the physical site of the campus was made irrelevant. This reimagination of education and pedagogy, in continuation to the existing reform in the education sector, is relevant in determining contemporary transformations in education. As per NSSO 75th round, only 9% of the currently enrolled students had access to any essential digital infrastructure. Only 4% of rural households had access to computers with internet access, whereas the proportion was 20% for the urban households. Emphasis here must be placed on the fact that close to 80% of the households in urban India had no access to computers with internet. Reddy A, Jose and Vaidehi (2020) drawing from this data ask, "Can massive online education be inclusive when 75% and 91% of the currently enrolled students do not have access to internet and computer with internet, respectively?"

Differential access to digital infrastructure, which had become essential to access education during the lockdown periods, is referred to as the digital divide. This divide is not only conditioned by geographical location (rural-urban) but social location as well. Reddy A, Jose and Vaidehi (2020) note that access to digital infrastructure was 'woefully' low among students from the poorest income and social groups, and highest only among the richest income group and advantaged social groups. With only 4% students from socially backward communities like Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) having access to online education, Reddy A, Jose and Vaidehi (2020) prompt us to think about what would have been the effect of massive shift towards online education, where close to 98% students from poorest income groups had negligible access.

Differential access was evident in higher education as well. A survey conducted by the University of Hyderabad revealed that only 50% of its students had access to laptops, and that only 45% could access the internet infrequently (Herald 2020, Bhattacharya 2020). This shows that the digital divide affected all sections of the education sector, from primary education to higher education. Reflecting on differential access, Bhattacharya (2020) notes that the students who are dependent on the physical campus as a space for education are often those who come from the deprived sections, who are further deprived in the online shift. The data related to India's internet user base, which places it as having the second largest user base in the world, with 630 million users (Devara 2020) often obscures the inequality prevalent in accessing the internet in India. Its large internet user base is reductively read to mean internet access for all. One

may assume that this was the rhetoric on the basis of which it was assumed that shift online would not significantly affect access to education. The reality however, was far from the case. Several scholars and practitioners have commented on the challenges of the digital divide and of educational access (Bhattacharya 2020; Reddy A, Jose and Vaidehi 2020; Biswas 2020; Cherian 2021; Singh, et al. 2020).

As per the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2021 the pandemic doubled the rate of children in rural areas not enrolled in schools to 4.6% in 2021, with the largest fall in enrolment rates being among boys in the lower age groups. Additionally, a significant pattern has been a rise in enrollment in government schools, as opposed to private schools, indicating the growing reliance on public institutions to ensure access to basic education. This is despite the differential access to online education available through public and private institutions (Editorial 2021). As per the World Bank estimates close to half of the 681 million children affected by the closure of educational institutions globally, were in India (Editorial 2021). Not only is there a decline in new enrollments, the dropout rate for students from classes 1-8 have also doubled as per the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) Plus 2021-22 (Sharma 2022).

The digital divide affected not just the students, but the teachers as well. Literature on teacher preparedness for the shift online has shown that private educational institutions were better equipped to move online, than government aided educational institutions. Many teachers worried about how to teach students, whose families were poor and had little to no access to technology, for whom basic sustenance of food and shelter were of higher concern. Teachers themselves reported being underprepared for the shift online, stating that they themselves had ‘very little knowledge of digital technology’ but were expected to be the agents who would implement the transition to online education. This would involve adapting existing resources for online instructions, creating new resources for digital learning, creating new modes for analysis and evaluation, coordinating all these tasks while dealing with a raging pandemic. While research and discussion around many precarious *frontline* workers have been conducted in context of the pandemic, there is comparatively much lesser academic engagement with the changes that teachers had to undertake, and sometimes in precarious conditions. In this context the biases of the education sector also became apparent. While private educational institutions were better equipped to move online, the access to education for all students enrolled in private education was also not the same. Various biases became apparent in ways in which private education preferred educational access for some. Cherian’s (2021)

study of online education in schools in India is telling in this regard, where the online mode was a "nightmare" for students from the Economically Weaker Sections. Cherian (2021) highlights the bias by revealing the opinions of a senior academic coordinator, who remarked "We have not thought about the classes for the EWS students as yet, let us focus on the ones who pay, because they are comfortable using internet, later on we will provide remedial classes to those students when school reopens, as such they are not top performing students and have considerable learning gaps, what they will be missing out is not much" (Cherian 2021, Editorial 2021). This observation reveals how education was considered to be a priority for those who could pay for it. In this one can already see the imagination of education as a transaction. Owing to these varied experiences, Singh et.al (2020) note that teachers recognized the need for a hybrid approach, with a mix of access to physical school and online modes, early on. In the post pandemic world, as we witness the staggered reopening of campuses, it is the hybrid mode which appears to be favored more and more, prompting us to rethink the need for physical campuses, and who it caters to (Singh, et al. 2020).

There are two important things that the digital divide indicates, one, the pervading inequality in access to education was exacerbated by the shift to online education, and two in the continued promulgation of the online mode, an overarching transformation can be seen in the imagination of education from a public good, to pedagogy of skill development, catering to the needs of the few who can access it. Noting the push for online education by various state agencies like the MHRD, UGC and NITI Aayog, Bhattacharya (2020) predicts that online education may become a permanent feature of the university education system. With the growing adoption of the 'blended' mode of learning, and online modes of education along with physical reopening of classes that we are witnessing today, what we may witness is the change in the imagination of educational infrastructure, and a shift in preference towards digital infrastructure, as opposed to physical infrastructure of the campus, like investing on computer laboratories with Wi-Fi enabled computers, libraries with sufficient reading spaces, buying physical books and other learning materials at the expense of e-books. The pandemic induced thrust for online education must thus be seen in relation to the overall transition in the education sector, a vision for which is now provided in the National Education Policy 2020. As Sen and Menon (2021) highlight, NEP stresses on transformation of education towards learning based on "how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields" (Sen and Menon 2021, 48). To achieve this, crucially, "Pedagogy must evolve to make education

more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based" (Sen and Menon 2021, 48).

What is the role of the teacher?

In the context of digital divide, while the aim was to ensure online teaching learning experiences for all, the role and contexts of the teacher to learn, adjust, introduce and execute these changes were not really a matter of discussion. How much training and sensitization initiatives did teachers undergo before the starting of online teaching happened? To what extent were the home/domestic conditions of the teachers even taken into consideration before directions on shift to online teaching were instructed? While these infrastructural issues connected with the material and social conditions of the teacher were ignored, was there a collaborative discussion on what kind of changes were necessary in the existing courses/curriculum when the transaction would happen online? "Can we go on teaching the same syllabus in the same fashion at a time when the world no longer remains the same?" asked Avijit Pathak (2020), a sociologist and educationist at JNU and someone who seemed to have emerged as the moral conscience of the voice and dilemmas of teachers encountering the pandemic and online teaching. Arguing about the poverty of imagination that educational institutions were faced with, Pathak (2020) articulated a) is there really a need to complete the syllabus when the social world is in crisis? Or when faculty and students may have lost loved ones or are in care-giving processes? b) How does the teacher take the 'self' away and be a 'performer' in front of the computer screen? While Pathak (2020) admits that he may not have the answers, yet he acknowledges, 'but I know I am tormented; I see the absurdity of the sort of things we are doing in the name of 'online teaching'. I am guilty. I am confused. I am broken. I acknowledge the crisis. And possibly because of this acknowledgement, I begin to strive for some other possibilities. It is in this context that I wish to share a set of ideas with all those who believe that education is not just what we do at schools/colleges/universities; education is also a therapeutic act with awakened intelligence, ethics of care and deep sensitivity to life' (Pathak 2020). He suggests, that if you are a sociology professor, is it altogether impossible for you to urge your undergraduate students to probe into the discourse of 'social distancing', and then read Emile Durkheim's notion of the 'social' differently at this moment when isolation is recommended and surveillance is normalized? These are existential and pedagogic questions raised by Pathak (2020). In the next section, we will turn to a set of conversations held between four teachers in HEIs brought together on one dialogic platform by WISCOMP, who explore some of the questions that are raised about the role of the teacher, generally and during the time of the pandemic induced online learning.

III. Pedagogic Transformation: A Dialogue

WISCOMP, a pioneering peacebuilding initiative in South Asia foregrounding women's leadership and cultural pluralism in the region, held dialogues with faculty and students on pedagogic practices during the times of the pandemic. While the immediate value of these dialogues was immense—they provided space for articulation and mutual learning—by contextualizing them within the broader narratives of the ways in which Government advisories on HEIs and hostels were made, the long-term implications of these dialogues will become more obvious. On 16 March, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare issued an advisory on social distancing in view of the spread of Covid-19 (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare 2020). This starts with defining social distancing as "a non-pharmaceutical infection prevention and control intervention implemented to avoid/decrease contact between those who are infected with a disease-causing pathogen and those who are not, so as to stop or slow down the rate and extent of disease transmission in a community. This eventually leads to decrease in spread, morbidity and mortality due to the disease." Closure of schools, regulations on mass gathering, ensuring physical distancing of minimum 1 meter between tables in restaurants, postponement of examinations, avoidance of non-essential travel—have been prescribed in this advisory. It is interesting to note that what the WHO is calling social distancing—maintaining 1 meter distance between anyone who is coughing or sneezing; is translated by MoHFW as physical distancing and the qualifier of people who are coughing or sneezing is missing. Since there is already a commonsensical understanding of social distance that is prevalent in India between various groups of people, that may have necessitated the reason for another term—'physical distancing'—coming into the MoHFW advisory, which is otherwise not there in the WHO texts. The Indian government directive seems to be addressing schools, colleges—the student community as the primary/priority target group—followed by private sector employees. The advisory says that students should stay at home and online education to be promoted. This led to immediate hostel evacuation policies (Sarvesh and Gandhi 2020) in various higher educational institutions. Clearly, all students do not stay at home for purposes of education and there was nothing worked out for how soon hostels needed to be vacated during this public health emergency and whether educational institutions had any responsibility to create interim measures and ensure a safe passage back home for students. In fact, on 19 March a central government higher education institution said in a press release, "hostellers are directed to leave for their hometowns at the earliest for their own safety. International students may make decisions in their best interest" (University of Delhi 2020). This is a complex situation of clearing hostels to

ensure social distancing, but at the same time promoting travel to hometowns (before or after lockdown) which need not guarantee physical distancing. However, a broader kinship question to raise is that in times like these, it is being presumed that the home emerges as the safest site. Students may not necessarily feel that home is the ideal site to return to or be in—especially if the home is an abusive place. One is also left wondering what paying guest accommodation owners would do in these situations, given that there cannot be government directives on them and yet, many students in metropolises live in these arrangements. It can lead to increased arbitrary behaviour on the part of the owners and precarity for the students.

In engaging with the effects of iniquitous access to livelihoods, healthcare, information and communication technology and 'stay at home' that the pandemic brought to the front—the dialogues were structured around the following questions: How were faculty and students in higher educational institutions in India dealing with this inequity? What initiatives have institutes started to address them? What are the limitations of these initiatives? And again, how has the disruption in the academy affected young faculty who were just starting their careers when the pandemic hit? What insights do their experiences offer into the mindscapes of 1000s of other young professionals in areas outside educational campuses? Education has borne the brunt of the pandemic in very specific ways. Students and teachers have had to keep away from the campus. Since distancing norms and lockdown policies across the world made it difficult to have face to face classes and interactions on campus. This resulted in an almost overnight and wholesale shift to online modes of academic work, classes, seminars, tutorials, student presentations, assessment discussion with research scholars' PhD, viva voce, examinations, and even international conferences now being conducted online. The change had to be affected abruptly and without much preparation. How did this impact pedagogy and assessment? What, if any, has been the physical and psychological toll of staring long hours at small windows on computer screens on both students and educators?

Krishna Menon, Professor in School of Human Studies, Dr B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi shared her thoughts on how Covid-19 pandemic has changed and continues to change our world in many ways. The ways in which it has compelled us to move beyond the worldview based on certitude and the arrogance of always being in control. How the pandemic has taught us about the vulnerability of human life, made us value interdependence and highlighted the inequalities of our societies. Unilateral, non-consultative approaches to managing the pandemic have unfortunately resulted in large scale suffering, deaths and devastation. Dialogue, effective and adequate communication of information

and data, robust public health infrastructure, free press and social media, public spirited citizens, civil society groups, and of course, dedicated healthcare workers have come together and responded creatively and smartly to the challenges posed by the virus. It is in this spirit of dialogue that the discussion between teachers took place, while respecting and centering the vulnerability, interdependence and tenacity of life. The focus was on the challenges faced by teachers, students and administrators in higher education institutions in India during the pandemic, and the ways in which they are working through this challenge.

Questions that Menon raised in this context were extremely relevant: Should we continue as if it is business as usual? Follow academic calendars, submission deadlines, course loads and convocation dates as in the past? Or should this be a time to revisit our understanding of what it means to be educated? Do we work towards only formalized certification, and the attendant rituals of completing the syllabus, holding examinations and following the academic timetable with 'near robotic efficiency'? Or do we acknowledge our limitations as we try and grapple with this monumental challenge? These were nearly the same questions that were asked by Avijit Pathak (2020), as we saw above. How much is the curriculum relevant as families and communities were overwhelmed by fear and loss of lives and livelihoods? Can students be expected to continue to learn through the experiences that life or the loss of it was offering to them– the experiences of illness, grief, death, anxiety, loss of employment and livelihoods? Are the conventional examination and evaluation systems relevant when life itself is precariously placed? The need for a refreshingly new approach to education was palpable. As the world witnesses a total breakdown of what humans imagined the future to be; a time when questions such as - so what are you planning to do next, something that teachers often ask students, has become rather irrelevant.What are the long-term pedagogical implications of teaching in the times of pandemic?

Menon emphasized that the thrust for online education must address the questions of access and disparities caused by the digital divide across class, rural-urban location, caste, gender, and disabilities of various kinds to name a few. Some experts have argued that online education dilutes the learning experience. There are serious pedagogical concerns that have been expressed about online classes and online education. The excitement, thrill, and indeed the transformative potential of the classroom it is feared would be lost forever. However, looking at studies undertaken by researchers, from an early skepticism, educators have indeed come gradually to embrace many aspects of virtual and online learning that are compatible with the democratic imagination of the higher education space. However, the serious limitations online education creates in deeply

unequal societies such as ours remains a challenge that cannot be disregarded. To conceive of face-to-face classrooms and online learning as mutually exclusive shuts down the possibilities of exploring new ways of reimagining higher education. Studies on the influence and impact of distance and online education actually recommend innovative and locally contextualized pedagogical permutations, where irrespective of the mode, learning remains foregrounded. But studies from settings as diverse as India, Slovenia, the United States of America, suggest that some sections of students, some women students, queer students, students experiencing disabilities of various kinds, actually seem to be able to participate freely and more actively in online classes. They value these spaces for a variety of reasons, such as the ability to interact with a certain degree of anonymity that it affords, especially for people who might not conform to traditional gender binaries; who are nervous in front of large groups. Many women have actually reported that they find online modes compatible with their childcare and other care responsibilities. Students whose mobility is restricted have appreciated the online mode for freeing them from having to navigate the physical space of the university campus. Time management remains a critical issue for many women students with their multiple responsibilities. The flexibility that the online system offers, has found an appreciation from these students in our context. Access and inclusivity remain important concerns while discussing online education. Equally significant is the question of what would be considered knowledge. Can students, who like us are coping with death and grief, continue to learn and take exams as before? The pandemic has compelled the teaching community to think about the place of emotions, feelings, empathy, and compassion within the higher education space.

Some leading educational institutions in the city of Delhi demonstrated these qualities in ample measure, and reminded us that education is a therapeutic act, and built into it is intelligence, ethics of care and a deep sensitivity to life. Miranda House, a premier college of the University of Delhi, ranked first among colleges in India in the NIRF 2022 ranking played a crucial role during the pandemic. Dr. Bijayalaxmi Nanda, Principal of Miranda House shared her reflections on the resilient role that students of the college played during the pandemic. She described that there was strategic planning and imagination built into it. A third year student in philosophy reached out to students in the National Service Scheme and other friends and they all joined hands to start a helpline. The reach of the helpline was beyond Delhi.Through online methods the students were able to connect and the online space became a space to reach out. So, while online space was a way for teachers to teach, it also became a way to reach out. This strategic planning was driven by compassion, it was fueled by students' capabilities. There was trust, courage, clarity, and a certain kind of

precision in the way in which they were able to do it. Initially, the helpline was meant only for the college community. But at the point, when the students started the helpline, the numbers went out, as it is with online methods, other people from all over the city also started reaching out to them, which indicated the extent of the need as well. Therein came a major challenge- how to protect the students from the burden that was being placed on them. There were both psychological challenges, as well as violation of their privacy and identity being revealed on public platforms. There was a COVID taskforce in the college, which included teachers and non-teaching staff. After discussion with the students, it was recognized that it will not be possible to say no to various kinds of people reaching out. While the COVID task force was there, a college level counselor, and a number of mental health counselors were part of this particular conversation with students. However, there were times when the students would go into deep silence and/or anxiety. Not being able to provide support and realizing that even if you provided support, there have been deaths that have taken place, all of that impacted them. One of the major focus was to not go ahead with first aid counseling. So, the importance of trained counselors comes to the fore here. There was an informed decision that whatever support that should be provided has to be through trained counselors. There was a mental health response protocol drawn up in the college with guidelines on who is asking for support? What is the background of that particular student? Where is she located at present? It was not that the college was the only support for the students, the University of Delhi also had a range of mental health counselors who were available to them. Students created their own resources.

However, the major challenge was to make it sustainable. And the key to sustainability was to be able to maintain a particular balance. And these were young students who had risen to a particular occasion, but they were not trained to run a help desk on a 24/7 basis. They did not have that kind of training and the kind of support. So, one had to then think of referral services, one had to think of, at what time they would close that particular Help Desk. Questions like when is the right time to withdraw support were tricky and infused in a lot of dilemmas. But what has been understood is that it is most important to train faculty since crisis response or even mental health protocols, are not adequate in an Indian higher education institution setting. There is a need to be equipped, not only for situations of emergency but for all kinds of contexts–it is important to internalize that a crisis is not an exceptional situation but in small measures could be an ongoing one.

There were cases where they were asked to be part of a support structure or to go and deliver an oxygen cylinder somewhere, which turned out to be hoax

calls. Those were the kinds of situations where also privacy was being invaded in ways. Sometimes they were challenged and questioned by people saying that this particular solution did not work. Such questions became very demotivating. Creating a sense of security, constituting enabling spaces or free spaces was the continuous objective on the part of the institution for the students. So, if they wanted to step away, or if they wanted to say no, and they wanted to just close down the helpline, they were welcome to do that. The entire situation seemed like a Helen Keller prophecy that 'although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it'. So, while the students did experience the sense of fear and articulated the burden attached to this, yet at some point of time, there was a sense that they were doing something significant; that they were contributing to a certain support. Thus, they were concerned citizens, contributing to nation building.

Moving beyond the terminology of COVID warriors, there is a need to ascertain and claim COVID healers. Teachers and students who offered these kinds of services became COVID healers. It is important to move away from that militaristic language. What they did, irrespective of their own issues, and they had many, they embraced the chaos, and they saw it as a creative space, to engage with a larger opportunity to reach out to others and bring about a certain kind of support system. They also reached out through their parents who were also a part of this support group again. It became emotional connection, driven by compassion driven by empathy, and these creative emotional connections were strategic. It is important to understand the work that lies ahead for the future—that these are young people who have certain capabilities, which now have to be measured against other kinds of capabilities that were measured earlier. One of the things that worked very well was a mentorship program, or a peer mentorship program that was conducted by students themselves. There were times when students did not want to be part of online classes because they would feel overburdened by the classroom experience itself in an online mode. They would develop anxiety. So, at that point of time, the other students would provide them with information that they would gather from the class and manage to connect with the teacher. While there would be these financial resource related challenges, a lot of emotional resources were necessary. That is why there was an emphasis on compassion, the emphasis on realizing that we can make mistakes as institutions, that we can learn from each other, and be sensitive to the intersectionality of vulnerabilities, be it class, gender or region. Regional disparity did come up as a major area that we needed to look at. There are multiple axes and the responses were small, but the effort was genuine and also the willingness to learn from all around us. It was empathy training for these students, and as a higher educational institution it is necessary to value these kinds of experiences

and maybe make it an active component of the teaching-learning process for future.

As a sociologist, Professor Rukmini Sen of Dr B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi observed the social inequalities that have been exacerbated by the online processes and provided a reflection. It is necessary to note that in India access to and completing higher education is a tool of social transformation, where although over the years the gender gap has decreased, the same may not be said about other forms of marginality, notably caste, ethnic identities, or disability. The classroom, (which due to the pandemic is now qualified as the physical or in person classroom) have acted as an important site for interaction, interrogation and interpretation. It is important to acknowledge that this classroom has had its share of inequalities depending upon the social background of the students' language skills, accessible academic content, or ways of coping with career-oriented demands of higher education. The pandemic and its shift to online classes has changed as well as challenged the nature of pedagogy. The inequalities now start with basic infrastructure, which can be enquired through the following questions:

1. Is there space in the home to do classes continuously for a few hours each day? Questions about whether the student has a separate room, a corner of a room available for listening to classes become relevant.
2. Are there electronic devices with adequate and high-speed internet access to be a part of the class uninterrupted? Also, internet connectivity sometimes may not reach inside the home and maybe best accessible at the terrace or the ground outside the house. So those spaces could also be from where the class happens for the student.
3. Is there a desktop or a laptop where students can write their assignments and submit for evaluation?

These foundational inequalities on infrastructure access demonstrate that the library, the computer lab, the common room, the canteen, the sports facilities of a college or a university all compliment the classroom not only learning but also in the broadening of horizons, interacting with students who come from rural backgrounds for whom these interactions would otherwise not have been possible through the rigid caste, community networks within which we usually lead our everyday lives. Thus, coming to campus is valuable for sociological reasons, as much as for personal growth, mobility transformation. Interestingly, in the online transaction, sometimes the anonymity factor worked positively, being able to type on the chat box certain questions or comments, as opposed to speaking out in class have been enabling for some. Also, students with physical

disability or mild forms of emotional stress have expressed their comfort in not having to travel or pressures of social interaction. But issues related to screen time, attention span, access to online reading materials, possibilities of interaction all become vital with respect to experiences and online teaching and learning processes.

Certain alterations in reading materials were necessary during the pandemic period of teaching. Use of visual content increased, use of interviews that were available online sometimes complemented the text heavy theoretical readings. Professor Sen mentioned that for the MA course on Relationships and Affinities, students did photo essays and or short audio video texts and notes on 'Pandemic Lockdown and Relationships' in the 2020; and 'Crisis, Relationship and Care' in the 2021 iteration. These originally used to be 2500-word term papers, but changes were made keeping in mind the absence of gadgets to write long essays. These changes also enabled experimenting with and to see how the students could learn with smartphones. While there have been teachers who have experimented with assessment, the pandemic was an important moment to think of creative modes of evaluating the student. One of the important lessons that the pandemic ought to have taught us is that the point is not necessarily always to complete our syllabus. But the point is to provide students with certain tools of learning. And these are, let's say, how do you read a text? What do you understand from a text? What is it that you are interpreting from it? A second thing is that when assessments are rethought, it is also important to have the students on board. There generally has to be very detailed write up on what the assessment is all about, and what is it that the teacher is expecting from the students from the assessment, and then actually do a class, sometimes even tutorials with students, especially if they're undergraduate students about whether they have understood the terms of reference of the assessment properly. Even understanding the assessment is necessary because the assessment may be altered but it can backfire if the student doesn't actually engage with it. So, to have the student collaboratively also on board is essential. That is not to suggest that the student has to decide what the assignment would be. But to at least know that the student has understood what are the terms of references of that assessment.

The third thing is that just like there is a stress on the students to get a higher grade and that has been behind the copy paste system or culture, there is also a stress on the faculty as well and especially during the pandemic, about how to mitigate the fact that the teacher is not physically present, when the students are taking a test. So multiple modes could be thought about – open book examinations are one kind where direct questions are not given. Doing photo essays or audio-visual notes and understanding ways of living and healing and caring of/by the

student during the times of the pandemic is another example. It is literally turning the gaze on oneself and trying to do it through photographs, so photographs and visuals can speak for themselves. It was important to break the monotony and dominance of our evaluation structures that are primarily focused on trying to test only written abilities of students. Not just in connection to a forced lockdown induced mode of evaluation, but more futuristically it is important for teachers to probably widen the number of things that are being tried to be understood from students, not just written skills, but also their ability to assess and understand a situation that they are living in. None of these experiments are easy, and it requires confidence, experience and maturity of the teacher, a willingness to participate by the students and a broader supportive evaluation culture in the institution of higher learning for any of these three to materialize.

The reflexive learning that is expected to have happened to many teachers (in sociology) was that it warranted a need to teach courses around crisis and care, because it was a pandemic-induced crisis which led to certain forms of alterations. And it was also the lens of care through which both faculty and the students were engaging with the situation. Finally, with research scholars, the challenge was to get them to write. With research already being a lonely exercise, the absence of a community of researchers felt starker with the pandemic. As a research supervisor, the need to be an empathetic listener is supreme, the pandemic made it mandatory, it added the need to provide care and support to one's research students much beyond their academic work. To be able to discuss vulnerability, grief, illness, healing, that was something that we felt was what we were doing with our research scholars. Pressures of completing the thesis, or parents planning marriages, experiencing psychological depression, or lack of faith, self-worth, all quadrupled during the pandemic isolation. For the research scholars the supervisors' just being there as an anchor point acted as a pedagogy of care. This was the most important learning through the one year of pandemic, experiencing and exploring pedagogies of caring.

Although the ideal is to practice pedagogies of caring, the pandemic did reinforce unequal power relationships within the home. The rise in the rates of domestic violence against women, was pronounced as the shadow pandemic by the United Nations. Even within the higher educational institutions, this gendered dimension of violence was experienced. There are three that could be mentioned in this context. Firstly, women students, as we all know, play the role of caregivers, and the pandemic has actually shown it in multiple ways. Students themselves have shared that they have been helping their mothers in the kitchen, they have been aiding with sibling education, or other forms of natural nurturance or even being the caregivers when the infection has spread in the home. These unequal

and gendered care burdens were experienced. Secondly, as per a very recent report (Trivedi 2021) 10 million girls in India could actually drop out of Secondary Education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this is data from school, this will in the long run have some impact on access to higher education generally, and gender-based impact on access to higher education in particular.

Thirdly, in India the poorest girls and those who live in rural areas have much less access to technology than boys and as per a recent GSMA report, there exists a 50% gender gap in mobile internet users in India. An assessment on lessons during COVID-19 found that more boys than girls had access to digital infrastructure such as mobile phones, internet services, and radio media. These are surveys which have been done in the context of school. But their spillovereffects on higher education in the years to come are something that we will have to wait and see. In the midst of all of these, there are always lessons learnt as a teacher. A student articulated that the pandemic has brought in a role reversal. The students were playing the role of caring for adults in the households rather than the reverse, and in many ways, they were unprepared for it. It is necessary to reflect on how prepared all teachers are/were to respond to the needs of care that had to be extended to students. Finally, all of this also tells us the need to do more research on the long-term gender impact of the pandemic, with education shifting home, its impact on students, its impact on faculty. But even as education has shifted home, there is also work from home. There is the already existing domestic labor within the home on which feminists have talked about for years. There is a requirement towards advocating citizenship education, pedagogic engagement with the Constitution, fundamental rights and responsibilities, the Bill of Rights of the Justice Verma committee in higher educational institutions, in order to create a future generation. A generation that both understands about everyday social hierarchies, are empathetic about it, as well as conscious about the ways of eradicating these hierarchies to create a more gender just egalitarian society.

As a newly-appointed teacher of Political Science at Miranda House (a college under the University of Delhi), Dushyant Kumar reflected on the larger economic and social issues impacting the online classrooms. According to the National Sample Survey report 2018, on an average only 9% households have digital infrastructure, with 21% in urban areas, and only 4% in rural areas. This is not something which the pandemic has brought. The pandemic at most has brought two things - it has intensified the already existing rifts and the digital divide, and it has exposed our capacities or our inability to be egalitarian and inclusive. It is forcing teachers to engage with questions like, who is the student? Who is

this *average* student being taught? This is a student, who belongs to the average household of a country which is running a vast informal economy. So, the sheer lack of physical infrastructure and social infrastructure is visible. When the pandemic hit, there was destruction of livelihood; lowering levels of nutrition; in the context of completely inadequate social protection, and a sheer dip in public spending, and loan burden on households. There were families of the students in the classrooms, who lost all sources of income. In such a context, in such a state of economy, it is important to reflect on how this situation translated for the students. In online mode when the classroom entered their homes, the family issues, their personal life disturbances, their unsupportive house infrastructure, were all visible. Many students were embarrassed and the teacher could sense that. And that's why they are hesitant to switch on their mics and cameras. Without these mics and cameras, pedagogies are dehumanized. So, what is the real challenge to pedagogy? As a young scholar, as a young teacher, what one would affirm is that regardless of the pandemic, there is a move towards a new kind of economy, which is filled with artificial intelligence machines, unimaginable technology, creative disruption and rapid digitalization and this is a global phenomenon. India is a developing country with a context of high informality, lack of protection, unemployment, excess labor, income disparity, exclusion and marginalization in education, training and job market. All of that is translating into anxiety and stress in the students. In this context, it is also important that we assess the social psychology of architecture, not the grandeur of the architecture, but the sense of belonging to the space of learning. It is evident that the students really missed those red bricks (of the University). That's why in farewells, they have used the background of those red bricks. So that longing is visible. Education certainly is not merely dissemination of knowledge, theory, facts, or simply skill development for the new techno-digital economy. Teaching is direct living engagement. It is not possible in virtual mode.

However, there were multiple ways in which teachers and the institution were trying to bridge the digital divide so that access to learning resources could be ensured for the students. Study materials were posted through Indian postal services, and it did reach the students since phone calls confirmed them. The students were really happy to receive these notes. Students were also requested to aid other students—so that peer-to-peer support was high. Kashmiri students were facing connectivity issues and students from Assam and Nagaland were facing power outages. They were taken on cellular calls, and that worked. Secondly, together with the standard method of creating Google classrooms, other platforms were also tried, like Zoom and Skype. There was use of WhatsApp calls as well, apart from regular phone calls. All possible technological methods available were harnessed to ensure inclusivity.

Professor Krishna Menon's final words were on the need to know the human beings behind those windows in google classrooms (or even in physical classroom setting),the kind of situations that they belong to and the kinds of challenges that they are facing even as they are trying to be attentive students in class, meticulous supervisors, research scholars. While the pandemic did deprive universities and colleges from certain familiar experiences, yet, a vast range of new possibilities opened up. It is indeed necessary to continue to explore ways to make learning spaces, whether it's physical or online, inclusive, accessible, creative and compassionate.

In this section we focused on piecing together a conversation between four teachers in public higher education institutions – facilitated by WISCOMP – to highlight a social justice response to the pandemic. Building on this, in the next section we try to understand crisis not as an exception, but sometimes as a norm. It may be worthwhile to see whether pedagogical adjustments happened only as a result of this exceptional situation of the pandemic, or is it that there are 'minor' adjustments that happen on a regular or seasonal basis in conflict-ridden situations or natural disaster situations? In the next section we suggest that crisis may not always be 'exceptional', rather they could be the mode of survival itself and education responds to it accordingly.

IV. Education in Disaster and Conflict Situations

The discussions around disruption to education, caused in the context of the pandemic, brought to the fore the serious consequences of such disruptions. The World Bank estimated that the education of 681 million children was affected due to school closures, which would potentially cost the current generation of students 10 trillion dollars in earnings globally (Editorial 2021). While the pandemic caused disruptions to education on a large scale, there have been several other events/contexts such as social conflict, and natural disasters that have also caused significant disruptions to education and conditioned the response to such disruptions. Socio-political conflicts like in the context of Kashmir and insurgency in the North Eastern states in India, have caused consistent disruptions in education. Natural disasters like the Kerala floods of 2018 and the 2004 Tsunami also caused disruptions to education in the areas affected. Here we pay closer attention to the context of such disruptions, and the response to these disruptions, to note how the response to such disruptions are conditioned by their social context. To do so we examine responses to disruption of education in the context of the Kashmir and the Kerala Floods of 2018.

Social Conflict – Kashmir and Education

The prolonged conflict in Kashmir has had severe consequences for the educational sector in the state. Drawing from data compiled by Jammu and Kashmir police based on media reports, Mannaan (2019) notes that since the 1990s Kashmir has lost close to 60% of total working days due to conflict. Owing to the conflict, the education sector in Kashmir has been working on erratic, unpredictable schedules, interspersed with school closures, and little to no alternative to accessing education. Studies have shown that prolonged closures even in non-conflict contexts leads to significant decline in achievement scores, especially in mathematical skills and reading abilities for students (Mannaan 2019). The context of the conflict adds fear and trauma to the loss of achievement scores.

Mannaan (2019) notes that in 2016 the state government announced mass promotion of students in standards 8, 9 and 11 because they were not able to finish the syllabus, relying on remedial classes later, to make up for the lost classes during the session. However, this approach relies on a different perception of education, as Aijaz Ahmed Bhat, the Director of School Education in J&K made clear in an interview noting that learning is not a function of information gathering but rather a process of meaning-making, that relies on the process of interaction with the environment and involves many factors like parent’s

education, environmental factors, peers, nutrition etc. In short, students are not 'empty containers' filled with information through the education system (Mannaan 2019). In the context of the conflict in Kashmir, educational disruptions have been so severe that the goals of basic literacy are also difficult to meet (Mannaan 2019).

It is worth reflecting on whether the push for online education imagines education as information gathering or a process of meaning-making. This is not to say that online education is incapable of promoting education as meaning-making, but rather we note that it is worth thinking about how online education can promote meaning-making, while making education accessible in situations where social conflict, public health crisis, and natural disasters make physical campuses out of reach. In the context of Kashmir, Suri has reflected on various aspects of the impact of insurgency led disruptions on the education of women, focusing on a range of issues like infrastructural damage to educational institutions; fall in educational standards; issues of mental health and fear psychosis among the population leading to the withdrawal of children especially girls from schools. (Suri 2007, 7).

The loss of education in such situations differentially affects girl students. Suri notes that the ethos of constant fear in the valley and the state has led to an increase in the number of girl drop-outs, as parents fear for their lives. This in turn has also resulted in girls suffering from depression and anxiety. Thus, on the one hand is the loss of education due to school closures, and infrastructural damage wherein, Suri (2007) notes, that about 828 educational institutions were gutted by terrorists, and adding to this, others were occupied by security forces. On the other hand, there has been a deep effect on the psyche of the students, caused by prolonged trauma and turmoil. The disastrous effect of this, Suri notes, has been that the students have been left less ambitious and bereft of dreams. She notes from the testimonial of a University student, who states, "I have learnt to live with death. I have learnt to live with bullets flying all around. Same is the case with all of us who have managed to reach Kashmir University…The question was not whether you would take up medical or non-medical courses of study, pursue journalism or botany. For us, hundreds of such girls, the question was whether we or the students of our generation would be able to reach home safely in the evening" (Suri 2007, 45).

S. Singh (2018) argues that while a political solution to the conflict in Kashmir is needed, interventions in education can address various dimensions of the conflict, as they particularly impact the youth. In this regard, educational intervention demands a pedagogical transformation as well. Singh (2018) refers

to one such measure, i.e. education for peace, which is defined as, "knowledge and skills related to the requirements of and obstacles to ... [the] achievement of peace" (S. Singh 2018, 50). Drawing from this we argue that pedagogical transformations often carry a purpose, as becomes clear by the term education *for* peace. We use this to reflect on the pedagogical transformations in the post pandemic era to ask, what is this pedagogical transformation for? What might it entail?

Coming back to the paradigm of education for peace, which was identified in the National Curriculum Framework, Singh notes that it "acknowledges the goal of promoting culture of peace as the purpose of shaping the enterprise of education (NCERT, 2006)" (S. Singh 2018, 51). Its implementation, however, Singh notes, has been a problem in the context of Kashmir. To achieve the goals of education for peace, Singh draws attention to the importance of initiatives like the Hum Kadam initiative by WISCOMP, which brought together school, university students and educators in Delhi and Kashmir together, to "address the trust deficit that plagues relations between young people of Kashmir and the rest of India". Using face-to-face-dialogues, participatory and experiential learning as key pedagogical tools, Singh (2018) notes that the key strength of the initiative was in its emphasis on, "alternative spaces for dialogue which could provide avenues for expressing genuine grievances" (Gopinath, in S. Singh 2018, 55). Such measures crucially address psychological phenomena such as mutual prejudice, delegitimization and dehumanization that accompany ethno-political conflicts, like in Kashmir.

Pedagogical transformations and responses thus have to address the existing concerns, and are guided by a vision or goal that provides a pathway for educational intervention. We may wonder how the online mode may be used to create such safe spaces for dialogue, which Singh notes are crucial in developing sustainable peace, in situations of conflict.

Natural Disaster – Kerala Floods and Education

In a different context of Kerala, the 2018 floods caused devastating damages to the physical infrastructure of the state, affecting countless lives. During the monsoon of 2018, Kerala state received unusually high rainfall, precipitating one of the most severe floods to have affected the state in close to a century. The state, owing to its topographical location of being on the slopes of the Western Ghats and along the sea coast, makes it highly vulnerable to natural disasters, with floods being the most common natural disaster in the state. The state's topographical vulnerability is exacerbated by its population density. As one of the most densely populated states in India (860 persons per square km.), the

state's propensity to natural disasters inevitably leads to heavy damages and losses to human life and property (Government of Kerala 2018). As per the State government's estimation, nearly 14.5% of the state's land area is prone to floods, with some districts having a proportion as high as 50%. The 2018 event was one of the worst instances of flooding in the state since 1924. In August 2018, the state received excess rainfall triggering severe landslides and forced release of excess water from 37 dams across the state. These cumulatively added to the impact of the flood. Nearly 341 landslides were reported in 10 districts, with the worst hit being Idukki which alone reported 143 landslides. As per the State government's data, the floods affected 1259 out of 1664 villages in 10 districts, adversely affecting 5.4 million people, displacing 1.4 million, with 433 casualties.

One of the sectors that were significantly affected due to the floods was education and child care. The state's recovery plan paid special emphasis on recovering the education sector. In response to the floods, all schools and higher educational institutions were shut for close to 23 days, and up to a month in some districts. Even when schools were reopened later, the attendance remained as low as 20% in various schools.

In devising a response to the disruptions in education, caused by the disaster, the state government has identified three avenues to address. First, the rebuilding of physical infrastructure. The state estimated a damage of INR 179.48 crore worth of physical infrastructure, including school buildings, teaching equipment, teaching and learning material etc. Partial response thus in rebuilding the educational sector has been investment in rebuilding the physical infrastructure. Second, in the context of vulnerability of the state to natural disasters, adopting the approach to green schools, strengthening existing biodiversity, designing educational institutions based on topography, climate, local conditions etc., and incorporating school safety planning, as well as disaster risk reduction in the curriculum. Third, strengthening mental health programs – through psycho-social support and school counseling, making these facilities accessible to both students and teachers. The emphasis on rebuilding trust, and making the students comfortable enough to come back to classes was seen in some initiatives in schools as they were reopening. Some schools in Alapuzha district reported reopening of schools, where teachers welcomed students by singing songs, and organizing cultural programs to 'calm their minds' (India Today Web Desk 2018). It was an intentional strategy of the state government, under which schools in flood affected regions, reopened with various activities like songs, dance, and games to engage children, in an attempt to make the students feel comfortable in coming back to school (Edmond 2019). This was done to keep dropouts at bay.

Disaster/Conflict and Building Trust in Education

Drawing from the two contexts of conflict, like in Kashmir and other regions in India, and that of natural disasters like the Kerala floods and the tsunami of 2004, we have tried to indicate how different contexts and events inevitably affect education. The response in rebuilding the education sector, and reviving education, we may note relies on approaching the problem of disruption on two fronts. One, rebuilding infrastructure. In the context of Kashmir, it meant rebuilding and making accessible schools and other physical infrastructure that were either destroyed or occupied. In the context of Kerala it implied rebuilding with a topographical sensitivity the physical infrastructure of schools that was destroyed by floods.

Second, is the crucial aspect of rebuilding trust. Herein lie important pedagogical transformations. S. Singh (2018) mentions, through the paradigm of education for peace, and initiatives like WISCOMP's Hum Kadam initiative, focusing on building safe spaces for dialogue to build trust among communities that are plagued with alienation, to rebuild trust in education. Kerala's response in rebuilding education systems was a special focus on mental health programs, psycho-social support and counseling for both students and educators who may be affected by trauma. These initiatives emphasize pedagogical transformations, relying on empathy and conversation. As Sujata Patel (2020) argued, every individual needs to have trust to survive, since it reinforces mutuality and reciprocity—between individuals, in relationships and in institutions; it indicates confidence in this mutuality and in possibilities of creating new relationships; it allows for belief in norms/rules that structure reciprocity, of opportunity and for aspirations and this finds legitimacy in the governance system at micro to meso to macro levels and thus a confidence in the possibility of its continuation. The pandemic created an anti-thesis to trust, some of which was induced by the initiatives of the government. In the way in which the lockdown was announced there was a presumption that India is an urbanized country and that the people of India live in self enclosed homes. Though the lockdown was for the entire country, the ways of organizing life in urban areas of India where most of the poor live was not taken into account; that a large part of lower segments of the urban population live in one room apartments in slum housing.

The pandemic has also laid bare the need for investment in psycho-social support, to ease the students into a transition back to schools today, as students stagger back from online education to physical education in campuses. In the context of the pandemic, with its severe physical, social, economic and mental health effects on individuals and families, as we begin a return to the pre-pandemic norm,

return to physical work spaces, to physical classrooms etc. constructing a support system based on empathy, and focusing on rebuilding trust will be of crucial importance. The pandemic led to fears of loss of education and livelihood, some students were reported to have taken their own lives fearing the loss of their education during the lockdown (Naha 2020) because of lack of access to online classes. This despite the fact that Centre for Psychosocial Support in Disaster Management, NIMHANS, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had initiated a nationwide toll free 24 x 7 helpline (080-4611 0007) on 29 March 2020 to address the mental health and psychosocial concern of the public during pandemic and lock down (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare 2021). As on 27 February 2021 this helpline had received 337,556 calls and provided 53,081 individuals with specific assistance/ interventions. A Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline "KIRAN" (1800-500-0019) has been launched by the Ministry for Social Justice and Empowerment. This toll-free helpline in 13 languages is operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week.We have to be mindful of the fears that disasters, crisis and disruptions cause, and address them through pedagogical interventions. In addressing pedagogical transformations, we have to ask whether education is inclusive, raise questions about accessibility of the infrastructure, and instill modes, mechanisms and pedagogical practices that rebuild trust, confidence and address mental health and trauma.

It is important to talk about alternative narratives of extreme care taken by educational institutions to reach out to its students during this pandemic. One such example was Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) which is a home for 30,000 poor tribal students from interior districts of Odisha, pursuing their studies from Standard- I to PG/PhD level. The KISS was one of the early institutes to begin online classes and has been maintaining the academic schedule perfectly for students of all levels. However, realizing that the Zoom platform may not be the best form of online education, the KISS launched an e-learning initiative with support from Kalinga TV, which is telecasting the classes every day. Follow-up instructions and study materials are also provided to the students in WhatsApp groups (*The Hindu* 2020).

V. Conclusion

It has been a difficult period of survival, resilience, resistance and transformation. Pedagogic processes within educational institutions underwent all of these processes through and post the pandemic. While the closing down was both sudden and unplanned, the opening up happened more slowly and steadily. What is important to enquire is whether thought went behind re-opening, returning to the physical space of the classroom/campus? Education Minister of Delhi had said that 'for decades, schools had a set pattern, standardized classes, times, way of functioning, these need to be reimagined now' (Government of Delhi — Department of Information & Publicity 2020). To that end, the Department of Education had prepared a two-phase action plan to bridge the competency gap among the students. Together with reduction in the class-wise syllabus, after reopening the Delhi Government schools would also give opportunities to every child to not just rebuild their foundational competencies but also build conceptual clarity before taking up subject-wise topics. The Government announced that teachers will be specially trained to address learning-related issues of children in the new session and implement the two-phase plan in schools. A weekly review will be conducted by the director of education to assess the implementation of the plan, the statement said. The plan will include two hours class daily at Delhi government schools for the "Happiness Curriculum"[1]and numeracy and basic reading classes under Mission Buniyaad in the new session (PTI 2022). Going forward, COVID-19 must be viewed as a catalyst to redesign post pandemic teaching. Much human capital has been developed, and expertise gained, in the use of some educational technology; continued use can enhance the learning experience for all students. Having experienced the conveniences of learning from home, it is conceivable that students—especially those who travel long distances to get to their college or university campuses—will seek a mix of face-to-face and online courses to accomplish learning while also having opportunities for social interaction with peers (Roy and Brown 2022).

The University Grants Commission had released 48 advisories/notices/guidelines on the functioning of HEIs in India during the pandemic period (05 March 2020 - 11 February 2022) (University Grants Commission n.d.). While one of the first guidelines discouraged large gatherings in campuses, an overview of these guidelines and advisories gives us a glimpse into the transformation of the

[1] Happiness Curriculum is an educational program started by the Government of Delhi in 2018 which focuses on integrating positive learning and critical thinking into the formal school education curriculum to achieve social and emotional wellbeing.

education sector, and possible ways forward. It is clear from the advisories that the online model is here to stay. However, the exclusionary tendencies of the online model have also been acknowledged. While there may be a return to physical campus, it is not a return to the pre-pandemic pedagogy and mode of education. One of the early guidelines that came from the UGC was antithetical in spirit to what Avijit Pathak (2020) mentioned as the desired role of the teacher. The April 2020 guidelines, just days after the lockdown had been imposed, included the following: 'To ensure uninterrupted teaching and learning at home and minimize academic loss by leveraging the potential of ICT, UGC has, in the recent past, also shared links of digital platforms developed by MHRD and UGC with a request to create awareness amongst the academic fraternity, using the institutions' websites, e-mail and sharing through social media apps like WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook etc. These digital platforms can be accessed by teachers, students and researchers in universities and colleges and also by lifelong learners. In this regard, UGC has also constituted an expert committee to make recommendations on pooling of e-resources and enhancing the online education systems in the country through the "Bharat Padhe Online" campaign'. The focus of this was 'making productive use of time by adopting ICT' and not the wellbeing of teachers and students. That came, but later.

An analysis of the advisories reveals that while most of the notices were related to reworking the timelines and modes of examination, there were several other initiatives integrating the education sector and stakeholders, namely students, teachers and staff to engage in the larger fight against the pandemic, by promoting COVID appropriate behavior, not only in the university spaces, but also as part of their social responsibility. The guidelines suggested engaging in these through media platforms and online modes, promoting AYUSH practices, addressing vaccination hesitancy, etc. This can be seen in the #youngwarrior program, promotion of AYUSH Sanjivani app, implementation of vaccination programs etc. The #youngwarrior program was meant for students and teachers between the ages of 18-30 years, with an objective to become vaccine buddy, stress buster, fake news police, care-giver or COVID appropriate behavior influencer. The intention was for young people to showcase leadership skills by becoming youth ambassadors who can impart knowledge and counsel youth during the time of crisis. While the COVID healer metaphor, as mentioned above in this monograph, was not used by the UGC, the objective seemed to be towards care and ways of emerging out of crisis.

In addition to these, several initiatives to create avenues for psycho-social support have also been taken. Psycho-social support and special attention to mental healthcare has featured prominently in guidelines related to campus reopening.

The intention behind mental health care and psycho-social support however is revealed in the MANODARPAN initiative, wherein it is imagined to be in line with the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, to efficiently reform the education sector by strengthening human capital and increasing productivity. The focus therefore has been on reforming the education sector on grounds of productivity. To enable this transformation, the financial burden and economic toll that the pandemic had taken on the lives of the people has also been acknowledged, addressing which several initiatives were taken to ease economic strain. This ranged from implementing full refund policies for candidates who cancel their admissions, to extending timeline of UGC sponsored fellowships, to easing the burden of paperwork pertaining to disbursal of stipends to research scholars.

The guidelines that reveal the most about how the pandemic has redesigned pedagogy and the education sector are the ones pertaining to the reopening of universities and colleges. The UGC also announced the names of Universities which can provide Open and Distance Learning programs in approved areas of studies till 2025. Most importantly, they note that the online mode is the preferred mode, however they make concessions by noting that wherever necessary, arrangements for offline mode and blended mode must also be made. The blended or hybrid mode thus appears to be slowly becoming the preferred mode of education, wherein physical presence is supplemented by e-resources, online tools etc. to further learning activities and education. This further reflects on what the campus is imagined to offer, and how education is perceived. Guidelines pertaining to reopening of campuses gave preference to classroom activities, mentor-based meetings, and administrative work, whereas cultural activities and other social activities were to be restricted. We may note that this has altered how we understand university spaces, and their purpose, with pedagogical instructions alone being seen as essential to the university, and social/cultural interaction and engagement as secondary.

The reimagination of education therefore relies on the blended mode to bring together the best practices of online education and its inclusive potential, while addressing the problems of accessibility. This is an opportunity and a transformation at the same time, as it may on the one hand enable inclusive accessibility, while making international and transnational collaborations possible, and on the other, transform the physical campus and its activities in ways that reimagines the physical infrastructure as one that is meant to primarily enable online participation. The pandemic gave us a moment to engage with the crisis and move towards resilience, and think about empathetic innovation for transformative pedagogy. Teaching to care is what the pandemic experienced

pedagogic learning may be. The transformative potential of education remains in the fact that it will be a significant site of building trust, in a world where risk and uncertainty looms.

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