



## POLITICS SOCIETY & HISTORY TWO-DAY ROUNDTABLE (ONLINE)

# YOUTH, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND ASPIRATIONS IN LIBERALIZING INDIA

**24-25 OCTOBER, 2025**

Organised by  
Politics Society & History (PSH) Constellation  
Office of Interdisciplinary Studies (I.D.E.A.S.)  
O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, Haryana



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# Itinerary

## DAY 1, OCTOBER 24, 2025

### 2:00 PM - 2:05 PM **Welcome Address**

Dr. Ambreen Agha

Constellation Lead, Politics, Society & History, I.D.E.A.S.

Associate Professor, Jindal School of International Affairs

### 2:05 PM - 2:15 PM **Introduction of the roundtable**

Dr. Renu Singh

Member Associate I.D.E.A.S and Independent Researcher

### **Panel I**

### 2:20 PM - 4:00 PM **Becoming Employable: The private route to upward mobility**

**Not a Government College: Minority Institutions, Caste Politics, and Privatisation in Higher Education,**

Sneha Krishnan, Associate Professor, University of Oxford and Tutorial Fellow at Brasenose College. (20 minutes) 2:20 p.m.- 2:40 p.m.

**Manufacturing Aspiration: Management Education and the Making of Youth Futures in Contemporary India,**

Shiuli Sinha, Junior Research Fellow and PhD scholar at the University of Hyderabad. (20 minutes) 2:40 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

**Curating an 'Educational Environment': Commercial Libraries, New Entrepreneurs, and Shifting Geographies of Education in India**

Avishek Jha, PhD candidate, University of Melbourne, Australia. (20 minutes) ) 3:00 p.m. -3:20 p.m.

**Escaping the Indian engineering nightmare: study in Germany as a path to desirable employment.**

Dr Sazana Jayadeva, Surrey Future Fellow, Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, U.K. (20 minutes) 3:20 p.m. -3:40 p.m.

**Youth and the Aspiration for Start Ups in New India,**

Nandini Hebbar, Postdoctoral Fellow, Centre for Learning and Innovative Pedagogy, MICA, Ahmedabad. (20 minutes) 3:40 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

*Chair: Dr. Ambreen Agha, Constellation Lead, Politics, Society & History, I.D.E.A.S. & Associate Professor, Jindal School of International Affairs,*

*Discussant: Prof. Mary E John (retired), Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), New Delhi. (4:00 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.)*

### 4:15 PM - 4:30 PM **Q&A**

## Panel II

**4:30 PM - 6:00 PM    The Parallel World of Education: Aspirations, Inequalities and the Shadow of Education Economy**

**Composite aspirations: Coaching, family, and the tribal girls of Rajasthan,**  
Deepika Meena, Assistant Professor, MICA, Ahmedabad. (20 minutes) 4:30 p.m. -4:50 p.m.

**Desire to Succeed in the Civil Service Examination: A Case Study of Young People in India,**  
Mitali Patle, Ph.D. Candidate, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi. (20 minutes) 4:50 p.m. -5:10 p.m.

**Gender and Employability in Indian Higher Education, Gunjan Wadhwa & Sinu Sugathan**  
Gunjan, Assistant Professor, Centre for International Education, University of Sussex. Sinu is Researcher, Savitribai Phule Pune University . (20 minutes) 5:10 p.m. -5:30 p.m.

**Changing Regional Landscapes of Higher Education, Jobless Futures, and Subaltern Youth Precarity in North India: Select Vignettes**  
Manisha Priyam, Sir Louis Matheson Distinguished Visiting Professor, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. 1.(20 minutes) 5:30 p.m. - 5:50 p.m.

*Chair: Dr. Renu Singh, Member Associate I.D.E.A.S and Independent Researcher*

*Discussant/chair: Prof. Sneha Krishnan, Associate Professor, Oxford University, (5:50 p.m. - 6:05 p.m.)*

**6:05 PM - 6:20 PM    Q&A**

**6:20 PM - 6:30 PM    Closing of the day one**

# DAY 2, OCTOBER 25, 2025

## 2:00 PM - 2:05 PM **Recap of Day 1**

Dr. Renu Singh

Member Associate I.D.E.A.S and Independent Researcher

Dr. Ambreen Agha

Constellation Lead, Politics, Society & History, I.D.E.A.S.

Associate Professor, Jindal School of International Affairs

## **Panel III**

## 2:05 PM - 3:25 PM **Crafting the Self: Youth, Education and the Making of Modern Subjectivities**

**Aspirations with Boundaries: Education, Gender, and Community Identity among Meena Women in Delhi,**

Seema Marmath, PhD, Advanced Centre for Women's Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. (20 minutes) 2:05 p.m. - 2:25 p.m.

**On the Long Road to Freedom: Educational Journeys and Aspirational Narratives of Puroik Youth**

Vijitha Rajan, Faculty, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. (20 minutes) 2:25 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.

**Becoming a Blood Donor in a Himalayan City: Young People's Blood Donation Practices and Forging Ethical Selves,**

Nilanjana Sen, Researcher and development practitioner. (20 minutes) 2:45 p.m. - 3:05 p.m.

**The Aspirants of Political Capital: A Bourdieusian Reading of the Field of Higher Education**

Dr. Soumodip Sinha, Assistant Professor, Alliance University, Bengaluru. (20 minutes) 3:05 p.m. - 3:25 p.m.

*Chair: Dr. Ambreen Agha, Constellation Lead, Politics, Society & History, I.D.E.A.S. & Associate Professor, Jindal School of International Affairs*

*Discussant: Prof. Sugandha Nagpal, Associate Professor, O.P. Jindal Global University, 3:25 p.m.-3:40 p.m.*

## 3:40 PM - 3:55 PM **Q&A**

4:00 PM - 5:20 PM

## Panel IV

### Aspiration and Ambivalence: Marginalised Youth in India's Higher Education Landscape

**Paradox of Muslim Minority Educational Institutions: Muslim Youth, Higher Education and Aspirations,**

Hem Borker, Assistant Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi. (20 minutes) 4:00 p.m. - 4:20 p.m.

**Working learners, aspiring professionals: Fellowship programs as a pathway for Indian youth**

Nirved Kumar, PhD candidate, IIM Ahmedabad & Mirae Asset Foundation Scholar. (20 minutes) 4:20 p.m. - 4:40 p.m.

**The gratitude of daughters: Higher Education as a gift**

Savitha Suresh Babu,  
Co-Executive Director, Samvada. (20 minutes) ) 4:40 p.m. -5:00 p.m.

**Flexible Aspirations among Young Dalit Women: Straddling Education, Mobility and the Rural in Punjab**

Sugandha Nagpal  
Associate Professor, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat. (20 minutes) 5:00 p.m. -5:20 p.m.

*Chair: Dr. Renu Singh, Member Associate I.D.E.A.S and Independent Researcher*

*Discussant: Prof. Satish Deshpande (retired), Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, 5:20 p.m.-5:40 p.m.*

5:40 PM - 5:55 PM

## Q&A

5:55 PM - 6:10 PM

### Concluding the roundtable and way forward

Dr. Renu Singh  
Member Associate I.D.E.A.S and Independent Researcher

Dr. Ambreen Agha  
Constellation Lead Politics, Society & History I.D.E.A.S.  
Associate Professor, Jindal School of International Affairs



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## Presenters Bios

### Roundtable on Youth, Higher Education, and Aspirations in Liberalizing India, 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> October 2025

#### Day 1, Session I: Becoming Employable: The private route to upward mobility

**1. Dr Sneha Krishnan** is an Associate Professor in Human Geography at the University of Oxford and Tutorial Fellow at Brasenose College. She is a feminist historical and cultural geographer whose work explores transnational histories of domesticity, intimacy, and education in the Anglophone colonial world. Sneha is currently writing a book on girlhood and domestic modernity in early 20th-century India and has ongoing collaborations on abolitionist domesticity and queer girlhood. She is also a public scholar, with writing featured in Verso, Public Books, and other platforms. Sneha is an Editor of Gender, Place, and Culture, and her work has been supported by the British Academy and a John Fell Fund.

**2. Shiuli Sinha** is a Junior Research Fellow and PhD scholar at the University of Hyderabad, where she is pursuing her doctoral studies in Sociology. She holds a Master's degree in Sociology from the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. Her research interests lie at the intersection of social mobility, education, information technology, and the corporate sector. Her current work critically engages with how emerging technologies and institutional structures influence access, opportunity, and upward mobility in contemporary India. She seeks to contribute to broader discussions on equity, systemic change, and the transformative potential of education and technology in a rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape.

**3. Dr. Avishek Jha** recently completed his PhD in Social Geography from the University of Melbourne, Australia. He examines the ways in which educated unemployed young people navigate educational privatisation, joblessness, and socio-political change in contemporary north India. He is also the co-author of the recently published monograph, *When People Rise in Protest: Mobilising for Equal Citizenship in India*, with Zoya Hasan.

**4. Sazana Jayadeva** is a Surrey Future Fellow in the Department of Sociology at the University of Surrey in the UK. She is also affiliated with the GIGA Institute of Asian Studies in Germany as an Associate Researcher. Her research revolves around the broad themes of education, migration, and digital and social media. She is currently involved in research on virtual student mobilities and the role of social media in facilitating international student migration. Sazana is an Associate Editor of the journal *Sociology*, an editorial board member of the journals *Sociological Research Online* and *Global Networks*, and co-convenes the International Research and Researchers' Network of the Society for Research into Higher Education.

**5. Dr Nandini Hebbar** is a scholar of education cultures with a PhD in Sociology from the Delhi School of Economics. A UGC-sponsored JRF Awardee and NET-qualified educator, with a published book *Gender, Caste, and Class in South India's Technical Institutions* (Oxford University Press, 2024). Awarded the Vina Mazumdar Memorial Award by the Indian Association of Women's Studies for best research paper by a young scholar in 2020. Invited Fellow at the Chicago Tamil Forum at the University of Chicago in 2024. Currently Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Learning and Innovative Pedagogy at MICA, Ahmedabad, committed to advancing impactful curricula in academic institutions.



## Sessions II: The Parallel World of Education: Aspirations, Inequalities and the Shadow of Education Economy

**1. Dr. Deepika Meena** is an Assistant Professor at MICA, Ahmedabad. She holds a Ph.D. from the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar, where her research focused on tribal development, higher education, migration, and the idea of agency. She completed her master's degree in public policy, Law, and Governance from the Central University of Rajasthan. Her research Interests are Tribal Development, Coaching's and aspirations, agency and migration.

**2. Mitali Patle** is pursuing a Ph.D. in Education from the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi. Her research work focuses on the educational experiences, aspirations, and employment of Adivasi students. She has completed a Master of Education from CIE, University of Delhi, with specialization in Inclusive Education, and worked on a dissertation about tribal girls' education in Madhya Pradesh. She can be contacted at [mitali@niepa.ac.in](mailto:mitali@niepa.ac.in)

**3. Gunjan Wadhwa** is Assistant Professor in International Education at the Centre for International Education, University of Sussex. Her research and teaching are focused on sociology of education, with a specific interest in gender, youth, work and livelihoods. Gunjan's doctoral and postdoctoral research examined the production of indigenous Adivasi and rural youth identities in India by tracing the linkages with land/ forests, work and education in context of protracted violence, conflict and postcoloniality. Her research draws on postcolonial, feminist and poststructuralist perspectives. Gunjan convenes the MA in International Education and Development and is Deputy Director of the Centre for International Education, a Centre of Excellence at Sussex.

**4. Manisha Priyam** is currently the Sir Louis Matheson Distinguished Visiting professor at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. She is a Professor of Education Policy at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi. She has a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

## Day 2, Session III: Crafting the Self: Youth, Education and the Making of Modern Subjectivities

**1. Seema Marmath** completed her PhD from the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi, and a Master of Arts as well as an MPhil in Women's Studies from TISS, Mumbai. Her doctoral thesis, 'Community, Gender and Education: A Study of Meena Women in Delhi', examines how Meena women experience higher education in the context of family migration to Delhi and sustained access to Scheduled Tribe (ST) reservations. It offers critical insights into how urban ST women navigate questions of identity, aspiration, and constraint across the spheres of education, family, marriage, and employment.

**2. Vijitha Rajan** is a faculty member at the School of Education, Azim Premji University, Bangalore (India). Prior to joining the University in 2020, Vijitha was a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Delhi (2015–2020). In 2018–19, she was a Commonwealth Scholar at School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, United Kingdom. Her doctoral research is on understanding educational exclusion of migrant children and foregrounds the discord between mobile childhoods and immobile schools in the Indian context. Post the doctoral study, she has led two research projects as primary investigator. 1) Education, Margins and City: Examining the Linkages through an Ethnographic Exploration (2021–2022). Early Career Research Grant by The Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF)- UK Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)- anchored at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS), Bengaluru. 2) Trajectories of Education, Livelihoods and Social Mobility of Puroik Community: An Exploratory Study in East Kameng District (Arunachal Pradesh), Small Grant Research Project, Funded by Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. She teaches various courses at the university such as Sociology of Education, Curriculum Studies, School and Society and Consolidation of Programme Experience for undergraduate and postgraduate students of education. Broad areas of her interest include sociology of childhood(s) and education, childhood(s) in Global South, education and social justice, educational inequalities, and marginalization. She is currently the General Secretary of Comparative Education Society of India (CESI). Further details about her publications can be found here: <https://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/people/vijitha-rajan>

**3. Nilanjana Sen** is a researcher and development practitioner whose work explores youth agency, ethics, and everyday decision-making. She is currently filming a documentary in the Western Himalayas, drawing on years of ethnographic fieldwork. Nilanjana holds a PhD in Human Geography from the University of Melbourne and master's degrees from King's College London and South Asian University. She has worked on governance and policy initiatives in Haryana as a Chief Minister's Good Governance Associate and now works in grant management and global corporate social responsibility. At the heart of her work is a commitment to public ethnography and ethical collaboration, grounded in the belief that lived experiences can shape a more just and imaginative future.

**4. Soumodip Sinha** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Alliance University, Bengaluru. He has completed his doctoral studies in Sociology from the Department of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi. His doctoral thesis revolves around an in-depth examination of student political activism within higher education. He is a member of Working Group 10 (WG 10) on Digital Sociology under the International Sociological Association (ISA). He is also a member of the Academic Precarity Task Force, an initiative of the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA). His areas of academic interest encompass an array of subjects that include the exploration of higher education, social movements, political sociology, sociology of law, and digital sociology.



## Session IV: Aspiration and Ambivalence: Marginalised Youth in India's Higher Education Landscape

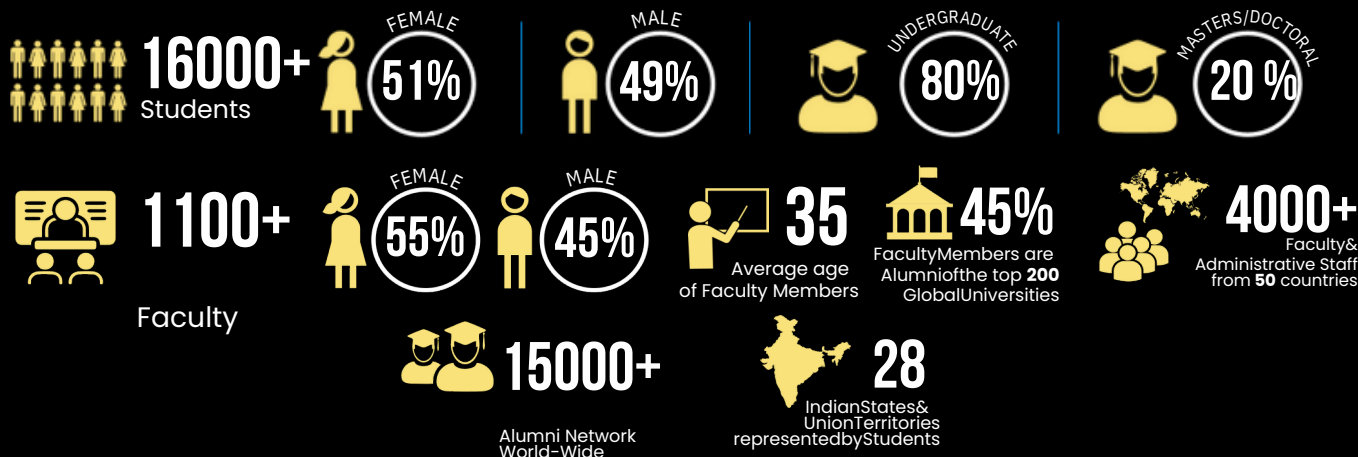
**1. Hem Borker**, is presently Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Work, Jamia Millia Islamia. Her research spans education, gender, minorities, social exclusion, and adolescents and youth with a particular focus on India. She earned her DPhil (PhD) in Education from the University of Oxford on the Clarendon Scholarship. She also holds a MA in Social Work from the University of Delhi and BA in History from St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi. Her ethnographic monograph *Madrasas and the Making of Islamic Womanhood* (2018) has been published by Oxford University Press. It explores the educational journeys of Muslim students in a girls' madrasa in India. Her Work has been published most recently in *Current Anthropology*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, *International Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *Sociological Bulletin*, *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, *Social Change* and *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*.

**2. Nirved Kumar** is a final-year PhD candidate at IIM Ahmedabad and a Mirae Asset Foundation Scholar. His research focuses on organisational innovations in higher education and youth skilling. His doctoral work uses mixed methods to study the role and influence of fellowship programs in India. He is co-authoring a forthcoming academic book on Global Engagement Centres and internationalisation in higher education for Palgrave Macmillan, to be published in 2026. Nirved's work has been published in peer-reviewed journals and presented at leading conferences across public policy, education, and management. Prior to academia, he worked for three years in public administration across central, state, and district-level institutions. A graduate of SRCC and Delhi University, he is originally from Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

**3. Savitha Suresh Babu** is the Co-Executive Director of Samvada since 2023. Before stepping into this role, her work in various Samvada programs, notably the Kanaja Youth Research and Advocacy Centre and the Baduku Centre for Livelihoods Learning, deepened her focus on youth vulnerabilities and the potential of critical pedagogy. Savitha holds a PhD from the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, and Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal. Her doctoral research examined how women from socially marginalized communities navigate state welfare hostels, providing important insights into how social inclusion policies translate into everyday practice. Her ongoing research and teaching interests play a key role in shaping Samvada's direct engagement with youth, as well as in strengthening programs that aim to create a socio-political environment that acknowledges youth vulnerabilities and champions youth rights. Her academic writings revolve around youth and education and have been published in journals including *International Studies in the Sociology of Education*, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* and *Economic and Political Weekly*.

**4. Dr. Sugandha Nagpal** (Ph.D. International Development, University of East Anglia) is an Associate Professor in the School of International Affairs at O.P. Jindal Global University. She is trained as an anthropologist and has been working on issues of migration, rural development and gender in North India. Sugandha's research on aspiring youth migrants in Punjab focuses on gendered experiences of class mobility, education, and transnational migration. Her research has been published in *Contemporary South Asia*, *Sociological Bulletin*, the *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, the *India Migration Report* and IOM-Research's *Migration Policy Practice*. Recently, Sugandha has been working with GIZ India on their Shaping Development-Oriented Migration (MEG) program. She has also worked as a Lead Research Consultant with the IOM-UN Migration India Office to helm the methodology and framework for the first pan-India project on youth migration. Currently, Dr. Nagpal is working on designing and teaching a course on Gender, Caste and Social Justice in Contemporary India for the first MA India Studies Program to be housed in India at O.P. Jindal Global University. In her academic and policy related work Sugandha is continually exploring the role that anthropological insights can play in devising responsive policies on gender and migration.

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