



# EDUCATION AND INEQUITY

Perspectives from South Asia



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**FRIDAY, 24 MAY 2024**

Margaret Thatcher Centre  
Somerville College. University of Oxford

# ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM

Education is simultaneously produced by, and reproduces, inequities in the context of South Asia. Educational policy and practice are not only imbricated with broader structural inequalities, such as those of caste and gender, but also shape newer registers of marginality and discrimination through the unequal adoption of technology or normative pedagogies in contemporary times.

‘Education and Inequity: Perspectives from South Asia’ is a one-day research symposium that focuses on identifying the sites, forms and operations of inequity in education and contributing to the growing body of scholarship on rethinking and redesigning education systems to be more inclusive and equitable. The symposium will be hosted by Education South Asia and Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development at the University of Oxford, and aims to bring together graduate students, researchers and practitioners to explore these entanglements from a multidisciplinary perspective.

This symposium will contextualise conversations and debates from education in South Asia in the broader paradigm of sustainable development.

# PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

9:00am-9:30am	Registrations
9:30am-9:40am	Welcome Note: Dr Uma Pradhan Lecturer, IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society
9.40am-10.00am	Keynote Address: Dr Akshay Mangla Associate Professor, University of Oxford
10.00am-11.30am	Panel 1: Dominant Discourses Chair: Ritika Arora Presenters: Jenifer Deivanayagam, Vishal Vasanthakumar, Shalanka Weerasinghe
11.30am-11.45am	Tea and Coffee break
11.45am-1.15pm	Panel 2: Pedagogic Peripheries Chair: Dr Arun Kumar Presenters: Kajal Reji, Cheta Sheth, Dr Trishant Simlai
1.15pm-2.15pm	Lunch Break
2.15pm-3.45pm	Panel 3: Policy and Practice Chair: Alison Bukhari Presenters: Loveina Joy, Usama Javed Mirza, Danya Haseeb, Harsh Mahaseth
3.45pm-4.00pm	Tea and Coffee break
4.00pm-5.30pm	Panel 4: Intersectional Inequalities Chair: Ritu Kochhar Presenters: Bharati Chaudhari & Raju Kendre, Dr Hem Borker, Papia Khatun
5.30pm onwards	Evening Reception

# PANEL 1: DOMINANT DISCOURSES

CHAIR

10.00-11.30



## RITIKA ARORA

*PhD Candidate, London School of Economics*

Ritika Arora is a PhD Candidate in International Development at the London School of Economics, researching accountability, school choice, and communal politics in Indian education. She holds an MPhil from the University of Cambridge and a BA from King's College London. Ritika has authored publications on these subjects, including her latest article, titled 'Relocating the political in education'. She also teaches in the Department of Government, and Department of Social Policy at the LSE. Previously, Ritika worked as a social impact consultant, advancing UNICEF's initiatives that bridge youth disparities and enhance community development.

PAPERS

## Unofficial Bilingualism, Marginality and Medium of Instruction: An Indian Dilemma

Jenifer Deivanayagam, Christ University, India (virtual)

## Performing Merit: Extra-curriculars and Castelessness in Elite Private Schools in Chennai

Vishal Vasanthakumar, University of Cambridge, UK

## The making of "good Buddhist girls": Exploring the Intersections of Education, Religion, and Gender

Shalanka Weerasinghe, University of Cambridge, UK

# PANEL 2: PEDAGOGIC PERIPHERIES

CHAIR

11.45-13.15



## DR ARUN KUMAR

*Assistant Professor of History, University of Nottingham*

Dr. Kumar is a historian of modern India with an interest in social, economic, education and labour history. His work explores different facets of the working-class life including their dreams, education, childhood, and night-time histories. He is currently working on his first book-project titled (tentatively) *The Silent Rebellion: Working-Class Dreams, Education and Welfare Capitalism*. His PhD on the educational dreams of Indian workers was part of the Transnational Research Group on 'Poverty and Education in Modern India' which was funded by the Max Weber Foundation.

PAPERS

## Academic Experiences of Students with Parental Disability in India

Kajal Reji, University College London, India

## Left in the Dark: Night Schools in Mumbai

Cheta Sheth, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India  
(virtual)

## Education or Control? Unveiling the dual facets of conservation education programs

Dr Trishant Simlai, University of Cambridge, UK

# PANEL 3: POLICY AND PRACTICE

CHAIR

14.15-15:45



## ALISON BUKHARI

*International Director, Educate Girls*

Alison is a non-profit management professional with over 20 years' experience working in education and child development in India. She moved to India in 2002 to take up a leadership role with a then start-up NGO Magic Bus and lived and worked in Maharashtra for 8 years. After moving back to the UK in 2010, Alison joined Dasra, a non-profit strategic consulting organization, where she worked between Mumbai and London. Alison joined Educate Girls in 2015 their International Director, working alongside the senior leadership team in India on their external affairs, strategy and project management. Alison was a Fellow of Practice at the Blavatnik School of Government in 2019 and continues to work with Educate Girls from her new home in Oxford.

PAPERS

## **Aspirations of Undergraduate Students of Vocational Education Programmes: Narratives of Mobility and Agency**

Loveina Joy, University of Delhi, India (virtual)

## **Piloting a novel socio-emotional inclusion index to assess educational inequities in Pakistan**

Usama Javed Mirza, University of Cambridge, UK and  
Danya Haseeb

## **The Significance and Impact of the No Objection Certificate Policy in Nepal: The Need for Immediate Change**

Harsh Mahasheth, OP Jindal Global University, India  
(virtual)



# PANEL 4: INTERSECTIONAL INEQUALITIES

CHAIR

16:00-17:30

## RITU KOCHHAR

*PhD Candidate, London School of Economics*



Ritu is an ESRC-funded PhD candidate at LSE's Department of Social Policy. She works on caste inequalities in India and abroad and explores the transnational academic mobility of caste through students coming to the UK. Before her PhD, Ritu was a Senior Research Associate at the Centre for Policy Research's State Capacity Initiative and worked extensively in the policy space with multiple state governments and departments in India, such as the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi and Women Empowerment and Child Development Department of Uttarakhand. She also holds a master's in Modern South Asian Studies from the University of Oxford.

## PAPERS

### **Navigating the Nexus of Inequity and Access: Educational Pathways for Historically Marginalised Women in India**

Raju Kendre and Bharati Chaudhari, Eklavya India  
Foundation, India

### **The Paradox of Education in Muslim Minority Educational Institutions: Ethnographic Reflections**

Dr Hem Borker, Jamia Millia Islamia, India

### **Access to Higher Education for Muslim Women in Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India: A Qualitative Study**

Papia Khatun, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India  
(virtual)

# SPEAKERS

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## DR AKSHAY MANGLA

*Associate Professor of International Business, University of Oxford*



Akshay Mangla is Associate Professor of International Business at Saïd Business School and a Research Fellow at Green Templeton College. His book, *Making Bureaucracy Work: Norms, Education and Public Service Delivery in Rural India* (Cambridge University Press), investigates how public agencies effectively implement universal primary education services in India. Dr Mangla is a Faculty Associate of the Department of Politics and International Relations and the Contemporary South Asian Studies Program in the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies. Prior to Oxford, Akshay was an Assistant Professor at Harvard Business School, where he taught in the Business, Government, and International Economy Unit. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MSc in Management Research from the University of Oxford and a BS in Finance and BA in Philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania.

## DR UMA PRADHAN

*Lecturer, IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society*



Uma Pradhan is a Lecturer at IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society. She is the founder and convenor of the Education South Asia initiative. Uma's research explores cultural and material dimensions of education, through ethnographic research in Nepal and South Asia. At UCL, She is part of Centre for Education and International Development (CEID) and Centre for the Study of South Asia and the Indian Ocean World. Before joining UCL, she was a Lecturer and Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Oxford.



# PRESENTERS



## JENIFER DEIVANAYAGAM

*PhD Candidate, Christ University*

Jenifer is a PhD scholar at Christ University, Bangalore. Her broad area of research is English Language Teaching (ELT). She holds two postgraduate diplomas in ELT. For her doctoral work, she studies the use of the first language (L1) in English language vocabulary assessment in government schools of Tamil Nadu. Her research focuses on reducing inequality and exclusion arising out of socio-economic barriers in accessing English education. She is interested in bi/multilingual language teaching and assessment, as well as the sociology of English language education.



## VISHAL VASANTHAKUMAR

*DPhil Candidate, University of Cambridge*

Vishal Vasanthakumar is currently pursuing a PhD in Sociology at the University of Cambridge as a Gates Cambridge Scholar. He has been a teacher for six years and holds a Masters in International Education Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His first book titled “The Smart and the Dumb: Stories on Indian Education” is due for release in July 2024 and is published by Penguin Randomhouse India.



## SHALANKA WEERASINGHE

*MPhil. Multidisciplinary Gender Studies, University of Cambridge*

Shalanka is a multidisciplinary researcher with a background in Gender Studies, Law, and International Relations. She recently completed an MPhil in Multidisciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Cambridge, focusing on the intersection of law and gender in the fight to decriminalize homosexuality in India. Shalanka also holds an LLB from the University of Colombo, a BSc in International Relations from the LSE, and is an Attorney-at-Law admitted to the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka. She will present her research on gender, religion, and education in the context of girls' education in British Ceylon at this symposium.

# PRESENTERS



## KAJAL REJI

*MA Special and Inclusive Education, UCL*

Kajal is a compassionate and trauma-informed professional with a background in both education and mental health support. She holds an MA in Special and Inclusive Education from UCL, UK, and an MA in Social Work in Mental Health from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India. Her expertise lies in supporting individuals with disabilities within diverse cultural contexts, having made impactful contributions in India, the U.A.E, and the U.K. Currently, Kajal serves as a Safe Haven Practitioner at Andover Mind and a Mental Health Consultant for Afghan Refugee Education Project at HealthProm.



## CHETA SHETH

*Graduate Student, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai)*

Cheta completed a BA LLB (Hons.) from Gujarat National Law University, and consequently pursued MA in Regulatory Policy and Governance from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Her Master's thesis explored the historical development of night schools in Mumbai, the different modes of provisioning and the ways in which the teaching and non-teaching staff negotiate within these spaces and limited resources.



## DR. TRISHANT SIMLAI

*Post Doctoral Research Associate, University of Cambridge*

Trishant is a conservation geographer/sociologist working as a post-doctoral research associate at the University of Cambridge. He completed a PhD in Geography at Cambridge where his thesis investigated the social and political implications of surveillance technologies in conservation. Trishant's research interests broadly revolve around the politics of conservation interventions in India with a recently developed interest in the politics of conservation education.

# PRESENTERS



## BHARATI CHAUDHARI

*MA Education, Leadership and Management, University of Exeter*

Bharati Chaudhari is a first-generation graduate, serves as a Training Support Officer at Welsh Women's Aid. She holds a Master's degree in Education Leadership and Management from the University of Exeter. With over six years of experience in the education sector, Bharati is dedicated to empowering and supporting young women through her role. Her journey reflects a commitment to education and advocacy for marginalised students.



## RAJU KENDRE

*Founder and CEO, Eklavya India Foundation*

Raju Kendre, founder of the Eklavya India Foundation, champions educational equity for India's historically marginalized communities. Originating from a nomadic tribe in the Vidarbha region, his journey from being a first-generation college student to earning an MSc in Development Studies at SOAS, University of London, on a Chevening Scholarship, exemplifies his dedication to making quality education accessible. His work is recognized on many global platforms like being an Ashoka Fellow, Inlaks Fellow, FRSA, TEDx speaker, and Forbes 30 Under 30 awardee.



## PAPIA KHATUN

*PhD candidate, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai)*

Papia is presently pursuing her Ph.D. in the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies, at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Her research focuses on "Higher Education and the Changing Status of Muslim Women: A Case Study of Purba Medinipur District in West Bengal." Through her research, Papia delves deeply into the experiences, aspirations, and challenges encountered by Muslim women involved in higher education, with a specific emphasis on those within the Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal.

# PRESENTERS



## DR HEM BORKER

*Assistant Professor, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi*



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.

## LOVEINA JOY

*PhD Candidate, University of Delhi*



Loveina is a PhD Scholar at the Department of Education, University of Delhi. Her research aims to contribute to educational choices, methods and pursuits in India. Her interests span a broad spectrum, including exploring students' aspirations, analysing institutional provisions, examining public-private educational partnerships, and delving into vocational and skill development in education. Drawing from her rich experiences in teaching positions at several esteemed universities in Delhi, Loveina's hands-on experience in the classroom has provided invaluable insights and perspectives that she continues to integrate into her research.

## DANYA HASEEB

*M.S.Ed. International Education Development, UPenn*



Danya is an International Education Development expert with 6+ years advising governments, the UN, and enterprises on ideating and implementing sustainable, scalable and disruptive interventions in the areas of Ed-Tech, Curriculum Design, Digital Wellbeing and Social Entrepreneurship. She has co-created a novel Socio-Emotional Inclusion Index that measures how well regions are catering to the mental wellness of youth. Danya has a M.S.Ed in International Education Development from UPenn.

# PRESENTERS



## USAMA JAVED MIRZA

*DPhil Candidate in Education, University of Cambridge*

Usama studied Physics and Philosophy at LUMS (Pakistan), and then Education as a Fulbright Scholar at Teachers College, Columbia University. He is also a New York state trained Emergency Medical Technician. In 2017, he founded Saving 9, a social enterprise dedicated to transforming mindsets in order to save lives; pioneering initiatives such as launching Pakistan's first women-run ambulance, Asia's first mental health ambulance and creating a novel Socio-Emotional Inclusion Index that measures how well regions are catering to the mental wellness of youth. He is currently a doctoral researcher and Gates Scholar at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.



## HARSH MAHASETH

*Independent researcher, New Delhi*

Harsh Mahaseth is an Assistant Professor at Jindal Global Law School, O.P. Jindal Global University, India. He previously held the role of Assistant Dean (Academic Affairs) at Jindal Global Law School, and Assistant Director of the Nehginpao Kipgen Center for Southeast Asian Studies. Harsh is a visiting faculty at Mahindra University and he is also the co-founder of Collegelt, a platform to help people connect with students and alumni while applying to universities abroad. Harsh specializes in Public International Law, with a focus on Asian Legal Studies. He has completed his Master of Laws (Asian Legal Studies) from the National University of Singapore and his B.A., LL.B. (Hons.) from NALSAR University of Law, India. Additionally, he holds a Diploma in International Affairs and Diplomacy from the Indian Institute of Governance & Leadership.



# ORGANISING TEAM

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## ABHISHEK RANJAN DATTA

*DPhil Candidate, University of Oxford*

Abhishek Ranjan Datta is a Clarendon and Lincoln- Kingsgate Scholar at Lincoln College, University of Oxford. His research focuses on mapping urban transformations in India and the broader South Asian region, particularly their impact on the region's youth. His interests span education, skill-training, unemployment, urban migration, globalisation, digital media and emerging youth cultures. His doctoral research is on India's civil service aspirants and his past projects include research on South Asian queer cultures and English language use and unequal multilingualism in urban India.

## MOHINI GUPTA

*DPhil Candidate, University of Oxford*

Mohini Gupta is a DPhil Candidate at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford. She has been the Charles Wallace India Trust Translator-Writer Fellow in 2017. She has co-edited *Rethinking Education in the Context of Post-Pandemic South Asia: Challenges and Possibilities* (Routledge, 2023) and *The Hindu Bard: The Poetry of Dorothy Bonarjee* (Honno Press, 2023). She co-convenes the Education South Asia Project along with Dr Uma Pradhan.

## NEERAJ SHETYE

*Partnerships & Communications Manager, Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development*

Neeraj Shetye is the Partnerships and Communications Manager at the OICSD. He manages OICSD's partnerships, strategic communications, research outreach design and relationship building, and is responsible for the Centre's operations. His research interest is studying the accessibility to public services in education and healthcare for marginalised sections of Indian society.



# INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS

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**The Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development (OICSD)** advances research on the opportunities and challenges of sustainable development in India, with implications for the wider world. The Centre's work rests on three pillars – research on a core set of themes by bringing together different academic disciplines and approaches; developing future leaders by supporting exceptional Indian scholars to study at Oxford; and translating academic ideas to inform policy-relevant actions and impacts in India.



**Education South Asia** is an interdisciplinary network of researchers and practitioners working on/in South Asia. This initiative is a collaboration between the University of Oxford and University College London. The project brings together academic and non-academic perspectives on education. It appreciates education as intertwined with social processes that shape and are shaped by people's visions of the past and future. This initiative was started in 2019 with the financial support from the Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship, Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF) and the University of Oxford's Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund.



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