

India Inclusion Audit 2022

The worth of a country would depend on its institutions' capacity to provide and protect a sense of belonging in its people. The **India Inclusion Audit 2022** exposes the harsh reality of more than half the population of our country not feeling included and accepted on one or multiple grounds.

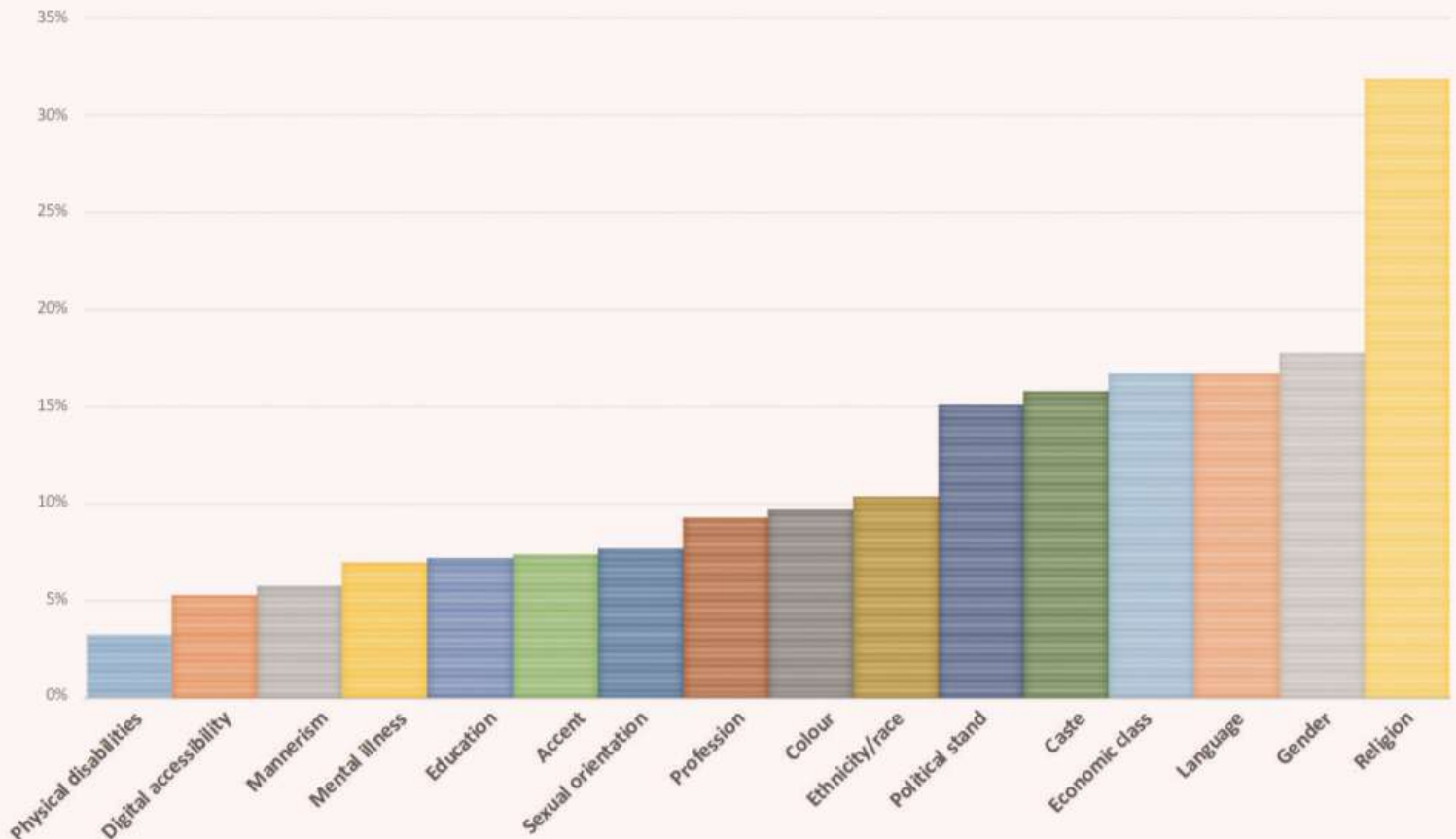
It was an online baseline research with seven questions, to get the pulse of the people

of India from different states regarding their experience of being included politically, socially, religiously, economically and so on. The data collected compels us to work at our shared humanity and belongingness as a country.

The **India Inclusion Audit 2022** was designed and executed by Dr Akeela P, Dr Rupa Peter, Nikhil Banerjee, Sumit Dasgupta, Kapil Arambam, Jamesmon PC OFM and Saji P Mathew OFM.



Do you feel excluded?

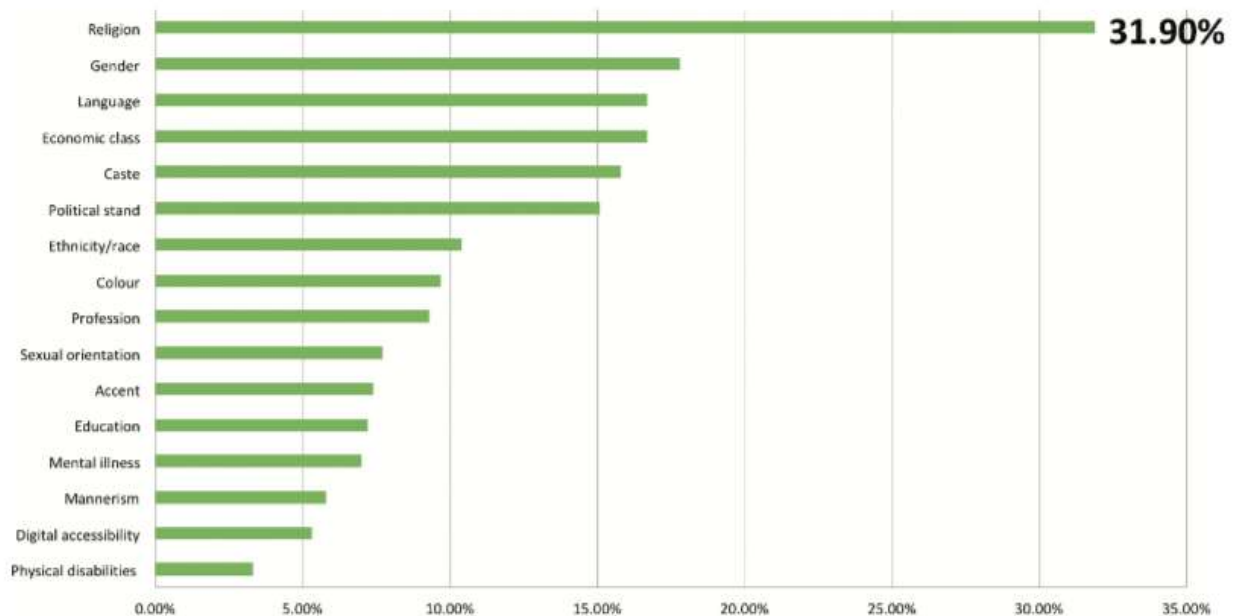


The Story of Exclusion in India

Dr AKEELA P

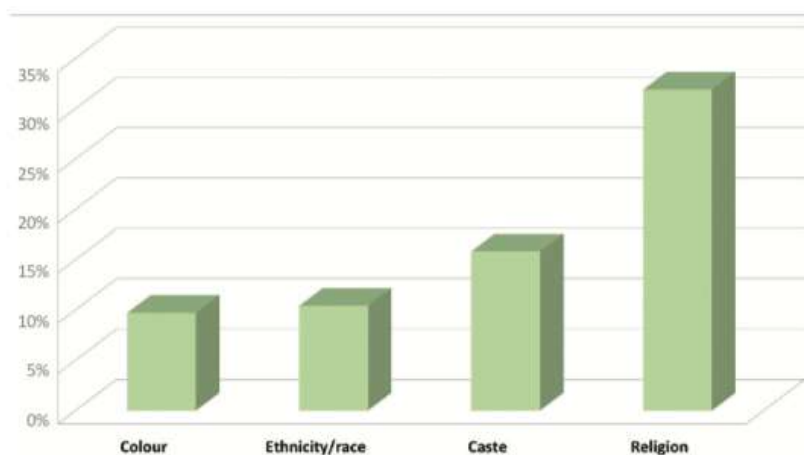
Our social sciences textbooks from grade one onwards ingrained in us how India is the seventh largest country in the world, second most populated country, and world's largest democracy. We are the epitome of multi-ethnicity, multi-linguality, and plurality of religions. We acknowledge and celebrate all the major religiously auspicious days. However, beneath all the diversity do we really feel being inclusive in India is the curious question we need to ask as we walk forward from the celebration of 75 years of Indian Independence.

The **India Inclusion Audit 2022** mainly focused on questions of exclusivity and marginalisation; and explored the grounds of exclusion.



Religion excludes more people than anything else

RELIGION is the number one factor participants felt that they are discriminated on by others. India is the birthplace of some of the world famous religions, like, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism; and we do have people following other major religion of the world namely Christianity and Islam. Our constitution gives the right to follow any religion and respect other religions. Yet people still feel outgroup from their own religions and by other dominant and powerful religions.



Though religion leads the chart, along with it caste, ethnicity, race, and colour too are grounds for marginalisation. Increasing incidents of honour killings are proofs of extreme exclusion on lines of caste and ethnicity. Peoples from the seven sisters of india (North East), Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep Islands, often face racial slurs and namecalling, because others of them mainland India lack familiarity and knowledge of them.

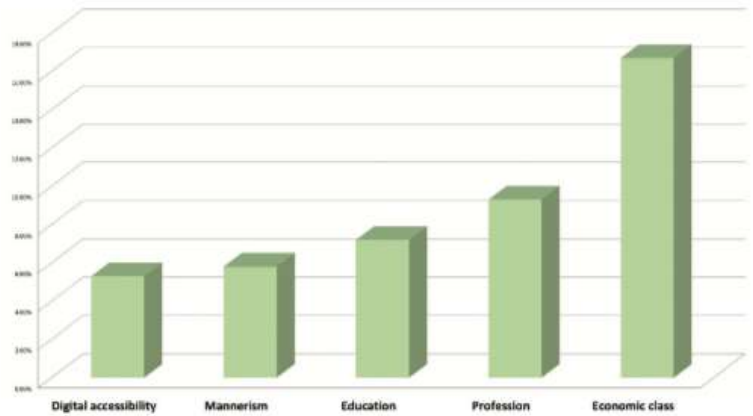
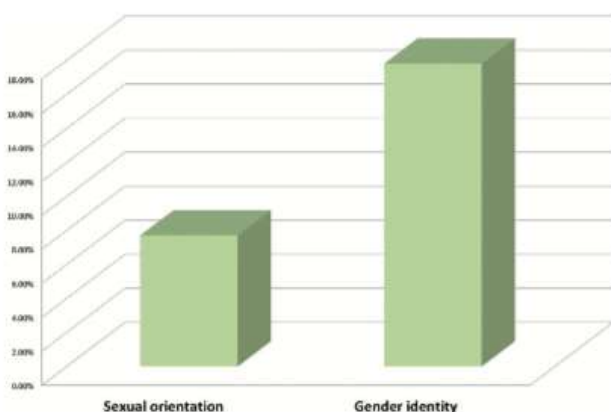
Due to colourism people, particularly women, face discrimination often by the relatives and immediate society. Fair skin is perceived as the sign of beauty, and it provides better prospects of groom and opportunities.

Considering GENDER, the data illustrates that a good number of population get discriminated because of their gender identity and sexual orientation. Women often are victims of glass ceiling at work places and in other spheres of life.

The society, governmental laws, and legal systems are still not geared up to understand, acknowledge, and protect Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and others' (LGBTQ+) rights.

Same LANGUAGE-speaking people often end up being together and interacting only among themselves, which hugely excludes the rest. Some of the Indian languages, due to its thick dialect and phonetics, give rise to the phenomenon known as 'Mother Tongue Influence', thus people mispronounce English word; and that leads to discrimination and exclusion.

On ECONOMIC parameters India lives in two different worlds. According to the State of Inequality in India Report 2022, over 10% group



earn up more than 60% of the total wealth in India, indicating a vast wealth inequality gap over the past 40 years.

One's PROFESSION is linked with ones social status; either because of monetary position or because of the power and title it holds. Government employees have better marriage prospects; foreign education and jobs overseas are wow factors in social gatherings.

POLITICAL exclusion in a democracy would mean denial of rights, denial of political participation, denial of right to organise, denial of personal security, denial of rule of law, denials of freedom of expression and quality of opportunity. India, under the right wing government, is increasingly becoming politically non-inclusive. Now with the arrival of the large corporates the political mechanism runs for the benefit of the economically rich class, bringing in more and more alienation.

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES and MENTAL ILLNESS are often related. The intersection of having a disability and living with a mental illness creates a unique identity, with complex needs and concerns. In addition to the obvious discrimination people with disabilities experience, they also have the pressure to adjust to a culture that engages in ableism.

In conclusion, we have excelled in technology, found cures for terminal diseases, invented satellites travelling millions of miles away into the space, yet our human history is marred with conflicts between various social groups. People have been killed in the name of religion, colour, and caste. Employability is still reliant on merely the knowledge of English and academic marks rather than emotional and social intelligence. If a nation is looking forward to develop and grow to be a great nation, becoming inclusive is not an option but an imperative. ■

Does India Care About Colour?

JYOTHIKA KRISHNAN and PRAVALLIKA MANJU

Colourism is an often disregarded but very real problem faced by many people across the world. It could be as mild as a snarky remark on how they have tanned over the summer, to severe discrimination against them merely for their complexion. Colourism is deeply rooted in India and has been prevalent since the British rule and beyond, where the colour of one's skin determined their social status.

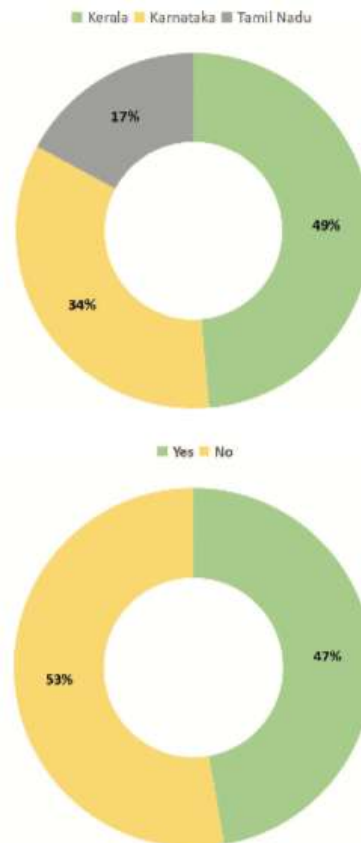
Even in the 21st century, one's colour can determine various social and cultural benefits they may receive, having serious implications on employment opportunities and marriage decisions.

According to the **India Inclusion Audit 2022**, 9.7% of people feel excluded because of colour. Out of these responses, 23.6% of the individuals were men, 74.5% were women and 1.8% identified as others. These responses came from individuals belonging to 14 different states out of which Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu had the maximum number of respondents (36%, 25.4% and 12.7% respectively) who felt sidelined or excluded on the basis of colour among other variables.

This exclusion starts with young children being taught that the lighter the colour of their skin, the more attractive they are. As they grow, this bias toward fairer skin gets reinforced. The prevalence of colourism in the Indian society is evident in movies, where no matter how dark-skinned other characters are, the female lead is always the fairest. This creates a notion that fairness is beautiful.

We also see advertisements of fairness creams like Glow & Lovely (formerly known as Fair & Lovely) that show young women preparing for job interviews by using their cream to become a few shades lighter. These ads not only prey on the insecurities of people, but may also lead one to believe that they must be fair and attractive to land the job of their dreams.

When asked if they were physically put out of space or physically treated badly because of their colour, 47.2% of the respondents said yes, while 52.7% said no. But it is important to note that out of the 55 individuals who cited colour as a cause for feeling excluded, 94.5% of the people observed other causes such as religion, caste, economic class and mental illness alongside colour. Only 5.4% of the respondents felt that colour was the singular cause of their exclusion. It is also interesting to note that the people who fell into the latter category belonged either to Karnataka or Kerala. The results of the audit only go to show that we continue to live in a society where those with lighter complexion are granted social privileges. ■



Top: Colour discrimination in three southern-most states of India

Above: Physically treated badly because of their colour

Political Inclusion Elevates Us as a Democracy

Often expression of one's political stand publicly may put one in a compromising position because it is not in line with the existing dominant views.

Dr RUPA PETER

Inclusion elevates all – Elaine Hall

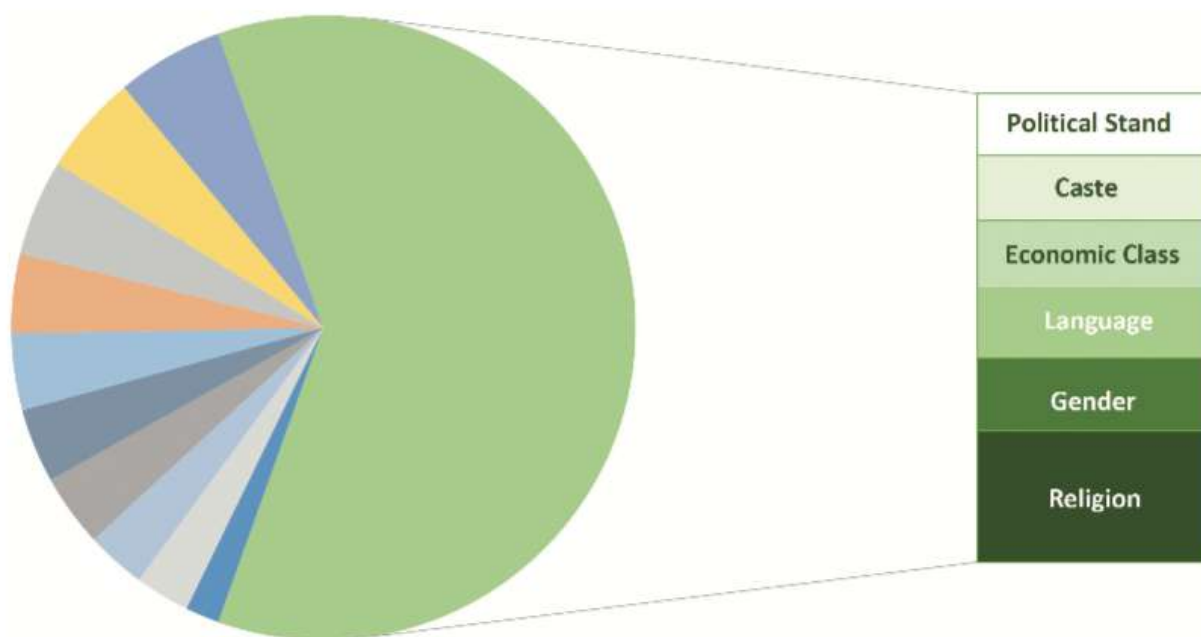
The **India Inclusion Audit** conducted by the *Together* magazine in the month of November–December 2022 throws new light on how diverse political views and ideas can lead to excluding behaviours in our society. 15% of the respondents felt that they have been excluded or sidelined because of their political stand which is based on the political ideology that they believe in. In the survey, exclusion due to political views and beliefs stands sixth right after religion (31.9%), gender (17.8%), economic class and language (both ranked at 16.7%), and caste (15.8%).

At the heart of every good democracy is the ability to discuss, agree, disagree, 'agree to disagree' and to dissent in a civilised manner. And at the heart of every elevating political discussion or conversation is the ability to have diverse views and engage with them effectively and inclusively. Without the co-existence of these two parameters, democracy as an institution falls short considerably.

India follows the multi-party system of democracy and most parties come with their own ideological standpoint which consists of their own doctrines, principles, views and belief systems. As of date, two distinct ideologies dominate the Indian political atmosphere—the

right-wing ideology upheld by political parties like the BJP which focuses on conservative, Hindu-nationalist elements with strong ideological and organisational links to Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS); and the centre-left social liberal belief system of the Congress. Extreme left as in the case of the communist parties are limited to a large regional presence in certain pockets of the country.

In today's scenario, right-wing viewpoints purported by the party in power largely dominate public thought processes and hold sway over the majorly held public opinion, which in itself is plausible. Panel discussions on television sets abound with such ideological musings, if I may call that. Social media posts fan the nationalist fervour from time to time, connecting everything and anything under the sun—from the recent Gujarat assembly elections to Deepika Padukone's wardrobe in the movie *Pathaan*—to right-wing belief systems. Not to mention, Whatsapp University and the enormous volumes of information, misinformation and disinformation that is continuously doing the rounds, on a regular basis. And people all over the country are not just lapping up all these 'capsules of information' but are also propagating them virally.



Six leading reasons for marginalisation in India

Now, the Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression which includes the freedom to express your political views which is what media and the public, by and large, do so eloquently. But the issue arises when the statement of one's political views or the expression of one's political stand publicly puts you in a compromising position because it is not in line with the existing dominant views. Here again, media takes the lead with consistent muting of alternative viewpoints be it on news shows or the vitriolic panel discussions. This gains a faithful reflection among the public who follow suit diligently. Elizabeth Noelle-Newmann's spiral of silence model explains this classic behaviour wherein divergent opinions from the status quo, especially political viewpoints which are perceived to be minority views are not disclosed because of fear of social isolation. This is what happens when divergent political standpoints are continuously frowned upon because the

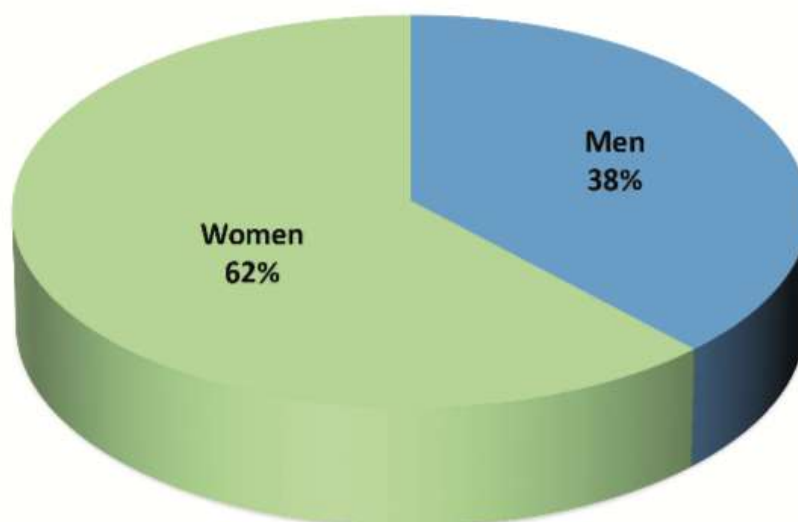
human need to be included (as opposed to being isolated or ostracised) often overrides the need to have a contrary opinion.

As a teacher of media studies, I often discuss politics with young people and I am happy to see that most of them have strong political leanings and are also unafraid to take a clear political stand or voice out their political views. However, at times, I do see that young people are not willing to entertain a divergent political view or even tolerate a different ideology during heated political discussions in the classrooms. This again creates the spiral of silence effect inside the classroom wherein divergent political views are slowly silenced. In my classroom, I insist that students open their minds to different viewpoints and look at different political perspectives and be more accommodating and inclusive of other people's political views and that's the same I would hope for my community, my country and for the world, in general. ■

Strange but True: Religion Excludes Its Own People Too

The greatest irony is that out of fear of being excluded because of your religion, you exclude others because of theirs.

MIKHAIL RAJARAM



Gender-wise distribution of religious exclusion

The widely accepted lyrical genius, Bob Dylan, once sang that *The Times, They Are a-Changin'*. In 1964 he wrote these immortal words and the song, if you listen to it now it rings true even today. If you ask the youth of today what they understand of religion, the first response is likely to be an unconscious wrinkling of the nose. A close friend of mine, when I asked him which religion he followed, once told me, 'My parents follow Islam, I guess I'm supposed to follow it too, but I don't.' If you question the young and young adults in any Indian urban setting you are likely to receive a similar reply. Following a religion is now an old school, uncool and nine out of ten times turns you into a right wing fascist in the eyes of the enlightened left. By now you wonder if this is a rant against



The running joke for women in Hinduism is that they should not feel bad for being excluded. There is a temple where Durga herself is removed from the sanctum sanctorum once a month.

the woke, I assure you that it is not! I seek to examine my own worldview as critically as I can. Any shortcomings are apologised for in advance.

The **India Inclusion Audit 2022** gave an overwhelming 30% response in saying that religion, often along with other factors is the leading reason for feeling excluded. Examination of the data shows that a large percentage of the respondents, perhaps because it is an online survey, are young. My understanding of the question would lead me to believe that these respondents feel excluded because they practice a particular religion and assuredly this is one of the reasons, but, there is another perspective, there is a section of the respondents who feel excluded because they are those who do not follow any form of organised religion at all.

Let's look at the interpretations one by one, starting from the obvious: the people who follow a particular religion feeling excluded. This is an expected response simply because the current powers are becoming more and more focused on using the influence of religion to hold onto power rather than focus on governance. It is far easier to hold onto power by creating a perceived threat than by actually putting in the effort to run a country. I have seen the induced myopia with my own eyes (pun not intended). People whom I considered as enlightened and wise in the ways of the world now claim that we are under threat, that we are on the verge of being wiped out and I am a fool for thinking otherwise. The greatest irony is this, out of fear of being excluded for your religion, you exclude others for theirs. Why else would you support the beef ban? Why

else would you disrupt a peaceful procession? Why else would you want halal certification revoked? It could be because you are an anarchist, but it's more likely that an IT cell has influenced your way of thinking.

Point two: examining the data obtained in the **India Inclusion Audit 2022**, 60% of those who cite religion as cause for exclusion are women. And this begs the question, are they excluded because of their religion or excluded from their own religion. Almost all organised religions have one thing that we can agree on, and that is viewing women as second class citizens. My parents brought me up to be open minded and accepting of all things natural. My own religion sees the feminine as sacred and yet will not allow a woman into a temple during her time of the month. The running joke for women in Hinduism is that they should not feel bad for being excluded. There is a temple where Durga herself is removed from the sanctum sanctorum once a month.

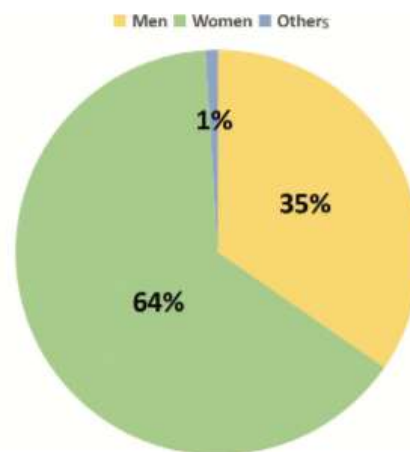
Religion and spirituality are separate. They have been made separate for reasons I have already mentioned. Among the youth of today there are two approaches, either there is a growth in agnosticism or there is a claim that they believe in god but not in religion. And this is perhaps the largest reason for exclusion. Not from social settings but the youth of today feel excluded from religious practice. They do not identify with rituals, do not see meaning in uttering words in languages they do not understand, be it Sanskrit, Latin or Arabic. They see God in their own way and this is a reason to be proud of. There are few things in life that are our own: among them comes our faith, or lack of it. ■

Whom Does Gender Belong To?

There is an entire semantic of respectability a woman must construct each time she leaves her home.

SUMIT DASGUPTA

I am sure we all think of ourselves as observant, vigilant, and intelligent creatures. We are on top of the proverbial food chain and we are the dominant species on this planet. We are outnumbered by ants and we are depleting this planet's resources at an alarming rate but we are number one while this journey lasts. But I digress—this piece is not about the planet. I am sure you already know where this is going. Let's look at the implication of my first statement and localise it. We are observant and intelligent creatures, but have you, have we, really looked and observed? Outside our own four walls? It might be difficult I admit, but humanity never thrived with blinders on. It thrives when we see, hear, and acknowledge everything around us (pardon me for being an ableist). If we look outside, we will notice construction workers, homeless people begging, food stalls going about their daily business, people going to work, children going to school and the unlucky ones going to work (although it is outlawed). One thing that we have all noticed but seemed to have maybe never properly acknowledged is the severe lack of women walking around or going about their daily business. The gender ratio of India, as of January 2021 according to the UN is at about 720 million males and 620 million females. The female population is at 48% while the male population is at 52%. This ratio is not bad when compared to other third-world developing countries. But when we look around, women are surprisingly missing. You can see them, walking and working but they are massively outnumbered by men. If in a metropolitan, urban city like Bengaluru it is this easily noticeable, imagine tier two and three cities. We can go one step further and include the data released by Statistia while talking about



Who is more excluded?

the same gender ratio in our country and it is revealed that for each 1000 males there are 1020 females. The ratio has skewed towards them for the first time in India's history. Yet the story remains the same. It seems that public spaces are not accessible to women.

Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets by Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan, and Shilpa Ranade is a transformative book, to say the least. It tests the idea that Mumbai, the so-called city of dreams, the progressive city of millions is a safe haven for women. Lucid and compact, the book was born out of a three-year research project titled *Gender and Space*, undertaken by Phadke, Khan and Ranade. It cuts across location, class, and religious affiliations. Carefully dispelling the myth of Mumbai being a safe city that grants full access to its women, it proves that even in this cosmopolitan city, the access that women have to public spaces is, at best, conditional. The book challenges the idea that being benign or neutral, at least in the public realm, is actually value-laden, constantly putting

its women under a panopticon of continuous surveillance that one may evade, or conform to. How easy it is to be spotted as out of the ordinary, and how difficult it is to function, once one has been perceived as such. Eyes are always on the street looking out for those 'not like us' and there are so many of 'them'. The authors demonstrate the difficulty of 'the others' to use the city normally and freely. The list of oddballs on the street, who are whetted by the silent city every time they step out is inclusive and top-lined by one single group: 'all women'. To conform, and so to have open access to public space, Mumbai's every woman must be or appear to be young, able-bodied, Hindu, upper-caste, heterosexual, married, or marriageable.

The case in Bengaluru is the same even though it's not Mumbai—it is an urban metropolitan place that boasts of progressive values and prioritises the safety of women. A recent report by the *Deccan Herald* stated that Karnataka has seen a rise in crimes against women as per National Family Health Survey data, UN, and other official reports. The total number of cases registered relating to crimes against women in 2019 was 13,828. In 2021, this increased to 14,468. While 2020 experienced a marginal drop in the number of cases compared to 2019, the cases of crime increased by 1,788 in the following year, 2021. The government has proposed to tighten security, install CCTV devices everywhere and 'educate' the citizens of the state of the evils of abuse of women. These measures are hollow and do not do anything worthwhile. This report comes hot on the heels of the gruesome murder of Shraddha Walkar in Delhi. TV news pundits, experts, and Elon-Musk-wannabes pointed fingers at Shraddha, her parents, and Muslims but nobody questioned the very roots of the issue of gender, accessibility, and safety. There is an entire semantic of respectability a woman must construct each time she leaves her home. She must be or appear to be neutrally middle-class, not Dalit, not Muslim, not lesbian or queer in any way, and not disabled. On Bengaluru's streets, every woman must dress modestly and preferably be escorted by an equally respectable-looking man. She must be healthy, freely mobile, sexually inert, and, most importantly, have a good reason for being out of doors. She must never 'loiter'.

So, whose gender is it anyway? Who does the mantle of gender belong to? Well, if you ask Judith Butler, American post-modernist philosopher, and gender and queer theorist, they will tell you it does not exist and, in its non-existence, most probably belongs to the exploitative capitalist and patriarchal machinery that benefits out of this. They said that gender roles are performative, it's a cycle. Society prescribes gender roles long before the so-called gender is even established. People tell you that you are a woman even before you figure out you are one and therefore you perform or act as a woman and the world acknowledges it. Anything that deviates from the path will be derogatorily called 'deviant'. Gender roles are beneficial to power dynamics because they dictate what a woman should and shouldn't do. So, when it comes to accessibility and safety of women instead of making public spaces a better place for them it has limited them to their homes without realising that homes are not always a safe space for them.

What *Why Loiter* and the **India Inclusion Audit 2022** is trying to point out is that we must recognise that women's safety, accessibility, and gender are not a cosmetic issue. It is the assertion that a woman may not remain in the public realm without purpose. If spotted as such, she would be perceived as having a 'loose' character or would be putting herself at risk and the city would need to exert itself to keep her safe. Her risks are twofold: the first is from an assault on her modesty or respectability, and the second is that she may do something disreputable or immodest. Every woman enters public spaces in Bengaluru with this knowledge. The city is not designed (nor has it grown) with enough consideration for women. Nowhere is this more visible than in the lack of public conveniences. If women from all strata can't use a public bathroom or go to a public park without having to think thrice, then there's no freedom nor any equality for everybody. Questioning the lack of women on the streets of Namma Bengaluru is also recognising that a fundamental right given to the people of India by the constitution is being violated in plain sight and everyone seems to be silent about it or has quietly accepted it and that should not be the norm. ■