Research Paper

Redefining Education during Pandemic Crisis: Exploring the Psychological Impact of E-classes on Women Educators

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ABSTRACT

The prevalent pandemic is far more than just the virus. It has wreaked havoc on India's Healthcare System, Economy, Educational system, and, most significantly, our mental health. Fears, stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and other often reported mental health concerns connected with being infected or separated from society have risen as a result of this outbreak, triggering a humanitarian crisis like never before. This is an exploratory study that aims to examine how education played a critical role during the pandemic by redefining itself, and how it in turn, redefined the pandemic times to a greater extent. The study further explores the psychological impact of this transformation on women educators. A mixed methods design was adopted to collect both quantitative (self-curated health checklist, Beck Anxiety Inventory and Coronavirus Anxiety Scale) and interview-based qualitative data from women educators (aged 30-50 years) from urban schools and colleges in Delhi-NCR. The study concludes that inability to relax, fear of worst happening, fatigue/weakness, head and joint aches, and digestive issues were highly reported by the sample of women educators. Encountering death, technological shift, change in educator-student dynamics, teachers as 'containers' in times of crisis, psychic strength, spirituality, traces of patriarchy and pandemic politics were among the few recurrent themes which emerged in qualitative analysis. The paper draws upon educators' perspectives, narratives and adaptations with the transforming computer-mediated learning and pedagogies, while juggling with burdening gender-roles and engaging in social solidarity. Some interventions are also suggested in the present research.

Keywords: *Educators As 'Containers', Double Burden, Psychic Strengths, Digital Learning, Emotional Labour*

I t has been more than a year since humans began the mighty fight against the Coronavirus disease-19 or COVID-19 (WHO, 2020) infection caused by the SARS-CoV-2. The possibility of a third wave of coronavirus infections looms large in the country as photographs and videos of tourists without masks flood social media. "The third

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wave is inevitable and imminent," the Indian Medical Association warned (The Indian Express, 2021).

The future is still highly uncertain, we are still wearing masks and following social distancing protocols, and questions like "when will the pandemic end" or "when will things get back to normal" puzzle us now more than ever with the potential third wave. The entire faith in the economy, healthcare, education and in the basic understanding of the world has been shaken (Weir, 2020).

Amidst the unlocking in March, India started to experience massive surges in COVID-19 cases. During the first wave, the central government had imposed a timely nationwide lockdown, on the 25th of March, 2020. This resulted in a well-controlled infection rate. However, there was a lack of coordination between the health agencies and the Government of India during the second wave. Several administrative barriers affected the collaboration between the state, center and national institutes which might be the contributors to the inadequate response for the second wave (EClinicalMedicine, 2021).

With India's surge in coronavirus infection growing at the fastest pace, as of June 11, 2021, the devastating toll of deaths during the second wave had crossed 2 lakhs (Times of India, 2021). Many people lost their loved ones to the pandemic, and adding onto this misery was the inability to be physically present for the last rites of the bereaved individual, in fear of contracting the virus oneself and spreading the infection. Instead, people had to rely on funeral organisers (Iftikhar, 2021) to ensure that their dear ones get a decent farewell, while they were grieving at their homes, *distanced*.

The healthcare system had collapsed during the second wave as the hospitals were unbearably full. There were families pleading for oxygen, beds and ventilators outside the hospitals (Money Control, 2021) and on social media platforms. Technology has been a great enabler in the pandemic and as the ordinary channels for medical assistance failed, the youth of India amplified the calls of help and circulated the information of the needed resources via Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and Telegram (Verma, 2021).

On January 16, 2021, India began administering vaccines to frontline workers and those over the age of 60. However, by May, when the drive was extended to everyone over the age of 18, the country had run out of goods, despite increased demand in the wake of a devastating second wave. The supply shortfall, on the other hand, hasn't been the only issue. Due to a variety of challenges ranging from planning to infrastructure to misinformation, India's efforts to vaccinate its citizens have had various degrees of success across the country (Arya, 2021).

As of now, the number of COVID-19 cases in India are decreasing, but the pandemic is far from over, and the introduction of more aggressive strains (Delta variant, Delta Plus variant, Kappa variant, Lambda variant and Epsilon variant) is adding to the trouble (Moneycontrol News, 2021).

We have been living extremely repetitive and monotonous, Sisyphean lifestyles, are bored of bingeing on web-series, tired of unceaseingly disinfecting products and door handles and further disinfecting the disinfectant bottles, to the point where things just seem pointless and meaningless, Albert Camus' concept of the absurdity of life (1965) then doesn't seem very

different from us trying to push the virus away, uncertain whether our efforts will even make a difference, yet doing so repeatedly, for more than a year now.

It has severely affected and challenged the Indian Healthcare System, Economy, Education sector and most importantly our overall well-being (both mental and physical). This disease is a humanitarian crisis, which has led to the outbreak of fears, anxieties, panic and trauma of being infected or being socially disconnected, all of them, as contagious as the virus itself. Studies show that fear, insomnia, anxiety, stress, depression, denial and anger were frequently reported mental health issues amongst Indians (Dalal et al., 2020).

Mental health issues in the Indian context of the pandemic are far more complex. We have a large proportion of socially and economically vulnerable population, a high burden of pre-existing mental illnesses (Dalal et al., 2020), further coupled with the fear that media houses (Anwar et al., 2020) and social media spread by communicating misinformation (Banerjee & Rao, 2020) causing an infodemic, resulting in more fear and panic.

The mental illnesses and disorders caused by the pandemic, as aforementioned, can be seen as "the surface manifestations of the deep psychic processes triggered by the radical state of danger posed by the virus" (Bansal, 2021). COVID-19 has altered the human psyche in different ways and compelled us to view normal human interaction, or a mere sneeze or touch as brutally fatal. It has made us aware of another individual's capacity to infect us and such threats of being mutually threatening to another person have filled us with paranoia, anxiety, hatred, anger and destruction (Bansal, 2021). Fears arising out of viewing other people as the potential carriers of illness and disease have made us more conformist and less accepting of eccentricity (Robson, 2020) leading to an increase in racism, stigmatization and xenophobia (Dubey et al., 2020).

Women in Pandemic

While the general population was coping and trying to manage work from home during this pandemic, to strike the work life balance, there was a massive section of the population juggling amongst different roles who notwithstanding gendered societal expectations came out to be more productive and efficient in these times of crisis. Mostly described as a *mother, sister, wife, daughter* and of course *a goddess* in a spiritual land like India, it is the women who emerged as powerful and capable of managing work with ease. Zengar and Folkman 2020) assessed 454 men and 366 women between March and June on leadership effectiveness using an leader 360° assessment and found that women rated significantly more positively than men. In their previous year article on "Who's seen as more qualified to lead in a crisis" the results represented women as better leaders than men. Nevertheless, we can not overlook their hustles and extreme dedication to fight every day with a bag full of responsibilities and with the damage that comes across. In Deloitte research, nearly 400 women across nine different nations found the pandemic to be affecting many women by upending their work-life balance and affecting their physical and psychological health (Dutton and Anderson, 2020). Some mentioned working for longer durations because of the pandemic and others cited juggling between household chores and extra caregiving duties because of school closures, caring for family members and relatives, and also working full-time. During the research, women mentioned different concerns, few of them were that many of them faced 75 percent more responsibilities than pre-pandemic times but it was also found that despite the numerous challenges, women remained optimistic about their potential and capabilities.

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One of the most important reasons behind why the pandemic hit differently to men and women is because of the increased unpaid work, which apparently women "owe to their family" because of the patriarchal gender roles. In an article Chauhan (2020) talks about how the laid gender roles have burdened women and affected them immensely. In India a woman spends an average of 351.9 minutes a day over unpaid work, compared to an average of 51.8 minutes a day by men. Data shows that the time spent on total unpaid and paid work by women in India is 536.6 minutes a day compared to an average of 442.3 minutes a day spent by men. This presumably means that "the drudgery of unpaid work is so high that they work longer than men" for a woman in paid jobs. And since women work for longer duration that too for unpaid work, they face 'time poverty', which leaves them with little or almost no time for their education or paid work alongside the constant oppression that they face having no time for their self, leaving them with sadness and decreased level of motivation. In another study, household chores and childcare resulted in decreased well-being and happiness level, with no time left for them to spend on any leisure activity, among women, especially mothers (Giurge et al., 2021).

There is something so iconic, unrealistic and sad behind how a woman works so relentlessly, flexibly and still the work and hustle is diminished in our society and mostly goes unseen and unacknowledged because some of us are afraid to accept the exceptional wonderful creation of the universe that a woman is. Referred to as "invisible labour", this is the unpaid work done by women, that goes unnoticed, unseen, and unacknowledged, primarily in cisgender heterosexual relationships. It was first described by the sociologist Arlene Daniels (1987) in the article "Invisible Work". Ciciolla and Luthar (2019) in their study titled "Invisible Household Labor and Ramifications for Adjustment: Mothers as Captains of Households", illustrated the occurrence of this invisible labour, and report that feeling disproportionately responsible for household management (chiefly child adjustment), in comparison to their partners, is related to strains on mothers' well-being and lower satisfaction with the relationship. They highlight the need for more societal recognition of this invisible labor.

Moreover, the statistics of women in the workplace in India is grievously declining after the coronavirus pandemic. According to an article in the Times of India (2020), 17 million women lost their jobs in the pandemic, which is also a major reason behind the fallout of India's GDP. Similarly, in research by Sharma (2020), it was found that India needs to employ more women workers in order to pull back its GDP. Two-thirds of the global workforce for the health sector consists of women, however, the pay gap still stands at 28 percent (World Health Organization, 2019). Women's capability to cope with the pandemic, despite their painstaking circadian toil, deserves due recognition, credit and appraisal.

E-learning in the pandemic
The sudden and misfortunate advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has ruthlessly coerced education to adopt the unconventional digital mode. It comes as no surprise that the advocated social distancing has demanded many educational institutions to postpone courses, examinations, internships, and other activities in favour of online learning. This state of new crisis has instilled confusion within students and institutions alike on the possible solutions to accessing affordable, experiential, flexible, responsible, safe and secure remote-learning across the complex and diverse nature of Indian society. In the present-day technologically unarmed India, this dramatic shift of e-learning came with numerous

challenges and various opportunities for the educational institutes to strengthen their technological knowledge and infrastructure (Jena, 2020), as we progressed.

Among the first to be affected by the lockdown closures in India was the structure of schooling and learning, including teaching and assessment methodologies. Merely a few private schools could adopt online teaching methods, while their low-income private and government school counterparts were imposed helplessly to shut down (Talesra, 2020). However, more than 50 percent of the students from low-income families or disadvantaged rural areas do not have access to smartphones, tablets, or WhatsApp, iCloud, or the internet, even in the best of times (Roshni, 2021). Professor Reetika Khera claims that for the majority of the people stricken with digital divide, online schooling is a mere cruel joke of their realities. As a result, she continues, 70 percent of families are eager for primary schools to open so that their children may receive an education that would, ideally, prepare them for the future (Thapar, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has outlined the severe economic, health, caste-based, gender-based, and educational disparities that the vulnerable sections of India face (Batra, 2020), leaving education as a luxury for only the privileged and not an equaliser for the prevalent digital divide.

This pervasive pandemic has also severely affected the Indian academic fraternity. Academicians are under insurmountable mental strain as a result of stringent isolation measures and the closure of universities and colleges, which is raising the prevalence and incidence of stress, anxiety, and depression amongst them (Charnsil & Chailangkarn, 2020). Furthermore, the levels of stress, frustration and anger associated with online classes is at an all-time high, due to unskilled digital use, insufficient essential resources, unstable internet, and feeble attendance, with little influence over students. Among aforementioned reasons, teachers have also cited lack of comprehension, limited opportunities for constructive interaction, absence of motivation for creative teaching, and the mechanical conduct of classes as major challenges (Gautam & Sharma, 2020). Meanwhile, few others overwhelmingly accepted that orientation services and seminars were helpful in learning how to use the current online teaching-learning modes (Mishra, Gupta & Shree, 2020). A study conducted on 29 women educators from Kerala, found that migrating to online mode of teaching has contributed to prolonged hours of talking, uploading videos and accessing submissions online, all of which are content heavy and time consuming, with an additional emotional work of dealing with students' challenges and reduced satisfaction level, all performed from the domestic space of labour- a new normal (Nair & Raja, 2020). Adding onto these unfortunate series of events, with the second wave of the pandemic, many lost their loved ones to the virus, were infected themselves or were caregivers to their family member(s) affected, and some yet working while being admitted to hospitals. Teaching faculty was forced to struggle with grief of their loss or of their students' while being confined to assignment evaluations and/or examination formalities, despite protests by their institutions. In a paper, Baruah (2021) addresses teaching faculty dealing with loss and grieving for colleagues, citing two famous Indian colleges (Delhi University and Aligarh Muslim University) as examples of the shock they have faced as an institution.

A study by Klapproth et al. (2020) found that female teachers reported being more stressed than their male counterparts, however, on average, they used more functional coping strategies (e.g., planning or finding social support), suggesting that they were able to consciously and intently manage distance teaching. Teachers who felt more stressed about their students' achievement put in more effort during lesson planning and distance teaching,

and therefore used more efficient coping strategies than dysfunctional coping strategies (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). This pandemic learning has also facilitated a brand-new 'teacher identity' and redefined the notion of 'work-from-home' in the teaching sector, especially for female educators.

Apart from the other factors, it is worth mentioning that this relentless rat race has had a negative impact on the mental health of many students. No stone is left unturned on social media to promote the hustle culture propaganda among the youth, resulting in mass anxiety and fear of burdening 'productivity' as the norm in the pandemic, which sadly is here to stay (Garg, 2020). Regardless, the internet has established a revolutionary status of virtual education, at least in the urban spaces. Amplifying Zimmerman's (2020) remark 'what's happening is a great online learning experiment and an opportunity to test online pedagogy centric approaches,' has promoted inculcation of emotional presence in order to create a climate of empathy and care, and helped focus on different types of presence, such as teaching presence, cognitive presence and social presence for embracing gradually, the power of technological shift in education (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020).

Bearing pious words etched on to our minds of Sheryl Sandberg (2011), "we need women at all levels, including the top, to change the dynamic, reshape the conversation, to make sure women's voices are heard and heeded, not overlooked and ignored," we strive to dedicate our research to all the women educators who make their toiling contributions towards liberating students with knowledge even during these times of unimagined crisis and hope to bridge the gap to acknowledge their labour and sidelined mental health in the academia with an honest representation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed methods design was followed to collect data both quantitatively and qualitatively from women educators (aged 30-50) from urban schools and colleges in Delhi. Quantitative data was gathered with the help of two Anxiety Scales Coronavirus Anxiety Scale (Lee, 2020) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck, Brown, Epstein, & Steer, 1988) and a self-curated health checklist. Through personal interviews with 3 educators, each belonging to urban schools and colleges; qualitative data was generated, rich with personal experiences.

Sampling and participants

The study included a sample of 40 women educators (aged 30 to 50 years) actively teaching in urban schools and colleges of Delhi-NCR for the quantitative data, and 6 women educators were interviewed for the qualitative data, from urban public and private schools and colleges of Delhi-NCR regions.

Measures

Beck Anxiety Inventory

The Beck Anxiety Inventory, by Aaron T. Beck and colleagues (1988) is a 21 item, multiple choice, self-report inventory. It measures the level of anxiety of people of age ranging from 17 to 80. The items in the BAI are described as the physiological, emotional and cognitive symptoms of anxiety.

Reliability: The internal consistency for the BAI is equal to (Cronbach's a=0.92). The test-retest reliability for a week for the BAI is 0.75 [Beck, Brown, Epstein, & Steer, 1988].

Validity: BAI was found to be moderately correlated with the revised version of Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (.51) and to be mildly correlated with the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (.25) (Beck et al, 1988).

Scoring and Norms: The total scores are calculated by finding the sum of the 21 items. A score in the range of 0-21 indicates low anxiety; a score of 22-35 indicates moderate anxiety and a score of 36 and above is considered to be potentially concerning levels of anxiety.

Coronavirus Anxiety Scale

The Coronavirus Anxiety Scale by Lee (2020) is rated on a 5-point scale, from 0 being not at all, to 4 i.e. nearly every day, based on the experiences of the past 2 weeks. This format of scaling is consistent with the cross-cutting symptom measure of DSM-5.

Reliability: The internal consistency for the CAS on the Indian population suggests good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of. 822 (Singh, 2021).

Validity: The diagnostic features of the CAS, which are connected to anxiety, depression, drug/alcohol coping, and suicidal ideation, are comparable to related instrument screening, such as for Generalized Anxiety Disorder, with 85 percent specificity and 90 percent sensitivity.

Norms: A CAS total score of below 9 indicates "probable dysfunctional coronavirus-related anxiety." Elevated score on a particular item or a high total scale score i.e., more than 9 may indicate problematic symptoms that need assessment and/or treatment for the individual.

Administration

A Google Form was circulated among women educators in the age range of 30-50 years via Whatsapp and the consent was attached herewith. The items were answered by 40 female educators in a time period of 10-15 minutes. The form had three sets of items, the first set was a health checklist which was followed by the Coronavirus Anxiety Scale and Beck Anxiety Inventory.

Interviews were conducted with the other 6 participants through Zoom meeting application, after taking an informed consent of the participant for recording it and later a qualitative analysis was followed.

Consent

The informed consent form was attached as a part of the survey questionnaire in the beginning of the form and it was made mandatory to give their informed consent before moving onto the questions.

Precautions

It was ensured that the participants belonged to the targeted age range and sociodemographic, and were well-read in English to fill the form efficiently. It was verified that each participant had filled all the questions of the survey. Ample time was given to every participant for completing the survey and all the doubts/questions asked were politely clarified prior. Confidentiality of the participant's data was properly maintained.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Table 1 depicts the levels of anxiety on the BAI, as experienced by both school teachers and college professors in the past one month, since administration. Amongst the school teachers (n=26), 6 teachers i.e., 23.07%, showed moderate levels of anxiety, while the rest 20

teachers (76.92) showed low anxiety. Amongst the college professors (n=14), only 1 professor i.e., 7.69% experienced moderate anxiety while the rest 13 professors (92.85) exhibited low anxiety. Even the mean scores of school teachers (13) on BAI were slightly higher than that of college professors (11.07), depicting higher occurrence of anxiety symptoms in school teachers as compared to college professors.

Table 1 BAI Anxiety Levels in School Teachers and College Professors (signs of anxiety)

	Low Anxiety	**Moderate Anxiety**
School Teachers	20 (76.92)	6 (23.07)
College Professors	13 (92.85)	1 (7.69)

Note. Numbers in parentheses are percentages.

Table 2 represents the top three, 'unable to relax', 'fear of worst happening' and 'indigestion', and the lowest three 'shaky/unsteady', 'hands trembling' and 'fear of dying', symptoms of anxiety that were reported by all the participants, both school teachers and college professors, with their respective frequencies. 'Unable to relax' was the symptom most highly experienced, with 9 participants being affected by it 'severely' and 14 participants being affected by it 'moderately'. Similarly, 'fear of worst happening' was the symptom that 'severely' affected 4 participants and 'moderately' affected 11 participants. Indigestion was another symptom commonly reported, that affected 2 participants 'severely' and 11 participants 'moderately'.

Table 2 BAI Symptoms frequency

	Not at all	**Mildly, but it didn't bother me much**	**Moderately-it wasn't pleasant at times**	**Severely- it bothered me a lot**
Unable to relax	8	9	14	9
Fear of worst happening	14	11	11	4
Indigestion	16	10	12	2
Fear of dying	33	4	3	0
Hands trembling	34	4	2	0
Shaky/ unsteady	35	3	2	0

Table 3 represents the 'functionality' of the school teachers and college professors associated with the coronavirus crisis. The results depict that none of the educators experienced impaired functionality due to coronavirus-related anxiety.

*Table 3 CAS Functionality Levels in School Teachers and College Professors*

	Not affected	**Dysfunctional Anxiety**
College Professors	26 (100)	0 (0)
School Teachers	14 (100)	0 (0)

Note. Numbers in parentheses are percentages.

Figure 1 depicts the various health issues experienced by the participants in the pandemic. The most commonly reported symptoms were 'fatigue/ weakness', 'headache', 'joint pain/ body ache', 'irritability', 'decreasing eyesight', 'watery eyes' and 'indigestion'.

Figure 1 Bar graph depicting self-reported health issues
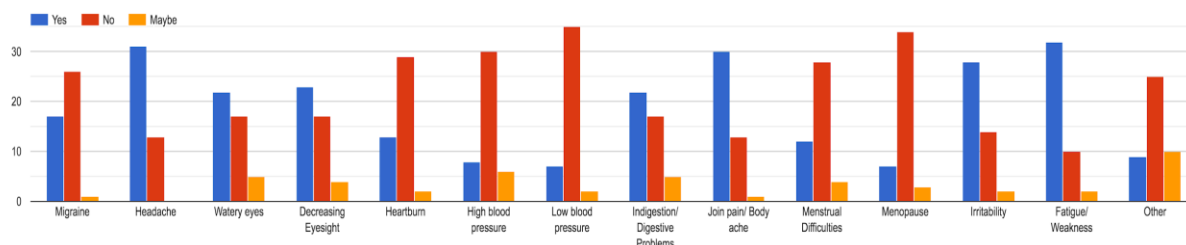
Qualitative Results
Extracted themes from content analysis

Pandemic- an uncertain new normal	Changing work-life dynamics	Teaching-as an expression	Strength of collaborative solidarity	Adapting to e-teaching
Social Support	Sense of loss	Faith & Spirituality	Mental Health Challenges	Alteration in sleep cycle
Neglect	Building psychic Resources	Financial Insecurity	Absence of human touch	Pandemic politics

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The response to COVID-19 pandemic evinces a huge spectrum of emotions. Studies suggest that stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia, denial, anger and fear were frequently reported mental health issues (Roy, Singh, Mishra, Chinnadurai, Mitra & Bakshi, 2020). Unfortunately, this situation was further exacerbated by the lack of awareness and access to mental healthcare among Indians. At the forefront of this were educators, in particular, women educators (Dagar & Mathur, 2016) who suffered the most.

In research titled, 'Impact of Coronavirus Pandemic on the Indian Education Sector: Perspectives of Teachers on Online Teaching and Assessments', four barriers to online teaching, potentially causing anxiety, were identified. These included (i) the home environment, such as lack of basic facilities and distractions caused by family members, (ii) the institutional support barriers, such as lack of training, (iii) lack of technical support and, (iv) the personal problems of the educators, such as a negative attitude and the lack of motivation (Joshi, Vinay & Bhaskar, 2020).

The current academia and psychological literature are heavily centered around the impact on the education/curriculum sector at large and student narratives of a youthful research pool. However, the existing works of authors do not cater to the lived experiences of educators and the psychological impact of the transforming mode of teaching-learning. Hence, to

change the narrative of grassroot-level Indian research and counter the dearth of research assessing the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on women educators, the present study aims to explore how education got redefined during the pandemic as well as how in turn, education redefined the phenomenon of pandemic. It also explores the psychological impact of this transformation on women educators and attempts to honour their labour.

In order to gain an understanding of the same, a Google Form, including a consent form, BAI, CAS and a health checklist, was circulated amongst educators from schools (n= 26) and colleges (n= 14). Result Table 1 depicts the levels of anxieties measured by Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck et al., 1988) experienced by both the groups in the past month, suggesting more occurrence of moderate levels of anxiety in school teachers (6/26) as compared to college professors (1/14). Result Table 2 describes the symptoms most commonly and least commonly experienced by the educators. 'Unable to relax', 'fear of worst happening' and 'indigestion' were the most highly rated symptoms, while 'shaky/ unsteady', 'hands trembling' and 'fear of dying' rated the lowest. The high occurrence of the symptom 'inability to relax' might be attributed to the busy schedules and routines, of managing work and household chores together, leaving hardly any time for self-care and relaxation. Similarly, the high occurrence of 'fear of worst happening' may be attributed to the anxiety being experienced due to the prevalence of heightened uncertainty in all aspects of life. The low occurrence of the symptoms 'trembling hands', 'shaky/ unsteady' and 'fear of dying' suggests how the educators have accepted and come to terms with the pandemic and the transition to online mode. 'Fear of dying', although deep seated, was not found to be a symptom consciously experienced by the educators. Scores from the CAS (Lee, 2020), as depicted in Table 3, also describe an absence of dysfunctionality (40/40), suggesting hints of resilience in overcoming the obstacles advanced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the responses on the health checklist (Figure 1) show the high occurrence of 'fatigue/ weakness' and 'joint pain/ body ache', attributable to women educators' double burden; 'headache', 'decreasing eyesight' and 'watery eyes', is a result of increasing screen time; and 'irritability' and 'indigestion'.

Additionally, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of the pandemic on teaching and educators, 6 personal interviews were taken, upon informed consent, and consent to record the interview. Following were the themes that emerged upon a qualitative analysis of the interviews of the six participants (see Table 4 to Table 9).

Encounter with death: An Uncanny Experience
This pandemic took us through an emotional journey. The common emotional responses often experienced were a heightened fear of loss of life, uncertainty about the future, a perpetual sense of anxiety and a pervading sense of terror and helplessness. through a psychoanalytical lens, these emotions are derivations of the workings of the death drive - a force that restrains upon the mechanisms of life affirming force. It would not be wrong to say that the pandemic has caused an inevitable encounter with 'Death' - both in reality and at the level of the imaginary. Death is an inevitable part of our lives, which we never talk or think about and its mere thought intimidates us to the core and we can agree that this pandemic made us think about the smallest and scariest part of our lives, and with already facing a second wave of COVID-19 casualties, this fear has been nagging us all.

Therefore, such circumstances compel us even more to have thoughts of death and loss. In a famous work 'Attitude towards Death' by Sigmund Freud (1914-1916), Freud talks about

how we never view death as a straightforward truth of our lives and process it differently (Freud, 1915, p. 289). Our unconscious is just as impenetrable to the thought of death as it is to strangers, and just as divided towards individuals we love. For instance, we may be able to imagine and talk about death when talking in someone else's context but when it comes to ourselves, we seem to avoid the whole conversation. Likewise, the participants in the current study have also mentioned their experiences with fear and uncertainty during the pandemic. Participant 3 mentioned *"I was scared, I was living alone and my family was back in Rajasthan. I had no idea when the situation would normalise. Normally I could go and meet my family but then the situation worsened"*. Participant 1 stated "*It was quite scary at the start...by looking at other countries and you know seeing their experiences, and watching news in general was a big threat.... It was very uncertain*."

This feeling of scare and uncertainty can be linked to the constant exposure to COVID-19 related news and casualties. Particularly, the second wave left all of us with great damage; scarcity of hospital beds, medicine, ventilators and lack of government support hit us all tremendously and left us with irreparable damage.

This encounter with death and constant uncertainty has truly been an *uncanny experience*. To understand from a psychological perspective in Freud's famous work "Uncanny" (1919), he describes the title uncanny as the feeling that evokes fear. According to him humans tend to fear what is unknown to them and this fear of the unknown reflects back to their vulnerabilities, this fear compels them to face what is familiar to them but also what they tend to escape from. As participant 6 stated *"I sensed fear all around due to the virus and it was like a huge scare but we didn't really know what to do."*

Quite definitely our experiences of the pandemic have left all of us with a different state of mind, with feelings of loneliness, fear, uncertainty, anxiety and terror. Parul Bansal (2021) in her work 'The Ravaged Psyche' states how the situation in the pandemic is similar to Freud's definition of uncanny, a 'class of frightening things which blur the boundaries between reality and imagination supporting our primitive beliefs about harm and death.' The pandemic has challenged us in peculiar ways. It has compelled us to confront our biggest fears and as a result left us with a spectrum of psychological distress.

In this period, we have come to realize that we, the *Homo sapiens,* are not actually the 'supreme power' that we think we are, that it was just a mere illusion of security until this virus, unknown and invisible to the naked eye, drastically took over our entire lives. This has opened up our own vulnerabilities, of not being the mighty race and that has led us to work in the path of solidarity.

On the contrary, former philosophers and psychologists seem to have an optimistic lens, when talking about death. In the article "On Facing Death", Moraglia (2004) raises the argument that realising one's finiteness can foster personal progress in the second half of life. This encounter is difficult since facing one's death is fraught with worries and concerns, however one can find comfort in beliefs that encourage the symbolic transcendence of individual finiteness. Ironically, this other side of death is extremely intriguing and perplexing at the same time, as to find meaning of the gravest situation requires a great amount of self-knowledge and acceptance of one's capabilities. According to May (1967) it is our willingness to face mortality that fuels our creative abilities, as 'confronting death is necessary for creativity.'

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Educators as 'Containers' in the time of crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has redefined the way educators and education are perceived. Even in such unprecedented times, educators have continued to enlighten minds and have emerged as '*protagonists*', managing the crisis in the education sector.

Students, both in college and high school, have been facing extremely high levels of stress and mental health morbidity, with a high prevalence of depression and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic (Aiyer et al, 2020). This anxiety may be due to a host of reasons, including one which suggests that anxiety is intrinsic to the teaching-learning process. "Paradoxically, anxiety prevents learning, but anxiety is necessary to start learning as well." (Schein, in Vince, 1996). Learning involves novel and uncertain experiences which revive unconscious processes that take one from a state of high anxiety to a state of coherence as one becomes able to accept, give meaning and tolerate ambivalence due to the 'holding capacity' in the teacher. This 'holding' capacity, called the ability to 'contain' was conceptualized by W. R. Bion (1959) in relation to the psychoanalyst and the patient, and was derived from Melanie Klein's (1946) concept of projective identification. This parallel may be drawn to the teacher-student relationship, wherein the educators display their capacity to act as emotional 'holders' for the anxieties faced by their students (French, 1997).

They act as temporary 'containers' for the anxieties and emotions displayed by the students in stressful times and help them give meaning to their experiences, allowing them to move forward. Although this emotionality has been often unacknowledged in classrooms (Vince, 2010), a re-emergence of the same was seen during the pandemic, even though teaching was online and physical connection was absent.

Participant 1 displayed this ability to 'contain' the stress and burden her students faced while taking online classes by engaging in recreational activities like dancing with them, *"When I feel that it's going on, you know, heavy now with the kids, so many teaching…and you don't want to overburden them, so I just ask them to, you know, do some stretching exercise."* Participant 4 and participant 5 also displayed their ability to 'contain' while describing how they would talk to the students about their personal issues and well-being before beginning to teach. "*I ask, I hope beta (child) everything is fine at home. How are your parents?*"

Redefining Education as an agent for restructuring

The pandemic has redefined our 'normal' in the past year. The challenges that the pandemic possessed have stretched educational systems throughout the world to reassess the way of teaching and learning, while the students and teachers distance themselves at home. The fast-changing educational environment in the pandemic is an unprecedented experience for both the students and teachers. Dedicated educators are committed to reach out to their students and fortunately during this age of technology, they have the ability to approach and give quality education via a number of online platforms. Participant 4 reported that she would send voice notes explaining the study material so as to accommodate students who would face difficulty attending online classes due to unavailability of phones during the day with no network. In 2020, before March 15, about 3 percent of the world was learning online and post March 15, 100 percent of the world went online (Chellathurai, 2020). Depending on the level of education, numerous web resources have contributed to the remote educational experience, such as Google Meet, Zoom and Microsoft Teams for regular classes, and Google Classroom for assigning homework and projects.

Participant 2 displayed that she could manage the redefined way of teaching, as she stated "*working from home was the need of the hour at that time….it took a lot of time to learn the new apps but now we have become perfect with various apps*". Digital applications like Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams not only allowed teachers and students to communicate over video-enabled remote classrooms, but also offered a host of engaging and collaborative resources on a single platform to guarantee that 'Learning Never Stops' (Zimmerman, 2020). Participant 6 also adjusted to the new normal as she goes on to say "*I enjoyed zoom classes and looking at everyone on screen was also exciting. Initially I found it intriguing but I adapted to it very well and so did the students.*"

With the shift from natural work settings to the online offices, the notion of education has been through a massive reorganization and restructuring for both teachers and students. In a recent article on 'Restructuring Education through Technology', Theodore W. Frick (2020) writes at length about the change and restructuring of education. The change for our participants was a little tough in the beginning but with time it worked out well as they became tech savvy and made this alteration possible in an easy and effective way. It made them resilient, dedicated and left them with a sense of fulfillment and achievement, as participant 1 mentioned "*It was a very difficult time but now the things are settled, things are settled, we are settled." Participant 2 stated "We managed online teaching...*" For participant 6 "*There was a huge resistance in the beginning but gradually I tried to take a leap of faith and venture into online teaching. Later on I found that I was quite excited about teaching online*"

In the same article Theodore also explains about the model of "system change" and how education can be delivered effectively online as it was in classrooms earlier, which is quite how our participants managed this transformation. However, some of the participants have adapted to the new work environment to the extent that they don't wish to change it again as it will cause more hassles and distress. Participant 1 reported that teachers and students are now apprehensive of being able to go back to physical teaching, "*so now we are comfortable. Now shifting from here to there, it's uh again the same challenge. How will we cope up now?*"

Additionally, the Government of India introduced the New Education Policy (2020). In the NEP the government proposed various changes in the current education system and claimed that NEP would make India Education SuperPower in the coming years. Some of the major changes are about the adult education courses, which will be ICT-equipped (where possible) and other community engagement and enrichment activities will be held at school complexes after school hours and in public library spaces. Addition of various vocational courses online/offline, new provisions for Special Children and various alterations have also been suggested. Where the recognition for the much-needed alterations is appreciable, the implementation is yet awaited (Hindustan Times, 2020).

There are certain disadvantages to India's new approach to education; during the last year and a half, millions of young children in India have been dropping out of school. People earning low wages and those in precarious occupations have been compelled to forego their children's education in order to make ends meet. In a field study focusing on daily wage workers, domestic workers, and frontline reproductive health workers (ASHAs) conducted in Lucknow, Pune, Bhopal, Jhansi, and Katni, it was discovered that more than 95 percent of

our respondents stated that their child had either dropped out of school or stopped learning after the remote learning began (Mohan, 2021).

Relationship with technology
The pandemic seems to have caused a psychic rupture, prompting us to rediscover and redefine different nuances of our lives, such as education, employment, culture, and health. This indicates amnesia or even nostalgia for the past, as well as a lacking internal phenomenon of banal continuity, from a psychoanalytic perspective; a disorderliness in reality.

The education system in India, in pre-pandemic times, has not relied on technology as heavily as it does today (India Today Web Desk, 2020). Educators were naturally more accustomed to 'blackboard teaching', hence, the shift from blackboards to screens was met with resistance, quite evident in the beginning of the pandemic. The participants commonly reported not being tech-savvy enough, which was one of the barriers to online teaching, as identified by Joshi, Vinay & Bhaskar (2020) in their study. Participant 4 reported that the in the beginning their entire working pattern changed. Participant 5 mentioned that majority schools in India were not "technologically armed" pre-COVID, hence the schools took hours long meetings to explain to teachers how to teach online. She remarked, "*um it was too much to digest.*"

Participant 5 also mentioned how she would spend long hours in front of the screen preparing for lectures, taking classes, attending workshops and conducting online competitions and fests for the students, "*and it was a havok! I mean, a havoc wreaked on the teachers...... Now everything is going in print and everything is going on social websites because each and every school wants to know jump up and show 'we are doing this, we're doing this. We are different and we are, you know, more than just surviving. So, quite a few things are added to it.*" She described feeling trapped and the strange Kafkaesque experience when she said "*And that's the time when we realized, my god, what hell.*" She added that teachers were online 24/7 as a result. Quantitative data gathered from the health checklist from forty educators also suggests high prevalence of headaches, decreasing eyesight and watery eyes (see Figure 1), attributable to the increased screen time during this transition. This was also reported by participant 1 who mentioned that her eyesight had weakened in the pandemic.

However, educators tried to regain control over their work by learning how to deal with technology. They explored various virtual spaces and tools in order to adapt themselves to create a 'new normal' of online, virtual, education. Imposing an order on the free flow of unconscious thought is thus a key task of civilization (Elliot, 2015). Not only educators but even students had trouble adjusting to the online mode of education. Participant 1, a preprimary teacher, remarked *"Initially kids were also not very settled because somebody, they don't know how, when, when to mute, when to unmute, initially mothers used to sit you know, and you are teaching kids and mothers all together."*

The initial resistance then quickly turned into a willingness to adapt as is evident in the interview with participant 6 who said "*There was a huge resistance in the beginning but gradually I tried to take a leap of faith and venture into online teaching. Later on, I found that I was quite excited about teaching online. I enjoyed zoom classes and looking everyone*

on screen was also exciting." Participant 3 similarly reported that the transition to online mode was sudden however, the teachers quickly adapted to it.

Resilience, as a psychic strength, is apparent in the educators, as participant 5 recalls, "*I was never a very tech savvy person. No, I was not. So, for me it was a new thing, though I loved it. I feel now I'm more capable.*" Technology has hence been, according to her, *"a master in disguise."*

Educator-student relationship: A screened relationship

The relationship between students and educators seems to have changed dramatically in terms of the dynamics involved, with hints of intimidation and anxiety, but also empathy and understanding on both parts. One of the results of this online transformation is "teacher's anxiety" which has been mentioned by Robert B. French (1997) in one of his papers. He describes three different types of anxieties specific to the role of teaching out of which two can be related with our present research, that the educators have experienced during the online teaching transition: *first,* the fear of competence/incompetence, i.e the capability to manage and direct. The online transition along with the technological advances left the educators vulnerable at times, surrounding them with fear of judgement and insult. *Second*, the fear of loss of control i.e a threat to identity, which in the present scenario can be related to the system failures like communication problems, losing internet connection between classes which can lead to undermined confidence and self-worth. Participant 1 stated "*.... sometimes electricity failures, sometimes net connectivity issues are there.* Describing an incident when she lost electricity at home resulting in the class to disconnect halfway, she mentioned, *"I was feeling completely helpless, ki how to, how to do."* She added, *"I should not get embarrassed in front of parents because with each and every child there is a parent sitting."* The loss of human touch and face to face interaction also disrupted the relationship, "*the time in which we used to go there and you know, settling down in the class and then the kids, um, and you're spending time with them and those, uh, part is not possible. Because we can't make them sit in front of a screen for such a long time. So you know that part is missing...*". However, on a positive side, the power dynamics between the students and educators seemed to have found a middle ground during the online transformation, as the teachers have also been learning from their students and as a result of this disastrous pandemic, individuals have been more empathetic and kinder. Participant 4 mentioned that the students were highly supportive.

Now more than ever, it is important that the teacher and student have a compassionate relationship, the abrupt change of the pandemic education has created a ditch between both the ends. Empathy and communication are the only key to fill this hollow that now exists. The educators have been thoughtful and considerate for the same, as participant 4 described the need to connect with students and understand where they are and if they and their families are well. The educators would first focus on wellbeing and later on studies and teaching.

Mental Health Challenges

The virus has been rapidly spreading across the world, with the foremost mental health issue being a rise in the level of stress of anxiety (Kar et al., 2020) and disturbance in the sleep cycle (Awasthi, 2020). The fear of disease, travel restrictions, social isolation and inactivity, financial losses, and the general sense of approaching uncertainty all play a massive role in sleep deprivation. According to a study by The Royal and the University of Ottawa, the

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COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the sleep habits of people. Insomnia is common when the mind is disturbed, and it can lead to psychological issues such as anxiety and depression (Ramakrishnan, 2020). While the health care system and the government were trying to control the pandemic and adopting preventive measures, not much attention was paid to the mental health status of the isolated, panicked, and house-arrested people.

A study by Rachel E. Menzies and Ross G. Menzies (2020) has depicted that loneliness can be a major risk factor for mental disorders, such as adjustment disorder, depression, anxiety, chronic distress, and insomnia. It is no news that not just the caretakers but the patients who were infected faced a lot of psychological distress. Recently it was reported in a systematic review that hospitalized patients who were placed in isolation were more likely to experience anxiety, depression, anger, and loss of self-esteem (Vindegaard et.al., 2020).

In order to maintain social distance and to avoid the dilemma of lockdown, the authorities urged teachers to take their lectures online (Choudhury et al., 2020) which was extremely difficult, as preparing and giving high-quality lectures to students during a pandemic was grueling, especially because most teachers had not been trained in the effective use of web resources for teaching, further adding onto their stress (Gautam & Sharma, 2020). Moreover, because teachers have little influence over pupils in online teaching, some students were not serious about attending classes and the instructors in rural locations were found to be more frustrated and discouraged since they were unable to fulfill their tasks due to a lack of or bad internet connection (Gautam & Sharma, 2020). Teachers also found themselves managing online education with other personal responsibilities on numerous levels, as most of our interviewees reported.

The significance of physical activity in the overall health and well-being of teachers during lockdown also needs to be considered. It has been discovered that instructors who exercise more during their free time may perform better during lockdown as this may help prevent more serious physical and mental health issues (Aperrbai et al., 2020). During the interview, participant 5 expressed her dissatisfaction with her body due to a lack of physical activity as she stated *"...The bodily stress has started steeping now. The unrest that is there i guess doesn't let me sleep. Body pain here and there, feet get numb early morning. Those pains also have..have made it difficult for me to fall asleep."* While stuck in a repetitious loop during the pandemic, *"We better talk about it! it is high time. Even children are facing these issues."* participant 5 also realized the importance of prioritising mental health during such unprecedented times.

Almost all of the interviewed participants have shown signs of anxiety and fear during the period of lockdown and some signs of insomnia. Participant 1 stated *"although it was new for everyone, nobody has ever experienced the same thing and how to go about this and what will be in the future? How long will it take? And there are so many questions in how will be, our jobs and how will we conduct our classes?....it was very uncertain"*. Participant 2 was also terrified of the pandemic as she stated, *"..also the tally of the COVID affected were growing. Their symptoms and quarantine experiences were very terrifying. Yes we were concerned to know about the severity of the situation..."* Participant 3 was scared and mentioned that she has insomnia, *"As I live alone, hearing about the lockdown and the virus was scary...I was not able to sleep at all, I had insomnia..."* Participant 5 hinted at the disturbed sleep cycle as she shared *"I am experiencing extreme sleep disorders these days. It's around a month or so. I'm up till 3-4 every night and then maximum by seven I need to*

*get up so with this three, three and a half hours of sleep, and then work the entire day....I can't sleep even if I hit the bed. I can't sleep. there's too much going o*n." and participant 6 said "*I experienced insomnia for couple of months. I could not sleep.*" A similar pattern also emerged in the data gathered through the Google form, from 40 women educators, wherein the symptoms of anxiety most commonly reported by the educators included an inability to relax and fearing the worst happening (see Result Table 2).

It should also be noted that in times of crisis, teachers played an additional and critical role. They truly attended to the students' psychosocial requirements. As a result, a teacher's workload can be considered fairly heavy, and the teaching profession can be associated with high levels of stress and physical ailments (Aperribai et al., 2020).

Enhanced self-awareness as 'women -educators'

The pandemic brought about various lockdowns, curfews, and popularized the notion of 'work from home'. It cut short on social interaction and travel time to and fro offices, giving everybody added time to self-reflect, become self-aware, think about what matters to them and what is essential to them. Symbols of enhanced self-awareness such as knowing one's fears, one's limitations, interests and desires seem evident in the participants. According to Simone de Beauvoir (1992), "Self-knowledge is no guarantee of happiness, but it is on the side of happiness and can supply the courage to fight for it." Most of the participants seemed to have an understanding of themselves and the multitude of emotions they were experiencing. They described their *fears* and *uncertainty* about the pandemic "*I was scared*", expressed participant 3 and participant 2 said "*I was scared that I could be the victim even with the precautions.*"

They described their initial resistance to online teaching and the associated emotions such as *'shame'* and *'embarrassment'* of not being able to work on computers. Participant 1 said "*I should not get embarrassed in front of parents*" and also described that she would feel helpless when facing technical difficulties "*I was feeling completely helpless, ki how to, how to do.*" Most of the respondents also narrated their sense of *pride* and *confidence* on being able to master technology later, as recalled participant 1 who said "*You feel happy that, Oh, wow you could do it*" and participant 5 who said "*... i was never a very tech savvy person. No, I was not. So for me it was a new thing, though I loved it. I feel now I'm more capable.*"
The participants also described how they yearned for some social-connect and "me-time", as participant 1 said "*I used to drive and I used to enjoy that time that I'm missing everyday*". Some of the participants even tried to take out some time to do something for their own selves while others had no time to do so.
Similarly, some participants found their families to be supportive, yet others felt missing support from their families. Participant 5 also recognized how she had been *neglecting* herself "*Now who has the time to moisturize the hands", "So breakfast I had completely forgotten." I've never eaten breakfast before in any of my classes.*"

In totality, it seemed as though the respondents were better able to understand their own selves in the pandemic and develop self-efficacy. As per participant 6 "*Resuming teaching was truly a blessing for me. I felt I have found a purpose*". Such self-reflection has been found to also have benefits for the teaching-learning process. An educational consultant Anna Hasper in an article suggests that self-reflection is crucial for promotion of a self-improving culture of learning and to increase adaptability during the COVID-19 crisis amongst teachers (Hasper, 2020).

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Navigating psychic strengths of women educators through a spiritual lens

Earlier studies have shown that the general public's anxiety and interpretation of the outbreak has resulted in panic during the outbreak time (Salari et al., 2020). Anxiety does not drive people to defend themselves, but rather reinforces their sense of helplessness and fear of infection (Blendon & Donelan, 1988). Their constant concern triggers an avoidance response and a reliance on culturally encouraged illness avoidance practises (Cheng, et.al, 2004), and similar experiences were shared between teachers during the present COVID-19 pandemic as well. The re-emergence of spirituality was noticeable among the sample we assessed and it was found to be crucial beyond mere coping, but towards a purposive quest for life and seeking certainty in such unprecedented times. There is an unspoken consensus within the majority that religious institutions provide 'essential' emotional and spiritual support. Even if they are infected with the coronavirus, respondents believe they will receive healing from their place of worship, concluded a study by Olonade, Adetunde, Iwelunmor, Ozoya, & George, (2021). The COVID-19 experience has compelled us to reflect more consciously on quality of life, health and well-being, and, perhaps most importantly, death.

During this time, spiritual care is an important part of holistic health management, particularly when it comes to dealing with illness, suffering, and death (Roman, Mthembu & Hoosen, 2020). Findings indicate that spirituality has a positive impact on resilience, hope, optimism, peace, and comfort, suggesting that spirituality is among the most culturally important dimensions to consider for women as the pandemic continues to unfold across the globe (Roberto et at., 2020). It is suggested that spiritual care through creative, narrative, and ritual work reported positive effects, such as the alleviation of pain, presence, empowerment, and bringing peace, as well as prove to be beneficial to address suffering given the degree of isolation, loneliness, and vulnerability caused by this pandemic (Gijsberts, Liefbroer, Otten, & Olsman E, 2019; Ferrell et al., 2020). Praxis of Buddhism as a coping and guide to introspection, *"Buddhism...is my spiritual anchor for my life. And I thought now I better address this in my prayers because I'm not able to find solace and that peace of mind these days"*, was reported by participant 5. Spirituality has also been relieved to play an important role in the relationship between positive leadership and social isolation at work among teachers (Moghtadaei, 2020). *"I derive immense hope In the spirit of life. We will sail through it. This is the time to revive togetherness and hope and education is the best means to do it"* expresses participant 6 to emphasise upon the role faith plays in her life.

Regardless, with a dramatic but steady approach, teachers were able to transform their access and knowledge of technology, accompanied by "hiccups" and exhausting screen hours. Participants have found success in achieving psychic strength through the pillars of adaptation, flexibility, and hope on both a personal and professional level, building resilience and conscientiousness. Participant 2 expressed self-gratification with technological independence: *"It took a lot of time to learn about the new apps, but now we have become perfect with various apps."* However, even within the suffocating gendered labour, women educators were also able to rediscover themselves, rekindle self-care, recognise absolute neglect, build the skill of patience and problem-focused coping, restructure helplessness and not let the patriarchal boundaries confine them, at least intellectually, for the greater good in which spirituality contributed substantially.

From the results, a pattern of empathy, gratitude and sensitivity towards their students and compassion emerged towards the teaching profession and the 'power' of unstoppable learning. Almost all participants expressed their concerns for their students' physical and

mental health; participant 2 emphasised the same while saying *"students learn from pc and smartphones causing headaches and eye strain…..continued online classes create boredom experiences and lack of concentration among students."* Participant 4 even talked about the difficulties students living in areas with poor connectivity faced, *"the kids were struggling even more someone doesn't have an internet connection so someone doesn't have a mobile phone, one family has five kids with one device so it is hard to manage."* *"As long as human beings are there on the planet, we should believe in the human touch"*, says participant 5, posing gratitude to intimate offline learning.

Status of social solidarity
During a crisis, every society's ability to survive is determined by its level of solidarity. The COVID-19 crisis is undoubtedly a summoning challenge that the world is contending presently, constricted to the walls of their homes. It is social solidarity (Durkheim, 1984) that is playing a unifying factor that aids in bridging the social divide that is widening as a result of the pandemic. Hence, social cohesion acts as the pivotal cementing force towards social distance and reducing public health risk by fostering a common consciousness in society. Arundhati Roy (2020) reminds us that pandemics have a historical reputation of teaching us to break from tradition and reimagine our 'world anew.' Though support within family, colleagues, and institutions was reported to be scanty for a few, peer support for educators appeared to be a commonly-shared solace; quite *"bigger than family"* (as remarked by participant 5). *"Initially the feeling of dependency was very painful. I learned how to do household work myself, also sometimes I took assistance from my family members as well..."* reported participant 2, recognising the importance of seeking familial assistance in coping with her pandemic journey. Quoting participant 6, *"the entire teaching fraternity got together and gave us various options such as flexibility in teaching, we got paid for our transport also without actual traveling, students also supported in various ways possible by doing their best,"* she finds comfort in social support and strengthened solidarity in academic faculties. She also mentions, *"If we don't help each other now than when will we do it? All we need to do right now is to be very kind and supportive in all possible ways."* The remodelled pandemic pedagogy also saw a rejuvenated bond and harmony, breaking away from the usual formal students-educators relationship. In conclusion, communication and empathy were good Samaritans of humankind among vulnerabilities, providing us with a heightened sense of community through our time and space, and comforting nostalgia and longing for order in our new reality.

Tracing nuanced nature of Patriarchy in the pandemic times
Indian women exist at the crossroads of Western individualism and patriarchal traditional gendered roles. Understanding who they are is determined by the performative roles they adhere to and how well they are able to multitask or balance *"responsible autonomy"* (in domestic context, proposed by Friedman, 1977), as daughters, wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law, and in our case, an additional role as a teacher. Therefore, their lived experiences are requisite in the context.

As Newcomb (2021) raises her voice to represent female academics, she highlights the emerging pattern of 'emotional labour,' compatible with our present study, wherein there is often a division of labour between men and women in pastoral or caring positions, with women educators anticipated to take on the majority of this job, i.e., both expected and invisible (Gajparia, 2017; Lawless, 2018). According to a study conducted between January

and October 2020 in India, the estimated additional unpaid childcare load per woman due to pandemic-related care burdens was 360 hours, based on published data from numerous sources like UNESCO and the OECD. For men, the equivalent figure was 33 hours (Kenny & Yang, 2021). Again, highlighting the myriad unrecognised roles played by women despite the prevailing 'crisis' situation. The statistics are only disheartening henceforth for women holding professional titles; women grappling with the Herculean task of balancing work and familial roles (Bhushan & Karpe, 2013).

Women's liberation has been progressing for generations, and yet in just one year, the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for political and societal failures. Amending a law does not mean that sexism is no longer present in the minds of the masses. On the contrary, women are still much too frequently subjected to candid misogyny. It is safe to say that the pandemic has affected men and women quite differently, leaving one faction more vulnerable than the other.

In the article 'The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism,' Helen Lewis (2020) pins down gender roles being augmented in heterosexual households and as a result affecting women from personal to dyadic, social, political and economic affairs, and resulting in women's independence being a silent victim. Women, particularly those with jobs, perform more housework and have less free time than their male spouses around the world, thus, laying a 'double burden' on their shoulders to obey patriarchal norms while juggling with their roles as professionals. One of the participants shared, *"..for us it was doubling the work...because maid wasn't available so all house chores cleaning, moping, this that. Oh, plus the school and school was also trying to sort of like, you know, squeeze the last drop of blood out of us, and my daughter also had online classes, she is young (primary school) so had to sit with hwr through classes."* Betty Friedan, calls attention to recognise the unfinished work for feminists to rejuvenate their image in the society and asks people to intentionally break away from the norms of patriarchy for a better world of peace and equality.

The participants in this period of uncertain humanitarian crisis were able to realise and reflect on themselves and the work they do. They have been working virtually in two full time jobs- one in liberating students with knowledge and the other in managing the endless household chores, especially because of blurring of boundaries between work and house. In the words of participant 1, *" I tried to complete my work before my class. And when there is a break in between, then I go, and go downstairs and then just the, you know, finish something or the other thing. And then come back and after completing the class again, I am just rushing down..... So I have been running in between during the break and sometimes a little bit before the class and after the class."* Participant 5 also desired to make her family understand that while she was at home, she was still working and was not free, *"it's very important, difficult to explain it to them that when we are... you can see our face, that doesn't mean we are available to cook your breakfast,"* she remarks. The pandemic sure hasn't come easy on women professionals and as per Freud, a psychologically healthy person should be able to: "lieben und arbeiten", to love and to work well (quoted by Erik Homburger Erikson, 1950, p.265). Striking the work-life balance then seems important for being 'psychologically healthy' as per Freud.

Women's unpaid work often covers the cost of care that sustains families, supports economies and fills in for the lack of social services, but it's rarely officially recognised as work (Lungumbu & Butterly, 2020). While for some participants the pandemic reinforced

patriarchal roles, "*...but the assistance is a word I don't know the spelling of and I'm sure there are many who do not know. I'm not the only one...It is still a far fetched dream, where the bandas (male members) of the families also pull in and help the ladies*" (as remarked by Participant 5), for others, on the positive end, it occupied a foreground to thrash societal expectations of gender roles that have persisted for years towards a more collaborative spirit and labour division in household chores. One of the participants reported the importance of teamwork at home, "*You know that females should not get burdened...everybody was taking the responsibilities. They (other family members) have never, ever cleaned the dishes, but they were doing that. Everybody was taking the responsibility on their own, you know without saying it, otherwise we have to always, you know, remind them, okay, take care of your clothes, take care of this, take care of that. But at that time, everybody was, you know, saying that it's a difficult time and we have to, uh, you know, work with each other, teamwork was there.. Out of three meals, one meal should be taken care of by my kid, my son or my husband so that I'll get relaxed.*"

The readers are encouraged to question and unravel the persistent hegemonic impact of patriarchy that triumphs in every household and formal space. The gendered roles that remain unnoticed for generations, onus of which is casted, majorly, upon females and women-identifying folks of the family. It is time to acknowledge their contribution beyond Women's, Mother's, Sister's and Daughter's Day. Thus, it becomes important to not glorify intimate sacrifices made by them, but to identify nuanced forms of patriarchy that seeps in all of us and bring about a radical shift through honest conversations and actions, especially in context of the pandemic which has made gender and class division even more visible.

Assessing how the pandemic politics shaped educators' realities
When talking about Women Educators and Education in the pandemic, it wouldn't only be ignorant but extremely unjust of us to not cater to the economic and political support and challenges that they experienced. The COVID-19 pandemic was definitely not something that any of us were prepared for, or even had the slightest idea that it would take over our lives in such a drastic manner. Criticizing the government for not being prepared at the beginning would, hence, be unjust. However, the second wave of the Coronavirus fatalities was a big mistake, the irresponsibility, carelessness and ill-preparedness of the Indian Government led to the scarcity of medicine, hospital beds, the saddening queue of people waiting to cremate their loved ones at cemeteries, anonymous dead bodies in holy rivers like Ganga and Yamuna didn't just break the hearts of the citizens but also made us a global horror of COVID-19 pandemic across the world. In the article 'How India failed to prevent a deadly second wave' (BBC, 2021), Biswas writes at length discussing the various irresponsible occasions that led to the second wave in India, i.e., the Kumbh, Election rallies and International cricket tournaments with over 130000 people unmasked. Quoting uninformed judgements of the ruling political parties left us feeling disheartened and disappointed.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the economy and political factors have played a huge role in our educators' lives and into shaping their realities. The teachers of Delhi Government Schools were allotted frontline work as the schools were closed. It was reported that from June 2020, teachers were allotted various other extra duties apart from their role of teaching, like distribution of ration to the poor & taking surveys in the neighborhood for healthcare; due to such level of exposure over 100 of educators fell ill due to the contraction of coronavirus and over 35 died in Delhi. They received no prior training for the work and

were not even provided with the basic Healthcare precaution of PPE kits (CNN, 2021). Participant 4 (a teacher in a Delhi Government School) stated "see with us the thing was, that even if the school were closed, we had to do extra work like ration duty". Amid all of this, due to a lack of clear instructions from the State government, teachers in government funded, and private schools were concerned about having to work from their schools while the second wave of COVID-19 was approaching (The Hindu, 2021). At the time when the second wave was unfolding, thousands of educators were allotted election duties which resulted in the demise of many educators. It comes as a shock that female teachers even in advanced stages of their pregnancy were not spared from election duties, for which they filed legal complaints but received no moderation (The Print 2021, Hindustan Times 2021). In Uttar Pradesh 1621 educators' deaths were reported as of March 2021. Telangana and Maharashtra reported 230 and 220 deaths of educators respectively. Even though the educators were allotted the frontline work but were yet not on the priority list of vaccination (Wire, 2021). A petition on *change.org*, titled 'Teachers to Be Recognized As COVID-19 Frontline Warriors' received close to 16,000 signatures (as on 10th April, 2021) in an attempt to recognize educators as frontline workers, so as to prioritize them for receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

In addition, the financial insecurity was another hustle. It was reported by the teachers at Delhi government schools that they didn't receive their salaries for months when the pandemic started and are still being paid late (CNN, 2021). Even for the private educational institutions, either the educators were fired from their jobs or were paid 50% of their prior salaries. Participant 1 stated "*Yeah we are getting our salary after 40% deduction.*" and in the follow up question about if that affected their mental health, she responded "*Yes*". The pandemic has been a physical, emotional and psychological turmoil for Indian educators which left them with minimal government support and nil in many cases, also there was no pay raise but educators were supposed to invest in technological appliances. Quoting participant 5 "*I mean, there was a time we were not getting salaries for months. And we had to invest majorly in our gadgets and connections. So my windows crashed.. then virus… bought a new CPU… phone fell off then bought a new phone.. got a new good connection... because everything was happening online, so whatever little savings I had, I was literally exhausted in investing in all these things*". In addition, in an article by India Today (2021), it was reported that over 1500 Educators of 10 private institutions protested for not receiving their arrears and 7th pay commission even after working on 50% salary. Participant 5 reported "*this year, we had to compromise on all the increments and the arrears whatever it was. And as I said already, private schools, most of the private schools don't give 7th Pay Commission. So we have compromised a lot this year. We still haven't received our arrears.. but we might get that*". The Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) have had a number of strikes and rallies against late, no payments of salaries and removal of ad hoc teachers without consent in the pandemic for which they have received minimal response (NDTV.2021), and regardless of all these difficulties our educators completed their existing and extra roles with utmost dedication and responsibility.

Apart from the unpleasant central role there were some states (and union territories) which if not succeeded but made some efforts to support the educators and the new education atmosphere. It was reported by one of our participants working for a Delhi Government School; that teachers in her school received training for the new mode of online teaching. They were trained through various workshops and were provided with required worksheets and e-books for the teaching process and they also received support from the IT department

of the school regarding technology. Quoting Participant 4 (a teacher in a Delhi Government School), "*See the government had started the training in the beginning, for us to get used to with technology, to be able to access internet easily, the teacher development department were also separately trained to guide us with technology and to support us.*"

Limitations

The study has limitations due to the online administration of the scales and the virtual conduct of personal interviews, thus lacking in 'human touch'. The CAS was administered in the month of March when the 'corona scare' was relatively low. Next, the research solely focused on the women educators as 'protagonists' and did not cater to students' perspectives. Even the results of the study are not generalizable due to the sample size.

Interventions

Through the findings of this research, we aspire to suggest some interventions, such as resource booklets for managing emotions, mindfulness workshops through virtual platforms, grievances/feedback forms for educators to express dissent or suggest changes in the prevalent pedagogy, organisation of support groups for teachers to navigate holistic health through a collaborative process, student training to inculcate sensitisation and building empathy for educators, building a Tech Team to effectively scaffold digital learning (Work, 2014), co-teaching and collaboration (Mavroe, 2020) etc. This could help make e-teaching smoother and an efficient space for learning.

Implications

Some of the implications emerging from the study include (a) generation of better institutional support ensuring technological aid and access to teaching resource material for the educators, (b) government assistance ensuring job stability, payment of complete salaries, medical support and recognition to the educators, (c) better planning from the government's end in making internet and education accessible to all students and educators from all parts of the country in order to reduce the digital divide and (d) a possibility of extending work-from-home beyond the pandemic. The present paper aims to further inspire a research base for intersectional and inclusive studies with just representation of lived experiences of non-cisgender-heterosexual identities in teaching faculty, neurodivergent educators, different religious backgrounds and faith, underserved and rural educational sector and/or take a political stance of feminism (need of) during the pandemic times for a more holistic and authentic understanding of complex realities of women educators and status of education in India during COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The current research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has redefined education, bringing a major shift from 'chalkboards' to 'computer screens' i.e., online education. The study reflects various domains, assessing women educators' lives in the pandemic. Education in turn, has redefined the times we live in. It has acted as a pacifier by being able to provide meaning to the lives of women teachers and professors, who have acted as 'containers' for the mental and emotional difficulties being experienced by the students. They have emerged as 'protagonists' that have been able to impart knowledge even in a crisis as this one.

Technology has been at the rescue here, but has also transformed the lives of women educators dramatically. The transition has thrown various challenges at women educators, such as striking the 'work-life balance', dealing with the double burden and operating

technology without proper prior knowledge, making them resilient, however leading to some anxiety amongst the educators according to our findings.

Nonetheless, they have likely been able to cope well with these challenges. It has been a journey of emancipation for these women and the teaching-learning process. The technological barriers unleashed hidden capabilities of our educators and pushed them to conquer their fears. Even when a large part of the world stood still, our educators paved their way to glory by crossing hurdles and boundaries everyday with adjusting to the present needs. Mapping through their fears and anxieties, residing in patriarchal frameworks and facing numerous politico-economic challenges, the educators developed various psychic strengths-empathy, patience, gratitude, resilience, spirituality and solidarity, emerging as frontline workers in this pandemic crisis who not just worked, but worked efficiently and relentlessly.

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