Dr Anuradha Chatterjee

Pro Vice Chancellor, RV University and Dean, School of Design and Innovation

Dr Anuradha Chatterjee is a transnational feminist academic practitioner in architecture and design based in Australia and India. She holds a degree in architecture from TVB School of Habitat Studies, India, and a Masters and PhD from the University of New South Wales, Australia.

Dr Chatterjee is Pro Vice Chancellor, RV University and Dean, School of Design and Innovation. She has also held prominent academic leadership roles as Dean, Faculty of Design, Manipal University Jaipur; Dean Academics, Avani Institute of Design; and Head, Research and Innovation, Pearl Academy where she was responsible for institution building, establishing collaborative cultures of academic excellence, enhancing internationalisation initiatives and research outputs. She continues to contribute to academic excellence as Founding Chairperson, Academic Advisory

Board, Cindrebay School of Design; and past Member, Academic Council KRVIA (2021-2023); and Board of Review, CEPT (2019-2022).

Dr Chatterjee has over 23 years of experience in research, teaching and administration gained through various academic positions in Australia (University of New South Wales, University of Sydney, University of Technology Sydney, University of Tasmania, University of South Australia), China (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University), and India (Manipal University Jaipur, Srishti Manipal Institute of Art Design and Technology, Pearl Academy and Sushant School of Architecture), where she developed critical and research-based pedagogies in studio and history and theory subjects.

Dr Chatterjee has also worked in professional practice in Australia, as Senior Research Executive at PTW Architects; Senior Architectural Researcher and Heritage Advisor at Cracknell and Lonergan Architects; and Guest Curator, Customs House Sydney. She is the author of three books Surface and Deep Histories: Critiques, and Practices in Art, Architecture, and Design (Cambridge Scholars Publishing); Built, Unbuilt, and Imagined Sydney (Copal Publishing); John Ruskin and the Fabric of Architecture (Routledge); and the Area Editor (Asia) for fourth publication, The Bloomsbury Global Encyclopedia of Women in Architecture 1960-2015 edited by Karen Burns and Lori Brown (forthcoming, 98000 words for the Asia Section). Her fifth book is an edited collection titled Architectures of Ageing in Place (under contract, Routledge, 2025).

Designing Inclusion and Institution Building in India

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Abstract

Designing Inclusion and Institution Building in India is a narrativisation of my feminist academic leadership across three design schools in India between 2018 and 2024, using the pandemic as a marker of time, and a framework for sharpening temporal and spatial experiences. The first section of the article titled Pre-Pandemic Memories from the Western Ghats talks about my collaborative work at Avani Institute of Design, which focused on justice and diversity in building self-governing cultures of academic excellence. The second section titled Pandemic Tales from Dehmi Kalan is a reflection on my time at Manipal University Jaipur during the lockdown and the work done to construct as well as repair lost social intimacies. The third and final section of the article titled Post-Pandemic Narratives from the Start Up City which brings focus to my ongoing work at RV University on looking at institutional and curricular practices that are redesigned to ameliorate mental health issues and learning disabilities. In essence, all these engagements are about creating institutional learning and working spaces that feel and are safe. Each institution is unique in the way these opportunities become available not just as problem spaces but also collaborators and co-creators who share these affinities and can provide structures of support by way of allyship.

Introduction

Feminist academic leadership in architecture and design for me has involved co-designing work cultures and practices that are about interconnected paradigms of inclusion, emotional safety, and mental wellbeing. This is especially so in the leadership positions I have held in India across my transnational movements between Australia and India, which has given me greater agency to make positive impact in collaboration with different stakeholders across institutional ecosystems. This paper is a correlated consideration of the three most recent leadership positions I have held in India, across the pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post pandemic periods. It is a narrative on how one locates unique approaches to designing systems of care within the institutional space, by building solidarities and sensing affinities embedded within.

Pre-Pandemic Memories from the Western Ghats

My role as Dean Academics in Avani Institute of Design was positioned within the broader ambition of this wonderful institution, which was founded specifically to educate young architects and to move beyond pedagogies that have been ossified and made irrelevant by new and more experimental ways of imagining, representing, and producing architecture. In the last ten years or so, a number of new schools of architecture have been established, Avani being one of them, who aim to be the new pedagogic 'avant garde,' with many of them consisting of leadership teams that are very male dominated.[2] In some sense, this foreshadows what Ewa Majewska describes as "West's male-centred notion of the *avant garde*" that is defined as consisting of

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[2] *For a discussion of this, please see Reshma E. T. (2021). Pedagogical Avant Garde in Architectural Education: A Brief History, Thesis, MArch in History and Theory, CEPT,.*

"heroic strength, bravery, success," accompanying perceptions of breaking with the past with something cutting edge and revolutionary, advocated by "male genius [who] was solely a leader, a hero, a champion." (Majewska, 2023). A critical/ constructive response of working in this context was my paper "Damned if I Do, Damned if I Don't" that interrogated the absence of spaces for the presencing of gendered labour and creative work (Chatterjee, 2023). This was further extended by contributors in our symposium *Gender and Academic Leadership in Architecture in India*, which was conceptualised to understand engagement of women and persons of minoritised genders and sexualities in the construction of the academy, architectural knowledge, professional identity, and academic practice amplify the need to recognise traditional and nontraditional forms of leaderships in institutions.

Figure 1: Poster, Avani Lecture Series; Figure 2: Avani Learning and Teaching Colloquium (ALTC) deliberations; Figure 3: ALTC Poster [Copyright: Author]

Continuing this work in disrupting systemic injustices in institutions, I also conceptualised Avani Lecture Series - *Building Voices, Building Alliances* – with my colleagues, whereby the curatorial perspective centred around architecture's embeddedness within wider spatial politics and its participation in the discourse on social responsibility. We expanded the curation across class, caste, race, gender, sexuality, disability, age, religion,

linguistic, and geographical difference to hear from architects, designers, artists, activists, writers, filmmakers, community organisers, humanists, urbanists, and educators who were agents of change. Some of these initiatives were further augmented by the conversion of the Academic Review into Avani Learning and Teaching Colloquium (ALTC). The Academic Review, in its early form, was focused on examining academic success by a few experts, which was then transformed into a much more democratic form of inquiry by many, marked by resonances of mutual accountabilities of participants and workshops to co-create new academic frameworks. The aim was to create a culture of academic excellence, which is internally sustained and run by committee without always requiring leadership. And, when I left Avani during the beginning of the first lockdown, the school was a self-governing entity, both academically and administratively.

Pandemic Tales from Dehmi Kalan

As I took on a new bigger role as the Dean, Faculty of Design, Manipal University Jaipur in May 2020, I nicknamed myself as the 'COVID Dean,' having relocated to Jaipur, with double mask as soon as the flights were operating again, ready to quarantine before accessing my office in Dehmi Kalan, Rajasthan. The pandemic was incomparable to anything else in our generation in terms of the kind of rupture it created in our imaginations, our bodies, lives, societies, values, and corporealies, which remain altered forever. And while the world seemed to have moved on, I resisted the urge to forget. Jamie Foster Campbell and Zizi Papacharissi capture this so beautifully in their paper as they talk about the change of "collective notion of intimacy and rituals of connecting with others," where intimacy is defined as "trust, understanding, and exposure" developed over time, "where you are actively expressing and receiving without any judgment," and it is something

intangible yet tangible, but missed when it is not there (2021). All of this was missing, while I embarked upon the mandate to build a 'high-performance culture' and drive up the targets, whilst also building trust and team in the age of the pandemic.

Figure 4: Reflections in the Dome Building during COVID19, Manipal University Jaipur; Figure 5: Jaipur Airport; Figure 6: Office Plants during COVID19, Manipal University Jaipur [Copyright: Author]

Echoing the words of Campbell and Papacharissi: "We quickly learn how to use technology to bend time as we live through times that feel simultaneously fast and painfully slow." (2021) Technology mediates this experience of social intimacy and is mediated by it. It is at the same time the bridge and the chasm between people and emotions. We reached across the screen on Teams, across loss digital and physical 'connectivity,' to our students to review design projects, provide remote site videos, virtual pin ups, all the time being mindful of fragility. Conversations with Heads and Directors around architectural pedagogies were punctuated with the sharing of news of sickness and death, loss of livelihood, creating even greater stresses to mental health and wellbeing of those around us. This increased the focus on what it feels to feel safe, at work. The pandemic created the need to socialise more than ever, leading to the expansion of the domestic realm as a public bubble. Initial bonding over where to find vaccines in short supply led to a sense of solidarity during this traumatic period, and these vaccine photos

became unshareable as people died in thousands because the vaccines could not be made available at speed. One of the creative outputs for me during this time, and a beacon of hope, was my special issue "Life, After Life," for *Textile: Cloth and Culture* that featured eleven papers on narratives of hope and resilience in communities of traditional textile crafts across India (Chatterjee, September 2022).

Post-Pandemic Narratives from the Start Up City

While the pandemic is 'forgiven, not forgotten,' and Indian cities have returned to 'normal,' the sense of uncertainty and risk remains embedded within our social body. My appointment as Dean, then Pro-Vice Chancellor at RV University, must be made sense of in the context of the post-pandemic. RV University was founded on 16 June 2021, coinciding with the end of the second and the deadliest wave of the pandemic, especially in India. The post pandemic sense of time and pace feels different due to the perceived slowing down of time, and it feels like everything is going faster than before (Wittmann, 2020). This is exacerbated by the energy of a startup university, which for academic and professional staff feels like every day is like EVERYTHING! NOW! The losses and the trauma of the pandemic remain an absent presence, within transformed families, social structures, and physical and mental health. Perhaps this informs our collective focus on making changes to design education, with respect to mental health and neurodivergent learners, and a response to this recent historic context. Mental health in education in India was already becoming an emergency given the history of student suicides and self-harm due to academic pressures (Pandey, 2017). Post pandemic, these stresses increased for people already at risk, and persons who are neurodivergent. These concerns are captured in many of our academic projects as well as advocacy work.

Figure 7: Cover Page, A Collective Mental Health Dossier; Figure 8: Diversity and Inclusion Workshop, RV University; Figure 9: Neurodiversity Workshop, RV University [Copyright: Author]

My elective titled Mental Health by Design tried to grasp the concerns for students, designers, and users, in which one of the most interesting outcomes was the co-written *Policy Changes in Design Education: A Collective Mental Health Dossier*. Elective offered by a colleague, Accessible Campus, expands the definition of accessibility from physical to social, economic, and cultural accessibility. Our School Committees – Diversity in Learning and Teaching Design Committee and Student Progression – are the advocacy structure established to inform real capacity for change. Faculty workshops on learning disabilities, mental health for teachers and students, and neurodivergence are conducted to reach agreements and consolidate shared knowledge that can be applied to an inclusive redesigning of learning, assessments, marking, shift outdated ideas around perfection and mastery in design education, and assemble a group of people who provide pastoral care not because they must but because they want to. Building on these efforts is my work to bring recognition to as well as resolve poor systems design in a startup university, which create stressors on academic and administrative staff, including but not limited to increased workload and backlogs, chaos and uncertainty that have the propensity to worsen existing mental health issues

and undermine institutional wellbeing.

Conclusion: Preparing for More Change

In conclusion, my work as an academic practitioner and leader is driven by feminist principles of designing spaces of emotional safety and mental wellbeing. And while it is gratifying to look back and reflect, the cognisance that all of this is 'under fire' is humbling. We are now looking at climate change in the face, with increased disruptions like heat waves, and rain, flooding, road closures across the country. Combined with political and technological changes, academic leaders must now look at designing future ready systems in higher education institutions which will continue to guarantee inclusion, justice, safety and well being for all.

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