

INDIA **SEXUALITY EDUCATION** SUMMIT

17 April 2026 | India International Centre

Welcome Address by Niyati Sharma (Founder Director, Pratisandhi)

- Origins and Mission of Pratisandhi as a Conversation Starter
- **Pratisandhi**, derived from a Sanskrit term symbolizing the transitional phase between two ages in Hindu mythology and philosophy, embodies adolescence as a period of resistance and growth.
- Founded by **Niyati Sharma** at age 17 as an Instagram page, it emerged as a vital platform to address nuanced, often unspoken questions about sexuality and relationships, filling the "asterisk" of unasked queries that require delicate negotiations with schools and social media companies.
- This grassroots initiative underscores a collective involvement in **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)** positioned to build essential bridges among educators, policymakers, and healthcare practitioners.

Chief Guest Address by Dr Zoya Rizvi (Deputy Commissioner, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare)

- **Government-Led Rebranding and Iterative Implementation of CSE:** Government programs embed CSE themes under alternative names like "health and wellness" to sidestep stigma, recognizing India's vast adolescent population demands immediate, tailored investments across diverse states and communities. Dr. Zoya Rizvi, Deputy Commissioner in the National Health Mission under India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, highlights how change is constant, evolving with realizations among parents, principals, teachers, educators, trainers, and healthcare providers about integrating topics like consent and mental health into curricula. Practical steps, such as renaming clinics to make them more welcoming, reflect adaptive strategies to detach stigma and ensure accessibility.
- **Youth Feedback and Continuous Training for Effective Delivery:** Central to success is incorporating youth feedback to construct and update curricula, materials, and service delivery, as "everything that comes from youth has greater weight," per Dr. Rizvi's experiences with younger generations. Programs falter without informed facilitators especially in rural areas or among elders resistant to change, necessitating interactive, ownership-building training to foster coordination and awareness. The White Paper launch, drawing from years of children's questions, promises to demystify sexuality, aiming to normalize the word itself through repetition until it ceases to evoke fear.

Chief Guest Address by Mr Anand Grover (Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India)

- **Respect as the Foundation for Open Sexuality Dialogues in Schools:** Anand Grover, a Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court of India, emphasizes respect across all backgrounds – ethnicity, sex, caste, or origin as the cornerstone for addressing sexuality education. Drawing from his time as a college professor in Mumbai, he recounts how students sought permission to discuss sex, prompting proper involvement of principals and parents. Society's reluctance to tackle these issues persists, as merely increasing penalties fails to solve root problems; schools emerge as the most critical arenas for such conversations, where ongoing learning and respectful engagement model the mission to "keep talking about these things" and "keep showing up for people."
- **Stigma-Driven Knowledge Gaps Around Reproduction and Relationships:** Public ignorance about basic bodily processes like menstruation and pregnancy endures, even among husbands and fathers, fueled by religious stigmas, as illustrated by Grover's experiences during a Georgetown lecture on abortion amid the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Women shared profound pains of pregnancy risks, including death, highlighting how little knowledge exists in the public mind. His early work with HIV patients shifted focus to candid discussions with mothers, daughters, and especially men, underscoring the need to demystify these topics to prevent harm from misinformation.

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- **Progressive Judicial Shifts and the Power of Respect:** High courts are adopting liberal views, redefining rape beyond penile penetration under IPC Sections 375 and 376, though protections lag for trans and homosexual individuals. Grover's work with sex workers built trust through **respect**, proving its transformative power. He calls for multi-perspective dialogues on laws like the **Trans Act**, rejecting ideological biases to foster inclusive, evidence-based reforms.

Launch of "The Questions Left Unasked" Whitepaper 2026

- **Misalignment Between Student Realities and CSE Curricula:** The 2026 White Paper by Pratisandhi starkly reveals a profound disconnect between adolescents' lived experiences and India's Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) curricula, analysed through 600+ anonymous questions from 6th-12th graders. Digitized and grouped into 11 thematic categories spanning emotional health, feelings to sexual health, and harassment. The findings expose a recurring loop of gaps: conceptual gaps from media-sourced misinformation, recognition gaps in interpreting personal risks and experiences, skill gaps in translating knowledge into action, and structural gaps in accessing confidential support systems. While students know these systems exist, they perceive them as neither safe nor approachable, questioning the appropriate age for delivering such information.
- **Dominance of Emotional Health and Consent as Challenges:** Among the categories, emotional health and feelings emerges as paramount, where adolescents struggle to validate emotions intertwined with relationships and sexuality, often internalizing them as personal failures or "something wrong with me", accompanied by feelings of loss and the courage needed to act. Similarly, consent, boundaries, and respect shows surface-level awareness but a profound practice deficit: consent is misunderstood as a one-time, irreversible concept rather than ongoing and revocable, coercion is framed as moral dilemmas rather than harm. Technology lacks safe negotiation spaces and power imbalances with authority figures like parents, teachers, or relatives erode agency, leaving youth unable to voice "no" to those they cannot defy.
- **Shift to Application-Oriented, Age-Appropriate CSE Reforms:** Pratisandhi advocates moving beyond mere awareness to an application-oriented approach, starting earlier with age-appropriate basics like body awareness, progressively building to consent while challenging entrenched myths and stigmas. Programs must embed emotional literacy and communication skills for safely addressing concerns, identifying risks, and seeking help, supported by dedicated resources and confidential, youth-friendly access that integrates legal agency. The White Paper repositions interactive adolescents as policy guides, ensuring their questions shape responsive curricula for students, teachers, and parents alike.

Keynote Address by Mr Pramod Bhasin (Founder, Aparajita | Former Founder and President Genpact)

- **Pervasiveness of Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Harassment in India:** Pramod Bhasin, Founder of Aparajita, former President of Genpact, and Chairman of ICRIER, underscores India's acute crisis with gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual harassment, a pervasive issue deeply embedded in society and substantiated by stark data. With 95% of women fearing sexual harassment, it profoundly impacts decision-making, career choices, salaries, livelihoods, and confidence across every life aspect. He urges men to listen to women's lived experiences. Despite legal frameworks, only 6-10% of cases reach formal stages due to massive underreporting, while surveys reveal alarming rates in public spaces over the past 12 months: 50% of women in Jaipur, 67% in Delhi, and 33% in Bengaluru. Bhasin marvels at how society normalizes living amid such pervasive threats.

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- **Root Causes: CSE Deficits, Cultural Stigma, and Male Disengagement:** Addressing GBV demands confronting root causes at schools, where surveys expose critical gaps: a lack of CSE leaves youth reliant on confusing, isolating social media misinformation, compounded by deep cultural stigmas around discussing sex and consent. Crucially, limited engagement of boys and men represents the pivotal starting point, as men remain "singularly unaware" of the issue's extent, with many women similarly uninformed. Simply elevating awareness at appropriate levels promises transformative impact.

Fireside Chat: Sexuality Education in Indian Classrooms

Speakers: Meghna Joshi (Counselling Psychologist & School Mental Health Consultant) Aarushi Sharma (City Director, Teach for India)

- **Schools as Primary Spaces for CSE Reinforcement:** Schools represent the first structured social environment for children, where CSE can both perpetuate issues or correct them through serious execution, as introduced by moderator Meghna Joshi, a counselling psychologist. Aarushi Sharma from Teach for India notes daily classroom questions on adolescence and safety, especially in government schools reflecting community realities, highlighting policy-implementation gaps that demand customized solutions.
- **Youth Curiosity vs. Adult Norms and Overload:** Children exhibit early, intense curiosity even in primary grades with menstruation, but face shooing away of behaviours and overstimulation from unregulated info, lacking grounding frameworks.
- **Leadership, Relationships, and Systemic Shifts:** Supportive school leadership and faculty relationships are essential amid administrative overload and stakeholder politics, including parental resistance. Meghna stresses adult "ego strength" to tolerate differences and proactive CSE policies with accountability; AS emphasizes diplomatic conversations for depth over speed, leveraging bright spots for progress.
- **QnA Themes: Navigating Parental Rights and Resistance:** Growing parental rights narratives frame CSE as private territory, instilling fear of punitive actions among educators. Responses focus on balancing confidentiality with child safety (physical and emotional), evolving psychoeducation workshops for parents/students, and affirming non-negotiable identity exploration by 12th grade, yielding positive responses despite contradictions. Systems should be aligned toward progress through conversation power, adapting diplomatically for systemic shifts.

Masterclass | Between "Man Up" and "Open Up": Lessons from Three Decades of Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Justice Work

Facilitator: Harish Sadani (Founder Director, Men Against Violence and Abuse)

- **Evolution from Deterrence to Inclusive Male Engagement:** Harish Sadani, Founder-Director of Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) since 1993, traces phases: Phase 1's punishment-focused deterrence creates fear without ownership; Phase 2 positions men as solutions, challenging cis-male privilege (via tools like bingo games) but risking disconnect; Phase 3 breaks binaries through non-judgmental dialogues, using curiosity over confrontation to build empathy as a learned behaviour.
- **Digital Backlash and Vulnerability in Young Men:** Rising manosphere influences, misinformation, and #MeToo misuse narratives frame feminism as anti-men, trapping youth between "man up" and "open up," with consequences like effeminacy stigma and male suicides. MAVA counters via Yuva Samvaad program (peer dialogues), Project Unlearn (ex-incarcerated facilitators), Samabhav film festivals, weekly digital posts, Yuvamaitri helpline, and Transforming Masculinities manual.

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- **Holistic, Community-Wide Interventions:** Male facilitators are essential for relatability; programs provide healthier sexuality/relationship alternatives, emphasizing accountability without threat, scenario-based "why" questions, and "calling in" acknowledgment.
- **QnA themes: Overcoming Home Patriarchy and Binary Language:** Schools must collaborate with parents and elders via community sessions, and film discussions, discuss films tackling masculinities, invest patiently in boys. Men question power's appeal, but healthier relationships and support systems outweigh rat-race pressures. Practitioners must self-check binary language (e.g., assuming heterosexuality), internalize inclusive terms, and question norms absorbed via porn like male dominance.

Panel: Scaling Sexuality Education in India

Speakers: Dr Sangeeta Saksena (Founder, Enfold) , Ramya Anand (Co-Lead, TARSHI), Dr Arpita Das (Senior Advisor, IPPF), Maitreyee Krishna (Gender Lead, Pratham)

- **Destigmatizing "Sexual" from Birth and Terminology Gaps:** Sangeeta Saksena clarifies CSE misunderstandings by framing sexual development as natural like any other, starting from newborns, with discomfort arising from conflating acts, pleasure, and anatomy. Aparna highlights terminology hindrances, urging destigmatization for open conversations.
- **Engaging Anxious Parents as Active Partners:** Ramya Anand views parents as anxious rather than resistant, fearing "saying something wrong", entry points via safety and wellbeing of children lead to deeper talks in short, non-judgmental sessions with simple scripts. Modern social media exposure forces openness, though they prefer schools handle sex/gender; reassurance balances their beliefs with child needs.
- **Contextual Capacity Building for Educators/Communities:** Rithambhara Mehta invests in workers and teachers exploring apprehensions before topics like periods and SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights), reaching 5.4M adolescents. Maitreyee Krishna at Pratham uses bite-sized, integrated health and life skills entry points, films and storybooks for equitable classrooms, and community engagement. Dr Arpita Das critiques tokenistic CSE, demanding comprehensive, inclusive, youth-involved national curricula with cultural sensitivity.
- **Scaling Without Dilution via Localization and Integration:** Ramya Anand prioritizes depth over numbers, localizing resources by "reading the room". Maitreyee integrates it into academics via storybooks/exercises, fostering boy-girl interactions; Sangeeta navigates textbook limits through activities.
- **QnA Themes: Backlash on Body Safety and Scaling Models:** Dr. Sangeeta counters backlash with child protection policies, parent prep, and flexible language (dropping the "gandi baatein" stigma), family as first teacher of concepts like sexuality. Scaling uses outcome-specific sessions. Challenges include parental negotiation in govt schools and South Asian digital adaptations. Youth-involved, inclusive curricula should prioritize depth, equity over uniform resources.

Panel: Sexuality Education & India's Policy Landscape

Speakers: Harsh Chauhan (Founder, Alt Unfold | Associate Programme Director - Patang), Moumita Sarkar (Senior Regional Director, Ipas Development Foundation) , Khyati Bhardwaj (Moderator | Pratisandhi Foundation)

- **Policy Existence vs. Implementation Ecosystem Gaps:** Harsh Chauhan from 'Alt Unfold' and 'Patang' finds abundant CSE policies but falters in execution due to unprepared health and legal systems, political flux requiring frequent changes, rural inaccessibility, and urban-class facilitators unable to relate to grassroots backlash.

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- Moumita Sarkar from Ipas Development Foundation sees CSE as foundational prevention against complex cases like forced marriages and elopements etc., building SRHR and relationship skills for informed decisions amid unsupportive communities.
- **Fragmented Design and Trauma-Informed Needs:** CSE fragments across ministries without budget convergence or trauma-informed training, overlooking its lifelong applicability and power dynamics, especially with men. Harsh reframes it as empowering self-knowledge beyond pregnancies, while Moumita highlights the scope in schools and educational institutions but gaps in educator training/resources amid overcrowded classes (e.g., 80 students/teacher) persist and pose challenges.
- **Beyond Binaries:** Contextual, Intersectional Frameworks: India traps CSE in values vs. health binaries. Harsh advocates audience-specific, reflective support over rigid school delivery, favouring participatory buildup. Moumita provides technical aid for state health implementation via master trainers and training modules, emphasizing youth involvement over specialist-only policies.
- **QnA Themes: Bridging Bookish vs. Ground Realities:** MS urges defining CSE as continuum conversations empowering autonomy and informed decisions, which should extend to workplaces beyond harassment for re-energized dialogue, accepting social friction to start talks.

Fireside Chat: Who Shapes How Young People Learn About Sex in India Today? Media, Influencers & Platforms

Speakers: Dr Tanaya Narendra (Content Creator, Doctor)

- **Digital vs. Classroom CSE Content Gaps:** Dr. Tanaya Narendra, doctor and content creator (@drcuterus), highlights the divides between social media's health-centric and information-centric focus and CSE's omission of key aspects (such as pleasure), risking incomplete sex education in quick-hit digital formats versus structured classrooms.
- **Balancing Nuance, Reach, and Implementability Online:** Social-media demands simple, actionable tips over detailed lectures. Dr Tanaya prioritizes implementable changes that resonate (e.g., health impacts), recognizing digital curation differs vastly from in-real-life conversations.
- **Navigating Censorship with Engaging Content:** To avoid shadowbanning or censorship, Dr Tanaya tests topics via patients, ensuring clarity, implementability, humour (for memorability), and reduced intimidation, making content stick without sacrificing accuracy.

Closing Address by Dr Seema Sharma (Advisor and Co-Director, Pratisandhi Foundation)

