

Completion Report

International Girl Child Day Webinar 2021 commemorated on 13th October 2021

On the occasion of the International Girl Child day, the Internal Committee (IC) of IIPS organized a virtual webinar through WebEx Video Conferencing Application. **Prof. Usha Ram**, Chairperson, IC of the IIPS welcomed the Guest Speakers **Dr. Khevana Desai**, Mithibai College of Arts, Mumbai and **Ms. Mitali Nikore**, Founder, Nikore Associates.

Prof. Ram invited **Prof. K S James**, Director and Senior Professor, IIPS, to chair the webinar and formally inaugurate the webinar. Prof. James welcomed the speaker and the participants and distinguished invitees. In his inaugural speech, Prof. James emphasized on the need to debate on the gendered digital divide inequality that prevails in the society. He added that no single meeting can address the issue and this is a long term process.

The first speaker **Ms Mitali Nikore** deliberated on the topic '**Building back better for India's girls**'. She began with discussing how lucky are those who are able to tune in the internet and be connected. And there is a series of digital deprivation where females are 15 percent less likely to use mobile phones as compared to males and 33 percent less likely to use internet at home. She also highlighted that Covid-19 pandemic led to a higher dependency on internet. For instance, an increase of 500 percent of tele-health consultation is massive. Yet, there is an inequality and exclusion crisis going on. The Global System for Mobile Communications, GSMA data suggests that inequality in mobile usage is much higher in India than Bangladesh and only marginally higher than Pakistan. Indian women do not use internet because of the reasons such as- rural broadband penetration is only 29 percent, and more men migrate to urban areas as compared to women. Hence, exposure to mobile as well as to internet usage among women is much lower compared to their men counterparts. Women are at triple disadvantages in terms of internet usage namely access of data (data doesn't reach rural areas), data affordability and common social norms. She explained that affordability is an issue as internet usage incurs a substantial percent of their monthly wages. Lastly it is a prevalent social norm that women should not use mobile phones and hence, they are discouraged from using mobile phones and internet usage.

Ms Nikore also discussed how most of the society judge women for using mobile phones. It is also evident that majority of the women possess basic or feature mobile phones. Ms Nikore pointed out one very important finding that the number of child marriages have increased substantially across the country in the post lockdown era due to the pandemic. A major reason for this is the closure of schools for longer time. Due to the schools' closure and eventual drop out, early marriage problem is hovering over the older girls. The Mann Deshi foundation is working towards making the mobile phones accessible to women. It is providing no cost EMI to purchase smartphones for women.

Ms Nikore concluded with measures to address the deprivation that women are facing. There is a need for training women about the usage of mobile phones and enabling them to use it for their business. There are some tailored solutions at hand- providing free smartphones to the rural women which can be facilitated by CSR partners and making efforts at normalising women owning smartphones. ASHA/AWW should be provided smartphones. Moreover, programs should focus on digital literacy. This is a necessary skill and hence government should intervene and help in a better manner.

The second speaker **Dr Khevana Desai** deliberated on the topic ‘**A screen of one’s own: Gendered digital divide in pandemic**’. She stated with an anecdote of a young Muslim girl who was the sole earning member in her family. She lost her job due to lack of access to mobile phone during the pandemic. She quoted **Judith Butler that the virus does not discriminate, we humans do.** The virus affected all of us differently and especially it unmasked existing structural inequalities. The virus has divided the country in two parts with respect to digital access. One part of India which was for masses and the other which was for classes. The class one had a smooth and easy shift from real world to virtual world. However, there were bigger problems for masses for instance like having electricity for less than 12 hours for more than 45 percent of the population. Around 320 million children are out of school due to pandemic and 40-70 percent children do not have any access to any smart devices. In states like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, 40 and 70 percent children respectively do not have access to internet. She also added that there is a great structural divide; gender and caste, gender and class, gender and disability, gender and religion and finally gender and geography. There are regional and household inequality in India. During the pandemic either the children or the parents were using the phones, someone of these two was always compromising. Women faced a lot of online harassment during lockdown and also people faced difficulty in registering for vaccination due to lack of phone or internet. There is a question of autonomy and ownership of mobile phones more than the access. There is a need for gender segregated data. She viewed that the platform current being used for education should be used as an agency for activism.

Dr KS James stated anecdotal evidence and covered real issues by the two speakers was praiseworthy. He complimented the detailed data covered during the lectures. He pointed the inter-sectionality mentioned is truly critical and added that there is the need of NGO’s intervention. He also asked if there is a need to develop a system and structures to address the issues. Can charity and NGOs be a permanent solution?

Dr Desai responded that NGOs are not permanent solution but that was the only option available. The education system failed to use radios as a medium. There were various reports on suicides because children had no access to internet. There were accidents because children travelled long distance to get internet connectivity. We denied children of their rights, of getting proper dignified education. Hence, for now charity is the beginning before we can find other solutions to empower.

To a question on need for an external training, **Ms. Nikore** added that digital literacy is about making women able to use phones for productive purpose. Women using and having their own phone is important. Language is an issue. There is software to translate and solve the language problem. However, it is still a barrier. Secondly, there are social norms, that women should not be using phone. Using phone is one's private matter, even parents should not have a choice to question. The questions are raised to the daughters and not to the sons. It's very hard for younger girls to stand up for themselves and answer. Hence, it's very hard for young women to learn internet usage, applications etc. Solutions should be designed for the people from the last mile.

The deliberation was followed by a brief insightful comment by **Dr Poonam Mutreja** who appreciated the brilliant presentations. She added that Women just don't need phones, they need smartphones. Women should have access to the smartphones. The number of women who have access to mobile phones and internet, an investment should be made in them. Young people always share phones with others. With sharing of phones, there will be a sharing of information. This way there will be a greater impart of knowledge.

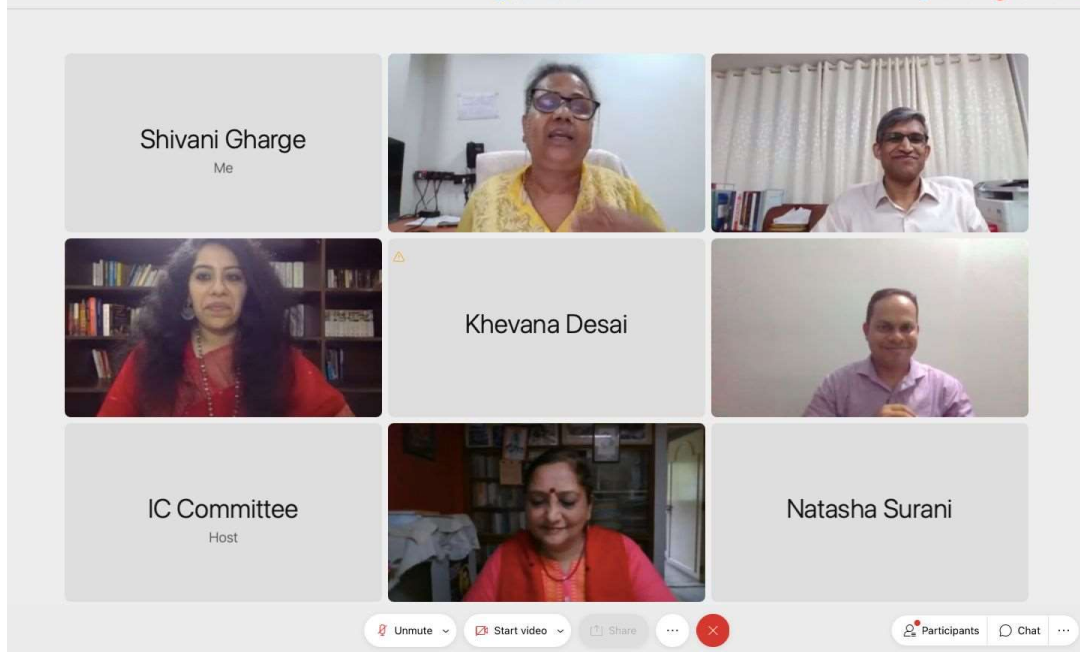
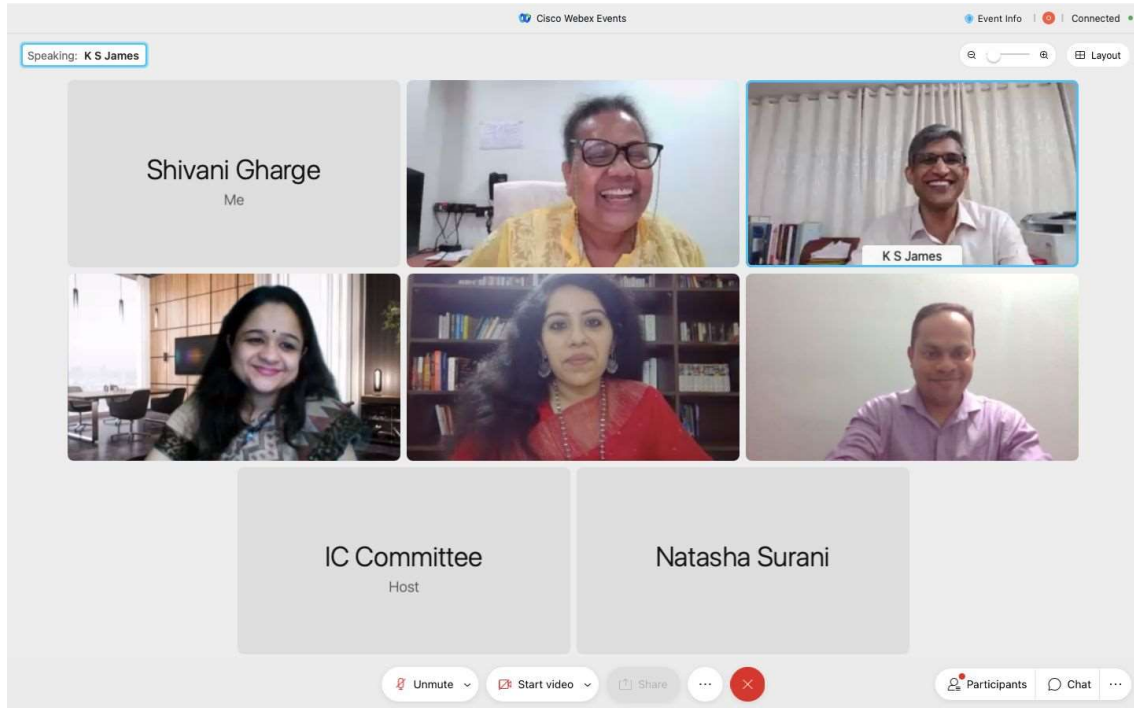
There were questions regarding gender sensitisation and how has the gender discrimination affected the discourse of digital activism and on female participation in the policy making and digital literacy among women. Additionally, there was an elaborate discussion on the steps to be taken for gender sensitisation. **Dr Manoj Alagarajan** added that women who do lower level of work lost their jobs. Men have not lost jobs, men get their things done. Even smartphones become outdated after 2 years, there should be better ways of communication.

After the question-answer session, **Dr. Manas R. Pradhan** proposed a formal vote of thanks and gratitude to the presenters, all participants, IIPS administration, Director Office, the ICT unit, and the ICC members for their timely help and support in organizing the webinar. The webinar received a good response and a total of 74 participants from academic and non-academic Institutions/Organization, representatives of the international and national development partners and the NGOs, faculty and students from IIPS attended the event. The webinar concluded at 6.30 pm.

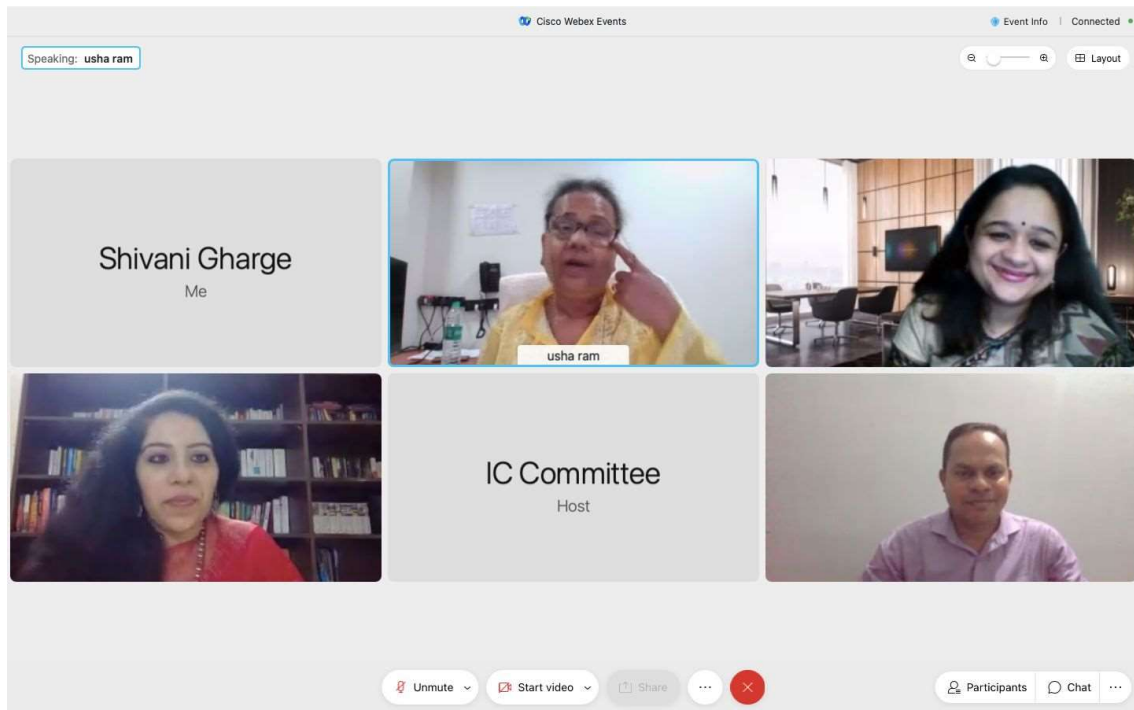
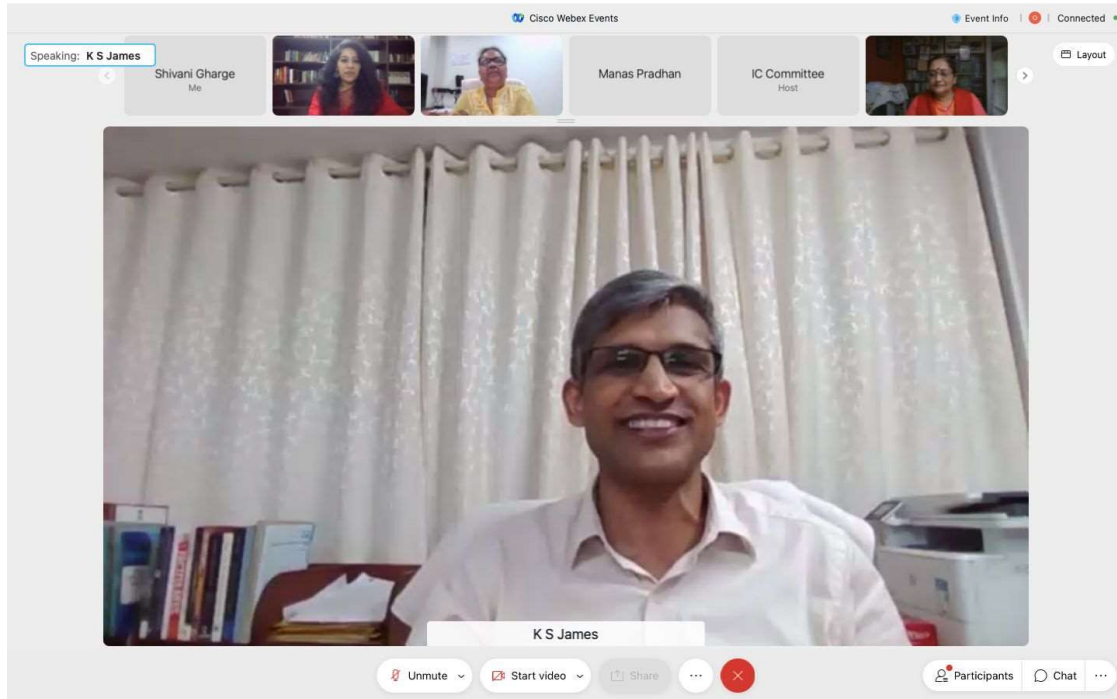
The IC members involved in organizing the webinar:

1. Prof. Usha Ram
2. Dr. Manas Ranjan Pradhan
3. Ms. Yogita H. Rangari
4. Mr. Soumendu Sen
5. Ms. Shivani Gharge
6. Ms. Aditi

Pics from the IGCD Webinar



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Attendance Sheet of IGCD Webinar**Session detail for 'International Girl Child Day Webinar': 13th October 2021**

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