



Edges to Centre: A Global Intergenerational Leadership Project for Marginalized Communities “Nothing About Us Without Us”

NextGen Rights Lab: Global South Intersectional
Rights & Leadership Accelerator

Academia from the Margins – Knowledge, Caste & Intergenerational
Leadership

Session – 1 (70 mins) - Knowledge, Power & the Global Academy

Introduction: What are minority rights?

1. What are minority rights?

- *Who?* Ethnic, national, religious, linguistic or cultural groups, usually non-dominant, who have the **right to maintain and develop their identity**.
- *What?* **Individual human rights** enjoyed by persons belonging to these groups, often exercised **in community with others** (e.g. language, culture, religion).

2. How do we identify minorities?

- **Objective factors:** Shared language, culture, ethnicity, religion, history that differ from the majority.
- **Subjective factor:** People **self-identify** as belonging to the group and want to preserve that identity.
- **Context:** They are often **marginalised or excluded** from political, economic, or social power.

3. How do we protect minority rights? (MRG's "three pillars")

- **Non-discrimination:** Prohibit direct and indirect discrimination; adopt and enforce equality laws and remedies.
- **Protection of identity:** Safeguard minority culture, language, religion and heritage (schools, media, cultural and religious sites).
- **Effective participation:** Ensure minorities can **influence decisions** – representation in public life, consultation on laws and policies, participation in development.



1. Academia from the Margins: Knowledge, Caste & Minority Rights

- Academia is not neutral – it is a site of power and exclusion.
- Today: focus on global knowledge production and how it treats caste-affected & minority communities.
- We will: unpack who defines “rigour” and “objectivity”, map funding, peer review, rankings, visas & archives as filters, connect this to Dalit/Bahujan, Adivasi, Rohingya and other minority scholarship.

We often treat universities and research centres as places where truth just “emerges.” In reality, academia is a **battleground**, where certain worldviews are treated as universal and others as “activist,” “biased,” or “local.” This session will show how global knowledge systems are structured: funding flows, peer-review politics, rankings, language hierarchies, access to archives, visa regimes – all of these decide who gets to produce knowledge, be cited, and be hired.

For caste-affected and minority communities, this means our lives are often turned into **data and case studies**, while our own theories and frameworks are sidelined. Today we start by naming how that happens, globally and in South Asia.



2. Knowledge Production Is Not Neutral: Who decides what counts as “rigorous” and “objective”?

- “Objectivity” has often meant: white, Western, upper-caste, male, secular or Christian, English-language worldviews presented as neutral.
- Gatekeeping happens through: who sits on editorial boards & peer-review panels, what methods are labelled “gold standard,” which topics are seen as “proper academic questions” vs “activism.”
- Impact: Dalit/Bahujan, Adivasi, Muslim, Rohingya, and other minority scholarship is: relegated to “area studies” or “NGO reports”, cited as raw material, not as theory.

When journals say they are looking for “rigorous, objective work,” they rarely admit that they have a very particular image of who can produce that work. Historically, that image is white, Western, upper-caste, male, and English-speaking. Methods that fit this worldview (certain quantitative designs, certain philosophical traditions) are lifted up as “neutral.”

Meanwhile, research rooted in Dalit, Adivasi, Rohingya, Muslim, Indigenous, Black, or queer perspectives is often treated as “advocacy,” “identity politics,” or “too local.” Our communities become **data**, while theories and frameworks still mostly come from dominant positions. Intersectional leadership in academia starts with refusing to pretend this is neutral.



3. Political Economy of Research: Follow the money, rankings, and passports

- Funding: who pays for research shapes: which topics are “hot,” which methods are preferred, whose “expertise” is hired.
- Rankings & metrics: journal impact factors, h-index, university rankings, “excellence” frameworks; these reward English-language, Global North, dominant-caste networks.
- Access filters: paywalled journals & expensive books, visa regimes, conference costs, closed archives and language barriers.

Research doesn't float in a vacuum – it follows **funding calls, career incentives, and border controls**. Donors and foundations decide which themes are fundable. Rankings reward publications in certain journals and ignore others. Visa regimes and travel costs decide who can attend conferences and give keynotes, while many archives remain reachable only to those with institutional badges and specific language skills.

For caste-affected and minority scholars, this means their topics can be dismissed as “too political,” their languages as “non-international,” their passports as “high-risk.” Understanding this political economy lets you strategise: which grants to pursue, which open-access routes to use, how to build **regional and digital alternatives**.



4. How Canons Are Built (and Policed)

How Canons Are Built (and Policed)

- Canons are constructed via: syllabi, exam lists, citation practices, “founding texts” and “giants” everyone is told to read.
- Often dominated by: European & North American theorists, upper-caste & upper-class South Asian elites, male authors, secular or savarna liberal frames.
- Result: caste and minority experiences appear as: examples, not as sources of theory, “empirical cases” that illustrate someone else’s framework.

When people say “this is the canon,” they are talking about a set of texts that have been chosen and repeated over time as essential reading. These choices are not neutral. Syllabi and reading lists tell students whose ideas matter. When most of those names are from Europe, North America, or upper-caste Indian elites, students internalise the idea that **serious thinking happens elsewhere**, and our lives are raw material.

Caste, race, indigeneity, disability, and minority perspectives are often treated as “special topics” or “case studies,” not as sources that can **challenge and reshape the canon itself**. Recognising this is the first step towards building new syllabi and curricula.



5. Comparative Traditions: Black, Indigenous & Critical Race: What Black Studies, Indigenous Studies & CRT teach us

- Black Studies: community-accountable scholarship; critique of racial capitalism; centring Black life, joy, and resistance.
- Indigenous Studies: land, sovereignty, relational ethics, knowledge guardianship; community control over research.
- Critical Race Theory (CRT): structural power, interest convergence, counter-storytelling, critique of “colour-blind” law.
- Shared strategies: building departments, centres, and journals, pushing for curricular change, surviving backlash and moral panics.

We are not alone. Black Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Critical Race Theory show how marginalised communities have carved out space in hostile universities. They insisted that their histories and theories belong **at the centre of the curriculum**, not at the edges. They built departments, centres, and journals, and fought waves of backlash.

For caste scholarship and minority rights work, these traditions offer concrete strategies: **community accountability, land- and labour-centred analysis, counter-storytelling, and long-term institution-building**. They also warn us: once counter-knowledge gains visibility, it often attracts state and right-wing attacks. We need to prepare for that, not be surprised by it.

Comparative Traditions: Black, Indigenous & Critical Race

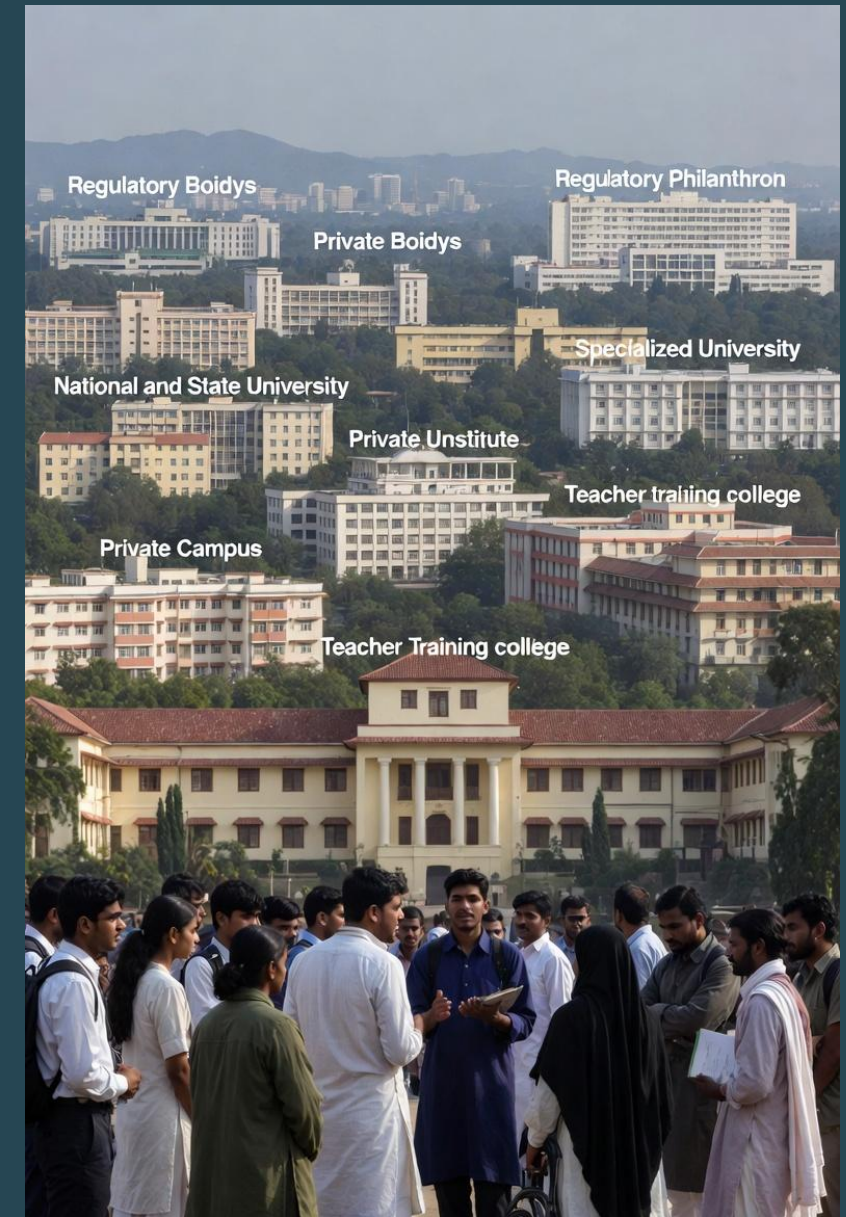
What Black Studies, Indigenous Studies & CRT teach us



6. South Asian Higher Education: Structures & Gaps: South Asia's academic architecture & representation gaps

- Architecture: public universities, state & central; private & “deemed” universities; specialised institutes; regulatory bodies & accreditation councils.
- Representation gaps across pipeline: undergraduate & postgraduate admissions, RAships & PhD supervision, faculty hiring, tenure, leadership roles.
- Intersecting lines: caste, tribe, religion, language, migration status, class, disability.

In South Asia, higher education is a layered system: national and state universities, private and “global” campuses, specialised institutes, teacher training colleges, regulatory bodies, philanthropies. Each has its own rules and gatekeepers. Representation gaps show up at every stage: who gets in, who stays, who supervises, who gets permanent posts, who becomes dean or VC. Reservations and affirmative measures exist on paper, but informal practices, entrance exams, language norms, and social networks often block Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, Muslim, Rohingya, migrant, and disabled scholars. To change academia, we must **understand where the pipeline leaks**.



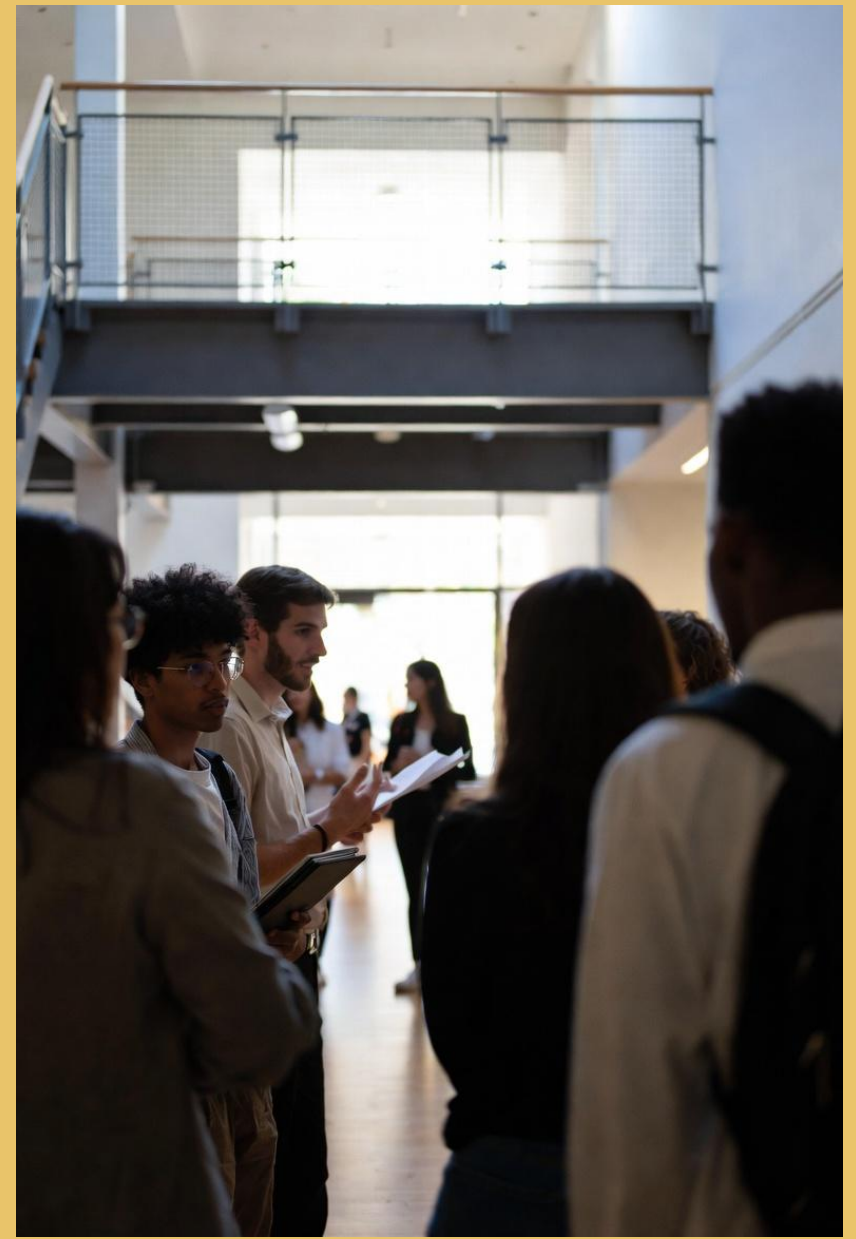
7. Curricular Politics, Textbooks & “Culture Wars”: Syllabi, textbooks & culture wars around caste and minorities

- Curricular politics includes: textbook deletions & sanitising of caste, communal violence, colonisation, resistance; inserting majoritarian narratives & “civilisational” pride ;sidelining Dalit, Adivasi, minority authors.
- Reforms & “NEP-style” changes often framed as: “modernisation”, “decolonisation”, “skills”, but can hide centralisation & control.
- Research ethics protocols may: ignore community consent & data justice ,treat communities as free data mines. .

Curriculum is political. Recent reforms in different South Asian countries show aggressive rewriting of history and social science: removing references to caste violence, erasing or minimising riots and pogroms, glorifying majoritarian histories, and diminishing the role of oppressed communities and women. These are not innocent changes; they shape how a generation understands justice.

At the same time, “research ethics” forms often focus more on institutional liability than on **community consent and data justice**. They rarely ask: who owns this data; where will it be stored; can communities veto uses that harm them?

Intersectional leaders must read syllabi, reforms, and ethics protocols critically.



8. Movements, Centres, Diaspora & New Openings: Movements, Centres, Diaspora & New Openings

- Student movements & unions: reservations & anti-discrimination struggles, campus protests against caste & gender violence, campaigns for inclusive syllabi & safe spaces.
- Independent research centres & collectives: community archives, peoples' tribunals, alternative fellowships.
- Diaspora networks & online communities: reading groups, podcasts, independent journals, digital archives. New threats: surveillance, defamation regimes, platform moderation, campus gag orders.

Even in hostile academic environments, student movements, teachers' unions, Dalit and Adivasi collectives, feminist groups, and independent centres have **carved out spaces** for critical scholarship and organising. Diaspora networks have also created journals, conferences, podcasts, and archives that keep conversations alive when local space shrinks.

At the same time, new tools of control — surveillance technologies, defamation laws, sedition/“anti-national” charges, platform takedowns, campus codes of conduct — make it risky to speak and publish. Understanding this balance of **opening and closing** is key to planning safe but honest work.



9. Intergenerational Leadership in Knowledge Production: Intergenerational roles in academic and para-academic work

- Elders: hold oral histories, memory of past struggles, pre-digital archives, often fluent in multiple languages & local registers.
- Mid-career academics/practitioners: turn lived realities into grant-competent proposals, design syllabi that can pass committees but still hold edge.
- Younger scholars & students: drive digital discovery, reading groups, interoperable bibliographies, data sets, podcasts.

Knowledge work is not just about publishing articles. Elders carry storylines, archives, and context that never made it into journals. Mid-career people understand institutional processes: committees, grants, accreditation. Younger people often know how to navigate digital tools, online repositories, and social media ecosystems. If these generations work together — sharing roles, credit, and care — they can build **archives, syllabi, and research agendas** that outlast them. If they don't, we risk losing knowledge every time someone retires, leaves academia, or burns out.



10. Key Takeaways & Bridge to Session 2. From critique to practice

- Academia is a structured system of power, not a neutral marketplace of ideas.
- Caste-affected & minority communities are often data without theory, presence without power.
- Comparative traditions (Black Studies, Indigenous Studies, CRT) offer strategies for counter-knowledge.
- South Asian higher education has specific structural gaps and curricular battles we must confront.
- Next session: focus on practising counter-academia — research design, writing, conferences, repositories, teaching, and institutional change strategies.

We've spent this session mapping the system: how knowledge is filtered, who gets to theorise, how curricula are policed, and how movements and centres have kept spaces open. The point is not despair, but **clarity**. You now have a more realistic picture of what you're up against.

In Session 2, we move from critique to craft: how to ask research questions rooted in community problems, choose methods that honour lived experience, write for different audiences, build ethical collaborations, and push institutional change from within and beyond universities.





Edges to Centre: A Global Intergenerational Leadership Project for Marginalized Communities “Nothing About Us Without Us”

NextGen Rights Lab: Global South Intersectional
Rights & Leadership Accelerator

Academia from the Margins – Knowledge, Caste & Intergenerational
Leadership
Session – 2 (70 mins) - Practising Counter-Academia & Institutional
Change

1. Practising Counter-Academia: Tools, Routes & Small Interventions

- Today: practical tools for building caste-just, minority-centred knowledge.
- Focus on: framing research questions from community problems, choosing methods & collaborations ethically, writing for journals, policy, and public, conferences, citation politics & networking, digital repositories & community data, curriculum & mentorship ethics, institutional change levers.

This session is about *how* you actually do the work: how to design a piece of research, an article, a workshop, a syllabus or an archive that serves caste-affected and minority communities — and still survives peer review, committee scrutiny, and institutional politics. Whether you are inside academia, in NGOs, in media, or in independent practice, these tools can help you **treat knowledge work as part of your organising**.



2. Framing Research Questions from Community Problems: From “gap in literature” to community-defined problems

- Start from community-defined problems, not just “gaps in literature”: e.g., manual scavenging, gig-work precarity, hostel segregation, hate speech, visa denials.
- Ask: Who is asking this question and for whom? What material conditions and histories does it sit in?
- Methods that honour lived realities: oral history, participatory action research, ethnography, worker surveys, legal mapping, archive-building..

Standard academic training says: find a “gap in the literature.” Counter-academia asks: **what hurts, what’s unjust, and what do communities want to know?** When you start from community-defined problems, your research questions change. Instead of “how do X perceive Y?”, you might ask, “how do laws, employers, and universities structure this harm?” You then choose methods that respect people’s time, risk, and dignity: co-designed interviews, community workshops, archival digs, legal case tracking. This doesn’t mean you ignore theory; it means theory is in conversation with reality, not floating above it.



3. Writing for Multiple Audiences: One insight, three formats

- Aim to translate your core insight into: a peer-reviewed piece (article, chapter, or working paper), a policy/practice output (brief, toolkit, evidence note), a public-facing piece (op-ed, blog, podcast script, or longform essay).
- Keep analytic clarity, avoid euphemisms about caste and minority persecution.
- Use layered referencing: cite across South Asian languages, grey literature, and legal documents, not just a narrow Anglophone mainstream.

Your work shouldn't live in only one format. A good research project can feed a journal article, a policy note that speaks to decision-makers, and a more accessible piece that circulates among students, organisers, and affected communities. Each format has its own length, tone, and citation style, but your politics and analysis stay consistent. Importantly, you name caste and minority persecution clearly, instead of burying it in phrases like “social tensions.” You also make your references plural: cite work in regional languages, cite community reports, cite judgments, not just the same five Western theorists.



4. Journals, Conferences & Citation Politics: Shifting who is cited, who is invited, who is on stage

- Journals & special issues that welcome caste and minority-rights scholarship exist – but: editorial logics still gatekeep style, method, and framing.
- Conferences: panels often curated through friendship networks and dominant-caste circles, abstracts judged for “theoretical contribution” in narrow ways.
- What you can do: build panels that centre Dalit, Adivasi, minority scholars, insist on inclusive citation practices, use invitations to pull others up, not just recycle the same names.

Journals and conferences are where visibility and legitimacy are made. Even when a call for papers looks open, decisions are often shaped by unspoken norms: whose work is already known, whose English is deemed “good,” whose methods match the editors’ comfort zone. Panels at big conferences are frequently built out of old networks. You can push back by curating differently: propose panels that centre caste-affected and minority scholars, suggest special issues on work-and-descent discrimination, normalise citing Dalit and Bahujan thinkers as theorists. When you are invited, ask who else is on the panel and suggest names; use your access as a lever



5. Digital Repositories, Licensing & Community Data. Making our knowledge findable, reusable, and protected

- Tools: open-access preprint servers, institutional & independent repositories, community-owned data commons and archives.
- Practices: metadata that names caste & minority dimensions (where safe), multilingual indexing (keywords in English + local languages), clear licensing (e.g., Creative Commons) that prevents extractive use.
- Consent models: community agreements about what can be shared, where, and under what conditions.

Publishing in a journal is not the only way to circulate knowledge. Preprint platforms, institutional repositories, and community archives can make your work accessible even when paywalls or rankings try to hide it. But this needs care: you must tag and describe your materials in ways that make caste and minority dimensions findable *without* exposing people to harm.

Licensing also matters: open licences can help others use your work, but you may want conditions that prevent commercial exploitation or hostile re-use. Community ownership of data and archives means **negotiating consent and access rules together**, not assuming that “open” is always good.



6. Collaborations with NGOs, Unions & Legal Clinics:

Collaborations with NGOs, Unions & Legal Clinics

- Good collaborations: start from movement-defined questions, share authorship, credit & resources, align outputs with community strategies, ensure findings do not expose participants to harm.
- Red flags: university partners vanish after publication, data is taken without return, communities only appear as “informants,” never as co-researchers.

Many of you will work at the boundary of academia and practice — with NGOs, unions, legal clinics, community media. This can be powerful if done right: you get deeper access to realities; movements get research that supports their campaigns. But it can also become extractive: academics collect data, publish papers, and move on; communities are left exposed or exhausted.

Ethical collaboration means **co-designing projects**, agreeing on authorship and data use, planning together where findings will be presented, and debriefing communities after outputs come out. It also means being ready to shelve or anonymise findings if sharing them would put people at risk.



7. Teaching, Curriculum & Mentorship Ethics: Bringing caste & minority scholarship into classrooms and labs

- Curriculum design: normalise caste and minority-rights scholarship across law, policy, sociology, history, economics, media, public health, environment, include core readings by Dalit/Bahujan, Adivasi, Rohingya, Muslim & other minority scholars, cross-list modules across departments.
- Mentorship & lab ethics: transparent authorship norms, fair RA hiring (no unpaid, caste-coded “favours”), language and accessibility support, clear grievance pathways that actually work.

Teaching is one of the most direct ways to shift knowledge systems. Even if you are not a formal lecturer, you may run workshops, training, or fellowships. You can choose readings that **centre marginalised scholars** and connect caste to every discipline, not just sociology. Cross-listing and co-teaching can break silos.

Mentorship ethics are equally crucial: authorship must reflect actual work done; RAs should be paid; lower-caste students should not be stuck with invisible labour. Accessibility (translations, different formats, disability support) is part of justice. Grievance systems need to be more than posters on the wall; they need to function without retaliation.



8. Institutional Change Strategies. Reading the machinery: bylaws, budgets, committees & levers

- Learn to read: bylaws & ordinances (who sets curriculum, who approves centres), budgets (which departments & centres get money), promotion & hiring criteria, accreditation reports & equity statements. Identify levers: curriculum committees, research ethics boards, libraries, presses, alumni bodies, accreditation visits.
- Aim: turn vague “equity & inclusion” statements into: binding rules & policies, protected posts & lines for caste-justice and minority scholarship.

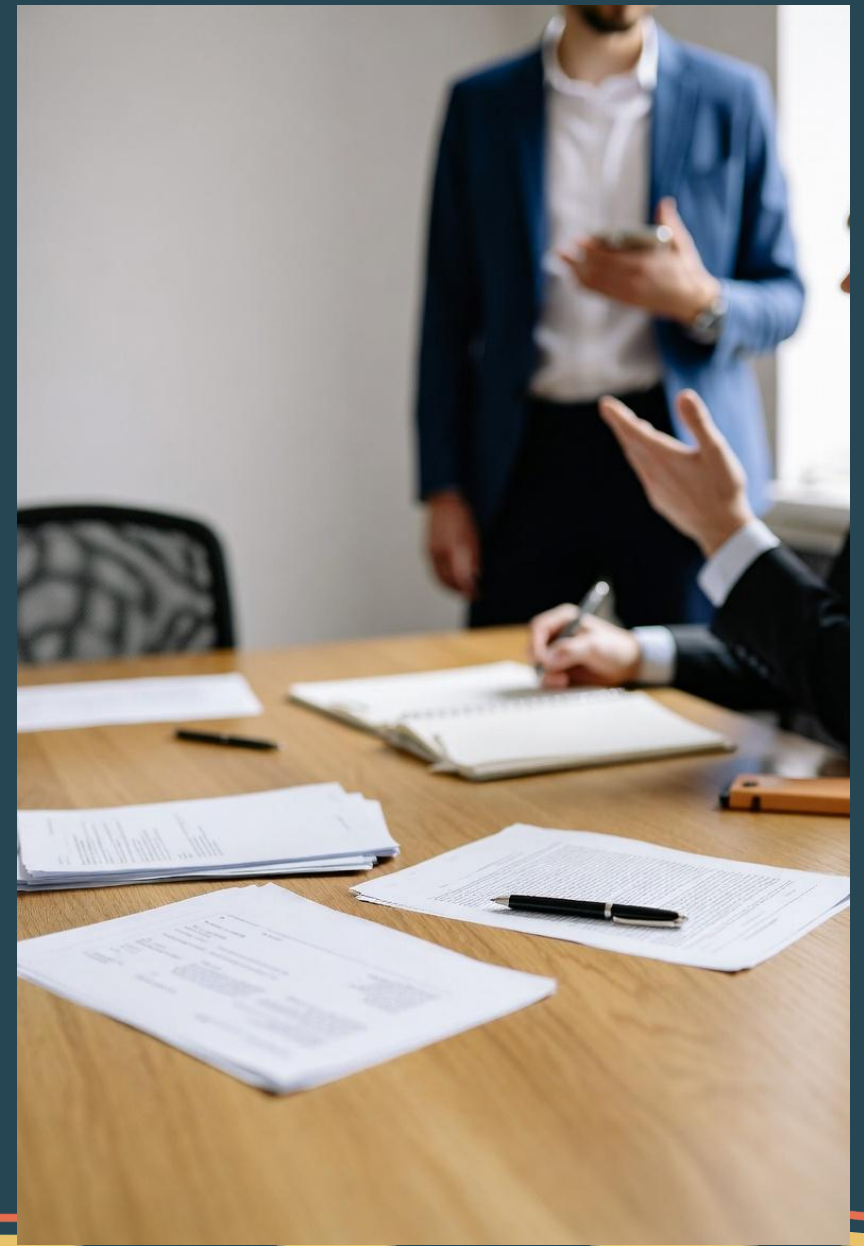
Academic institutions look opaque on purpose, but they run on documents and committees. If you learn to read bylaws and budgets, you can find where decisions are actually made: which committee approves new courses, who controls centre creation, how hiring lists are finalised, where library purchases are proposed. Intersectional leadership means using this knowledge to push for concrete changes: dedicated positions, required courses, protected budgets, equity clauses in hiring and promotion. Alumni networks, library committees, and accreditation visits can be powerful leverage points when pressure is organised.



9. Online Individual Activity: Your Academic Power Map. Online Individual Activity: Your Academic Power Map

- Individual online activity (for diverse backgrounds): Pick one issue you care about (e.g., caste in gig work, minority health access, climate displacement, campus segregation, online hate).
- In an online doc/form, answer: Where does this issue currently appear in knowledge spaces? (courses, theses, NGO reports, podcasts, YouTube, journals, think-tank papers, community archives). Who are the top 5 power-holders that shape how it is written about? (departments, journals, NGOs, donors, media, individual “experts”).
- Name 2 missing voices (groups or languages) that should be central.
- Suggest 1 small intervention you could realistically make in the next 6–12 months: e.g., convene a reading group, propose a new session in a course, start a shared bibliography, pitch an article, upload a community document to a repository.

This online activity works whether you are inside a university, in civil society, in media, or in tech. It asks you to map how your issue lives in the knowledge ecosystem: who writes about it, in what languages, in which spaces; who gets invited to speak; whose experiences are still missing. Then you design one small, concrete intervention that you personally could make: starting a reading circle, adding a module to a training you already run, writing a blog, building a small digital archive, nudging a syllabus, or curating a public list of readings. The idea is to move from feeling blocked by the size of the system to seeing that you can shift one part of the ecosystem, starting now.



10. Commitments & Closing: From this module to your practice

- Academia and knowledge production are fields of struggle, not just degrees and titles.
- Caste-justice and minority-rights scholarship must move: from “case study” to theory and curriculum, from “beneficiary data” to co-owned archives and authorship, from “guest lecture” to protected lines and centres.
- Closing question (round or chat): “From this module, one practice I will change or adopt in my knowledge work (teaching, research, writing, training, archiving) is...”

We end by naming that you are already part of knowledge systems – whether you write, teach, code, design, litigate, or organise. You can choose to reproduce existing hierarchies, or to **tilt the field** towards caste justice and minority rights. That might mean citing differently, designing different assignments, creating or supporting an archive, pushing a committee, or mentoring in a more intentional way. The closing question asks you to pick **one practice** you will actually change. Maybe you’ll commit to always checking who is cited; maybe you’ll start a reading group; maybe you’ll build a shared folder of Dalit and minority scholarship for your team; maybe you’ll push for a new session in a class or training. Small, concrete moves, multiplied across people and years, are how counter-academia becomes **the new normal**.



Thanks

