



## Agami Prize (Agami Prize 2020)

680 Shamnad Basheer Citizenship Prize

# Himmat Initiative



GQRERyBA

## Application details

What is the name of your initiative?	Himmat
Is your initiative part of a larger organisation?	No
What type of initiative are you?	Not-for-profit
How old is your initiative?	0 to 2
Where is your initiative primarily based?	West Bengal
Name of the City / Town / Village	Kolkata
How many team members are working on your initiative full time?	11 to 20
Website	<a href="https://safecollegespace.com">https://safecollegespace.com</a>
Instagram	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/teamhimmat/">https://www.instagram.com/teamhimmat/</a>
How many founders does your initiative have?	2

Describe the specific problem(s) your initiative is trying to solve for.

As per the [Economic Times](#), 75% of sexual harassment cases go unreported. While, the umbrella framework, i.e, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Act, seeks to foster safe working spaces, it's impact upon the student community is small-scale. Students remain largely unaware of their rights and remedies, in spite of the obligation placed on Universities to sensitize their students. There is a lack of information regarding what qualifies as sexual harassment and the systems in place to protect survivors.

As identified by the [Saksham Report](#), a University is not merely a "workplace". Students inherently have less agency and bargaining power when dealing with University Administrations. Coupled such power dynamics present within Universities,

the change PoSH Act seeks to bring, is much harder to enforce in reality.

Thus, our idea seeks to solve the problem of information asymmetry, lack of legal support and sensitization across Universities and colleges.

What is your core idea?

There are numerous reasons that prevent a survivor from accessing justice, such as institutional apathy, insensitivity, untrained and ill-equipped IC's, lack of support systems, social stigma, intimidation and hostility by the administration. Due to the same, in our opinion, each survivor has the right to take recourse that best suits their mental health and circumstances. If given full information regarding their rights and remedies, they will be able to consider extraneous factors and make an informed decision. However, due to the information asymmetry survivors are often prevented from being able to contemplate the best course of action.

Thus, our core idea is that each survivor is entitled to making an informed and personal choice regarding their recourse. Should they choose to pursue formal recourse, we seek to equip them while leveraging technology, with utmost sensitivity to privacy and in a safe and dignified manner.

Describe your strategy to solve the problem(s).

To tackle this information asymmetry we are employing a two-pronged strategy. First, we have set up a literacy program through our website which contains basic information required to consider/pursue institutional proceedings, such as how to file a complaint, tips on submitting evidence and much more. Tools such as sample complaints and other important resources will be added to the same soon.

Additionally, we are making a ready-reference guide on institutional proceedings to distribute amongst Universities. We plan to conduct webinars and workshops, currently, we are conducting a webinar on online consent and best practices for Pandemic proceedings.

Second, since every survivor has unique circumstances for which there is no one-size fits all approach, we are launching a pro bono consultancy programme, through a network of lawyers and trained experts. Survivors can **anonymously** avail this service through our website by filling a form outlining their queries and providing relevant details. To ease the process, we are creating a repository of policies of various Universities. Himmat will play a facilitative role in connecting a survivor with a consultant to answer their specific queries.

In this manner we seek to make access to justice more accessible and affordable for college students.

How do you see your strategy or idea being different from others?

Currently, numerous organizations that work towards ensuring that workplaces are in compliance with the PoSH Act. There are also numerous organizations that train employees and employers about appropriate conduct and recourse available to them. There are fewer organizations that specifically train members of Universities, however, the focus remains towards educating and sensitizing administrations, employers and employees of Universities.

While such work is crucial, our initiative aims to address the problems of the stakeholders with the least bargaining power-students. As a target group of sexual harassment, if the student community is unaware of their rights, their access to justice will be left at the behest of the administration of the University. Although the UGC Regulations, make Universities responsible for maintaining zero tolerance for sexual harassment, this is rarely implemented. Apart from their apathy, insensitivity, outdated mentality, hostility, administrations may also have a vested interest and malafide intent in reinforcement of information asymmetry due to the impact on reputation or involvement of faculty/staff in such cases.

Therefore by empowering students directly we seek to contribute to increasing accountability amongst college administrations while providing students with the agency to call out inaction instead of being passive spectators of the system.

Describe the direct and indirect impact your work has had till date. Use data to substantiate your points.

The #metoo movement in the education sector has had its fair share of outrage and controversy. Through news reports highlighting exploitative power dynamics and hierarchical structures in academia, it has been acknowledged that students require an added layer of protection. While the Saksham report highlights the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in Universities, there has no reliable statistic on the prevalence of sexual harassment in the student community.

Also, sexual harassment can often be hard to identify by the survivor due to the complexities of relation with the perpetrator, e.g, intimate partner violence etc. Our initiative aims to have a direct impact in educating students regarding such occurrences.

As highlighted in the Saksham report, the student community comprises various intersections of backgrounds and identities that may make them vulnerable to sexual harassment. Since Sexual Harassment is a form of oppression, it may be casteist, gendered, homophobic, transphobic, communal, or other such depraved behaviour. For instance, persons of sexual minority have been noted by the report to be very vulnerable to sexual harassment.

We strive to empower students susceptible to sexual harassment, by providing them with the tools and support in case they seek formal recourse.

Which stage would you say your initiative is at? | We've shown our value/impact, now we want to grow

Have you partnered with others in the field of law and justice? | No

Have you partnered with any State institutions for your work? | No

Pick one or more areas that your work fits under |

- ✓ Legal education
- ✓ Legal literacy
- ✓ Rights & Entitlements
- ✓ Pro bono and affordable legal services
- ✓ Online identity & building trust
- ✓ Legal research
- ✓ Uses media & storytelling

Is there anything more you would like to share about your work and its impact?

Our idea has mobilized students across colleges to collaborate with us in order to be able to change the flawed functioning of their college's Internal Committees. We hope that in the future, this impact will have a ripple effect in creating students who are aware of their rights and can demand accountability from their college administrations.

Additionally, our idea has also evoked interest amongst certain faculty members of universities who recognize and wish to change the inadequacies of their institutional redressal mechanisms. Moving ahead, we envision this impact contributing to holding institutions more accountable towards their obligations under the PoSH.

Have you raised any kind of funding for your initiative? | ✓ Personal contribution

How do you plan to make your idea sustainable?

Our functioning has been through mobilizing human resources. Currently, we have as advisors- *Ms. Veena Gowda, Ms. Sonal Mattoo and Mr. Adit Pujari*. We have created our website on the Wix platform through a nominal fee. The website content is curated by our pan-India team of law students.

For our pro bono consultancy programme, we have a team of 15 consultants of lawyers and trained experts. We are also consulting privacy experts to ensure safe collection of sensitive data for our upcoming services.

Additionally we have an instagram handle through which we disseminate information, share lived experiences and much more.

Which resource are you most in need of? (First Priority) | Technology expertise

Which resource are you most in need of? (Second Priority) | Visibility

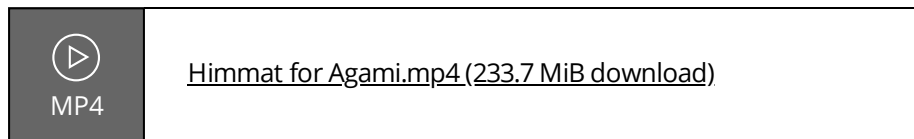
Which resource are you most in need of? (Third Priority) | Connectivity with judiciary/parliament

What will you do with the prize money?

We are launching our pro bono consultancy program by the end of August. With the prize money, we would like to upgrade our website and invest in sophisticated technology to encrypt sensitive information and ease anonymous correspondence. This will reduce our dependence on third party applications which we utilize due to lack of capital. We would also like to increase visibility through SEO packages.

Additionally we would like to start a research centre to undertake large scale surveys and research to propose policies to create inclusive safe spaces in Universities. Also, we would like to conduct workshops across Indian cities.

Upload a video



Do you agree to have your application open for public viewing and comments? | Yes

How did you get to know about the Agami Prize? | ✓ Friends/colleagues

Founder Details

**Megha**, Rana, 18 to 25, Female, Law, In college, No, As someone trained in institutional proceedings and member of the internal support committee of my university, I have experienced first hand the immense legal support that survivors require to consider/pursue institutional proceedings. To file a complaint and submit evidence, a survivor requires legal knowledge and support. As a survivor, who has faced the brunt of lack of transparency and hostility from administration as well as an ill-equipped committee, with outdated beliefs, I understand how it can be mentally draining, especially when one is unaware of their rights and remedies. When a person is sexually harassed, it is not just their bodily autonomy that is violated, there may be severe mental health issues that also impact one's learning, growth and career prospects. Thus, due to my personal and professional experiences, I am committed to the cause as I recognise the devastating effects that it can have on one's life.

**Sreeja**, Sengupta, 18 to 25, Female, Law, In college, No, In my experience as the Team Leader of the West Bengal Chapter of IDIA, I have observed how significantly a lack of access to resources can impact marginalized students throughout the course of their college degree. There is a lack of inclusivity across colleges and the impact of the same is magnified when marginalised students face forms of oppression such as sexual harassment. Therefore there is a need for making recourse inclusive and sensitive to the background of victims. However, as universities are rarely equipped to even train and sensitise their internal committees, making them inclusive seems distant. As a woman, who has noticed the extreme prevalence of sexual

harassment in my college campus, I think legal support is urgently required to tackle the information asymmetry relating to institutional recourse. This is why I firmly support the cause of empowering survivors so that together we can hold our institutions accountable., <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sreeja-sengupta-972144193/>

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Log in to [prize.agami.in](https://prize.agami.in) to see complete application attachments.

