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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Reasonable accommodation and interdependence: revisiting the dynamics of disability inclusion in higher education in India

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ABSTRACT

The principle of reasonable accommodation according to Article 2 of the UNCRPD is defined as 'necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms'. Exploring the relationship between inclusive policies enacted in institutions of higher education in India, and their impact on those who claim accommodation, we discuss the nature of care that informs and animates such interactions. Drawing on feminist disability studies scholarship on care, particularly, *Akemi Nishida's recommendation that care is inherently collective* we analyse two sets of transactions selected for study as enabling care in patronizing and charitable manners, while simultaneously ignoring the politics of responding to and providing accommodations. We find that institutional responses to accommodation claims are less reflective of the socio-political and affective aspects integral to the RA principle. Instead, the focus seems to be on providing either technocratic solutions or interpreting RA claims as causing undue burden. By reading the RA principle through the lens of scholarship on interdependence, we aim to broaden the scope of adopting and interpreting the RA principle.

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The law wants my body reasonable

My body won't fence in its demands

...

My body is a pyromaniac

My body is the art

Of Angela Bassett's right hand

Letting reason go up in smoke

- Camisha L. Jones, *Accommodation*, 2017

You have a fit when an environment is built to accommodate you. **When you are accommodated, you don't even have to notice that environment.** You are a misfit when there is an incongruous relation of your body to thing or body to world.

- Sara Ahmed, *Complaint*, pp. 140

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Introduction

Camisha L. Jones's poem 'Accommodation' lays bare the limits of accommodation policies in the face of disability embodiment. In the line, 'The law wants my body reasonable' Jones underscores the irony that informs the implementation of the reasonable accommodation (RA) statute, where a body is expected to be reasonable and not the accommodation (2017). Jones's poem is a critique of the troubling logic that often comes to be employed while practising the principle of RA in instances where university campuses are adapted to the accommodation needs of a diverse population. While the attempt may begin with the intention of adapting a regulatory physical or academic structure, it often results in the individual being regulated, and the environment remains unchanged.

The principle of reasonable accommodation (RA) according to Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is defined as 'necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms' (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD, 2006]). Exploring the relationship between the implementation of inclusion policies enacted in universities in India and their impact on those who claim accommodations, this paper discusses the nature of care that informs and animates these interactions. We explore the praxis of the RA principle while recognizing that there is no standard way in which institutions either state their commitment to adopting the principle or practice its premises.

Institutions of higher education in India do not follow any standardized system of supporting students and faculty with disabilities. The universities that adopt disability-inclusive policies adapt guidelines supplied by the University Grants Commission (UGC)¹ or extrapolate them from the national disability law or the inclusive education clauses in various laws. While some institutions develop policies of disability inclusion motivated by the necessities and demands of their student bodies or workforces, others are driven by external stimuli. For example, The National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC), which is responsible for ensuring quality assurance in the functioning of colleges and universities, assess institutions based on various criteria, which includes disability access and accommodations. The visit by the NAAC team to an institution often becomes the primary reason for establishing an accessibility unit such as a Persons with Disabilities Cell. Having such a cell or unit entitles an institution to points that contribute to the overall grade that the institution is assigned. Institutions, however, are not mandated to follow specific laws or guidelines to enable access or provide accommodations to students and faculty members. Aside from the imperatives placed on an institution by the NAAC, an institution may also be motivated to set up an enabling unit to avail of financial schemes offered by the UGC to institutions such as the Higher Education for Persons with Special Needs (HEPSN) to enable access for persons with disabilities. There are also instances of universities that cater to an international or NRI (Non-Resident Indian) student body establishing disability inclusion policies and practices to be at par with universities in Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States of America. Additionally, the practice of accommodation, for example, providing scribes for blind students, is implemented differently across institutions. While one institution may organize student volunteers on a need basis, another may have a readily available pool of student scribes who receive a stipend for the services they render to the enabling unit. A third variety of institutions would have a policy that stipulates the educational qualification of the scribe in relation to the student needing the scribe, thus making it possible for the student to bring a scribe of their choice but not provide a scribe institutionally. However, the haphazard manner in which the principle is enacted, we argue, contributes significantly to its dynamic conceptualization. When RA is considered in relation to contextual asymmetries of power and sociality that circulate within institutional spaces it may be envisaged as part of disability justice (Mingus, 2011) and care justice (Nishida, 2022).

We recognize that the principle of RA within the context of disability inclusion policies may be critically evaluated, as evident in the excerpt from the poem in the epigraph. The liberal sensibility of rationality that informs the idea of ‘reasonableness’ can be questioned for the relativity that it implies and the limitation it defines in matters of provision of accommodation. An orientation of disability justice which factors in care justice may not appear theoretically compatible with the idea because it delimits accommodations on the basis of reasonableness. However, we argue that RA is an instructive principle in the episodes we study, and a more expansive conceptualization of the principle which recognizes the politics of care and interdependence would be significant as it animates every attempt at disability inclusion, and furthermore, disability justice. As Amita Dhanda (2016a) argues, every accommodation that enables the full participation of persons with disability must be deemed reasonable.

However, what concerns us is the dynamics around the adoption and practice of the accommodation principle. We note that the more visible disability-inclusive policies and practices reflect either a technicist approach exemplified in exam-related accommodation and the provision of screen-readable classroom resources, or an approach that reflects patronizing or charitable gestures by individuals and offices that have decision-making powers in the universities. At times, it is noticeable that the technicist provisions are extended charitably and at other times acts of charity appear to be strongly inflected by the offer of technicist solutions. Both the technicism and the acts of benevolence served to obscure the politics that animate various types of care relations that operate in university campuses between offices that provide support and individuals who claim it. We chose to focus on the complex terrain of care relationships on university campuses and unpack the politics that operate around and within them. Our intention is not to identify these two cases as exemplary of the type of university spaces they occurred in but to reflect on them as critical instances that significantly conceptualize the RA principle and the implications thereof. We are interested in how they present key patterns in the implementation of the principle and how they may be reimagined as structural or collective interventions through the politics of care idea.

Analysing episodes from Indian universities, we discuss two of the many instances about claims and provisions of RA in a variety of Indian Universities that circulated in the public domain. Drawing on public conversations and documents, our examples demonstrate an individual student’s claim for RA and the University administration’s limited interpretation of the principle. The second episode collects together a range of RA claims made by students and professors after the constitution of a disability services unit by the University’s administration. The Unit which was appointed to respond to accommodation claims is located within a system of graded governance. Since disability inclusion practices are not standardized across institutions, nor within the same institution, they are administered by a combination of people holding different designations. At times, institutions may recruit a specialist in accessibility matters to administer the office of the enabling unit. Across these different arrangements, the person or people administering the unit may only be able to make decisions to execute an accessible solution or provide an accommodation after the approval of a committee or office that controls their unit or is at a higher level than the unit.

Literature review

Attending to the complexity of care, particularly on the nature of (in)dependence, disability studies scholarship has made perspicuous the relationships between caregivers and receivers and the power dynamic that circulates within this equation (Addlakha, 2020; Chakravarti, 2018; Ghosh & Banerjee, 2017; Nishida, 2022; Shakespeare, 2006). These works foreground the fact that care relationships could be sites for violence, control and oppression. Interrogating the normative assumption that people with disabilities are helpless dependents, a critical investigation of the notion of dependency has emerged, exposing the narrow conceptualization of the concept of independence (Kittay, 2019, 2020; Mingus, 2011). Questioning the notion that the aim of care is solely to promote autonomy, Tom Shakespeare argues that care and living circumstances concern aspects of life that go beyond

autonomy given that support may be selected on the basis of varying conceptions of quality of life (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 137). By closely studying the relations of power between the provider and recipient of care, the seemingly imperative ethic-of-care is contested and politicized. Significantly, Rosemary Garland-Thomson argues that thinking with disability enables the incorporation of notions of interdependence into discussions about rights and disability subjectivity (2011, p. 29). Extending the concept of interdependence through a reflective infusion of disability politics, Akemi Nishida's work on care relations offers the idea of affective collectivity, a range of complex interactions that coalesce among the disabled person, the institutional mechanism and the caregiver, helps us frame the accommodation sought by the student in Episode One (Nishida, 2022, pp. 105–106). In our discussions of disability-inclusive practices within institutional spaces, we record how charitable actions in the name of RA are experienced as violence and reinforce the sensibility that disability means dependence. Additionally, we note the absence of a reciprocal understanding between the seekers of RA and its providers demonstrates the failure to realize that RA is only achievable when attentive listening becomes possible, when responses and responsiveness are enacted by those invested with the responsibility of providing support by depending on the details of the need articulated by the seekers.

Further, feminist scholarship on the ethics and politics of care is a robustly evolving field of research and critical debates (Ahmed, 2017; Gilligan, 1982; Glenn, 2010; Lorde, 2017; Ticktin, 2020; Tronto, 1998; Woodly et al., 2021; Woodly, 2022). Identifying care as a political phenomenon and not solely an interpersonal issue, Black and WoC feminist scholars have variously engaged with the politics of care. Their interest in care is rooted in the belief that care can be used to address recurring forms of exclusion and dominance while also caring for oneself as an act of resistance and survival (Ahmed, 2017; Lorde, 2017). The politics of care, emerging from this location is understood as 'a collection of principles, practices, and laws that facilitate communal gathering and the governance of polities' (Woodly et al., 2021, p. 890). The politics of care emerging from this location is perceived as a tool that has immediate relevance draws from robust interdisciplinary practices and social organizing which fosters care as 'an inherently interdependent survival strategy, a foundation for political organizing, and a prefigurative politics for building a world in which all people can live and thrive' (Woodly et al., 2021, p. 890). RA has the potential to be reimagined within the framework of politics of care because even though it is a right that is formulated as pertaining to an individual, its mechanisms animate the participation of various actors within the context of higher education institutions, thus containing the possibility to be intrinsically collective. As Akemi Nishida suggests, 'care is inherently relational' (2022, p. 10) whether or not it is enacted in situations that bind two or more entities together and has the potential to be manifested in multiple ways that go beyond material relations.

A note on methodology

Our initial motivation to study the politics of care and interdependence that attends to RA claims in higher education institutions emerged from our participation in a panel discussion on the praxis of RA. The panel was titled 'Care Relations in Indian Academia: Reimagining Reasonable Accommodations' and was part of a hybrid conference organized by Marquette University in the Fall of 2022 called Disability at the Intersection of History, Culture, Religion, Gender, and Health. The five speakers in the panel, including those who identified as disabled and those who did not disclose their disability status, shared various instances of RA claims they were familiar with from different Indian universities that included institutions involved in education and research that were specifically oriented towards science and technology, the social sciences and multiple disciplines. As academics who were interested in intersectional disability studies and holding semi-administrative positions, we reflected critically on practices of disability inclusion evident in different universities.

The authors of this paper did not have institutionally defined designations related to disability access but were part of semi-official conversations in our campuses about disability access. We

present our discussion of RA claims made by faculty and students having come to realize that not all participants of higher education campus spaces can disclose their disability identity because of the complex social responses to different impairment groups and the impossibility of disclosing disability because of the stigma it might attract and the precarity of embracing disability identity in institutional spaces that are strongly governed by notions of meritocracy that implicitly index ablebodiedness and ablemindedness. Furthermore, we write as faculty members who are continuously engaged in questions of social justice related to gender, caste, class and disability on a daily basis within the classroom and outside, with students, teaching and non-teaching colleagues. In these interactions, we find that disability is inherently intersectional and often overlapping with other marginalized subjectivities.² Of the various RA claims/complaints that emerged in the papers presented as part of this panel, we chose to study the ones that the two of us had shared during the panel discussion, cases that had circulated in the public domain of particular university campuses – either in oral or written form. We intended to pay particular attention to the ways in which they were heard, or sometimes, not heard, the responses they elicited and the contexts of such response-making. We use the two episodes outlined later as aggregated springboards to think through the dynamics of RA in operation. We extend this method to attend to the ways in which RA claims are not heard. Sometimes RA emerged as a set of actions that the administrative representatives performed to fulfil a commitment to disability inclusivity, in other moments RA was an adjustment that was made with little or no attention to the concepts of disability or the discourse of disability law and policy that defines RA. In the section that follows, we outline our instances as two episodes. In Episode One, the case of a student in a university who made an accommodation claim is pieced together in some detail based on the oral narratives that were shared publicly by the student and the teaching fraternity who were concerned about accommodating her request. Episode Two brings together a series of events surrounding the establishment of a disability services unit in another university, based on the meeting minutes and annual reports of the unit that we accessed for the purposes of our panel discussion and subsequently the present article.

Claiming accommodations: two episodes

Episode One: An Undergraduate student at an Indian University with an undiagnosed physical disability reached out to the administration because every expansive and imposing building on campus had only one ramp and she had to walk a lot to enter her classrooms which was leaving her exhausted. A representative from the administration met the student and listened to her concerns. As per the student's account that circulated publicly, the administrator was 'nice, calm and patient'. After speaking to her for about thirty to forty minutes, he told her what accommodation he could provide on behalf of the University. He said that he would provide a phone number that she could call 20 minutes before her classes started and they would send a buggy which would pick her up and drop her off to her next destination. She was informed that she could not share the buggy ride since this provision was made only for her because of her disability. She left the meeting with mixed emotions. The student felt that she would be isolated if her friends could not share the ride with her. Her friends would be together, while she had to take the buggy alone. She was even somewhat embarrassed by this proposal. Simultaneously, she felt that the person she spoke to was very kind, patient and caring about her concerns.

We chose Episode One because it is not necessarily unique to this university and, we assume, typical of a higher education institutional response in India that would be commonly recognized as 'sensitive' or 'attentive' to disability accommodations. We discuss this student's account because it aggregates a few accounts that were shared during our conference panel discussion and because it allows us to note that the RA principle in practice has more potential to be framed within the politics of care. The University attempted to make some form of RA in the provision of a buggy and this action demonstrated a kind of concern which is also reflected in the time the administrator spent listening to the student's needs and coming up with a solution that the University felt was adequate.

However, it left the student dissatisfied and she eventually decided that it was better for her *not* to call for the buggy and instead rely on the support that her friends provided for her to reach her classes. The student's account of her experience circulated in the public domain as one in which she was met with kindness that was patronizing. Implicit in this account was the sense that the response of the administrator was not something new to her as a person with a physical disability who had often encountered charitable and patronizing responses from those around. Her account was laced with the disappointment and surprise of not having had an experience that was different from the common social responses she was already used to.

Episode Two: Our second anecdote reports the experiences of a committee that was instituted in another Indian university to ensure access and suitable accommodations to students and staff with disabilities. The university was being guided by the impending NAAC review and a committee's visit to assess various aspects of the university's infrastructure. The committee was instituted to check a box that would improve the grade the university would get at a time when it would be assessed for better funding from the central government. However, in the aftermath of the committee's constitution it became clear that the university's administration believed that it had also appeased the disabled community members on campus by the very act of constituting such a committee. While the members of the committee considered the establishment of the committee as the beginning of accessibility work on that campus, the administration saw it as an end in itself. The resultant feelings of disappointment were evident in the reports of the committee and were shared in the public domain by disabled campus community members who felt that the committee and the cell were inactive or unresponsive to their concerns.

The University administration had instituted the committee to run a unit called the Persons with Disabilities Cell to organize activities such as awareness raising, counselling and organizing a rally on 3rd December. As the events progressed, it became apparent that various constituencies in the university, including the administrative officials, used these opportunities to gain a kind of charitable value by posturing as caregivers of disabled people on campus. Even when a talk organized by the committee was focused on disability discrimination and protections emphasized in the UNCRPD, it was evident that some attendees were there to gain value (Friedner, 2013) by being seen at the event. When top administrators attended the rally on 3rd December one year, they insisted on pushing the wheelchairs of the wheelchair users. Photos were taken of them pushing wheelchairs and shared dutifully on social media platforms. Teaching and non-teaching staff attended the rally because they wanted to be perceived as sympathetic to the cause of disability. They were also checking off a box by wanting to be viewed by the administrative officials as moral, and/or socially conscious. However, the campus community's response to disability appeared to be in stark contrast to their responses to other categories of social difference such as caste or religion, thus proving its presence as a kind of "'feel-good' diversity' that is not threatening (Friedner, 2017).

Since the duties assigned to the committee were perceived as non-threatening, the goal seemed to have been simply to appease the disabled constituency on campus through these gestures. Nevertheless, it was made clear that any event organized by the committee to inform the community about laws and policies related to disability accommodations, such as a talk given by a sociologist who unpacked the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, were overreaching. Film screenings that invoked a sensibility of benevolence towards disabled people were wholeheartedly accepted and encouraged.

However, the committee that spearheaded the cell and tacitly aligned itself to the rights-oriented disability framework evolved at the interface of affective relations and institutional mandates. Problems emerged when the committee began to demand architectural alterations and transport-related adaptations of the administration, on behalf of the disabled campus community members requiring access. The administrative offices, reluctant to make these accommodations, indefinitely delayed making decisions about them, often citing their preference for *standard, accepted practices* to continue, and thereby tacitly endorsing infrastructural and systemic status quo.

Of the different accommodations that were demanded via the new committee, two are worth illustrating. Students in the university's Education program who were required to do their teaching practice in schools outside the campus wanted a vehicle to commute from the university campus to the practice school. Unlike the other students in their program, they found it difficult to walk for 2 km from the campus to the bus stop and ride crowded buses to reach their practice schools. Given that the practicum was a mandated curricular requirement, they worried that without the accommodation of a separate vehicle, their academic progress would be hindered. Alternatively, they requested a travel allowance that would enable them to book a vehicle to take them to the practice schools. Seeing that making either of the accommodations would require an 'undue' financial commitment on the part of the administration, the concerned department in the university was unwilling to comply.

In another instance, a wheelchair-using professor was due for a promotion to the next grade but was told that he had not fulfilled the requisite criteria of completing two short-term faculty development programmes with a gap of at least six months between them. As per the governing body's guidelines, a professor had to have completed two faculty development programmes with a gap of six months to be eligible for promotion. Given the limited number of accessible campuses in the country, he had completed the requisite number of faculty development courses but did not have the requisite time gap between them. He had chosen to do the courses at accessible venues or where he faced the least number of barriers, as and when he came across them. In this matter, the university's administration insisted on adhering to the rules by not making accommodations based on disability.

We chose the committee at the university as our second instance, because it presents a chasm between the university's rhetorical commitment to address disability issues and its material responses to claims of RA. Moreover, it is similar to the case in Episode One, where the nature of care demanded by the claimants is radically distinct from the one offered and professed by the administrative authorities. Additionally, these instances stand as typical examples that echo Sara Ahmed's explication of how accommodation-seeking manifests as complaint-making in situations where institutional structures have to be dismantled to accommodate diversity in higher education spaces (Ahmed, 2021, pp. 137–140).

Reasonable accommodation and its outcomes

Conceptually, the RA principle draws on international human rights law that bases equality on two features – non-discrimination and reasonable differentiation. In the United States, the concept of RA emerged within civil rights legislation in relation to discrimination on the grounds of religious practice. According to the Civil Rights Act of 1968, employers must provide 'reasonable accommodations' to an employee's need to observe or practice some feature of their religion³. The caveat of not causing the employer's establishment 'undue hardship' while making the accommodation is included here.

RA, in international conventions and national disability laws worldwide, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 in the U.S. and The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 in India, enable diverse accommodations for people with different access needs. Accommodations enable the overcoming of barriers created by a wide variety of norms and practices of standardization. That the UNCRPD does not describe the kinds of accommodations that can be made which has strengthened its underlying goal of non-discrimination by supporting different kinds of claims for accommodations. Access needs of disabled people vary across impairments. Additionally, people with the same impairment may have different access needs based on gender, caste, class, region and religion. An accommodation is based on the experience of disability and not only the assumed impairment effect. Embedding the RA clause in law follows a long history of informal measures adopted in educational and employment establishments and the non-recognition of disability support as a responsibility of the establishment. According to Amita Dhanda, the clause is grounded in the

principle of inclusion and addresses the exclusionary potential of norms that do not account for disabled people's experiences. Two features are noteworthy. One, the institutionalization and practice of certain norms requires that they be customized to be accessible to the different needs of persons with disabilities. Two, given that it is not negotiable, any change that enables inclusion is considered reasonable as it has significant implications for enabling diversity (Dhanda, 2016a). Dhanda argues that in including every person with disability, the essence was to treat each individual as a class of their own while resolving claims for RA. When accommodations are not implemented they prevent disabled people from enjoying the right to equality, regardless of the price that is incurred by making the provision (Dhanda, 2016a). Further, Dhanda points out that is significant that we pay attention to the circularity embedded in the principle of RA:

To draw a connection between the recognition of diversity and reasonable accommodation, it can be stated that whatever change is needed to obtain inclusion, the change has to be categorised as reasonable. The circularity of the definition brings home its non-negotiability. If non-implementation of an accommodation could prevent a person with disability to partake of the right, then irrespective of cost, reasonable accommodation as an integral limb of the right to equality has to be provided. If on the other hand, non-acceptance of the accommodation does not have such consequence, then it would be reasonable to refuse accommodation. (2016, 'From duality', 454)

Going back to Episode One, the university representative made what he thought were the 'necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments' (Article 2, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD], 2006) to ensure that the concern raised by the student with disability was addressed. He changed the general norms of the university which did not have a buggy service for students, to accommodate this particular student to make the space more inclusive while 'not imposing disproportionate or undue burden' (Article 2, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD], 2006) on the institution. Abiding by the RA principle, he provided the individual with a solution that addressed (at least in part) her apparent need. However, this particular form of accommodation brought to the forefront the limited way in which an individualized accommodation is usually made.

The focus of RA solutions on individuals in this context prevents addressing another important clause : 'recognition of the importance of effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (Preamble, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD], 2006). The University's accommodation appeared to address the impairment effect while ignoring the experience of disability holistically – the student's social life. Although the RA principle is designed to address all the requirements of the person with disability, in this context, it is only partially used to address her impairment and not her social participation. The accommodation offers to take the student out of her social circuit and place her in an individuated locale that would very likely attract the 'non-disabled gaze' (Loja et al., 2013). By extension, the accommodation provides only physical access and therefore fails to address her social need. As a result, the outcome of the accommodation resembles medical model adjustments, where the individual is fixed and not the environment. An important part of the 'individualistic and particular' (Dhanda, 2016b) claim made by the student, is her request to be accompanied by her friends – while the particularity of her impairment is addressed by the administrator, the particularity of her disability is not recognized. What the accommodation ignores is that 'disability is experienced in and through relationships, it does not occur in isolation' (Kafer, 2013, p. 8). The interdependent nature of student life did not gain attention when this accommodation was made.

RA seekers in Episode Two struggled for their access needs to be acknowledged by the university's administration. The economic implications of complying with the RA demands took precedence over the disability value that the university would accrue if they had complied. Jay Dolmage observing similar situations in the UK context criticizes the fact that only disabled students are 'constructed economically – they cost too much', nondisabled students are viewed as investments and all the while 'campus policies are generally designed to protect the university from disabled students' (2017, p. 79).

Accommodations that fit into the charity framework that the university was working with were fulfilled as dole-outs. For instance, students with mobility disabilities were given tricycles that carried in bold letters the name of the donor. These so-called accommodations had to be valued by the recipients and they bore the burden of being eternally grateful to the benevolence of the officials. A sense of exceptionality was embedded in these responses of the administration, 'an extra gesture for which there should be gratitude' (Dolmage, 2017, p. 215). The denial of RA in relation to the students as well as the professor was akin to not acknowledging their disability. Dolmage's statements mentioned above, hold true here as well. In the context we study, only those who conformed to the administrative office's idea of disability, those who docilely accepted the benevolence of the university, were recognized as disabled people. Anyone who sought accommodations as a right by virtue of international and national treaties and laws was threatening the framework of disability that the administrative offices worked with. As a result, the complaints/demands were not treated as RAs that prevent disability discrimination but as charitable dole-outs. A previously non-threatening docile unit had turned into one that appeared to threaten the university's resources!

In Episode One, the student's accommodation claim is not individualized in accordance with the RA principle, but the imagined generic nature of her impairment as being immutable is addressed. A disability norm is imposed on the student and she is expected to conform to a standard way of having her impairment which it is believed would equalize her with the non-disabled population. As Campbell argues, 'typical approaches to reasonable adjustment are often predicated on the basis of equality as sameness in contrast with substantive equality, that is, treating a disabled academic differently without suggesting it as a case of "special rights"' (2020, p. 215). Both episodes reflect the presence of people who assign power to themselves by becoming 'technicians of certification', those who 'aim to furnish an enumerative passport, a document of truth-telling that becomes a form of "notification", legitimising disability' (Campbell, 2020, p. 215). As evident in Episode Two, the students and the professor are not credited with being different by virtue of their disability, but treated as those who are making special claims that would possibly give them undue advantages. The *technicians of certification* at the university do not recognize these members as legitimately disabled because their barometer to measure disability is based on those who are deserving of their benevolence.

Both episodes present instances of disability straight-jacketing or fitting, to invoke the epigraph from Sara Ahmed. In Episode One, the student was expected to be satisfied with a normative disability accommodation – her disability experience had to fit into the available mould of disability experiences. As per the second episode, the disabled students and faculty members had to experience disablement that fit into the university's idea of disability non-discrimination. It was expected that they would be satisfied with the social attention and recognition they got by virtue of the PwD Cell's events. Accommodations claimed as rights were rarely addressed; they were received as complaints. Sara Ahmed, recognizing the strength of complaining within academic spaces, and building on Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's conception of *misfitting*, suggests that complaint-making is a kind of work that has the potential to reveal structures: 'You learn how a structure is built when you do not fit that structure. A complaint can be what you do *not* have to make if you fit, if you are enabled by a structure. For those who do not fit, a complaint might be what you have to make before you can get in' (Ahmed, 2021, p. 140). So also, notions of reasonableness are determined in ways that affective costs are rarely acknowledged. Ahmed notes that some people's humiliation is assumed to be reasonable in order to justify the dominant able-bodied academic community's desire not to be disrupted or dislodged (Ahmed, 2021, p. 142).

Care emerges as a complex articulation in the two episodes and so we bring the politics of care scholarship to speak to the praxis of RA. In Episode One, the student felt that the administrator demonstrated concern for her, however, he did not entirely understand her situation and need for a kind of collaborative care. Significantly, she explained that she attempted to assert a human rights discourse, while the response was one of charitable action. In asking for her friends to travel with her in the accessible vehicle, the student's accommodation requirement factors in care sociality. In the

case of the university committee in Episode Two, the tussle between two varieties of care becomes evident where the care that is given by the university authorities is antithetical to the care required by the recipients. The disabled university community members are subjected to gestures that appear charitable, a kind that accrues value to the provider alone. Similar to Episode One, however more exacerbated in nature, is the committee's 'gestural violence' (Kuusisto, 2015, as cited in Dolmage, 2017, pp. 80–81) towards disabled members of the campus community, by denying reasonable accommodations while posturing as caregivers of disabled people.

We suggest, however, that care has the potential to acknowledge power differentials in these seemingly overdetermined interpersonal relations, by its inherently interdependent orientation animated by the possibilities of evolving affective collectivities. So doing, we reiterate the value of Dhanda's recommendation (2016b, 'Reasonable Accommodation') that the principle of RA has the potential to be enacted for various marginalized constituencies in college and university campuses. The two episodes are peopled by disabled actors who recognize these potentials and demand accommodations that can only be fostered by affective collaborations and not by the clinical provision of an accessible vehicle or the sentimental valorizing of charity-rhetorics.

The student in Episode One, seeks an accommodation that includes such a notion of political care— one where there is a communal commitment to human rights and the recognition of care as inherently interdependent. Mia Mingus explains interdependence as an approach that departs from the 'myth of independence' (Mingus, 2011) towards a recognition of everyone as valuable and with the potential to offer something, thus moving away from conceptualizing disability as dependent on the goodwill of non-disabled people.

The episodes we study highlight significant consequences of RA claims. At the moment of making these claims, the structures of power of these educational institutions are rendered visible (Ahmed, 2021). Within these structures of power, the University administration can select certain aspects of the claims as being an *undue burden* and choose not to recognize the inherent interdependence aspect of a caring social life of the members of the University. Although the two Universities we study do not explicate the *undue burden* clause, they implicitly obviate it in the decisions they make. In one case, the student's need to travel with her friends appears to have imposed an undue burden and in the other, marginal adjustments to promotion guidelines are perceived as unnecessary augmentations. Such approaches when undertaken by the university systems often result in the claimants being addressed as dependent on a University's benevolence and exposes its limitations in recognizing the significance of interdependence.

The scholarship on care and interdependence that we have traced above, makes explicit the power dynamic and underscores the political potential that exists within relationships of care – both as a structural concern as well as within interpersonal relationships. In both these episodes, the operational approaches in the two universities are exemplary of variations of charitable actions that are reminiscent of care as an individuated response of kindness. However, the demands made by the students in Episodes One and Two are inflected by a rights approach. In particular, these demands/complaints open up possibilities for the Universities to acknowledge affective, interdependent relationships as characteristic features of sociality while making reasonable accommodations. Such approaches to RA, which recognize interdependence rather than charitable acts aimed at individuals, contain the potential of building relationships of care that as the scholars mentioned above have argued, can be used to address systemic exclusions and dominance within an institution. These and similar approaches can unleash the immense potential of the RA principle.

Conclusion: the need to accommodate reason

The present article has attempted to read RA, in the two episodes of the Indian universities, through the lens of radical care politics and interdependence as articulated by Black and WoC feminists and disability studies scholars. In so doing, we find that RA is often used to make instrumental gains and importantly, the implementation of the principle does not recognize the experience of members of

the University as one of interdependence. Both episodes discussed in this paper underscore the tensions that arise when disabled people make claims of their universities' administrations. Further, in Episode One, there is little recognition of the fact that access is enabled by interdependence. In Episode Two, there is a misrecognition of dependence. The university's administration clearly depended on its disabled members to gain disability value. On the contrary, the RA demands of the community members were not complied with and in turn they were cast as the ones who depended on the universities for resources.

We note that the institutions interested in disability inclusivity, through their actions, seem to be more readily cognizant of the idea of *undue burden* while registering and responding to accommodation claims. The enthusiasm and persistence with which undue burden is identified by the University administration is absent when they are required to respond to RA requests. The administrative offices in both episodes present a wide range of instances where the accommodation's *undue burden* deters its fulfilment – be it the financial implication that deters the provision of a bus for the Education students to attend their practical sessions as well as the hesitation to offer transport facilities to all students on campus, or the inability to revise rules or even guidelines in the context of the student seeking mobility accommodation or the professor applying for a promotion. Such narrow implementation of the RA principle has two primary consequences: (i) a lack of acknowledgement of the wide range of experiences of oppression that people with disabilities undergo in many of our education institutions and (ii) this partial recognition of the needs and rights of people with disabilities leads to providing solutions that often address material deprivation via charitable or patronizing actions. RA practices in these universities do not recognize the fact that just as disability is relational, so is access. Even though the concept of reasonable accommodation is explicitly individuated, the enabling of accommodations is collective because it requires an interdependent engagement between two or more actors where active listening and mutual responsiveness are essential. By bringing critical disability studies scholarship in conversation with feminist scholarship on the politics of care, our aim has been to highlight the care potential inherent within the RA principle (beyond a relationship latent in charitable actions) which the kind of universities we study in India are yet to explore. Thinking about RA praxis in terms of care may enable us to go beyond the charity/model and the technicist model that standardizes the accommodations, and thereby bodies. Instead of expecting bodies to be reasonable, as cautioned by Camisha L. Jones, the potential of the RA principle could be realized when University administrations recognize that bodies inhabit University spaces in affective, relational and interdependent ways.

Notes

1. UGC is a statutory body of the Indian government, established to oversee the functioning of universities across India. Periodically, the UGC develops guidelines on teaching, learning, faculty management and organizational aspects of the higher education institutions.
2. It is important to mention that disability is also perceived as non-threatening (Friedner, 2017) when compared to issues of social justice raised as part of gender and caste debates and we are conscious of the fact that it is not often accorded recognition as a stand-alone constituency .
3. The RA principle is significant in India in the context of sociolegal debates about the inclusion of religious minorities' interests in public institutions.

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