SAM'S TRANSCRIPT

- P: Participant
- I: Interviewer

I: Shall we begin?

P: Yes.

I: Okay, so you chose your pseudonym, which is Sam. Can you please tell me how old you are, Sam?

P: I'm 22 years old.

I: Okay and what is your gender?

P: Female

I: Where did you relocate from and where did you move to?

P: So, I relocated from Lucknow to Varanasi.

I: Okay, and what was your reason for relocation?

P: Education, to pursue my bachelor's from Banaras Hindu University.

I: Okay, great. Can you please tell me what was your living arrangement?

P: In Banaras? Where I am currently?

I: Yes

P: Currently live in a private PG there.

I: Okay, if you're ready, shall we start with the main questions?

P: Hm

I: Can you please begin with telling me, what does the concept of safety mean to you, so you can think of both physical and emotional safety, like, if you feel comfortable emotionally secure, what makes you feel safe and secure?

P: I think- in general, what safety is for me?

I: Yes, yes. What is safety to you?

P: Safe? I think, according to me, safety is when you can be carefree, and you don't have to look over your shoulder all the time. Like, not literally, look over your shoulder, you get it. That's what safety means to me. Like, if I'm out and I don't have to look around all the time to see if there is some suspicious character around me when I'm traveling, I don't have to share my live location or open my maps so that- because I'm not worried about my safety. Being safe for me is just existing peacefully with a calm mind and a calm body. That's what safety is to me. Okay, that's really lovely. Can you tell me what makes you feel safe or unsafe in an environment?

I: Okay, that's really lovely. Can you tell me what makes you feel safe or unsafe in an environment?

P: I don't know if I'm allowed to say this part- *laughs* I mean-

I: As long as you're comfortable, please share. Otherwise, its okay.

P: I mean, I guess whenever- ever since I've relocated to Varanasi for my education. If- if I'm in a place where there are only girls around me, it's pretty chill and safe. I don't have to think. But as soon as a male enters the picture, that's what makes me get you know, alert.

I: So, other than that, is there anything about the environment itself that makes you feel safer or unsafe?

P: I guess when you're in a place that you know and a familiar place, then familiarity leads to a sense of safety. Maybe it's a false sense of safety, but I think that if you're familiar with the place, then I feel- I- if I'm familiar with the place, I automatically feel a little safer in it, and if I'm- I'm in a strange location, then I'll start feeling unsafe. That's mostly it and I feel a little unsafe around guys in general.

I: I get that, It's not really your fault, honestly completely understandable. So, you mentioned how familiarity also breeds a sense of safety, even if it's false. You kind of feel comfortable if you know the place. So especially when you're relocating, it's a

completely new environment. You don't really know the place, even if you visited before, or anything like that. So, can you please describe your initial perception of safety in your new environment? So, what was your first impression of the place like that, the environment, the people, public transport services, things like that. What was the initial perception of everything?

P: So, when I initially got to Banaras, it was a hellish few week. I was so scared all the time. I will genuinely say that I was so scared all the time and sad because I was leaving my home. I couldn't eat or sleep properly, and whenever I was out of my room in the city doing anything, it was not- it was very scary. So for me college, I had to commute via an auto and I still remember one day what happened was that the auto driver did not know the location, and I was new to the city, so I also didn't know the location. I didn't know the way to that place. And I was alone in that auto, though it was daylight, but I was alone. And this driver, he was, I think, now that I recall, he was probably drunk, I think he was just- he was just roaming around in circles. And I remember fearing- the sense of fear that I felt at that time because I was alone in the auto with this strange man in this strange city. It's like my third or fourth day in the city, and that that was the first perception about everything in Varanasi has been extremely bad, to be honest. Safety wise, transport, I have felt very unsafe, and it's not reliable. If you're- imagine you're riding an auto and the auto driver doesn't know where he's going, and I'm talking about within the campus, not even outside the campus. This was an auto driver from inside the campus, and he didn't know where he was going. That evoked a lot of fear, and that made me not want to travel alone by auto so I in fact, that incident was so bad that I called up my parents and begged them to send the scooty that we have at our home so that I wouldn't have to travel via auto, because it was so scary, and so that was my- my first perception was it was like a completely new environment full of these new people that I don't trust. And it- it wasn't good. Actually, the first couple of months were not good there. I'm used to it now. But in fact, I'm used to the bad things that happened there. Do you, I'm not sure, do you want me to tell you about the incidents that happened? Is that okay?

I: Yes, yes. I would love to hear it if you're comfortable.

P: Yeah. So, this was one of the many incidents that have happened in that city. But that was my first perception. It made me realize that I am in a city where you can't trust anyone. I don't know people here, I'm all alone. And that was scary.

I: Oh, man. So, that first perception kind of made you, like, feel more guarded, like "I need to rely on yourself more", like that?

P: Yes, in fact, right? That- on that day. So, I-I joined a little late, so I wasn't able to get familiar with everyone quickly, and everyone already knew each other. So, what happened was- that's why, also, I had to travel alone all the time because I didn't know anyone, so I didn't have anyone yet. Yes, so that made me realize that I'm all on my own, and I have to take care of myself now.

I: So that made you feel a little bit unsafe in this place when you first came?

P: Yes, and it's objectively unsafe.

I: Aw sorry, like it's not even just you saying-

P: Yes, it's not just like a sense of unsafe. It's- it's unsafe, objectively speaking,

I: Oh gosh. So has your perception of safety changed over time at all? after you moved like you mentioned, this incident happened in the very beginning. It had only been like the fourth day or something since you-

P: Yes

I: So now that its been a while since you have moved, has your perception changed at all? Do you feel any safer? Any more unsafe, anything like that?

P: No, it has definitely changed. It's been a long time and now, first of all, I know the parts. That's why I guess it's like a situation like that can never occur again, because now I know where I'm going, and that incident also taught me to take the necessary precautions that I guess I should take. So, after that day, still I couldn't, I did not learn the routes so quickly so, but after that day, I started using my maps very much and made sure that I had it open so that that never happened again. And no, it's like I do feel better now because I know my campus and I know the city, and I know the area where I live. I know the people there. Now I have a group of friends. I know I have

people I can rely on. I know that if I am ever in a situation which is unsafe for me, I can call up someone and they will show up to help me. So that has really changed my perception of safety in this city now.

I: Just becoming a little more familiar has helped you?

P: Yes. It has helped a lot and having the having a support system that has also helped a lot.

I: Very understandable. So you mentioned you take certain precautions before you go anywhere now. So can you please describe any of the specific challenges or incidents that have made you feel unsafe since your relocation? You mentioned you had a lot of incidents Unfortunately since you moved. So if you'll be willing to share any of those, like any trouble that you've experienced in any form after relocation?

P: There are so many, let me just think of one to tell you, right? So when I- when I reached the- when I reached my college, I-I had a pep- I did have a pepper spray before I went off to college. But this one incident happened of um, this was this incident is a very long incident like it continued happening. Basically, a senior started harassing me on campus.

I: Oh no

P: Yes, so he couldn't take no for an answer, and he thought that convincing me would work, I guess. So, that happened for- it actually, It started in my first semester, and it hasn't stopped yet.

I: Still, he is? -

P: Every, yes! every few months, this guy shows up in front of me and tries to make conversation or tries to ask around about me from my friends and acquaintances, like, if I don't show up to the college for a couple of days, he has the audacity to come up to my friends and ask them that, “where is Sam? She is not coming?”. So, after my first couple of interactions with him, which made me feel very like- I was very afraid of him. I- now I'm not as afraid of him, because nothing major happened, and he's about to leave as well, because he's graduate- graduating now. But I-I equipped myself with one more pepper spray, and so I dedicated a pepper spray to my college

bag and a pepper spray to my traveling bag so that it never happened ki, I forgot to, like, shift the pepper spray, even accidentally, like, I forgot to put it and I don't have it. So, this- when this senior was harassing me, it made me buy one more pepper spray. That's- That's what triggered it. Well, that's what made me buy one more. I remember I ordered it from Amazon. I had one from my school days, and then I ordered another one so that, as a like, it never happens that I don't have it with me. Apart from that, this eve teasing has also happened a couple of times on campus. And with eve teasing, it's like with me, it might it have happened, I guess, once, but it keeps on happening. I keep hearing girls recalling incidents of eve teasing happening on campus to them, and I- I'm not sure how, how much you know about my college, but things are very bad. Things have happened in BHU, and it has become like national news. And an incident happened at IIT BHU. So IIT BHU and BHU, they all lie within the same campus, and a girl was- it was a very bad incident. A girl was- I, I'm not sure if she was raped or not, but she was definitely molested, and yes, on campus. So that also made me like- before coming that's why that made me very- my- not just me, my parents were very reluctant to send me off after that and safety measures apart from this, like that incident, so this IIT BHU incident is a very big cause of worry and fear in me and the senior harassing me, I got lost by the auto driver. And apart from that, what has happened? You asked me, like incidents that triggered?

I: Anything that's made you feel unsafe.

P: Yes, yes

I: Its not fair, your own campus, you cant be safe

P: Right? and It's actually an open campus. It's more of a tourist spot than a college campus, to be honest, because there's a temple inside the campus

I: Oh

P: Yes, and that's open to everyone. You're not- We don't even have to carry our ID cards with us. You're in Christ. I know in your college it's- it's very strict. It's nothing like that on our side of the world, you can say. And one more incident, one of the biggest incidents that happened in Varanasi was that when near my- the- there was a

house right next- there is a house right next to my PG. And whenever a girl went to the terrace, an old man used to start masturbating on his terrace, out in the open while looking at the girls from my PG, while they were on the terrace just doing their thing. This house was right next to- is right next to our PG. So, this old man, whenever a girl came, he used to start masturbating on the terrace while watching us. So, it had happened. I mean, I did not used to go to the terrace. And then I heard about this, so I was like I'm not going on the terrace, like there is no way. I used to go just to hang my clothes. And I used to be so aware of that house when I was hanging, ki I don't- I will not look there. I will not look at the terrace. I don't care if anyone is there or not. I'm just not looking. And I used to quickly hang my clothes and come back downstairs and but suppose, once in a while, we made plans. Let's go on the terrace. Let's chill. Let's watch the Moon. So, this man used to start masturbating while looking at us. So.

I: Oh, that's so bad. That’s terrible. Did you ever bring it up to your PG- your warden or anything at the PG?

P: So, the PG is like a private PG. There is no Warden, to be honest.

I: Oh okay

P: There is, haan, It's a very small private- you can say there are no rules or wardens there. And I mean, we all, we all thought that if we'd bring it up, the best solution that we'd get would be to not go to the terrace, because that's the go to response of most of the people, right? Restricting the victims.

I: Yeah

P: Because they can't do anything about it. But, I mean, we got that resolved. We actually complained to the police, two of my seniors, right..ah right after so I, when I was in first year this incident was happening. So these, they were in third year, so they were about to leave. So they called up the police that this is happening. The police showed up. They went to their house, to this man's house, and they- the police made sure that, you know, this shouldn't happen again. And-and after that, it stopped. But it happened for a long while, almost my- entire, first year that happened. So, I just did not go on the terrace. But see so this house was on my way to college, so even though

I was able to avoid it, I mean, I did not visit the terrace, there was this fear whenever I passed in front of that house, I used to look at it like briefly glance at it.

I: Like ‘what if he’s there’ or something.

P: Yes, and you know, the worst part was that I didn't know what he looked like, because I never looked at that terrace when that was happening. No, I still don't know what that man looks like. I never glanced at it, because, like, as soon as I came, as soon as I joined, my roommate told me that this happens, that happens. So, yes, so I was, I was firm on this, that I will just not watch it, no matter what happens. So I didn't even know what that man looked like, the one who used to do that. So whenever I used to pass in front of that house, I just thought, what if this is the guy who does it? What if he recognizes me, because he could see us, right? I was not watching him.

I: Yeah.

P: That- just imagine living in- living like it was horrible. It was very bad.

I: I would just never wash my clothes, not even-

P: *Laughs* Whenever I used to go upstairs, I used to just like it was on the left side of the plot. And I just did not look at that place. And it was and this man was an old man, I'm saying someone who is probably our grandfather's age, someone like that he was doing this.

I: Oh god, its always- It’s so uncomfortable to like, not even- campus is also unsafe. Home is also like- how did that make you feel? like you were not feeling safe in campus, you’re not feeling safe at home-

P: Constantly heightened. It's like, whenever I'm in Varanasi, I'm always in this- my body is not able to relax at all because you can't relax there. These are just my incidents, and I've heard like a million other things happening to other girls, there are more incidents. So, this one, this incident- should I continue answering?

I: Yeah, sure, please. Go ahead, yeah.

P: Want to go to the next question?

I: No, no, please continue as much as you like.

(19:32) P: Okay, so there's this incident, which, it didn't happen to me directly, but it happened to my friends that they were just they were traveling via an auto, and this bike started following them. And so they got angry, and they- one of the girls, said something to him that, ‘what are you doing? Why are you following us?’ So. this bike man got angry, and he was like, ‘now, I will not leave you’. He started following them for a very long while, and then the auto stopped on the side of the road, and he also parked it right in front of the auto. But thankfully, at that time, there were police cars in that area. I guess that's why the guy didn't try anything. Nothing happened. But following, I have gotten followed a couple of times on campus, so like I am traveling via my scooty. This happened, actually, this- the last time I was in my college before these holidays. I was with my roommate, and I was just, we were just riding around the campus, just chilling, and all of a sudden, I noticed that a bike is moving along with us. So, at first I thought maybe they're just going in the same direction, but it had been a while, and they were still right behind us. So, what I did was I-I accelerated my scooty to check if they were following us, if they accelerated along with me, and then I slowed down, so they slowed down along with me. And then I realized, ‘oh, shit, we are being followed right now’. So, what I did, I mean, see, then- now, these things have happened so many times that I don't really panic anymore. Just stopped at a Chauraha [Intersection/crossroads]. I like- I thought I would either confront them, or I would wait there and call one of my guy friends to come. So, I just stopped at this chauraha and so they were not expecting me to stop, right? So, they passed by me, and then they almost stopped, and they turned and watched me and my roommate. And my roommate is still in first year. She's freaking out like, and she's like, ‘didi they're watching us, they're watching us’ And like, I know, I know they were following us. I think I just stopped at this intersection, and after that, I- so they had gotten ahead of me. I took a U turn, and I completely changed my path, and then I-I sped. I-I was driving very fast, hoping to lose them and but they didn't even turn. They went their way after that. They gave up basically after that.

(22:19) I: How does that make you feel? like not being able to calm down or have to always be one alert. Have to always be hyper vigilant in every environment that you're in, at home or in campus. How does that make you feel? Or how does it impact your safety?

(22:35) P: It actually had a very negative impact on my physical health. I think there was a time where it was very hard for me. I don't know if this is the reason that happened, but I do think it contributed a little. It was- it had gotten very hard for me to fall asleep at night or during the day. It's like, it was like, whenever I used to wake up, my heartbeat was very fast. My- my heart beat. My heart was beating very fast, and I used to think- I'm so sorry. There's just a knock on my door, just two minutes

I: No that's okay, take your time. No worries.

(23:36) P: Actually, my dog was sleeping here, and his walker, just like the guy who takes him out for a walk, just came.

I: Do you want to take some time? It's okay if you need to.

(23:54) P: No, it's done. He's- he's, I sent him outside.

I: Okay. You were saying your heartbeat every morning when you-

P: Yes, yes. So, the- yeah that, that started happening, and I wasn't really, I don't know if it's because of this, these incidents that kept on happening, but there was a time where I couldn't, I just couldn't fall asleep. And I used to, I- my sister is a doctor, so I called her up and I asked her that 'I can't fall asleep'. And I mean, I don't know if it was because of these things, but I do think they contributed a little like not being able to chill and not these, all these unsafe elements really prevented me from participating in college in general. So there, unlike yours, we didn't have attendance issue. We- it's not a problem if you don't attend the classes in our at least not in in your first year. So, because I didn't have this college attendance issue, I used to stay- I used to stay in Lucknow a lot, I used to just come home as soon as I got the chance. I used to only go to Varanasi to give my tests or examinations, and then I used to come back. It was because it just it- I just hated it so much in Varanasi that I used to do that a lot. I mean, now I like it a lot. It's nice now genuinely, I genuinely enjoy, I miss college right now, but because of these unsafe things in the beginning, I did not participate in any college event, any celebration that happened like there was holy celebration, or Diwali or Valentine's Day celebration, but I did not really attend anything. It's the- it was- there was this fear that, what if something happens? Yeah, and that- that made me, that made, that has impacted my college life a lot, because

you network by attending events, you make friends by doing that, right? So I was not able to do that.

(26:00) P: What?

I: Sorry like even memories for your college life and everything.

(26:18) P: So, my first semester. I don't have any sort of memory of my first year. Later I was like, I don't care what happens. I'll deal with the problem when it comes. I will attend whatever I can. So, in my second year, I started going out. I started going out, in general, in the city, going to cafes and stuff. I started attending, participating in events like my DEP SOC and MUN and my dance society. When they threw an event, I used to- I started attending it and but in my first year, because of these unsafe elements, it hindered me a lot from participating. I didn't even stay in that city. I used to just come home as soon as I got the chance to.

(27:06) I: So, how did that make you feel? in the sense, where you weren't able to make yourself at home for a while, I'm guessing, and that really impacted the way you interacted with it.

(27:16) P: It made me feel- It built up a lot of resentment, to be honest, for my college, and especially that senior who used to- most of the time, the thing that stopped me the most from attending events was that this guy would also be there, and 'what if he tries talking to me? What if he?' I used to, no not used to, I genuinely hate that person. So, of course, there's a very strong feeling of hatred inside for that one person. And it was just that one person, his friends, I don't know, to help him out so, whenever his friends saw me. They used to give such a big, dramatic reaction that, oh, we know you. And it had gotten so bad that he used to stalk me a lot like we are in different years. I know that his classes are not held where mine are, but somehow, he shows up wherever we should, like, even during an event. So, we had Founders Day. It's a big- we- the college celebrates it like grandly. There are a lot of people, but somehow this guy found me, and I remember, like the very few events of my college that I attended. One of them was the founders day, and there was so many people dancing and celebrating, and somehow this senior of mine found me and started walking alongside. So, it's like my group of friends, and then his group of friends, and we were all walking together, because I don't know what he's just, yeah. So, in fact,

after that, so my friends noticed him, right? And so, we decided that we will lose him some way or the other so we- we changed our path. We entered the most crowded part of the celebration in the hopes that we lose him, and we did lose him, and I was able to enjoy myself after that. That made- that just- it made me feel, first of all, it, it made me feel very helpless that I was not able to do anything about the situation, because guys like these don't have the- they're not- they don't have that much emotional maturity, you can say. So, I did think about contacting the authorities a lot of time. But this guy was what you call a gundawali [gangster/thug] personality. I don't know if you get that.

I: Yes, yes like very persistent.

P: Yeah, that's what it was. One of those popular guys that you would call to beat someone up.

I: Oh no.

P: Yes, and that made me so reluctant to speak out against him.

I: Hm, like what if people take his side or something?

P: Not just that, what if he gets offended and he takes it on his stupid ego? Like, I'm not using ego- I know I shouldn't use ego like that, but I just meant it in a layman's term so.

I: Sorry, one second. The audio is getting cracked. Just one second.

P: Yes.

I: Hello. So sorry for the interruption. Please continue what you were saying. So, you were worried he would act on it.

(0:07) P: Yes, I thought that it would just blow out of proportion. I thought that if I just ignored him and just gnored him, it would- he would get bored and just maybe stop bothering me. But in fact, that did not actually work. It went on for more than a year, almost two years. It kept on happening. It made me feel very helpless. That's the feeling that happened the most, like whenever suppose I was after my class one time, so many incidents. I have so much *laughs*, I have so much.

I: I’m so sorry for you, I’m so sorry for you. I really hope you’re a lot safer now.

P: So, one time it was, it was my Hindi examination. We had a compulsory language in the first year, and we were forced to study Hindi. So, after my Hindi exam. So, this has started in first semester. I'm talking within 10 days of my- of me joining my college because I was late. It started within 10 days, my second semester in the examination. It was a big- I did not do well. I remember I exited the examination room 10 minutes earlier, which I don't do. I write till the last minute, usually, but I did not have anything to write, so I left the examination room, and I'm just standing on the boundary with like- with like this, because I did so terribly on my exam. And then I hear someone call my name, ‘Sam’. I turn and there is the Senior with a chocolate for me. Yeah, you- I know! the audacity, the confidence, the shamelessness, you just don't get it. I know I was just caught off guard. You, up until this point, I have rejected every single advancement of this guy like he just- I remember our first conversation. He just asked me where I'm from, and I refused to tell him where I'm from. I said that ‘I'm not interested in telling you anything. I'm sorry. I'm telling you very politely. I'm not interested’. And this was in my first semester, I'm talking about the final exams of my second semester. And he showed up right outside my- he somehow found my examination room. This was a compulsory paper of all the students of my batch, and we have a very big batch, and everyone was giving this examination, and somehow he found my center. How? I don't know. I mean, you have to know someone's roll number to know where they're sitting, unless he was looking from classroom to classroom to figure out in which one I'm sitting. And very persistent. He's- an incident happened, like a couple of months ago as well. So, he's- he's standing there with the chocolate waiting for me, and then I turn and I'm just I don't have words. I don't even know what's happening. I am alone there because my friends were still writing. And then he says that ‘I thought that, since it's your last examination, I will give you this chocolate’. And I'm just looking at him. And then, yeah, I wish I was exaggerating any of this. I really do. And then I say that ‘I don't want this. Please, don't ever get me anything again’. And then he got offended over that. He just turned and he just- he just went and went away. And I remember, so I was just waiting for my friend to come out, and as soon as she came out, I hugged her, and I started crying there in that hall, because the- these things were just constantly happening. This guy was just not giving up, then the exam. This is one, and the exam didn't go well. I did terribly on that exam. And it was that was a very bad incident, a

very bad day, a very core memory of my college that you know just you're not expecting anything. You're having a bad day, and this person who is harassing you shows up because it- just the whole incident made me- it- I started asking myself, 'How did he find my classroom, and will he continue doing this? Why is he not giving up? What is not clicking? What does he not understand?'

I: You must have felt so helpless.

P: Bohot zyada [very much], bohot [very] helpless. It was very bad.

I: Were there any like strategies or anything that you used to feel safer when all of this was happening? Did you tell your parents? something that helped?

P: Yes, so obviously I- it was, I- it had gotten very bad. So, I decided to tell my siblings. So, I have one elder brother and an elder sister. Okay, I used to, I start, after that incident, I started telling them, I remember, I- so we have a WhatsApp group, the three of us. I called them up and I started crying that there is the senior who keeps on bothering me and my jiju, my sister's husband, he, he also joined the call. I mean he and my sister were sitting next to each other, and he started asking me questions. 'What happened XYZ', and that's what, to be honest, it was a very bad situation. There wasn't a lot I could do so, because what happened was that this guy was not doing something that he was not allowed to do, right? So, it's like, it's, it's an open campus, and forget an open campus. He's also a student. He can be anywhere he wants. I can't go say that I am at this festival and he's also standing right next to me. That doesn't make sense, right? He's not doing anything like trying to coerce me in any way or technically following me. It's not like he showed up to my hostel or anything. It was just that whenever there was events he can also attend it right? It was- so what I did to make myself feel safer was I started informing my brother and sister. In fact, one time, it got so bad that I actually told my father as well, and he said that if he ever does something again, we'll complain to the police. That day my father was very mad, and he was like, 'we will do that'. But after that, things stopped happening, so we never got to the police part. Thank God.

I: Thank God. Yeah.

P: Yes. I mean, that's what I think held a lot, was that I knew that I have a support system, my family, that if, if something were to go wrong, I know that I'm not this helpless person. See this feeling of helplessness came because I didn't want to escalate the situation. I just wanted it to die down. I don't want to do anything about it. I just did not want to interact with this person at all. But I knew that if something were to go terribly wrong, I have my family who will support me who will take a stand for me. They'll show up because Lucknow is not that far from- I know they'll show up as soon as I call them up. And not just that. I have relatives in Varanasi as well, and I knew not just relatives but my Jiju's [sister's husband] friends are there. So that's what helped a lot, having people I knew I could trust who would show up for me and my friends also took a stand for me, to be honest. So, these- Yes, one time, this guy approached two of my friends asking that, where is Sam? She hasn't come to college in a long time.

I: Like the guy's friend who's like inquiring?

P: No, no, the guy is inquiring from my friends. This senior straight up approached my friends and started asking about me. So, my friends go, one of my friend goes,' you have to stop stalking'. Or, you know, and this- this unconscious, uncultured fool doesn't even know what stalking means. My friend is- my friend is then explaining, 'do you know what stalking means?' And he's like, 'No', and she, she says that 'you have to stop following her around'. So, he says, ki that, 'why are you getting bothered? It's about her, right?' And this is- haan, after this incident, I told my father. He said that 'how long will she say no? one year, two years, 10 years. Let's see, I like. I won't give up'. That's what he said to my friends. But my friends took a stand for me. So that also it was like, since I didn't want to talk to him, the things that I wanted to say, they said it in my place, like my friends actually insulted him a lot to his face that 'you're acting this way. Why would she ever want to talk to you?' He- look at the audacity of the senior. He once asked my friends that 'she doesn't have a problem with talking to other guys. Why does she have a problem with talking to me?' So, my friend straight up told him that, 'look at the way you behave. You follow her around. Why would she want to talk to you?'. Yeah, that has helped a lot in making me feel safe in this now, having people I can rely on because, I mean, I can say that having a pepper spray helps, but to be honest, I'd say that is way more helpful.

I: At least having someone to support.

P: Yes, especially- especially the like friends, relatives, my jiju's friends and people like this this factor also plays a role- that I live very- my hometown is very near to this place that I'm living in, where I'm like Varanasi is not that far from Lucknow I just know that if anything, everything goes to shit, I can just run home.

I: That's really nice. I'm- I'm so glad you had that. How did your living arrangement and the physical layout of your campus and your PG affect your sense of safety? Like you said, it was an open campus, so like things like that. How would that impact your sense of safety? Maybe the lack of street lights, lack of surveillance camera, being like public access, things like that. How did that make you feel your sense of safety?

P: So when I talk about campus, so okay, matlab [meaning] during my first year, I did not used to go anywhere alone, cause of the- because I feared my own classmates, to be honest, like this guy was just a year senior from me, not my classmates, but it was like, I don't know these people who are studying alongside me, who knows what is going on in their minds. And it's not like- I knew nothing would happen. It's not like anyone would attack me or anything, but it's like, if some- if I caught their eye, then they will not give up. So, I did not, I would-. I did not let myself get into situations where anyone could approach me. That's what I did during my entire first semester. I used to always be with my friends. I did not attend events if no one else was coming. I only started doing that later. In my first year, I did not used to go to campus. I used to go to the class, I used to come back. That's it. I did not go anywhere else alone, not at all. And like the lack of streetlights, it's actually an issue on our campus. So, there are a few, like, few streets, few routes, which get very dark after a certain time because there aren't any lights. So, I did not take that path. In fact, when you talk about routes, there is a route that is- that goes along the- like there are boys hostels alongside that road, and he, this guy, also lives in one of those hostels. I don't use that road. I have started using that road. It's like, I will not put myself in a- on that road. I don't want him to accidentally see me and try to talk to me. So, I did not use that road. I used to do- use, use all these other roads, but it- I mean, there are a lot of ways to get to the places that I need to so I could avoid it easily. So, I used to avoid it.

I: Did you use much of public transport, or anything of that sort, or did you stick to your own transport, of using your scooty?

P: No, once I got my scooty, I stopped using public transport to a large extent unless we are going anywhere with a lot of people. So, I can't take my scooty otherwise. I know I used to stick to my scooty. I take her everywhere with me.

I: Can you elaborate why you can feel comfortable with- aww best friend since day one.

P: Yes *laughs*

I: could you elaborate on why you didn't feel that safe on public transport, anything that evoked a sense of unsafety other than the auto incident that you mentioned?

P: So apart from that one, one thing was that autos, first of all, you don't know your who you're sitting with, right? When we used to attend the- when I used to go attend my classes, a lot of times suppose it's- it's late, it's afternoon, so there aren't a lot of people on campus. It did not feel safe. I mean, to be honest, I did not need to use public transport after I got my scooty. Using my scooty gives me such a sense of independence and freedom, because I- it's completely up to me where I'll stop, how fast I'll go, and I always know that I can exit from a bad situation, if it were to ever happen, I feel very powerful with my scooty. Yeah, suppose I am at campus. I am somewhere. It actually happened once I was in front of that temple and I was sitting on my scooty because my friends were getting something, and this senior came and started talking to me. So, this, having this vehicle gives no- I know that I can just easily start this and get away from them as soon as possible.

I: So, it gave you a sense of safety more than public transport?

P: Yes. absolutely public transport- in fact, a lot of auto drivers, not that it's not unsafe or anything, but I have had very small, petty issues with auto drivers, like, they'll say that we'll drop you here, but then they'll drop us very far from the location, and say ki, like, like, we're at the location, and we're like, Dude, we talked about that. Why are you dropping me here? And then the auto driver- once it happened, the auto driver got agitated. He switched from aap [‘you’; honorific in hindi] to tum [informal way of saying ‘you’ in hindi]. I mean, it's like he started being a little disrespectful. So, public transport is pretty nice there, to be honest, it is economically good. It's available. It is

all over the city. I can easily catch an auto, but I don't have to. So, I don't use public transport.

I: I understand you mentioned that for your- your campus, it's- there were a lot of incidents that happened there, and it's pretty like national and it was on the news and everything. So, before you moved there, hearing news stories on social media or online about your new location. How did that affect your sense of safety before you moved and even after you moved?

P: So this incident, the one that happened in IIT BHU, it happened right off, right before I was about to join my like I'm saying, a couple of days before I was about to leave, and my father, was we, he, I remember, he asked me that, 'did we make a mistake by getting you admitted to this, getting you an admission into this college,' and reading about that incident, what had happened? It- It was there. It was, there was this impending sense of doom that bad things will happen. I was, it's like nothing could have prepared me for what happened, but at least my expectations were very low, and I was, I knew these things would happen. It's not like, it's like it's happening with all these girls. I knew that will happen, and it made me not want to go. Obviously, I was very reluctant to go. And even when it came to my PG, I was, like everyone in my family was very adamant that we would find a PG in a good location. And there is no such thing as a very good location in Varanasi like you have to find a PG around the campus. And so my father was not actually- I love the PG that I live in. He was not comfortable with it. He thought that the location was not great. But I think my PG was pretty good, to be honest. I love my PG so before I left hearing about these incidents, just there was this impending sense of doom, like preemptive sadness, that bad things are gonna happen when I reach the campus. It did make me very cautious. And maybe, if I was like, it did prepare me for all these bad things in- in some way that I knew things would happen. So, I came to know that okay if eve teasing happens on campus. I thought- before I started researching about my college, I thought that it's a college, college campus, obviously you're going to be safe there. Like stuff happening there, it wouldn't be a regular occurrence. It would be something that is shamed a lot and something that happens once in a while to some poor, unfortunate person. I started realizing, oh, that that is the norm there. Like things like this is happening, it happens a lot, and you're not supposed- it's not recommended to walk around the campus alone. Still, I wouldn't, I wouldn't let- tell anyone to go to an

area that they don't know. Our campus is huge. It's very and it's not very smart to just roam around alone or at night. All of these things made me very cautious before I leave. I mean, I couldn't avoid anything. Stuff happened anyway, but I was personally very cautious. I have a friend actually in IIT BHU, and I remember he gave me this list of instructions and numbers of like the proctors that, in case happens, you should call for her, like you should call this number and stay away. He was the one who said that stay away from that boys hostel wala road because, and at the end one of the boys hostels in like- guy started troubling me as well. I mean, he was completely right all the things that he warned me about. He did warn I was- I knew I was scared, and all of it happened. So, this hostel is- it's very famous on our campus that my senior also comes from, that he lives in that hostel. It's called Birla hostel. So there's big name of Birla hostel in BHU. Everyone knows that you're not supposed to get into any kind of conflict with guys from Birla, and I had this- I had this- I had told myself that no matter what, if a guy is from Birla, I won't even become friends with him. And that is something that I have actually stood upon till now. It's like it's a prejudice, but I feel like they have earned that name. I-I'm not taking that risk. I'm not interested in proving people- proving this prejudice wrong. It's fine. I'll just accept it, and I'll just stay away from those people. So, hearing all of these incidents made me prepared, like I knew stuff would happen, and I hoped it wouldn't, but it did anyway. That's all hearing these things was before I came to my college was not good. In fact, in more than myself, I used to think what my parents must be feeling when I am away from home, and they keep on hearing about these things. Must they be feeling that their little girl is away in this city alone? They probably were worried whenever. I mean, like just by thinking about me, they probably used to get worried.

I: So how did the stress of relocation affect your perceptions of safety? Like you mentioned, you might have definitely felt homesick thinking about your parents. So how also your physical health was at stake?

P: At one point it was deteriorating. My first year, my first semester, I think I did not use like, forget three meals a day. If I had one meal a day, I used to be like let's go. We did something right I guess today. It was very bad. The- when my first semester was probably my hardest up until now, and it-it took a toll on my body, obviously, but mostly on my mental health. And physical health was fine. It was okay, but my mental health, yes, it took a lot of toll. I was you- I can't- It's been so long since I have

I try not to think about these things, actually, but I used to be so afraid all the time, whenever I was on campus, genuinely like the fearful of everything, of every guy, any, any guy who tried to talk to me, I used to get so cautious. What does he want? Will he also start harassing me? Somehow it was and it hindered me from making friends because I was not participating in societies and stuff. It made me so fearful that if I ever attended events from my clubs, and they made us like write our attendance. So, we were supposed to write our name, our year and course, and our phone number. I used to write a fake phone number on that, because, what if? And I did all of that, and guys who wanted my number somehow still found it. One incident happened was during Durga Puja. It's, uh, you know Durga Puja? So, when they, when we the visarjan [hindu practice of immersing the idol in a water body], when, like, murti [idol], you're supposed to put it in the water, right?

I: Yes, yes.

P: On that day we, me and my friends went to attend that celebration, and there were two guys there, and one of them handed me his phone and said, Can you please take a picture of me when I lift the murti? And I said, Okay, I mean, cool. So, I clicked his picture, I clicked the video for him. I gave him no other contact, and we did not exchange any information. Forget a phone number. I didn't even tell him my name, and next day, on my whatsapp, I get ‘Hi, you didn't tell me your name’. I recognized him from his display picture, but he was the guy.

I: Oh, the guy from the previous day.

P: And I'm just looking at this message, because, first of all, I was, I was a little impressed that, how did this lunatic get my number? Yeah, like I don't. I give fake numbers during college events. I have, I don't have friends. I mean, I had a group of people. They kind of adopted me in my first semester, and they’re my friends up until now. I mean, apart from them, I don't talk to anyone. How did this guy get my number? And then he had so- I obviously did not reply. I blocked him on WhatsApp. So, if you block someone on WhatsApp, that doesn't mean I can't call you, right? This guy called me via a normal call. I could recognize the number, so I didn't pick it up, and I blocked him from there as well things like this.

I: So, your safety precautions have mainly been avoiding certain routes, blocking their numbers, using fake numbers, pepper spray, like the things you have to do is something else.

P: Yeah, in fact, in my first semester, I tried to find a pocket knife online a lot. I just couldn't find it. Otherwise, I would have ordered it for myself to carry it here and there.

I: It's so crazy. Things you have to do just to, like, study at a place.

P: Just to exist. It's like, it's like they are entering my space. I am just trying to live, and they're just entering this space for no reason against my will. You know, in fact, when you talk about mentally, I used to hate how much time I spent thinking about these things. Like, suppose something happened today, like the senior try to talk to me, then my whole day is to it. I can't be productive that day. I can't study that day, because that is all that is happening in my head. I can't concentrate on anything, because I- whenever something happened, I used to cry a lot. I would cry, I'm a crybaby. I cry very easily. So whenever something like this happened, I used to start crying. Whenever I used to recall this thing to my brother and sister. So, it's like something happened. I cried. Then I'm telling my brother and sister about it. I'm crying again, yes, and it- I mean, now it's been a long time. I'm able to talk about it. I'm genuinely okay right now. Unfortunately, I'm so used to this, all of it, that it doesn't affect me that much anymore.

I: You're insanely strong. First of all, that's- you're- you are really brave for not dropping out immediately I have to say.

P: I used to run off to my home whenever-

I: But still, you still, stayed, and you completed so much. It's still a really, really great achievement.

P: I mean, and especially later on, I was I just, I just told myself that whatever happens, we'll deal with it. But you are not leaving this college without having all of these necessary college experiences. You're going to attend these events, you're going to do whatever you want to, and if things happen, we'll deal with it when it happens. Because it was like, it was just, it was just affecting my life, right? They're taking all

of this mental space in my life and preventing me from doing the things that I want to do. After that, I started even attending events alone, like my desktop. My friends weren't interested in debating, so I was like, I'll just go alone. So, I started attending events alone. I went to I attended IIT BHU, MUN alone. And after that, I started doing everything. I was like, okay, my scooty has actually played a role in this because having that gave me a lot of freedom. I did not have to worry about suppose it got late in during an event.

brief pause

P: Can we continue talking like this?

I: Yes, yes, it's perfect. It's- I can hear you very well. For my last question I was- I would like to ask, can you share an experience where cultural differences in your new environment, if there were any influenced your sense of safety, any sort of social norms or anything that was different?

P: Sorry, can you give me an example? I'm not able to..

I: Sure. So, basically, I had an interview with someone who had moved from the north to the south, and those they felt a huge culture difference in language, in social norms, in a lot of the ways, even the same religion they felt like they were practicing things a little bit different, and they had a bit of time adjusting to all of that. So, did you experience anything like that? Like, any cultural differences between Lucknow and the place you said?

P: But like, Okay. The way people talk is very different, actually. So in Lucknow, you're so- people in general are very polite. Our rules, as in, you're supposed to talk politely, even to a stranger, even if you're having a fight, you will talk politely. And when I reached Varanasi, I remember I used to think that, ‘did I do something? Why is he talking to me like that?’. But then I realized, ‘Oh, this is just how people talk in the city’, especially like shopkeepers. I used to think that, ‘why is he getting offended? Why is he getting mad?’ But then I realized that, oh no, people just talk like this here a, little crassly. It's not as fine as like how we talk in Lucknow, in fact, it has affected my language so much that my Lucknow friends have started calling me uncultured because I talk like some local lingo has entered my vocabulary as well,

and now I talk a little differently from what I used to. So, my friends have started calling me out on that. That was one of the cultural differences that I faced. So, I thought maybe, you know, like, it's a normal situation, and I'm like, 'why are you getting mad? Why are you trying to pick a fight?' But then I realized that, oh no, people just talk like that here. That was a difference that I noticed that the way people talk, it's very different. In Varanasi from Lucknow, like using tum [informal way of saying 'you'] for- it's we don't- we don't do that. I have grown up calling like referring to everyone, especially strangers, with aap [honorific] now there people just talk like this, that tu, tera, and that was a little. It was a- not a shock, but kind of a shock. I was not expecting that to be honest. I didn't expect people to talk that way, because I don't, and that was a little so.

I: Did that impact your sense of safety in any way, the way they were speaking?

P: First, yes, at first, I thought that it was like, this person, is he trying to pick a fight with me? Did I do something? But then I realized after, I mean, I quickly caught on that, no, that's just how people talk there. I shouldn't take it personally. So I after that, I stopped caring about it. In fact, I have started using similar language. So like there, cases of road rage is very normal. It's very common whenever you step out of the house, whenever I step out of my PG, I will definitely see one accident at least, it's very common there. So, people screaming at each other on the road is also very common. That's not something that you will see in Lucknow. I mean, it's not that common. It's something that happens once in a while, but there, people screaming, people hitting each other's vehicle. It's very common. So that was- while driving, I started getting very cautious. It's like, I know I am driving, well, I know I am following the rules, but you can't trust anyone. You shouldn't. They will come and hit you. A lot of times, people have hit my vehicle. It's like I'm just standing and someone will come and hit me and then try to- what can you say? Be aggressive. People think right, that if they're speaking loudly, they're right. One incident happened was I was just standing in the traffic, and a cycle, a child on a cycle, came and he hit me. I mean, I guess he probably got more hurt. I didn't feel it, but I thought I saw him. And instead of apologizing, he says that- he started trying to blame me in some way and and I remember, at first, I was just so disappointed that why is this child trying to pick a fight? I mean, it's- it's sad to say that this is what he has learned growing up where, if I were in his place and someone so old, someone who is elder than me was in front of

me, I would just say sorry, but this child was trying to pick a fight, and then I also I did not, I did not try to be the bigger person in that situation. I told him that if you've done something wrong, you should apologize. I spoke in Hindi at that time, ‘galat kiya toh’ [if you have done something wrong] just apologize. Yeah, so that is also, actually, to be honest, a safely thing. When I'm driving, it's like I have to be very aware, because people don't follow traffic, traffic rules. People don't use indicators in Varanasi, yes, it's like, I'm- I use indicators, but people don't. They just turn wherever they want.

I: Oh, no.

P: Without giving any indication, that is also something that I realized after a couple of days that, oh, people just don't use indicators. That is a very big safety issue.

I: Yeah, thank you so so so much for sharing all of that with me. I really had fun just talking to you. You were great. I'm really, really grateful to you, honestly. Thank you so much. So, I really hope you're much safer now.

P: I'm safer and I'm used to it. I'm just stronger than the girl that I was.

I: actually really like, genuinely like, I'm very in awe of you, because the things you like described right now, they don't- they're not like, silly little things, like you're used to it now, like you said, but-

P: I did not go to that city. I used to just stay in Lucknow for as long as I could.

I: But you still went back and you still completed what you had to and that’s honestly- I'm really proud of you for- that's amazing. I know I asked you this off the recording, but I just want to confirm again that you would be okay with me using your audio and your data for my dissertation.

P: Yes.

I: Also the note taker takes screenshots in between of the video call. Would you also be okay with me using the screenshot as proof that I did do the interview?

P: Yes.

I: Thank you so much. Thank you so much. That was really great. It was so so good. Have a great day. Bye.

P: It was very nice to meet you. I'm just- sorry, how do you pronounce your name? Khadijah. Khadijah, it was very nice to meet you, Khadijah.

I: Is there anything else you would like to add or say in anything?

P: No, I- you- It was very nice to meet you. Actually, I was able- I felt very comfortable during the entire conversation. You're a very good interviewer. I can see- I don't, I don't- I can't find the appropriate term right now, but it was very nice to talk to you. I can't- I- we've been talking for a while, and I didn't even realize the time.

I: I didn’t even notice, because this was genuinely very like, that was really nice. Like, as an interview, we have to be like, paying attention but this was- I genuinely just, like, really enjoyed our time together. So.

P: Me as well. I hope we stay connected even after this.

I: Yes, yes. I would love to.

P: Was very nice to meet you

I: Thank you. Please take care.

P: You as well. Bye.

I: Thank you so much. Thank you.