The theme of the study is a quest into my very ‘being’ as a woman in the Indian setup.

The gender equations generally prevalent in a society make the roles pertaining to gender appear as near truth - when it is experienced in every sphere of life and through all agencies that construct gender.

My own life experience comprised of agencies working quite in contradiction to each other. My home laid out loosely gendered upbringing - the strictures pertaining especially to gender were never followed. Being an Army Officers daughter I was brought up by a father in the same league as my two elder male siblings. Hence everything seemed, achievable for me. Mother having a ‘public school education’, was liberal but working mostly within the confines of ‘traditions’. Father used to give me a free hand in all things much the same way as he did to my brothers. My brothers being away from home, I was the one staying under the shadow of influence of my parents, especially my father, whose active public life influenced my way of thinking to a great extent.

I was constantly engaged in negotiating my ‘self’ in different ‘environs’ as I encountered them; sometimes in the simple Oriya country life to sometimes in the Orissan/Indian Avante Garde representing different walks of life, leave alone the active, glamorous parties of army days. I grew up much as a ‘tomboy’ - a character tolerated if not encouraged in the society quite contrary to a ‘sissy’ - which is frowned upon in the society.

I used to make efforts to eulogise my dad and would like it every bit when people would draw similarities between the two of us.

The only person who would reflect and mark out gender roles in the family was grandmother. Both of us two generations apart, I would be eager
to learn my culture 'sitting at her feet' but also shriveled at the strict injunctions, being thankful that she is not my mother - who was the rulemaker at home.

Coming of age in Orissa, realisation of my gender dawned upon me in different separate parts of my microcosm - my peer group which represented the generalised others drew a gender picture quite different from the one at home. I came to understand the fact that society draws out different gender roles based on 'sex' of the individual and sticks to it. Slowly and gradually, I could get hints of it at 'home' too. At the school, despite being an allrounder - actively participating in extracurricular activities such as sports, debate, music etc. still I could see the gendered values being delineated in different ways, giving it the status of 'truth'. I became painfully aware of my womanness at the same time inculcating a gender identity, which was self-negating as well as secondary to my male counterparts.

Fourteen years of boarding life has brought wisdom to me in various quarters. Out of which the first seven years exposed me to life in Orissa and status of girls in Orissa households - both urban and rural and also belonging to different caste groups - their angst especially due to curtailment of their freedom of choice be it in line of education, career, life partner etc. I found myself as a 'marginal man' wanting to cling on to my Oriya identity but at the same time repelled by it due to inertia of the cultural baggage pulling me back, owing to my biological sex.

My passion for reading knew no bindings, and since school I read a lot. My 'English teachers' in the schools wherever I studied unravelled the treasures of English literature and I would lose myself in the classics/novels. At home, me and my siblings, inherited a library of sorts which was an assortment of books of all kinds - from life series Books on culture, science etc. to Harold Robbins Best sellers, many of which my father would suggest especially to me for reading. This expanded my stock of knowledge to myriad
possibilities or destinies for persons great and small, throwing light invariably on their gender identities.

Owing to such a kaleidoscope of experiences my tryst with questioning the status quo began some where around this time. I used to question the established values a lot ending my reverie in self-negation that my biological sex seemed to inflict on me.

Coming to JNU, brought to surface what lay latent deep inside me. Earlier I used to hesitate to bring forth my opinions, which I thought would seem radical, nay, abnormal to my peer group. For the first time in JNU, I could find friends, associates, teachers who thought on the same lines as me, on various issues which slowly and gradually put to rest certain quests but at the same time opened me to an unquenchable thirst for seeking answers to various questions.

My knowledge of the Bible further opened up new vistas of knowledge of my being gendered being to me. My understanding that I am a woman because I am a divinely created being same as a man is - different but not inferior comforted me a lot. For the first time, after several years, I reconciled happily in this newfound revelation. The Bible removed the scales from my eyes, and showed me that I am capable even as many women in the Bible were. In fact, I was privileged as many other women of faith were. I became part of a band of Christian students who called themselves as the JNU Christian Fellowship, workable in the campus since the 1970s, little after the inception of the university. These were actually a group of intellectuals, who wanted to set apart some time in prayer --- and which is multi-regional, multicultural and multidimensional. These students continued as an uninstitutionalised church flexible in functioning, enriching themselves by learning about various cultures and ‘way of worship’ of various denominations. They questioned and critically examined everything contained within the Bible much the same way as many paradigms and theories were
challenged, deconstructed and constructed in the classrooms of JNU and strengthening their faith. It needless to say, fanned into flames the embers, to reach at the bottom of my every inquisition, academic or otherwise.

I had arrived, so it seemed as an academic, breathing the air of postmodernism, never accepting things as they are or seem to be ‘but trying to rationalise’ why they are the way they are and was driven by the passion to ‘dig’ into the truth, and to hopefully look into a future which is full of hope and which is different from the existing status -quo.

As a social researcher my preoccupation was with my society, girls especially in my society. What struck me especially was the fact that Oriya girls meekly accepted their destiny in the societal set-up never questioning their position vis-à-vis the member of the opposite sex. And I realised that education, is an agency which is responsible in a big way to inculcate the traits belonging to our gender identities and so interventions in this sphere at different levels (which are a possibility) would go a long way in checking the inertia of the negative gender equations as per the culture or otherwise can also work strongly to reinforce and thus make rigid - the gender truths that is delineated to them at their homes.

Therefore I sought to choose, this topic and relating it to the various cultural, historical trajectories, I feel made my study a complete but at the same time, a disturbing one.