

Faculty Exchange Program Report

Host Institution : Trnava University (TRUNI), Slovakia
Date of Visit : 28th April to 20th June 2025
Name of Participant : Prof Donatus Kujur, SJ, Ph. D. and Dr Shristy Kala Chhettri
Institution Represented : St Joseph's College, Darjeeling

Introduction

This report presents a summary of the experiences, outcomes, and key insights gained from the faculty exchange program at Trnava University (TRUNI) in Slovakia. The initiative was part of the ongoing academic collaboration between TRUNI and its partner institutions, undertaken within the framework of the Exchange Program. The primary objectives of the program included:

- To engage in collaborative teaching and academic exchange with Trnava University
- To explore potential joint research opportunities.
- To understand the academic environment and higher education system in Slovakia.
- To foster cultural exchange and institutional partnership development.

As part of the academic collaboration between St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling and Trnava University (TRUNI), Slovakia, Fr Dr Donatus Kujur, SJ, and Dr Shristy Kala Chhettri undertook a significant academic and cultural visit from 28th April to 20th June 2025. This visit was made possible under the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the two institutions, aiming to foster academic cooperation, cultural exchange, and mutual learning between the faculty and students of both universities.

This comprehensive report outlines the academic and non-academic engagements carried out by both visiting scholars during their stay at TRUNI. The visit not only enhanced scholarly discourse but also laid the foundation for future collaborations in research, pedagogy, and intercultural understanding.

I. Academic Engagements

A. Dr Shristi Kala Chhettri's Academic Activities

Dr Shristi Kala Chhettri, Assistant Professor of Sociology at St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling, actively participated in various academic events during her stay, sharing her research and expertise while also learning from Slovakian perspectives on sociological and humanitarian issues.

1. Meeting with the Faculty of Sociology

Dr Chhettri and Dr Donatus Kujur commenced their academic engagements at Trnava University with an introductory meeting with the Faculty of Sociology. This session focused on the thematic convergence of ongoing sociological research at TRUNI and St. Joseph's College. She introduced her research interests, particularly in identity, multiculturalism, caste dynamics, and gender issues

in India, and discussed possibilities for future joint research projects, student exchange programs, and co-hosted academic events.



Faculty members expressed keen interest in comparative studies involving Central Europe and South Asia, especially in the context of migration, community cohesion, and post-colonial discourse. This initial interaction set the tone for a fruitful academic collaboration between the institutions.

2. Lectures and Presentations (2nd May – 20th May 2025)

Over the course of nearly three weeks, Dr Chhetri delivered a series of lectures and presentations across multiple departments at Trnava University. These sessions were attended by undergraduate and postgraduate students, faculty members, and researchers.

Topics included:

- The Caste System in India: A historical and sociological perspective on how caste continues to shape Indian society, including contemporary challenges and social movements.
- Changing Family Structures in India: Analysis of the shift from joint to nuclear families, and the implications for gender roles, elderly care, and child-rearing.
- Gender and Human Rights: A discourse on intersectionality, women's movements in India, legal frameworks, and challenges in achieving gender parity.
- Migration and Multiculturalism in Darjeeling: Drawing from her fieldwork, Dr Chhetri explained the unique social fabric of Darjeeling, emphasizing the coexistence of diverse ethnic groups and the socio-political undercurrents of identity formation.



These sessions stimulated lively discussion and drew connections between South Asian and Central European contexts, especially in terms of social stratification, integration of minority groups, and migration-induced transformations.

3. Presentation at the Sociological Institute, Bratislava (13th May 2025)

Dr Chhetri was invited to the **Sociological Institute in Bratislava** to present her paper titled

"Darjeeling: Unity in Diversity – A Sociological Study". The presentation offered deep insights into the unique socio-cultural landscape of Darjeeling, which functions as a microcosm of India's pluralistic ethos. Her work examined inter-community relationships, migration patterns, linguistic diversity, and identity politics in the region.

The presentation was well received and followed by a panel discussion with Slovak researchers who drew parallels with multicultural urban centres in Europe. Her approach of ethnographic detailing and reflexivity was lauded, encouraging further transnational dialogues.

4. Meeting with Zora Bútorová, Institute of Public Affairs (15th May 2025)

In a significant intellectual engagement, Dr Chhetri met with **Zora Bútorová**, a noted Slovak sociologist at the **Institute of Public Affairs for Empirical Research**. The meeting revolved around mutual interests in issues such as **refugee experiences**, **gender equity**, and **migration policies**.

The scholars exchanged perspectives on:

- The role of public institutions in supporting refugee communities.
- Comparative gender indices and women's political participation.
- Empirical methodologies used in measuring public attitudes towards minorities.



The meeting concluded with a preliminary agreement to explore joint research proposals and conference collaborations that would bring together South Asian and European scholars on a shared platform.

5. Meeting with Ombudsman (30th April 2025)

In a dialogue hosted by the Slovak **Office of the Public Defender of Rights (Ombudsman)**, Dr Chhetri discussed issues related to human rights protection, particularly of vulnerable and minority populations. Topics included access to justice, discrimination, and institutional accountability.



There was mutual interest in organizing an International Conference on Human Rights and Social Justice, involving speakers and participants from multiple regions. The conversation highlighted the importance of cross-border collaborations in advocating for the rights of migrants, ethnic minorities, and socially marginalized communities.

II. Non-Academic and Cultural Engagements

Both scholars actively participated in cultural immersion activities, promoting mutual understanding and international goodwill.

1. Cultural Exchange Programs

Fr Dr Kujur and Dr Chhetri attended multiple cultural events hosted by TRUNI, including:

- Traditional Slovak music performances.
- Visits **to museums, historical sites, and castles** around Trnava and Bratislava.
- Participation in a multicultural evening where they shared music, and storytelling from Slovakia.



These engagements helped build interpersonal relationships and break down cultural barriers between academic communities.

2. Student Interaction

Both scholars held interactive sessions with undergraduate and postgraduate students, offering mentorship and guidance on topics ranging from research methodology to sociology and humanities. These sessions were informal yet impactful, creating a lasting impression among students.



III Future Directions

The visit by Fr Dr Donatus Kujur, SJ, and Dr Shristi Kala Chhetri to Trnava University under the MoU with St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling, marked a significant step in fostering intercontinental academic cooperation. Their diverse engagements-academic, cultural, and social-demonstrated the value of mutual learning, comparative research, and cross-cultural dialogue.



Key outcomes of the visit include:

- Initiation of joint research interests on migration, gender, and indigenous studies.
- Planning for international conferences and student exchanges.
- Enhanced understanding of global sociological and philosophical discourses through mutual exposure.

This collaboration has sown seeds for a long-term partnership, grounded in the Jesuit spirit of holistic education, intercultural empathy, and the pursuit of justice.

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