

# Newsletter Summer Edition'2022

## Memoir of ISST and its Feminist Practices

BY RAJIB NANDI

When I joined ISST in 1998, it was just entering its adult stage. I remember in those days ISST was a young bubbly organization with an energetic team of researchers. I started my journey at ISST with a very interesting research study on herbal medicinal plants of Himachal Pradesh, primarily to investigate the income and employment potential at the household level. In those days, as a young Ph.D. scholar from JNU, I found ISST as a research organization with a strong zest for making solid contributions in the field of gender studies. ISST's strength has always been the desire to connect research with policy and programme design in a way that captures people's perspective and voices. But ISST like several other research organizations outside the university systems, was struggling to balance its identities, both as a research organization and as a non-governmental organization. While ISST always carried both identities, reorienting the programmatic thrust, it often lacked recognition and value as a knowledge producing institute devoted to women's studies.

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In India, the genesis of Women's Studies, as a political and intellectual inquiry within the institutional set-up draws extensively from the women's movement. It is often said that India's women's movement has been instrumental in articulating women as a political subject and shaping the feminist discourses. Consequently, feminist historiography has taken a shape where the agenda of the discourse was not only to make women visible in history but also to record their struggle for recognition, experiences and contributions to various socio-economic and political processes. The Report titled "Towards Equality" published by the Committee of the Status of Women in India (1974) provided the much-needed push for state realization that women's lives, especially those of poor rural women, needed recognition and change. The findings of the report reopened the women's question for government, academia and women's organization. Consequently, it also prompted the UGC and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) to fund research studies by the universities and ICSSR institutes which perhaps created a formal academic base for women studies programmes. This resulted in a fundamental shift from viewing "women as subjects to be educated" to seeing "women as the new subjects of investigation and study" as Mary E. John comments in 2008. Women's Studies, thus, started to be regarded as an instrument of transformation, not only to change state policies but also to transform women's perceptions about themselves as commented by Veena Mazumdar in 1987. The official recognition of Women's Studies as an academic discipline in the university system came around that time only. This process of institutionalization was facilitated by initiatives like the National Conference on Women's Studies in 1981 and finally the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS). Those became platforms for the scholars to share their academic views and ideas towards facilitating the advance of the discipline.



**Dr. Rajib Nandi, Ex-Associate  
Director and Research Fellow, ISST**

Besides, Women's Studies centres within the university systems and various other non-academic forums for addressing women's/gender issues were launched during that time. A number of those platforms were initiated by pioneering figures of women's movement of this country and funded by the governments, UN agencies and other international philanthropic and development agencies. A number of noted feminist scholars acknowledged that the contributions of those organizations are immensely important in shaping the women studies as well as gender discourse in this country. There were in total 16 autonomous organizations with focus on women and 26 women's rights organizations promoting women's studies as Himanshi Nagpal comments in 2017. Incidentally, ISST was one such organization that revamped its organizational structure and relaunched as a public charitable Trust in 1980, though ISST has a visible pre-trust history, and its founder Devaki Jain always had a strong connection with the women's movement of India. ISST was established to conduct new research on women with a critical perspective and with the aim of achieving socio-economic and political transformation through the domain of knowledge production. As one of the first organizations to undertake systematic research in women's studies, in due course, ISST emerged as a leader in developing research and planning agenda for women.

There were always shifts and innovations within the discipline as well as within the organization. In the initial phase, ISST also had an advocacy mandate in terms of translating research findings into advocacy tools and hard-core actions. Later, however, ISST's focus shifted more to the innovations in the methodology. ISST's contribution in the time use survey is one example of its innovation. Later, during the mid-1990s, ISST started focusing more on developing a perspective in Indian gender research and contributing to the development of a gender analysis framework. One such innovative project was Reproductive health through panchayat study – where the idea was to co-design an action research methodology with grassroot NGOs in three parts of India towards experimenting and integrating the agenda of reproductive health within the development agenda of the elected panchayat bodies. The second project was to develop a consistent but dynamic framework for gender analysis, by demonstrating the importance of identifying the context of such analysis, and by highlighting the necessity of differentiating gender as a social cultural category and economic variable from its various indicators. It also sought to put in place a new agenda of gender research by expanding the existing set of gender indicators to include those such as gender-related stress, anxiety and violence. The viability of such an approach is demonstrated through a coordinated set of household surveys designed for inter-country comparisons. Both studies were conceptualized by Swapna Mukhopadhyay during the 1990s. ISST conducted another important study in the early 2000s through an action research project on public accountability. The study based in eastern part of Delhi engaged ISST's newly developed community centre in creating a local network of like-minded NGOs and governance advocates along with the local elected municipal bodies to ensure the rights and entitlements for the socially and economically disadvantaged groups of citizens of east Delhi. The study itself was a great learning experience for ISST in unpacking the complex and opaque governance systems of Delhi and the value and power of rights-based actions by the civil societies. ISST gradually started placing itself as a bridge between research, policy and action with an inclination towards building empirical evidence and consequent policy agenda.

However, everything at ISST was not that hunky dory. With the lack of any core funding, ISST gradually became fully dependent on project funding and that too on foreign donors and grant makers. In the changing funding landscape, ISST got lost a bit and started struggling for funding. I remember towards the end of 2000s we applied to ICSSR for funding an interesting study on ICT-enabled governance and how ICT may enhance citizen voice towards good governance. Unfortunately, ISST did not receive the small grant of seven lakhs Indian Rupees which looked too high for the council. As with ISST, there is no core funding, the salaries of the principal researchers are also budgeted under the project fund. Whereas, in the university departments or ICSSR funded institutions that was not always the case. At least this was not the case in 2000s. We understood the challenges of even surviving from such experiences. During this period, ISST concentrated more on women's work in the informal sectors. In ISST, I started working more on the home-based work and low-end IT occupation. We started working with the organizations who collectivized women workers and took the research findings to the national and international policy advocacy lobbies. Many of these works created a niche for ISST for its contribution in studying and unpacking the challenges of women workers.

However, early 2010s brought fresh air for ISST. ISST along with IDRC and Ford Foundation designed a four-year programme called – engendering policy through evaluation. That was perhaps the pioneering project in the field of feminist evaluation in the sub-continent. It was the time when evaluation communities were getting organized in the South Asian region. The discourse of evaluation was getting sharpened with the questions - who is conducting evaluations and what role does evaluation and evidence play in programme designing and policy making? At that key moment - ISST facilitated an iterative process of reflections and reflective writings with a group of gender researchers, practitioners and evaluators questioning women's rights and empowerment in a range of sectors, particularly from programme and policy perspective. Eventually in 2012 ISST designed and conducted its first online course on the topic at South Asian level. Along with this program, ISST did two things - created a global network called Gender and Evaluation Community, and established a reputation in the field of knowledge generation and capacity building.

This was also the period when ISST re-oriented its inquiries more along the lines of contemporary feminist discourse. By applying different innovative approaches and methods, ISST specialized in understanding the dynamics of paid and unpaid work for women. In terms of funding, it became smoother for ISST from 2017 onwards as major players in the development sector recognized ISST's value once again and the institute used that space to develop research and programmatic activities that were able to feed into policy making on one hand and deepen the knowledge practice on the other.

In view of the fact that I recently left ISST after 24 years, it is amazing to see that ISST as a 40-year-old organization is standing at a crucial juncture with initiatives of re-building its identity and organization, and finding a place in the post-Covid feminist discourse, in the midst of changing socio-economic and technological conditions where the pandemic has exposed the limitations of traditional theories and approaches against the backdrop of power dynamics and various ways of gendered labour. We'll wait to see how ISST shapes its programme agenda and continues to build knowledge through co-learning and desire for a gender equal world.



### FEATURED!

Numerous women who have been and still are associated with ISST featured in the article ['Trailblazers past, present, future: Tracing the journeys of India's women economists, policymakers'](#) on Scroll.in

# Pedagogy for an online course- Learnings and reflections from FGTE 2.0

BY BIJITA DEVSHARMA

Facilitating Gender Transformative Evaluations or FGTE as is popularly called is a self-paced, module-based, online course for development practitioners, researchers and/or evaluators who work within the evaluation space and/or use evaluation results for their work. In particular, the course introduces its participants to feminist evaluation ethics and principles, as well as an array of evaluation approaches with the aim of integrating that critical gender lens with evaluation. The course was first launched in 2018 and was implemented through the online learning platform named moodle. In fact, I was amongst the first few who had the opportunity to experience the course in its first edition as part of its cohort of 20 in 2018. When I joined ISST last year, I was therefore faced with the challenge of designing, repackaging and launching the course in its new avatar that we unanimously decided to call FGTE 2.0. It was going to be both interesting and challenging!

How should one begin thinking about the pedagogy for a course that's directed towards adult learning? What should be the best combination of learning styles given the diversity of participants and their backgrounds? How can pedagogy address the need for perspective-building and skill-building in learning about GTE? How can the course be made inclusive, participatory, and oriented towards peer-to-peer learning? These were some of the questions our team began to grapple with as we initiated the course design process.

The pedagogy or the format and style of delivering teaching-learning, sharing feedback, assessment etc. forms an integral part of any learning process to become fruitful. The pedagogy becomes even more critical and often challenging within the adult learning context. This is so primarily for three reasons: one, that adults when they are also working professionals usually have limited time (additionally development professionals usually have fieldwork commitments!), two, adults learn best through dialogue, discussions and debates and hence there is a need to create ample room for that; three, given the diversity and experience in cohorts for professional development, providing a platform to share and exchange experiences and co-creating knowledge is a must.



**Bijita Devsharma, Curator and Host  
of the Facilitating Gender  
Transformative Evaluation 2.0  
Course**



Keeping the above in mind, FGTE 2.0 was packaged as an online course that was run through Google Classroom for a period of 10 weeks. It used a mixed pedagogy that had both synchronous and asynchronous elements of weekly self-paced reading time, end-of-week live sessions and case-study based group work that tried to address all the needs in the best possible way. Some of the key considerations and takeaways from the pedagogy are: one, assessing participant readiness for committing themselves for such a course is a must. This can either be done at the stage of selection through putting down some apt questions pertaining to time commitments or during selection interviews, if possible. This is an essential first step as it allows the course designers to gauge interest, time and effort, commitments and ensures that the cohort is ready and committed.

Two, designing the course length is a critical next step and should be based on the participant's level of experience. If the course is for beginner to mid level professionals, a duration of 10-12 weeks may work. However, if it is for senior professionals then too long a duration may result in dropouts as seniors may have difficulties giving too much time. Three, the course delivery model is the most critical part of the pedagogy design process and as mentioned above, it should ideally be one that meets all the conditions of adult learning. Hence, a combination of self-paced reading time along with live sessions and group work for allowing application was adopted for FGTE 2.0.

This format was surely a success and hence can be seen as a best practice as 35 out of a cohort of 40 successfully completed the course. Four, the course design should also have ample space that allows for participant feedback.

Feedback and assessment are integral to any pedagogy. FGTE 2.0 used a regular feedback system from all participants at the end of each weekly module as well as at the end of the course for receiving inputs on their group work and live session experience. Five, group work with basic guidelines and flexibility enables a great learning format. It is necessary that adults be given flexibility in setting their own rules when working in groups and there is no micro-management. However, a basic guideline pertaining to what is to be done, how soon and what are the expectations should be clearly conveyed. FGTE 2.0 used unique thematic case studies through which the groups discussed, shared experiences and applied evaluation concepts in designing their case work solutions.

Watch the testimonials for the Facilitating Gender Transformative Evaluation 2.0 Course on our YouTube Channel



# Capturing Fields

BY ASHMEET KAUR BILKHU



Figure 1 A village in Yavatmal district of Maharashtra



Figure 2 Collective Farming Unit at Ananthapur, Andhra Pradesh

At ISST, we are preoccupied with the question of women's work and labour. Through our constant research and programmatic interventions, we have constantly challenged the declining data and figures on the women's work. We have seen, researched and added to the value of women's work in Urban scenarios but the nation-wide farmer's protest significantly known as Samyukt Kisan Morcha 2020, carried out on the Delhi borders pushed us to take our framework on women and work to the rural landscape of India.



Ashmeet Kaur Bilkhu  
Research Consultant, ISST

Hence, was born the project, 'Unpacking Women Farmers' Strategies for Collectivizing' with an objective to look at how women farmers consolidate the identity and agency through their association with various collectives such as farmers unions, networks and rights-based organization. We also wanted to apply the feminist lens to understand and un-layer the process of feminist consciousness building.

Keeping in spirit of the inquiry, we explored various groups working with women farmers in Uttarakhand, Punjab, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Our preliminary first visit to these states has made us realized that the phenomenal landscape of rural India is a also a mix bag of hope and despair!

Our field work in these locations took us to the remote villages and striking stories of success and struggle of women farmers living in between the home and farms.





Figure 3 Women farmers from Andhra Pradesh working on the Collective forming units which practices organic farming

In aligning with the research rationale, the team met groups of women farmers and people from organizations who are working with them to gather an in-depth understanding of the context of women farmers who are collectivized. The inquiry was led using in-depth interviews and group conversations focusing on multiple aspects of women farmer's work in household and farm along with their relationship with the organizations.

We met multiple groups of women who exemplified the human spirit of handholding, transformation and creation through their own understanding of means of production.



Figure 4 A Collective Forming Unit in Talapur village of Ananthapur district. It was a lively group of women farmers who left us with awe in their determination towards defying gender equality!

What struck us was our own urban location, rigid boundaries and fixed parameters of being a 'researcher' as against the inquisitiveness and curiosity to learn as unique professional and personal capabilities of these women.



We looked at multi-dimensional life of a woman farmer in Andhra Pradesh who is negotiating in home, at farm, with market all round the year. From women farmers in Uttarakhand, we could reflect at the dying relationship of a consumer with a producer. We saw women in Punjab, who called out the economic understanding of ‘what is work’ in their own language and context. Maharashtra brought us face to face with caste and community challenges where women are step by step carving a space for themselves instead of gatekeeping the caste system!

We could hear, some of the undocumented and unusual stories of leadership, assertions and re-building!!!



Figure 6 A Farm land ready to be sown in Ralegaon, Maharashtra



Figure 5 Woman from Andhra giving us a tour of her kitchen garden

A woman farmer from Nayal village in Ranikhet, Uttarakhand in her early 60's mobilized the women from her village to grow kiwis and figs and bring to them opportunities to earn a livelihood from their own farms.



Figure 7

## JULY, 2022 | STORIES FROM THE FIELD

In Punjab, an aged woman and her peers narrated to us about her courage and defiance of patriarchy. Her demeanor soft and fragile but strength enough to encourage other women to step out and join the movement. These women came from small land-owning farming families who joined Samyukt Kisan Morcha and carried out protests first at two toll plazas in Punjab and then showed up at Delhi borders.



Figure 8

The Yavatmal region of Maharashtra brought together the stories of strength and struggle. These areas are marked with the prolonged issue of farmers suicide, debt crisis and extreme poverty and drought. Yet, in the homes of these women who led us inside, we saw immense courage of those who had lost their husbands to suicide and left with families to nurture

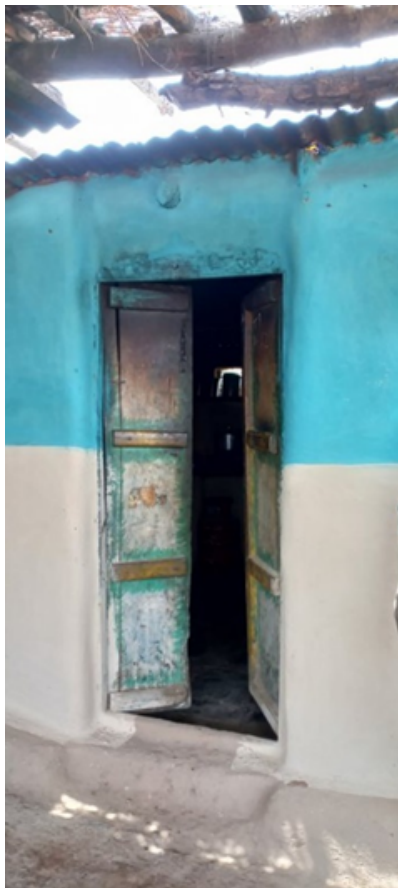


Figure 9 A doorstep at the intersection of public and private sphere of women! Clicked in Yavatmal

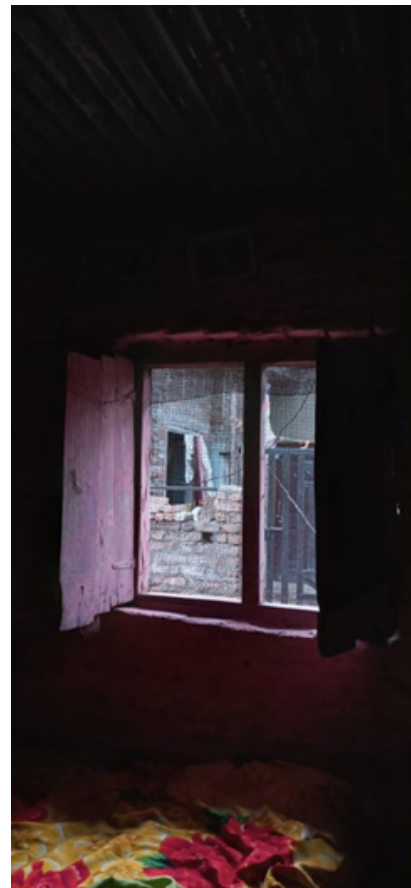


Figure 10 A window looking out during an interview in Maharashtra



Owing to growing awareness towards organic farming and various natural method-based farming, Andhra Pradesh had us collated, the stories of women who despite hesitations and resistance did not shy away from plunging into new avenues and different ventures of farm work and making a mark in their lives.



Figure 11 Collective forming unit in Kurugunta Village in Andhra Pradesh



Figure 11 Clicked during a visit to Ranikhet

The team also tried to build an understanding around the women's lives owing to these situations and bring out how do they take charge of their life. From the data field, there emerged multiple narratives of struggles, crisis, courage and re-building process which women took upon themselves.



Figure 10 A pathway to Naini Village in Ranikhet, Uttarakhand



Figure 12 Clicked in Ralegaon, Yavatmal after light showers

At the end of our first round of field visits, while we sit with interviews to process, decode and analyse what often brings me back is the enigmatic rural landscape of India which rests silently miles away from me untouched by my nostalgia!!



# BACHPAN

BY SARITA KANDARI  
(ASSISTANT PROGRAM COORDINATOR,  
SAATHI CENTRE)

साथी सेंटर में पिछले 15 -16 सालों से एक बचपन प्रोग्राम चलाया जा रहा है। इन सालों में हमसे कई नए बच्चे जुड़े और कई बच्चे अपने उज्ज्वल भविष्य के लिए आगे बढ़ते चले गए। ये बच्चे उस समुदाय से आते हैं जिनको अपने जीवन यापन के लिए काफी संघर्ष करना पड़ता है। इस संघर्ष से बच्चों का बचपन भी अछूता नहीं है। बच्चे भी इस संघर्ष में अपना पूरा-पूरा योगदान देते हैं। उनके इसी योगदान को मैं एक छोटी सी कविता द्वारा दर्शाने की कोशिश कर रही हूँ।

## बचपन

मैंने बच्चों को बोझा ढोते देखा है।  
पिता का हाथ बटाते देखा है।  
गलियों, सड़कों, बाजारों में  
रेहड़ी चलाते देखा है॥  
मैंने बच्चों को। .....

पिता की रेहड़ी के साथ,  
उनको हँसते, गाते, इतराते देखा है।  
मेरी नज़र पड़ते ही  
उनको मुझसे नज़रे चुराते देखा है।  
मैंने बच्चों को। .....

मैंने उनको किताबी ज्ञान से  
कई दूर देखा है।  
लेकिन जिंदगी के उलझते ताने बाने को  
सुलझाते देखा है।  
मैंने बच्चों को। ....

घर का काम निपटाकर  
सेंटर दौड़ लगाते देखा है।  
विलम्ब आने का कारण पूछने पर  
छालों भरे हाथ दिखाते देखा है।  
मैंने बच्चों को। .....

साथी टीम की हर चर्चा में  
इन बच्चों को देखा है।  
बच्चों के लिए कर गुजरने का जज्बा  
साथी टीम में देखा है।  
मैंने बच्चों को बोझा ढोते देखा है॥

# Theatre: a medium to learn and express

(थिएटर: सीखने और अभिव्यक्त करने का एक माध्यम)

BY VANDANA SINGH

YOUTH RESOURCE PERSON, ISST YUVA

SAATHI CENTRE

ISST द्वारा कल्याणपुरी क्षेत्र में युवाओं के साथ काम करने के लिए "युवा साथी सेंटर" चलाया जाता है। यहाँ युवा किशोर-किशोरियों के लिए अनेक प्रोग्राम चलाये जाते हैं जिसमे मेरी भूमिका सहायक की रही है। इनमें से एक प्रोग्राम, किशोर एवं किशोरियों को थिएटर सिखाने का भी था जिसका हिस्सा मैं शुरुआत से लेकर अंत तक रही। इस प्रोग्राम के तहत सेंटर से जुड़े किशोर-किशोरियों ने थिएटर सीखने में रूची दिखाई क्योंकि यह उनके लिए नया था। इस थिएटर प्रोग्राम में 12 प्रतिभागी, जिनकी उम्र 16 से 20 साल की थी, भाग लिया और 6 महीने तक संचालनकर्ता कुलजीत सिंह जी के साथ थिएटर सीखा।

इस दौरान किशोर-किशोरियों को थिएटर से जुड़ी अनेक गतिविधियों से अवगत कराया गया जैसे की सामान्य चर्चा, संवाद, अभिनय, आदि। इनके आलावा युवाओं को शारीरिक मुद्राएँ जैसे की साँस लेना, छोड़ना, आवाज़ बुलन्द करना, वस्तुओं को रचनात्मक तरीके से इस्तमाल करना, डायलाग डिलीवरी, दृश्य संयोजन आदि चरणबद्ध तरीके से कराए गए। एक कार्य में युवाओं को हिंदी की कुछ कहानियाँ पढ़ने का काम करवाया गया जहाँ मैंने अनुभव करा कि युवाओं को कठिनाई हुई क्योंकि हिंदी को लेकर सबके मन में यही भाँति है कि हिंदी निम्न स्तर पर है तो उसका अभ्यास क्यों करना। परन्तु क्योंकि थिएटर की स्क्रिप्ट भी हिंदी में थी और उसको प्रस्तुत भी हिंदी में करना था, युवाओं ने लगातार अभ्यास करा और इस कार्य में सफलता प्राप्त की।



कुलजीत सिंह जी ने युवाओं को थिएटर सिखाने में अपनी भूमिका को बखूबी निभाया। क्योंकि हर युवा प्रतिभागी का स्वभाव अलग था, उन्होंने सबका तालमेल बैठाया। बहुत से उतार-चढ़ाव से गुज़रने के बाद जो नाटक तैयार किया गया, उसको थिएटर में प्रस्तुत करने पर दर्शकों ने खूब सराहा और तालियों की गड़गड़ाहट से युवाओं का उत्साह बढ़ाया।

इस प्रक्रिया से मुझे भी बहुत कुछ सीखने को मिला।

मेरे अनुसार थिएटर किसी भी व्यक्ति के विचारों, भावनाओं और अनुभवों को व्यक्त करने का सबसे अच्छा माध्यम है। साथ ही यह मानव व्यक्तित्व को रचनात्मक बनाता है।



Listen to Podcast 'Kisse Kalyanpuri Ke', a series of stories, written and narrated by the children from Yuva Saathi centre and musically curated by Kahani Ki Dukaan Foundation On [Anchor FM](#) and [Spotify!](#)



# Infusing Arts in Evaluation: Putting Power Outside the Box

BY RITUU B NANDA

Gender & Evaluation online Community hosted an e-consultation on Art & Creativity Evaluation. Members with MEL expertise and creative talent generously offered to host the event. Abu Ala Hasan from Bangladesh provided a theoretical background on the topic with focus on Photography/ painting. Chris Lysy from United States shared how cartoons can relay Evaluation findings. Yelizaveta Yanovich from the US brought experience of theatre in facilitation and evaluation. Madri Jansen van Rensburg from South Africa presented drawings to engage children in evaluations. This started a conversation amongst 70+ attendees on Art as a means to evaluate and report on the results of an approach or programme. Participants shared experiences of using storytelling, musical instruments, adapting a dance form, role play and improvisation. Faith Foundation from India shared about dissemination of study findings by theatre for youth in indigenous communities.

Art expressions engage people's feeling at a much deeper level than ticking boxes and presenting figures. There are many ways in which people can express their feeling if words are not easy for them and in such cases using art can be inclusive. However, some people are reluctant to draw. Perhaps this has to do with the hierarchy between the evaluator and the participants, or because they feel shy. In such a case, the evaluator will have to be creative in facilitating the method. Art practices can tap into peoples' imagination and can help bring out insights in ways that connect deeply to people as human beings and not "subjects" of research. Gender transformative evaluation is about shifting power relationships and creative methods can visibilize different voices/vantage points.

A challenge raised was that art can be interpreted in several ways and there exist individual differences, how can one be sure about the findings? Others responded that the diversity has to be valued and arts-based methods are interpretive, multi-faceted, and divert from positivist approach. Amongst those in the webinar, most had used arts to engage with people and said they can best interpret their product. Another challenge the participants said is how to get people on managerial level to open up to artsy forms of evaluation. Unfortunately, the funders do not consider art as a scientific method. The group felt that arts combined with a strong analysis could enrich evaluation. One suggestion was of using art in convincing commissioners of evaluations.

Participants concluded that arts could be easily used without being an expert artist etc. They were inspired to incorporate different forms of art into evaluations as one observed that "we can start thinking of using comics as a tool for research and evaluation."



**Rituu B Nanda, Project Consultant,  
ISST**

To know more about our Gender and Evaluation Community, visit us at <https://gendereval.ning.com/>





# What's keeping us busy!

ALL ABOUT THE PROJECTS AT ISST

## **Project: Locating the Processes of Non-state Relief Work during the COVID-19 Lockdown in Delhi**

This study is centred on the concepts of social reproduction and care and aims to understand the inherent crisis tendencies within social reproduction driven by the interaction of institutions of the care diamond in the neo-liberal capitalist economic model of India. The study draws on the framework of gender responsive 'intersectionality', a concept that delves into the complexities of various factors and processes that shape life experiences. The study uses the qualitative case study methodology for an in-depth empirical inquiry of the phenomenon in question, that is, 'Locating the Processes of Non-state Relief Work during the COVID19 Lockdown in Delhi'. For this, four slum communities were identified in Delhi (Yamuna Khadar, Sanjay Camp, Seelampur and Bawana JJ Colony) as 'cases', these cases were constructed by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with key actors during the COVID19 relief work. The key actors included – women, men and youth frontline workers from non-profit organization, community leaders and representatives, beneficiaries of relief work, and other actors such as funders, representatives of political parties, and state agents. In all, 121 semi-structured interviews were conducted across four slum communities with various actors between December 2020 and June 2021. After analyses of the collected qualitative data, writing and reviewing the report, it is in the final stages of designing and will soon be published.

## **Project: Sustaining Power: Women's struggles against contemporary backlash in South Asia (SuPWR)**

The project aims to understand when, how and why women's struggles in South Asia succeeded in retaining power and their gains against backlash. The research is housed at Institute of Development Studies, Sussex and it is being conducted in four countries-India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. ISST is heading the research in India. We are working with four movements/organizations: Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA) in the family space, Nyay Samiti of Samarthan Mahila Sanghathan in the community space, Community for Social Change and Development in the market space, and Kotra Adivasi Sanghathan in the State space. SuPWR uses a variety of research methods such as case level and national level gender political and economic analysis, interviews, focused group discussions and theatre to understand the kind of backlash the struggles face and the type of strategies they use to sustain their gains. We have almost completed one round of data collection for BMMA and Nyay Samiti and moving into coding of the data for both the struggles. The data collection is ongoing for the other two struggles. In addition to this, we are also in constant touch with each struggle to generate audio-visual materials which will be useful for the cause of the struggles and help in taking the research to a wider audience.

## **Project: Understanding Pastoral women's work**

The project is an exploratory study which attempts to understand how the relationship of pastoral women with the ecosystems they inhabit defines their work and how different processes of sedentarization have changed the nature of work. The research is being conducted in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh and specifically with Gaddi and Gujjar Pastoral women. The study uses various methods to allow the experiences of pastoral women to come forth. These include: oral histories, in depth interviews, focused group discussions and participatory methods such as mobility maps, body maps and some techniques of theatre of the oppressed. The team has completed the data collection and is in the process of writing the report.

Visit [SuPWR Website](#) for more details 

The team also in their own small ways tried to take back this study to the community by doing workshops with the youth of the community. This was done not only to verify the findings but also to initiate conversations around gender roles in the community and the future of pastoralism. Of the four groups with whom the workshop was done, three were student groups from 9th-12th class and fourth was a different group.

### **Project: ‘Unpacking Women Farmers’ Strategies for Collectivizing’**

The team is studying how different collectives are working with women farmers to consolidate their identity and agency through various strategies for collectivizing. This project also tries to understand the nature of Feminist Consciousness among women farmers who are part of these collectives.

The project is set in four states namely Uttarakhand, Punjab, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The team reached out to different organizations independently and through MAKAAAM (Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch). After several conversations with experts, following organizations were finalised: Umang FPO (a women led Farmer Producer Organization) in Uttarakhand, BKU (Bharatiya Kisan Union) in Punjab, Perna Gram Vikas Sanstha (NGO) in Maharashtra and REDS (Rural and Environment Development Society) in Andhra Pradesh. The first round of fieldwork, conducted in the four states, during the months March-June, was to understand the unique issues of women farmers of the said region and strategies used by the organization. The second round would be more focused on exploring the nature of feminist consciousness among the women farmers and how the process of collectivization affected it. The team is currently analysing the data from the first round of fieldwork.

### **Project: Impact of COVID-19 and School closure on mental health and emotional well-being of Students, Parents and Teachers in Delhi**

Government of Delhi wished to assess the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and emotional well-being of students across schools due to the closure of schools and the shift towards the online education system. Therefore, a large-scale survey covering 9087 students, 1753 parents, and 1770 teachers were surveyed by ISST across 28 education zones of Delhi during April-May 2022. ISST engaged a team of 36 surveyors and 7 supervisors to undertake the survey and most of them were selected from Kalyanpuri area (where the SAATHI Centre works) for maintaining the familiarity of the team with each other which would be helpful in easy communication in a quick paced and intense data collection process. The candidates were selected based on their understanding of conducting surveys, experience of working with different stakeholders, community engagement, and leadership qualities as showcased during their classes at SAATHI Centre. The team had shared the first draft to the Delhi Government and is currently reviewing the comments shared by them.

### **Project: Understanding the scope of non - traditional livelihood skilling in achieving women’s economic empowerment: An Exploratory Study**

The research in collaboration with the Non-Traditional Livelihoods network, was designed to understand when and how skilling in NTL contribute to women’s economic empowerment. The team decided to explore various kinds of skilling initiatives offered by the network and study how participants in these programmes negotiated their ways across three different phases of skilling which includes: pre-skilling; at the time of skilling and as they enter the market post-training (this would entail studying their socio-economic conditions up to 2 years after their entry into the market).

Accordingly, after having conversations with the network partners, it was decided that the team will try and develop 8 in-depth case studies of participants from across 6 organizations spanning over 4 states, including Archana Women's Centre in Kerala; Centre for youth and Social development in Odisha, Jabala in West Bengal and Azad Foundation and Magic Bus in Delhi for the purpose.

After the tools were finalized through a pilot process conducted in the ISST's Community Centre, field work in each of these locations was carried out in the months between January and March, 2022. Several key respondent interviews were also conducted to get a 360-degree understanding of the skilling ecosystem over the next few months. The team, right now is in the phase of analyzing data and writing the research report.

### **Project: Gendered Impact of Tourism on Lives and Livelihoods - Case study of Khajuraho**

The research in collaboration with Equitable Tourism Options (Equations) marks ISST's entry into the relatively under-explored field of studying gendered dimension of labour in the tourism sector. Using a case study method, the research was planned to explore how tourism sites assume the role of a work space which interacts with the socio-economic, cultural and political lives of local communities whose livelihoods are connected to the destination.

For the first round of this research, the team narrowed down on Khajuraho as a tourism-scape to develop its case study. Khajuraho, in the district of Chhatarpur in the state of Madhya Pradesh is best known for its over 1000-year-old temple complex, which has also gained the recognition of being an UNESCO world heritage site. The team visited Khajuraho periodically over a span of 6 months to develop a place-based understanding of the tourism sector that has proliferated in the region.

Using an eclectic mix of tools based on qualitative and participatory research methodology, the team finished collecting rich in-depth data about the tourism sector of Khajuraho from the perspective of those who make a living out of it.

The team is now in the phase of analysing the data and writing the final research report.

From the field!!

 <https://fb.watch/eelbSLd4q7/>

### **Project: A study on informal livelihoods in Circular Economy**

The study, Informal livelihoods in Circular Economy is a scoping study being conducted by ISST in collaboration with WIEGO. The study aims to explore the informal reuse, repair and recycle livelihoods in Delhi and understand its realities and challenges. By documenting the valuable contribution of informal workers such as waste pickers, home-based workers, and street vendors, the study aims to place informal livelihoods at the center of discourse on promoting a circular economy. For this, a set of six unique livelihoods were identified in consultation with the WIEGO team to capture the diversity of the informal reuse, repair, and recycle economy. These are (i) sorting and resale of food grains and spices; (ii) knife and scissor sharpeners; (iii) e-waste dismantling; (iv) resale of household electronic goods; (v) repair and resale of shoes; (vi) recycling of old clothes to make new products. The team has completed qualitative fieldwork involving interviews and observation of informal workers engaged in these varied informal livelihoods, along with interviews of stakeholders who provide raw/waste material and purchase/use the products and services provided by the workers. Currently, the team has been conducting interviews with key experts and community leaders working closely with these informal workers.



### **Project: Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forums**

The Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forums are aimed at creating spaces for critical dialogues and evidence building on gender-based issues within contemporary policy. The forums have been regularly organized by Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) in association with Heinrich Boll Stiftung (HBS), Regional Office, New Delhi since 2012. Under the broad theme of ‘embodied politics’, two policy discussion forums were organized in 2021, namely “Understanding body politics in the context of ‘big data’ and information society” on 31 August 2021 and “Shifting masculinities in contemporary India and everyday implications on gender inequalities” on 26 November 2021. An expert panel which constituted of academicians, technologists, activists, filmmakers and practitioners greatly enriched the conversation on embodiment by bringing diverse perspectives and insights to on-going debates.

The critical discussions emerging from the two forums were captured in two briefing notes.

**Read the Policy  
brief [here!](#)**



### **Project: Impact of digitalization of work on frontline health workers**

Covid-19 has brought to the fore the poor working conditions of ASHA workers, who have been widely acknowledged as the backbone of public rural healthcare in India. With the recent push for digitalization of their work, the study aims to explore how frontline health workers stand to be affected with the adaptation of digital innovation and technologies. In particular, the study would aim at understanding the impact of digitalization on work, working conditions and empowerment of ASHA workers. It would also address the issue of worker surveillance by referencing the ASHA workers’ recent fight for digital privacy. Mixed methods research will be used, including survey and in-depth interviews with workers affected by digital technology as well as KIIs with NHM state and national coordinators, technology specialists in the NHM and trade union representatives. The proposed field sites for the study are Haryana and Rajasthan.

### **Project: Compendium on Full-day Childcare Services in India for the Marginal Communities**

The idea to look at existing full day childcare and after school care services for the children of marginal communities in India has emerged from the focus of ISST’s research on women and work which has highlighted childcare as an important dimension of work and advocates for the full-day and universal childcare provision. We are in the process of building a compendium on the existing full day and after school care models for the children from disadvantaged background.

Over the last year, team has interviewed up to 30 organizations which are providing childcare facilities and creche services to children. The objective of preparing this compendium is to bring information on these different centres in one place as we believe that this would provide more visibility to full day child care centres already running in the country and will also highlight the support that they provide to women with young children.

All the interviews have been completed and currently, we are in the process of writing the first draft of profiles of the interviewed organizations to highlight the distinctiveness of their model and various needs it meets in the community.

### **Project: Curriculum on Women and Work: Making it Count**

The project, Curriculum on Women and Work, produced by the ISST using existing literature attempted to highlight the issue of inadequate recognition of women’s work in social and policy discourse. In the light of

this, the team with external support from experts designed a course that focuses on highlighting social, economic, and political dimension of women's work and the interconnections between them.

The curriculum was broadly premised on three modules which discussed in detail and at length the structure of Patriarchy, State and Market to showcase, to make visible the contribution of women's work and labour. The course was conducted online for 10-weeks with the support of ISST team and different facilitators for each session. The team has successfully completed the first iteration in September-December 2021 with up to 30 participants.

The team is currently working towards documentation of the course which will bring together the exhaustive journey and processes undertaken to shape a one of its kind course. Alongside, we are in the process of preparing for the second iteration in November 2022 as a residential, face-to-face Course.

### **ISST Saathi Centre**

The Saathi centre executes 2 programmes, the Bachpan Programme which has been continuing for 16 years now and The Youth Resource Centre, under which different activities are undertaken with the children for their cognitive development.

The Bachpan programme engages children in the age group of 3 to 15 years. The children, 3-5 years of age are in the Early child group and the focus of the work here is development of their motor skills and their behaviour. The bachpan group has children in the age group 5-15 years. Here, children are engaged in innovative and interactive activities to develop their concepts. For instance, if the concept of 'counting' has to be taught, props such as flash cards, pearl necklace, stones, etc are used. This helps children in learning while playing. The older children, from class 6th to 10th are also taught their course books alongside such activities.

In the last few months, a number of initiatives have been undertaken such as Vaccination Drive in the community, vaccination drive for children in the age group 12-17 years, celebration of Women's Day on 8th March on the theme "Paid and Unpaid work", where women were involved in activities based on the work that they do and subsequently understand how they see their work. As a collaborative attempt, a group of 30 children participated in a theatre workshop with National School of Drama for a play on freedom fighter, religious leader, and public hero, 'Birsa Munda'. which was later presented at a theatre. This not only helped children attain preliminary knowledge about theatre but was a great exposure opportunity for them.

**Watch how we celebrated  
International Women's Day  
with the community at the  
Saathi centre**



With the coming of summer vacations, the Saathi centre, this year, organized the summer camp which was not happening for the last 2 years owing to COVID. The summer camp this year was themed 'Behtar Nagrik' (Better Citizen) and numerous activities around the subject were done such as discussions, poster making, slogan writing, play writing, etc. alongside other activities like drawing, writing poem on the drawing and reciting it as a song, enacting the poem and so on. As a new initiative, the children who passed 10th this year were taken as partners of the Centre and were asked to lead separate groups at the summer camp. Lastly, the Saathi centre has also collaborated with Mr Kuljeet Singh who leads the Atelier theatre group for developing a play with the women of the Kalyanpuri community. For this, he has been engaging in multiple sessions where women share their thoughts, music and are alongside trained on the basics of theatre.

As a Youth Resource centre, the Saathi Centre has been hosting a 6-month Computer course, which recently ended and a team from Udyan Care NGO came at the centre for the exam. The new batch for the course has already begun. Additionally, the centre-run helpdesk provided assistance to a total 32 queries on NIOS and IGNOU admission, birth & death certificate, Aadhar Card, Pan Card, RTI, Police clearance certificate, Complaint writing and E-gram card.

### ISST Yuva Saathi Centre

A result of ISST's research study on Adolescent girls, the Yuva Saathi centre, as an extension of the Saathi centre was set up in 2017. The Yuva Saathi centre is dedicated to adolescent girls and boys which includes both school going adolescents as well as those who have dropped out of school. The purpose of creating the centre was to provide a space to the adolescents of the community to understand themselves, their families and society without any pressure or anger and to enable them to bring the change they would want to see in their surroundings. This is done through multiple initiatives such as discussions, exposure trips, activities, music, theatre and so on. The centre also undertakes gender trainings with the adolescents for their better understanding on gender equity and equality.

After facing setbacks due to Covid, the activities at the centre gained momentum in terms of multiple initiatives. For example, Online theatre sessions by Mr Kuljeet Singh from the Atelier Group; Storytelling workshop with the team from Kahani Ki Dukaan Foundation. A beautiful outcome of this initiative is a series of podcasts, 'Kisse Kalyanpuri Ke', which consists of 6 stories, written and narrated by the participants themselves, musically curated and recorded by Kahani Ki Dukaan Team. The podcast series is available at Anchor FM and Spotify. Alongside, the Yuva Saathi Centre team continuously engages with the school going as well as dropout students in their subjects. The team uses the curriculum and study material by Nirantar Organization for school dropouts to improve their conceptual understanding. The adolescents are also regularly invited for open conversations on contemporary issues such as sexual identities, gender, Hijab, etc. for better understanding amongst themselves.

As a result of these initiatives, it is seen that the adolescents of the community are now less aggressive and have faith in the Yuva Saathi Centre team. Unlike before, they are now able to discuss and share their problems and concerns. The initiatives such as theatre group and storytelling have provided them a space where they are able to express their anguish on social issues in a much effective way and have also provided a medium to share those thoughts within their community.







# Publications

REPORTS, PAPERS AND JOURNALS

- Covid-19 Pandemic and Early Childhood Care : Assessing the Impact on Children Enrolled with Sangini Bal Sewa Centres. (Report)
- "Domestic Workers and Social Protection in Nagaland", Improving Access to Social Protection for Domestic Workers in South Asia: WIEGO Social Protection Programme. (Policy Brief)
- "Domestic Workers and Social Protection in Kerala State", Improving Access to Social Protection for Domestic Workers in South Asia: WIEGO Social Protection Programme. (Policy Brief)
- "Domestic Workers and Social Protection in Bihar State", Improving Access to Social Protection for Domestic Workers in South Asia: WIEGO Social Protection Programme. (Policy Brief)
- "Domestic Workers and Social Protection in Madhya Pradesh", Improving Access to Social Protection for Domestic Workers in South Asia: WIEGO Social Protection Programme. (Policy Brief)
- "Domestic Workers and Social Protection in Tamil Nadu", Improving Access to Social Protection for Domestic Workers in South Asia: WIEGO Social Protection Programme. (Policy Brief)
- Recognizing Connectedness: The Practice of Feminist Evaluation, Rajib Nandi & Ratna M. Sudarshan. (Book)
- Solidarity at the Crossroads: Struggles and Transformations of Domestic Workers in Kerala, Rajib Nandi for "Social Reproduction, Solidarity Economy, Feminisms and Democracy: Latin America and India". (Book)
- "Women Entrepreneurs in India: Where Do They Stand?", Shiney Chakraborty & Priyanka Chatterjee. (Journal)
- "Understanding body politics in the context of 'big data' and the information society", Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum. (Policy Brief)
- Recognizing invisible work: The women domestic workers' movement in Bangladesh, Anweshaa Ghosh. (Journal)
- Women's work in Delhi: Dimensions, Challenges and Emerging Issues. (Seminar Report)
- "Shifting Masculinities in Contemporary India and Everyday Implications on Gender Inequalities", Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum. (Policy Brief)
- "Work and women's economic empowerment in tribal Rajasthan, India", Mubashira Zaidi for 'Gender & Unpaid Work and Care in India'. (Book)

- "Evaluation Policy: The core of Evaluation Ecosystem", Rajib Nandi, Rashmi Agrawal and Banda VLN Rao, Development, Monitoring and Evaluation Office, Niti Aayog's Compendium of Essays.
- "The 'Fluid Landscape' of the Sundarbans: Critically Reviewing the 'Managed Retreat' Discourse", Prama Mukhopadhyay (Journal)



## MediaScope

IN PRINT, PODCASTS AND INTERVIEWS

- "Are Domesticity and Domestic Work Different", Episode 2 of 'Women and Work: Why it Matters!', Mubashira Zaidi, Podcast Series by Feminism in India and International Center for Research on Women
- "Why Are There so Many Women Informal Workers in India?", Monika Bannerjee, Podcast Series on 'Hidden Economics of Remarkable Women (HERO)', A foreign Policy Podcast supported by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- "Wrong End of the K-shaped Recovery", Shiney Chakraborty, Bloomberg Quint (Video & article)
- "The life and labour of India's Pastoral Women", Gurpreet Kaur, Prateek, Sae Pawar, Hindustan Times (Article)
- "Hustle And Hatred: The 'Influencer' Life Of An 11-Year-Old Indian Girl", Shiney Chakraborty for Decode (Comment)



## Events

EVENTS ISST ORGANIZED/PARTENERED!

- "Skill to Work Transition: Empowering Women Through Non-Traditional Livelihoods", Panel for CSW 66, 16th March 2022.
- 3rd APEA Conference and EvalFest 2022, 21st-25th February, 2022.
- "Shifting Masculinities in Contemporary India and Everyday Implications on Gender Inequalities", ISST-HBF Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum. 26th November, 2021
- "Understanding body politics in the context of 'big data' and the information society", ISST-HBF Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum, 31st August, 2021
- "Women's Work in Delhi: Dimensions, Challenges and Emerging Issues", Seminar by ISST and Institute of Human Development, 17th -18th August, 2021
- 'Locating Women in Gig Economy in India', Webinar, 30th June, 2021

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communications@isstindia.org