

## **We Celebrate the Life and Work of Ratna M. Sudarshan with much love**

It is with profound sadness that the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) shares the passing of Ratna Mangala Sudarshan, our former Director (2003–2011), a deeply valued Trustee, and a mentor and friend to so many of us, who left us on 17 June 2026.

Born on 2 January 1953, Ratna ji built one of the most distinguished careers in Indian social science — five decades dedicated to understanding women's work, the informal economy, education, and the politics of gender and evaluation. From her early years teaching at Lady Shri Ram College, through influential research roles at IDRC and NCAER, to her time as National Fellow at NUEPA and advisor to the ILO, World Bank, UN Women, and HomeNet South Asia, her scholarship consistently centred the lived realities of women workers too often left out of economic policy.

At ISST, she led the institution through nearly a decade as Director — strengthening our research on the informal economy and governance, growing our community outreach work in East Delhi, and shaping the institutional rigour and feminist commitment that continues to define ISST today. Even after stepping down as Director, she remained closely engaged with us as a Trustee, generous with her time, her sharpest questions, and her quiet encouragement.

Ratna ji was, above all, a builder of people. At ISST, she nurtured young leadership, taking the ideas of younger colleagues seriously, offering guidance with patience and care, and opening doors through the connections she so willingly shared. She made space for new voices to lead and to grow, trusting younger researchers with responsibility and standing quietly behind them as they found their feet. Generous and endlessly encouraging, she shaped not only the work of those who came after her but the confidence with which they pursued it.

Her contributions were recognised widely, but those who worked alongside her will remember her first for her rigour, her humility, her commitment to the ethics of research, and her unwavering belief that research should give voice to women workers and bring the lived experiences of the most marginalised into view.

We extend our deepest condolences to her family, friends, and the many researchers and feminist economists across South Asia she mentored and inspired. ISST will continue to carry forward the values she helped build into this institution.

Ratna ji, thank you for everything you gave to this institution and this field.